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New Farm to School Pilot at Marietta City Schools Is a Win-win-Win for Georgia Students, Farmers and Community

The pilot is supported by The Georgia ACRE Collective and kicks off with August 1 nutrition training workshop.

MARIETTA, GA – August 1, 2023 – Something fresh is growing at Marietta City Schools. The district is prepped for a new recipe development and nutrition training workshop that celebrates Georgia-sourced fruits, vegetables and meats—an official kick off to a new local foods incentive pilot program that will support small farms led by people of color, women and others historically excluded from market opportunity within the state and increase student consumption of locally grown, nutritious food.

Green kale, freshly harvested watermelon, pastured poultry and grass-fed beef—rare features for farm to school programs—are among some of the featured items the nutrition staff from the 6th Grade Academy and High School will be preparing that day.

The pilot program, which officially takes root this school year, is funded by a grant from The Georgia ACRE Collective, a new initiative led by nonprofit The Common Market Southeast and other food and health organizations, that aim to support shifts in institutional food procurement toward local, values-based purchases. The funds will increase the amount of local, culturally significant food included in school meals and will demonstrate how local food incentive dollars catalyze economic opportunity for Georgia farmers and increase student access to fresh, healthy foods.

“We are so excited to support innovation within Marietta City Schools nutrition department, and to honor our state’s small, sustainable growers in the process,” shares Emily Hennessee, program manager of The Georgia ACRE Collective. “Through this work, we hope to build the case for statewide adoption of a local food incentive program for school meals across Georgia.”

Cindy Culver, Marietta City Schools’ Director of Nutrition echoes this excitement: “This program is a pivotal step in our mission to ensure that every child in our district has access to fresh, nutritious food,” shares Culver. “We’ve noticed a growing gap between our students and their awareness of where their food truly comes from. Our aim is to educate and demonstrate to them the simplicity of obtaining fresh, locally sourced foods right here at school.”

The Marietta City Schools School Nutrition Training Workshop will equip school nutrition staff with the knowledge and skills necessary to implement the pilot successfully, and will highlight the importance of local and sustainable food sources in school meals. The event is scheduled to take place on August 1, 2023, from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., followed by a lunch featuring the food prepared during the workshop. Participants will have the opportunity to provide feedback on the recipes and discuss the acceptability of the menu items among students.

The training agenda includes hands-on cooking demonstrations of two new kale recipes. Participants will also learn about food safety practices while preparing chicken chimichurri and beef picadillo recipes, emphasizing the importance of culturally appropriate menu items.

“We are excited to participate, this feels really important,” shares Dannia Sanchez, owner of D&J Berry Farms of Milan, Georgia, just one of several local farmers of color that will be supported through the pilot. “I’m just as enthusiastic about the idea of teaching kids about local food production and its importance to the economy.”

The training workshop will be facilitated by chef and health educator Asata Reid, as well as members of the Georgia ACRE Collective, including Kimberly Della Donna, Director of Community Collaborations at Georgia Organics.

“Georgia Organics is thrilled to work with the ACRE Collective and Marietta City Schools on this innovative project,” Della Donna adds. “School cafeterias have untapped potential to build demand among our next generation of consumers for delicious, fresh, and sustainably-produced local food while offering tremendous financial support to a local food system that nurtures the land and our communities.”

The pilot program will also launch at Rockdale County School District later this school year.

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About The Georgia ACRE Collective

The Georgia ACRE Collective works to advance agriculture, community, resilience and equity through values-based procurement. The Georgia-based initiative centers on garnering purchasing commitments from Atlanta-area anchor institutions, while shifting procurement to producers that share the institutions’ values. The purchasing power of these Atlanta institutions creates economic opportunity for sustainably grown food produced by Black farmers, women farmers and others historically excluded from wholesale markets. Made possible with support of The Rockefeller Foundation, the ACRE Collective is a collaboration between [The Common Market Southeast](#), [The Conservation Fund’s Working Farms Fund](#), [Georgia Organics](#), [Health Care Without Harm](#), and the [Turner Environmental Law Clinic at Emory University](#).