

Culture of Peace: Rogue Valley Farm to School inspires a healthy change

By Tracy Harding / Ashland Culture of Peace Commission

Posted Aug 1, 2016 at 12:01 AM

How does the mission of Rogue Valley Farm to School (RVF2S) overlap and intertwine with the mission of the Ashland Culture of Peace? Completely. Each is inspiring and empowering people to grow.

Broadly, RVF2S inspires an appreciation of local agriculture that improves the economy and environment of our community and the health of its members. We have been doing so in a variety of ways in Jackson and Josephine counties for more than seven years.

RVF2S programs provide students with in-depth healthy living skills through hands-on learning in the classroom, school garden, cafeteria and on farms.

RVF2S believes that farm to school programs hold great potential as a solution for two of the major challenges facing our society: concerns about the diet and health of children as well as the dwindling of small farms.

In 2009, RVF2S began working with farms and institutions to include fresh local food in school meals to improve the nutritional health of children and the local economy. Progress was slow and inconsistent until recent farm to school legislation provided new procurement opportunities. Work still needs to be done, especially with distribution, however consumer demand and concern over children's health are spurring solutions.

There have been misguided decisions and actions throughout the history of agriculture in this country that have seriously upset the health of our food system. Real food is more expensive than the subsidized system that brings us cheap processed food. Those without economic power bear a heavier burden of the health risks associated with limited food access and have a much greater risk for chronic diseases.

Food preferences and eating patterns develop when people are young and are likely to influence long-term behavior determining the extent of their vulnerability to obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

RVF2S is challenging food system injustice by reducing barriers to including fresh foods in school meals and through education and exposures that reveal the underlying roots of an unjust food system. As we teach students where their food comes from and how to grow and cook it, we connect children to their health, the health of the community and the environment.

Culture leads policy. As RVF2S deepens its presence in school communities and the larger community, we are influencing a shift to health and health advocacy. Improving school food benefits all, most especially low-income families who qualify for and depend on free or reduced price school meals. RVF2S programs dispel misconceptions that only people of privilege can afford to eat healthily and consider the impacts of their choices. We believe all students and their families should have access to fresh healthy food through schools and throughout their lives.

How we produce and consume food has a bigger impact on Americans' well-being than any other human activity. The food industry is the largest sector of our economy; food touches everything from our health to the environment, climate change, economic inequality and the federal budget. Improving the food system is a challenge that will require systemic approaches that consider social, economic, ecological and evolutionary components. Wherever food and community intersect there is an opportunity.

Everyone can participate in the slow steady work of evolving food culture back to when we all knew where our food came from. Let modeling be your activism. Support local farms. Protect farmland, soil and water. If you care about the state of the planet, eating locally is a very rewarding responsible action. Choosing food that is healthy for you is choosing economic growth as well as social and environmental change.

The Ashland Culture of Peace builds upon the foundation of existing groups that contribute to the wellness of the community. Rogue Valley Farm to School programs do so by nurturing the health of our children, protecting the environment and promoting social and ecological balance.

Tracy Harding is the executive director of Rogue Valley Farm to School. For more information about RVF2S, see www.rvfarm2school.org. For more information about the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission, see www.ashlandcpc.org. Both RVF2S and the ACPC welcome your participation. Email comments and questions to ashlandcpc@gmail.com, or drop by the commission office at 33 First St., Suite 1. The ACPC website is www.ashlandcpc.org; like the commission on Facebook at www.facebook.com/AshlandCultureofPeaceCommission.



SIGN UP FOR DAILY E-MAIL

Wake up to the day's top news, delivered to your inbox

