

Goodness Grows

in Providence Public Schools

by Wendy Fachon

Special education students at three Providence public schools are learning how to grow organic food inside the classroom with a new terraponics system. Terraponics apply the same scientific principles as outdoor gardening, while delivering the benefits of year-round farming, because the process takes place indoors. This health education initiative was formed through a partnership between the Providence District Wellness Committee, Sodexo, the district's food service company, and EvanLEE Organics, an indoor grow system company that promotes healthy plant-based eating, sustainability and self-reliance.

Sodexo purchased one classroom unit for each of three middle schools, with autistic and special education student populations specifically in mind. School District Wellness Coordinator, Solight Sou, explains, "Our wellness policy strives to promote inclusion and celebrate the diversity of all our students and families, and these carts combine



Student prepares terraponics tray for seed planting

accessible nutrition education with hands-on learning aligned to the state's science standards."

Healthy eating for this particular group of students can be complex. Challenges include food sensitivities and texture issues. The grow system eliminates environmental toxins, and the scientifically-formulated 24:45 Organic Soil assures the growth of produce that is nutrient-dense, better tasting and unquestionably fresh. This collaborative and interactive learning approach makes these students

more receptive to trying salads at lunch. Students at Nathan Bishop Middle School had fun creatively combining fresh lettuce from their first harvest with corn chips, chili and other lunch plate ingredients.

The system is simple. Students work together to plant and manage mini-farm fields in trays. They do the seeding and watering, and they keep watch as their plants sprout and grow under a specialized lighting system that delivers the ideal spectrum and quantity of light every day. After three weeks, the lettuce is ready to harvest. The students learn how to carefully clip the leaves from the plants, and they fill big salad bowls. Then, they place the trays back onto the rack system, so the same plants can continue to grow more leaves that will be ready to harvest in another seven days. Students learn a lot of exciting things about indoor terraponics, such as its environmental sustainability and its ability to produce commercially viable yields. One grow rack can produce 10 to 20 pounds of produce per month depending on what vegetables are grown and which type of unit is used.

Students can grow leafy greens, root-bearing vegetables and herbs of all varieties. Working with the soil and a variety of plants, these special students receive a nurturing experience that is healing on a social-emotional level. Some students benefit from the sensory activities, while others build self-confidence. EvanLEE Organics is the New England distributor for the 24:45 Organics patented technology of growing organic produce indoors.

Location: 1325 Springfield St., Feeding Hills, MA. For more information, call toll-free 844-741-3341, email Info@EvanLEEorganics.com or visit EvanLEEorganics.com.

Wendy Fachon is a regular contributor to the magazine and host of the Story Walking Radio Hour on the Dream Visions 7 Radio Network. Learn more at NetwalkRI.com. See ad on page 7.