

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Students at International Studies Elementary Charter Academy Harvest Produce From Their School Garden to Enjoy in the School Cafeteria as Part of Flint River Fresh's Youth Ag & Conservation Education initiative with DCSS department of School Nutrition Services.

Albany, GA -- Flint River Fresh's Farm to School program in partnership with the DCSS department of School Nutrition and their partners of excellence has had remarkable success and growth at International Studies Elementary Charter School this school year. From the construction of 10 new raised garden beds with the help of 4C Academy's construction work study program, to the empowering parent engagement day attracting eight parent volunteers filling the new beds with soil and compost, to engaging planting days with students planting collards, cabbage, broccoli, lettuce, carrots, mustards, turnips, spinach, swiss chard, brussels sprouts, and strawberries. Special guest gardeners included Georgia's Mrs. United States Agriculture who dug in and shared gardening tips while wearing her tiara. Coming full circle, the healthy, crisp lettuce and collards went from seedlings to salads and vegetables in school lunches.

Gardening with the first thru third graders proved to be a wonderful example of a thriving Farm to School and Youth Agriculture Education initiative. The program gives unique learning experiences and great opportunities for students to be a part of the food production process for school meals and taste tests. Moreso, elementary school students (especially those living in food deserts) gain lifelong benefits from learning how to grow food themselves.

In mid-January, the school garden produced a total of 19 pounds of butter crunch lettuce, 18.4 pounds of romaine lettuce, 9.2 pounds of collard greens, and .6 pounds of spinach and swiss chard. Students not only learned how to harvest lettuce, they also learned how to compost the lettuce roots and inedible leaves back into the soil to improve soil health. Demonstrating how math with decimals is essential in the garden space, students weighed the harvest using a digital scale.



After students weighed and separated the harvest into containers, they wheeled the produce cart to the cafeteria where cafeteria staff cleaned, stored, and prepared the student grown produce for the week's lunches. School staff and students at International Studies Elementary Charter School enjoyed fresh collard greens and crisp salads thanks to the hard work of first through third grade gardeners. Over 300 students and staff had the opportunity to taste the collards and lettuce straight from their school garden. "Having the opportunity to see the school garden process full-cycle is so rewarding", says Jordan Parker, Flint River Fresh's School Garden Coordinator, "students started with an empty garden space-- they watched the raised garden beds come to life by 4C Academy's construction students, they helped lay landscape fabric and level the ground, they planted seeds and transplants, and ultimately harvested and weighed some of the finished product. And finally, students shared their harvest with the whole school. That's what our Farm to School program is all about!" The Dougherty County School Garden team members involved with this phase of the project are Assistant Principal Nancy Gay at International Studies Elementary Charter School, Flint River Fresh's School Garden Coordinator Jordan Parker, along with Kristin Caso from Albany Recreation and Parks and Monica Mays from the Dougherty County School Nutrition Office.



Flint River Fresh held its February board meeting on site at International Studies Elementary Charter School's School Garden. The virtual walking tour and storytelling by Assistant Principal Gay gave board members a real-time view of the sprouting garden space and made it clear how impactful the garden has been for ISECS. According to Gay, ISECS students have greatly benefited from the new garden space through student engagement activities in science, math, and language arts and through learning about the impact of agriculture on the school and surrounding community. The school is gearing up for another growing season with opportunities to teach in the space and to continue to use the school garden-grown produce in the cafeteria.

This Youth Agriculture & Conservation Education Initiative through an NCRS Technical Assistance Grant with active garden projects at all 15 elementary schools in the Dougherty County School System expands educational outcomes to include knowledge about where food comes from, importance of soil health, germination rate, garden maintenance, and safe harvesting practices. Partnering with Agribusiness role

models and leaders for volunteer days is another fun-filled experience for our youth to learn more about the food distribution system in their community and people making it happen.

This urban farming inspired education program is supported through collaborative partnerships among Flint River Fresh, Dougherty County Cooperative Extension, the National Farmers Union, Albany Recreation and Parks Department, 4C Academy, Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital, The Georgia Farm Bureau, Dougherty County School System, and the Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District. Individuals and organizations provide subject matter expert guidance and support throughout the various phases of the program.

Flint River Fresh is a 501(c)(3) organization that aims to make fresh, locally-grown produce accessible and affordable for people throughout the Flint River Region, while empowering community and youth through education and outreach opportunities. Visit www.flintriverfresh.org to learn more.

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Attached photo 1: 1st - 3rd grade students at International Studies Elementary Charters School with their lettuce harvest.

Attached photo 2: School Nutrition staff preparing collards greens for the cafeteria from the school garden.

Attached photo 3: Student at International Studies Elementary Charter School enjoying a salad from the school garden.