



MORGAN COUNTY CITIZEN

April 4, 2013

Locally grown produce part of local school lunches

Morgan County public school students eating school lunches are chowing down on locally grown produce.

Through a bid process, the school system is working with Atlanta-based Royal Food Service to obtain locally grown food for school cafeterias, according to Morgan County Director of School Nutrition Phyllis Martin. Royal vets and procures food depending on what the system has requested.

Royal sends Martin an e-mail once a month listing produce that's available. Martin uses a purchase sheet to submit the system's order weekly.

Five to 10 percent of the produce Morgan County students consume in school cafeterias is locally grown, Martin said, and that "locally grown" designation, in this case, means the produce comes from Georgia or a state touching Georgia. That produce has included, from Royal, watermelon, apples, yellow and green squash, cucumbers and some lettuce. The school system has also independently gone out and purchased strawberries from a Mansfield farm and, over the summer, peaches from CJ Orchards.

Martin maintains that the school nutrition program is self-supporting – 70 percent of the budget comes from federal funding, the rest from state and local funding – and will continue to be, and that **using Royal doesn't make for additional costs.**

"With Royal procuring for us, it doesn't cost more," she said.

Martin has applied to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the governing body of school nutrition programs nationwide, for a fresh fruit and vegetables grant. About two or three years ago, she got the grant for the elementary school. It's preferential that schools receiving the grant have more than half of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch, so Martin's hoping to acquire the grant for the primary or elementary school. She should hear back by mid-April.

This is the second year that the school system has worked with Royal to get locally grown produce. So it wasn't a big jump for Martin to join the 5 Million Meals campaign, a drive statewide by Georgia Organics to have 5 million meals including locally grown food to be served in public school cafeterias. There are 28 systems to date taking part in this initiative.