

Who says kids won't eat healthy food? The proof that they will is evidenced in a Tulsa World photograph this week showing Union Public Schools children eating a lunch made of locally produced foods. These students even like salad, especially the spring salad mix from Peach Crest Farms in Stratford. Part of the reason that's so is because they know the origins. Peach Crest's Susan Bergen visited with students about what she grows. Union Public Schools climbed on the locally grown farm wagon about a year ago and this month joined an initiative by the Made in Oklahoma Coalition that promotes local producers and state agriculture. Shawnee schools joined in September and the Mid-Del school district in Midwest City in October. More districts are bound to follow because it's a win-win proposition. "When you buy locally, you're benefiting your neighbor," said Sharra Martin, market development coordinator for the coalition and the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry. "It's been interesting because schools are learning Oklahoma products are competitive in pricing and it helps keep dollars in Oklahoma," she said. At Union, a recent lunch included spaghetti made with beef from Enid-based Advance Food Co. and milk from Hiland Dairy, which has two plants in Oklahoma. Spring mix, cherry tomatoes and watermelon radishes on the salad bar came from Peach Crest Farms. The Farm to School program, which the Legislature approved years ago following lobbying by the Oklahoma Fit Kids Coalition, is all part of a move to get children to eat healthier. Oklahoma has one of the highest child obesity rates in the nation, a consequence of poor nutrition and learned habits. Sure, some of the fresh food might end up in the trash but so did a lot of the unhealthy stuff that appeared on plates in school lunch programs in the past. Change will come incrementally. But eventually Oklahoma kids, with some help from the schools, will make the transition from fast food to fresh food. SUBHEAD: Schools climb on farm wagon Original

Print Headline: Salad days