

Sheboygan Falls High School



At Sheboygan Falls High School, the farm to school program is as local as it gets. Each year, the agricultural education program feeds students' minds *and* bodies, growing 1,200 pounds of tomatoes, as well as hundreds of pounds of cucumbers, peppers, carrots, kohlrabi, lettuce, garlic, and herbs, all grown on the school's third-of-an-acre farm.

Bruce Brunner, agricultural instructor at Sheboygan Falls High School, saw a gap in his students' education. "Every year, it seems we're a little further removed from where we grow our food – from that agricultural or farm setting," Brunner explains.

Now, thanks to a robust agricultural education program, nearly a quarter of the high school's students are involved in the farm. Students can choose from 9 agricultural courses and 3 culinary arts classes integrated into the agricultural program. From a horticulture class planting seeds in a 20 ft. x 50 ft. hot house in March to harvesting tomatoes well into November from the 72 ft. x 30 ft. high tunnel greenhouse, students spend much of the school year experiencing firsthand how to grow their own food.



But the lessons don't stop with chomping down on a freshly picked cherry tomato. Thanks to culinary arts teacher Diana Woodworth and dedicated support staff, the farm's produce is used to teach students what happens next in farm to table progression. Culinary arts students process hundreds of pounds of the farm's vegetables into tomato sauce and salsa to freeze and serve in the school's cafeteria.

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And tomatoes are only the beginning. This month, students are expecting to harvest 100 pounds of honey from their two bee hives, and Woodworth says her culinary arts students are already thinking about how to incorporate honey into recipes. Students even prepare food from the farm – which includes a flock of 100 chickens – as a catering service and provide dinner at school functions.

This extensive programming, while invaluable, can be costly. Efforts to make the program self-sustaining offset much of the expense. The school buys produce from the farm for the cafeteria and culinary arts classes, much as they would if the food were grown by a local farmer. The honey, along with pickles made from the farm's cucumbers, can be sold to back to the community for fundraising, as well. These funds are used for farm upkeep and improvement, such as drip lines for irrigation or supplies for the horticulture classes. The farm is also able to save money on compost by using composted materials from culinary arts classes. Eventually, Brunner hopes, half of the budget for the school's agricultural education will be covered selling produce grown on the farm.

Seeing hundreds of pounds of harvested and processed vegetables is very satisfying. But for Brunner and Woodworth, the real satisfaction comes from seeing how the farm can unearth interests that students never knew they had. "You never know what's going to be a trigger for a student," Brunner recalls. "I had a student who was forced into taking one class with me. She ended up in college at UW Madison. She told me before she left that she thought she was just going to major in business, but she ended up minoring in environmental studies and now she works for a nonprofit that does food-related work."

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