

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Students at International Studies Elementary Charter School and Radium Springs Elementary School Enjoy Strawberry Kale Smoothie Taste Tests Inspired By Produce From Their School Garden as Part of Flint River Fresh's Youth Ag & Conservation Education initiative with DCSS department of School Nutrition Services.

Albany, GA – Three hundred students and teachers between International Studies Elementary Charter School and Radium Springs Elementary School participated in a strawberry kale smoothie taste test in their school gardens thanks to Flint River Fresh's Farm to School program in partnership with the DCSS department of School Nutrition. Through this Farm to School and Youth Agriculture Education initiative, students receive unique learning experiences and great opportunities 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. The strawberry kale smoothies provided to students and teachers at these two schools proved a great example to show students a nutritious and delicious recipe to utilize the produce grown in their own school gardens— both the strawberries and the kale.



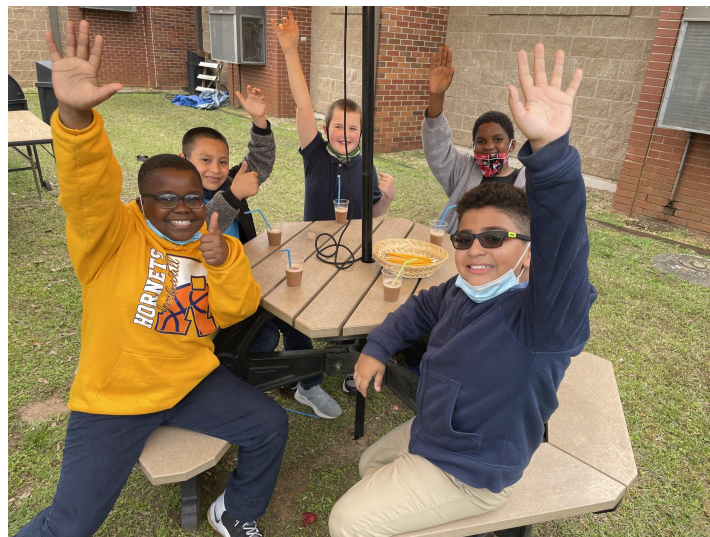
In preparation for the strawberry kale smoothie taste tests, Flint River Fresh's School Garden Coordinator, Jordan Parker, ordered over 200 pounds of fresh strawberries and kale from local regional farmers, furthering Flint River Fresh's and Dougherty County School System's support of farmers in Southwest Georgia. Additionally, Blaine Allen, Ronald Bell, and Monica Mays from Dougherty County School System's Department of School Nutrition supported Flint River Fresh through preparation of materials and tools needed for the taste tests, testing the recipe and preparing over 300 smoothies for students and teachers, and serving students at both schools.



During the taste test at International Studies Elementary Charter School, over 130 2nd and 3rd grade students were first led on an educational garden tour by Assistant Principal Nancy Gay, where they had the opportunity to learn about lettuce, squash, carrots, and peas. Students were also able to pick a radish of their very own to take home and pick a strawberry from the strawberry beds. After the garden tour, students received their strawberry kale smoothies and

sat down to fill out a taste test rating sheet. After trying the smoothie, students rated it on a scale of 1-5 based on visual appeal, smell, taste, and texture. The average score total score fell between 18-20 out of 20, proving that the majority of students enjoyed the smoothies. After tasting and rating her smoothie, one 3rd grade student said, "I don't usually do kale, but this smoothie is bussin'". She is glad she gave kale a second chance and wants to try the recipe at home.

Similarly, at Radium Springs Elementary School, 150 Kindergarten - 5th grade students were granted access to the taste test as a PBIS "Caught You Doing Good" reward. Students here were led on a garden tour by the Albany Recreation and Parks Department's Kristin Caso and were able to see both kale and strawberry plants in their raised garden beds to make the connection to the ingredients in their smoothies. According to Ms. Stephanie Harvey, teacher and school garden contact at Radium Springs Elementary, students "loved having the opportunity to... explore the garden and to see the strawberries and veggies that are growing[.] One student said that she thinks that the smoothie gave her energy and that even with it having no sugar added it was sweet and tasted really good."



"Serving students and being a part of the strawberry kale smoothie taste test is so rewarding," says Parker, "many of these students have never seen or tasted kale. The looks on their faces when they see that kale is in their smoothie is priceless, and their ambition and bravery to try at least one sip is even greater. This is the whole purpose of the Farm to School program– to show students where their food comes from, what it looks like, and to provide them the opportunity to taste what they have grown."

As part of Flint River Fresh's Farm to School and Youth Agriculture Education initiative, each student was sent home with a goodie bag containing 3 recipes to try at home– a recipe for the strawberry kale smoothie, strawberry salsa, and kale pesto. In addition, the goodie bag contained coloring and activity sheets to label parts of a strawberry plant, healthy foods coloring books, pencils, and bookmarks from the Dougherty County School Nutrition Services Department, pollinator handbooks and soil health coloring books from Dougherty County's Natural Resource Conservation, and cups, bracelets, and healthy living pamphlets from Angie Barber with the Phoebe Foundation. Students were excited for their goodie bags and for the opportunity to try their strawberry kale smoothie recipe at home with their families.

This Youth Agriculture & Conservation Education Initiative through an NCRS Technical Assistance Grant with active garden projects at multiple 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 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: 3rd Grade Students at International Studies Elementary Charter School selecting their smoothies.

Attached photo 2: 2nd grade students at International Studies Elementary Charter School picking a strawberry from the raised bed.

Attached photo 3: Students at Radium Springs Elementary School raising their hands to show that they love their smoothies.