

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Flint River Fresh Prepares School Garden Sites for Spring Planting at Dougherty County School System Elementary Schools through USDA-FNS Grant

Albany, GA -- At the start of the 2020 school year, Flint River Fresh received a “School Garden to Cafeteria” USDA-FNS Grant aimed to create a farm to school pilot program with the Dougherty County School System. With this grant, Flint River Fresh was provided the opportunity to work with DOCO school’s Nutrition Services department to grow regional produce in school gardens and utilize produce in school cafeterias at three elementary schools-- Turner, Radium Springs, and Robert H. Harvey Elementary schools.

From September - December of 2020, Flint River Fresh’s Executive Director, Fredando Jackson, and School Garden Coordinator, Jordan Parker, teamed up with Dougherty County School System’s Nutrition department’s Partners of Excellence to renovate existing and build new raised garden beds at the three pilot elementary schools. Currently, Radium Springs has 12 raised beds that have been prepped and planted to support Albany’s Feeding the Valley. Robert H. Harvey now has 4 additional new double stacked raised garden beds, totaling the school garden to 10 raised beds, and Turner Elementary has 10 newly renovated double stacked beds. Cold crop planting, including lettuce, broccoli, kale, and collards, will take place at the schools towards the end of January, leading into Spring planting in February and March.



Jackson and Parker have partnered with 4C Academy to utilize the Monroe greenhouse to prepare seed starters for the 3 pilots schools and for the raised beds at 4C Academy. Almost 500 lettuce seeds in multiple varieties have been planted in the greenhouse to date with many more varieties of regional produce to come.

Although COVID restrictions and virtual learning has impacted the School Garden to Cafeteria grant plan, Jackson and

Parker have worked with DOCO schools Nutrition Services department to develop a plan to still utilize produce grown at these schools for staff and students. “Learning where fresh produce comes from and how to grow and prepare it is a vital and necessary skill,” says Jordan Parker, Flint River Fresh’s School Garden Coordinator, “and I’m really excited to be a part of that and teach our students how to grow and cook their own food. My favorite past-time is cooking at

home, so I look forward to developing kid-friendly recipes to share with the students.” Flint River Fresh will continue to plan to engage youth at each of the three schools, with the aims of teaching self-sufficiency and life-long skills, including basic gardening, nutrition, basic prepping/cooking techniques, and leadership skills. “Through this pilot program, we want to provide students with life skills that can be used at home and in their community” says Fredando Jackson, Executive Director of FLint River Fresh, “They’ll learn how to grow their food, see the relationship agriculture has with math, science, social studies, english, arts, and technology, how to prepare a healthy meal with



seasonal crops, and enjoy eating the fruits of their harvest with a community meal.”

The project partners in this collaborative project include Dougherty County Cooperative Extension, the National Farmers Union, 4C Academy, Dougherty County School System, and the Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District. Individuals and organizations will 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.

Attached photo 1: Seed starters planted in the Monroe Greenhouse

Attached photo 2: 5th grade students at Turner Elementary planting broccoli and brussels sprout plants in their newly renovated raised garden beds.