

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Jordan Parker
Email: info@flintriverfresh.org
Phone: 229-942-9757



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Students Throughout the Dougherty County School System Have Been Provided with Fresh, Locally Grown Strawberries and Blueberries Throughout the Months of April And May Through Partnership With Flint River Fresh and Beyond Harvest Foods.

Albany, GA – April and May have been “berry” good months for our local Dougherty County students. Georgia Grown Strawberries provided an extra boost of nutrition in Dougherty County School System’s cafeteria meals to support cognitive health and to prepare students for state testing.

Flint River Fresh partnered with Beyond Harvest Foods and Dougherty County Schools School Nutrition Services to bring 3,150 pounds of Georgia Grown Strawberries from Dickey Farms in Musella, GA to all 22 Schools in the Dougherty County School System, in efforts to encourage a sustainable, local food system, and to introduce students to produce that is grown in their own region.



“Increasing the level of healthy foods students consume may help with students' test scores,” states Blaine Allen, Director of School Nutrition with DCSS. While students were able to enjoy fresh strawberries with their school lunches all throughout April and May, School Nutrition’s main focus was to serve fresh, locally grown produce during testing weeks, which occurred through the end of April and beginning of May. Strawberries are rich in vitamin C and polyphenols, which are antioxidant compounds. According to the CDC, there is evidence linking healthy eating to student concentration, memory, and mood, and to academic achievement, which encompasses academic performance through class grades, standardized testing, and graduation rates. Mr. Allen goes on to add, “also, when the School Nutrition Department can purchase fresh Strawberries & Blueberries from a local, Georgia Gown, Farmer, we reduce our carbon footprint.” Strawberries were the featured fruit in April for the Georgia Department of Nutrition's Harvest of the Month program. This campaign supports local farmers while building the capacity to connect schools to local producers.

Not only were students served fresh strawberries with their school lunches, they were also provided with opportunities to “taste-test” special strawberry based treats. Radium Springs

Elementary School's kindergarten classes were served delicious frozen treats— strawberry frozen yogurt. Mr. Ron Bell, along with Radium Springs Elementary's School Nutrition staff, prepared the strawberry frozen yogurt from the locally grown fresh strawberries, Greek yogurt and honey.

According to Farmer Fredo, Executive Director of Flint River Fresh, "It felt good to be back delivering local produce from local farmers to our schools again. This can only be done through collaboration between school nutrition program staff, teachers, farmers, and the community." Throughout COVID, restrictions, staff shortages, and supply shortages created difficulty for the district-wide use of locally sourced produce, but Flint River Fresh and DCSS School Nutrition are excited to pick back up on the partnership and initiative to source locally. Flint River Fresh and DCSS School Nutrition plan to add blueberries to the mix throughout the month of May. The next scheduled delivery of the locally grown berries is scheduled for Wednesday, May 11th. This delivery will go to all 22 Dougherty County Schools and will include 12,600 pounds of Strawberries from Dickey Farms in Musella, GA and 1, 071 pounds of Blueberries from Thomas Family Farms in Blackshear, GA.



These opportunities for taste-tests and usage of local produce in the schools encourages continued partnership between Flint River Fresh and DCSS School Nutrition, through Flint River Fresh's Farm to School Youth Agriculture & Conservation Education Initiative. This initiative, through an NCRS Technical Assistance Grant, supports active garden projects at multiple elementary schools in the Dougherty County School System, and expands educational outcomes to include knowledge about where food comes from, importance of soil health, germination rate, garden maintenance, and safe harvesting practices.

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: Fredando Jackson of Flint River Fresh, Blaine Allen and Ronald Bell of DCSS School Nutrition, and School Nutrition Staff with a strawberry delivery.

Attached photo 2: Kindergarten students at Radium Springs Elementary School enjoying a frozen strawberry yogurt treat.

Attached photo 3: Freshly picked strawberry from Dickey Farms in Musella, GA

Attached photo 4: Blueberries growing at Thomas Family Farms in Blackshear, GA