



STATE OF MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & COMMERCE
Cindy Hyde-Smith, Commissioner



PRESS RELEASE

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Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce And Mississippi Department of Education Celebrate Farm to School Week With USDA At Highland Bluff Elementary School

The Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce and the Mississippi Department of Education recently celebrated the sixth annual Mississippi Farm to School Week with Highland Bluff Elementary School in Brandon. Special guests had the privilege of dining with students in the Bluff Bistro, their school cafeteria. The guests included Mississippi Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Cindy Hyde-Smith, Mississippi House of Representatives Education Chairman John Moore, Mississippi House of Representatives Agriculture Chairman Bill Pigott, Mississippi Senator Josh Harkins, Mississippi Department of Education Director of Child Nutrition and Healthy Schools Scott Clements, United States Department of Agriculture Office of Community Food Systems National Director Erin Healy, and the Mississippi farmers responsible for growing some of the lunch menu items.

Farmers, including Louis Guedon, of Churchill, Glyen Holmes, of Durant, Gil Thompson, of Mound Bayou, and Becky Beard, who represented the Mississippi Poultry Association, visited third-grade classrooms during the celebration to explain the importance of agriculture and eating healthy fruits and vegetables.

“Educating our children extends beyond what our teachers do in the classroom each day,” Rankin County School District Superintendent Dr. Sue Townsend said. “I believe that the Farm to School event provides a wonderful collaborative effort which includes beneficial hands on and real life experiences for our elementary schools.”

The Mississippi Farm to School Program provides farmers and schools with an educational experience that is unmatched.

“Farm to School is an outstanding partnership between the Mississippi Department of Education, Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce, Mississippi farmers and local schools,” said Scott Clements, State Director of the Office of Child Nutrition and Healthy Schools. “Through this partnership, we are able to provide students with locally grown, fresh produce while promoting the state’s economy. Further, through Farm to School events, students have a unique educational experience in meeting local farmers and having the opportunity to learn more about agriculture and nutrition.”

Over the last 15 years, the Mississippi Department of Education and the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce have made successful efforts to increase the amount of Mississippi-grown fruits and vegetables served in cafeterias across the state through the Department of Defense (DoD) Farm to School Program. The program offers schools 15 varieties of Mississippi-grown fruits and vegetables, including butterbeans, southern peas, sweet potatoes, yellow squash, butternut squash, zucchini, turnip greens, collard greens, cantaloupes, watermelons, green beans, corn cobbettes, cucumbers, blueberries and broccoli crowns.

“The Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce is proud to be a part of the Farm to School Program collaboration with the Mississippi Department of Education,” Hyde-Smith said. “The effort made to purchase fruits and vegetables directly from Mississippi creates a marketing opportunity for our farmers and increases the students’ access to locally grown produce. Also, through this program, we are able to educate students where their food comes from, and we hope that some of them will take an interest in farming and growing for future generations.”

The first full week of October was designated as Mississippi Farm to School Week by the Mississippi Legislature in 2012. Farm to School Week was introduced to schools in an effort to encourage them to serve locally-grown and locally-raised agricultural products in their meals and to recognize the substantial economic and health benefits of farm to school programs. Farm to School Week draws attention to the vast number of crops that are grown in Mississippi and serves as an educational tool to teach children where their food comes from beyond the grocery store.

“I was delighted to see so much stakeholder engagement in Mississippi for Farm to School Week, as diverse coalitions of partners are a key ingredient to Farm to School success,” USDA Office of Community Food Systems National Director Erin Healy said. “The representation from state agencies, government, producers, funders and nonprofits at the event demonstrated how successfully Farm to School has been institutionalized in the state. It was evident that the classroom visits from farmers, combined with local produce served on the lunch line, had a positive impact on the students’ willingness to try new vegetables — when I pointed the farmers out to the students at lunch and explained, ‘he grew this corn and sweet potatoes,’ they immediately all asked to try a bite from my tray. Such events continue to demonstrate that Farm to School is an effective way to strengthen local economies, connect our nation’s farmers with income-generating markets such as schools and nurture our children with healthy, fresh foods.”

The Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce and the Mississippi Department of Education participated in other farm to school celebrations throughout the state during Mississippi Farm to School Week. Representatives from both agencies attended special events at North Bay Elementary in Biloxi.

Picture and Cutline Attached.



Highland Bluff Elementary School in Brandon welcomed farmers and state and local officials to their school during Mississippi Farm to School Week. This celebration, a collaboration of the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce, the Mississippi Department of Education and the Rankin County School District, gave students the opportunity to meet the farmers that grow many of the fruits and vegetables served in their cafeteria throughout the school year.

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