

The spring salad mix from Peach Crest Farms in Stratford is a big hit with Union elementary school students. "It is fresher, more nutritious and, I think, better tasting," said Lisa Griffin, child nutrition director for Union Public Schools. The district ushered in locally grown produce a year ago, bringing in Peach Crest's Susan Bergen to talk with students about what she grows. "They got really interested just in seeing the person who grew their food," Griffin said. This month, Union joined an initiative by the Made in Oklahoma Coalition promoting state products and agriculture in schools. "It's been interesting because schools are learning Oklahoma products are competitive in pricing and it helps keep dollars in Oklahoma," said Sharra Martin, market development coordinator for the coalition and the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry. In coordination with the Farm to School program, the coalition has begun working with several school districts to ensure local foods are part of their menus. "When you buy locally, you're benefitting your neighbor," Martin said. The first district to partner with the organizations was Shawnee in September, then Mid-Del in Midwest City in October and Union this month, she said. More districts will join the movement. Griffin said the initiative is a "win-win" for everyone. "Our students will get fresher, more nutritious foods grown locally. The farmers and producers in the Farm to School program will find a steady market for the products. And the Oklahoma economy is positively impacted through more jobs and sales," she said. Although Union has been serving local food and produce for about a year, the district kicked off its participation in the initiative recently with spaghetti made with beef from Enid-based Advance Food Company and milk from Hiland Dairy, which has two plants and several distribution centers in Oklahoma. The meal also included sweet potatoes, spring mix, cherry tomatoes and watermelon radishes from Peach Crest Farms on its salad bar. Union will focus on serving locally produced food once each month, Griffin said. And students are happy to learn the food comes from Oklahoma, she said. "I grew up on a farm. It's dear to my heart because I know what good

food tastes like and how nutritious it is," Griffin said. "To present that to kids who don't even know where food comes from and what it looks like before it's cooked or processed, I was very glad to be able to share that and let them experience that." Local growers participating in Oklahoma Farm to School program Cattletracks LLC, John's Farm, Fairview: organic beef Creekside Plants and Produce, Oologah: beef, pork, produce Crow Vegetable Farms, Shawnee: watermelons, cantaloupe, assorted vegetables Great Plains RC&D whole wheat flour made from wheat grown in western Oklahoma Hendrix Farms, Wellston: apples Peach Crest Farm, Stratford: peaches, cantaloupe, tomatoes, onions, lettuce Perennial Produce, Hinton: watermelon Produce, Colbert: produce Spencer's Orchard, Harrah: produce Sunberry Orchard, Harrah: peaches, blackberries, n honey and more TG Farms, Newcastle: fruits and vegetables The Farm, Atoka: strawberries, onions Trebuchet Gardens, Norman: sweet potatoes and more Upper Red Fork Innovations, Hunter: whole wheat flour made from locally grown wheat Whitmore Farms, Coyle: asparagus, cucumbers, cantaloupe, strawberries, squash sweet corn and okra Source: Oklahoma Farm to School website Kim Archer 918-581-8315 kim.archer@tulsaworld.com

SUBHEAD: More schools are serving foods grown right here in Oklahoma home grown: school lunches kids love Original Print Headline: Buying, eating locally