

## IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Flint River Fresh Partners with Dougherty County School System's Department of Nutrition Services to Close out Farm to School Month with Week-Long Planting Celebration.**

**Albany, GA** -- A week-long planting celebration will take place at seven of Dougherty County Elementary Schools throughout the last week of October to help close out Farm to School month. Students at Radium Springs Elementary, Turner Elementary, Robert H. Harvey Elementary, Northside Elementary, Lincoln Elementary Magnet School, Magnolia Early Childhood Education Center, and Morningside Elementary will have the opportunity to plant delicious Fall veggies. Flint River Fresh, along with the Dougherty County School Nutrition Department and their Partners of Excellence volunteers, will be teaching students about raised bed gardening and where their food comes throughout the week. We are also looking forward to inviting our city commissioners and state representatives to be a part of the fun! Students will be assisting with planting fall crops, including collard greens, cabbage, kale, broccoli, lettuce, carrots, turnips, spinach, swiss chard, brussels sprouts, and strawberries in their school's raised beds. As the crops grow throughout the fall and winter seasons, students will have the opportunity to taste the different types of produce, and the school cafeterias will be able to utilize the harvested goods in the school cafeterias for student lunches.

"DCSS School Nutrition is excited about our upcoming teaching garden planting season," says Blaine Allen, Director of the Dougherty County School's School Nutrition Department, "we are looking forward to student engagement and school community involvement...Fueling minds and bodies."

The Dougherty County School Nutrition's Partners of Excellence, including the Flint River Fresh Farm to School team, have worked diligently since the beginning of the school year to clean out and prepare existing raised beds for the big planting week at the end of October. Partners of Excellence, including 4C Academy and the Albany Recreation and Parks Department, helped pull up weeds and summer crops at participating schools and taught students at Radium Springs Elementary about growing and harvesting sweet potatoes— how they are grown underground and need to cure in the sunlight before consuming. Students at Radium Springs have already gotten to taste the fruits of their labor in the school cafeteria this year! Finally, partners helped amend soil in the raised beds with fresh compost and organic fertilizer in order to prepare for the big planting week with students at the end of the month.



According to Parker, Flint River Fresh and the DCSS School Nutrition partners are looking forward to getting their hands dirt with students at each of the schools. "It brings me so much joy to see the kids' excitement when

we bring out the tools and the gloves. And the plants! They can't believe that the small plugs and seedlings grow into the vegetables they see at the grocery store and eat in the cafeteria...that excitement and energy is so contagious.”

Flint River Fresh's Farm to School program with Dougherty County's School Nutrition department was established at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year on a USDA-FNS planning grant aimed to create a Farm to School pilot program with the school system. Despite COVID difficulties and restrictions, the planning year was a great success, and many students, staff, and families participated in activities to learn where their food comes from and the steps to how to grow their own produce at home. Flint River Fresh was able to help the three pilot schools produce upwards of 250 pounds of produce combined! The schools utilized this produce in the cafeterias, for the end of the year school-wide community meal with Flint River Fresh, and for student and staff families. Because of this success, Flint River Fresh is continuing this work with a NCRS Technical Assistance grant to expand the Farm to School program with the Dougherty County School System to all 14 elementary schools in the school system.



The project partners in this collaborative project include 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 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](http://www.flintriverfresh.org) to learn more.

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Attached photo 1: Students showing off the sweet potato harvest at Radium Springs Elementary School with Flint River Fresh's School Garden coordinator, Jordan Parker, Albany Recreation and Parks Department's Linda Harris and Kristin Caso, and 4C Academy's Agribusiness teacher, Megan Verner.

Attached photo 2: Last school year's (2020-21) planting day at Turner Elementary.