

## IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Flint River Fresh Grows Partnership With The Dougherty County Schools System through USDA-FNS Grant

**Albany, Georgia** — Flint River Fresh is among the esteemed 2020 United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Farm to School Grant awardees. The planning grant, entitled “From School Garden to Cafeteria,” aims to implement common regional vegetables that can be effectively grown into existing school gardens, ultimately to be used by school nutrition staff in school cafeterias. This pilot will create a guide for schools throughout the region on how to holistically incorporate school garden education, local produce and procurement, and conservation principles into school systems.

Building on the current infrastructure of raised garden beds and commitments from the leadership at Radium Springs Elementary, Robert H. Harvey Elementary (formerly Jackson Heights), and Lincoln Elementary Magnet School, Flint River Fresh expects to fully launch the From School Garden to Cafeteria Program in January 2021. Activities on-site will adhere to regulations governing the COVID-19 pandemic.



*Magnolia Pre-K school students participate in an interactive lesson at one of school garden sites during the 2018/2019 academic year.*

“The Garden-to-Cafeteria Program gives students real-world experience in feeding their community by growing fruits and vegetables that will be served in their school cafeteria,” says Fredando Jackson, Executive Director of Flint River Fresh. “Students will walk away with the confidence of knowing that they can make a difference in other people’s lives by putting food on their tables.”

In addition to working collaboratively with school staff to design, develop, and implement engaging, interactive learning experiences about gardening, Flint River Fresh will work under the umbrella of the USDA FNS Farm to School grant to guide the collaborative process for a Dougherty County student-centered Farm to School Action Plan inclusive of school garden produce. The plan provides for intensive training focused on environmental stewardship and agricultural best practices for employees and staff.

The Dougherty County Schools System School Nutrition Services department is one of the most valued and essential partners. Their input on project components ranging from the feasibility of crop selection to the proper storage and preparation of school garden harvests is critical to the program's success. Flint River Fresh looks forward to sharing the healthy delicious meal plans and tasting demonstrations that are integral parts of the program's deliverables.

“The process of planting irrigating, harvesting, cooking, and eating these crops is a priceless learning experience,” says Blaine Allen, Dougherty County School Director of School Nutrition Services. “Teaching gardens provide students with the opportunity to see the importance of eating to live healthy.”

One of the pillars of Flint River Fresh programming is youth engagement, aimed at developing the lifelong

self-sufficiency skills that teach young students basic gardening skills. Programs like the From School Garden to Cafeteria help equip future community leaders with the tools necessary to reverse adverse trends in communities like Dougherty County, where food insecurities, health disparities, and food deserts statistics are astonishing.

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](http://www.flintriverfresh.org) to learn more.



*Seedlings at 4C Academy preparing to be transplanted into a Flint River Fresh managed community garden site.*