



the abundance foundation

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building our local foodshed, modeling renewable energy and inspiring community

220 Lorax Lane #5 · Pittsboro, NC 27312 · 919-533-5181

Contact: Jenny Schnaak
Telephone: 919-533-5181

Email: wow@theabundancefoundation.org

Web: <http://theabundancefoundation.org/events/chatham-county-chef-challenge-2012>

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Chatham Chef Challenge Brings Students Healthier School Lunches

Pittsboro, NC – On Leap Day, Chef Colin Bedford gazed at a table full of ingredients ranging from canned cling peaches and whole grain pasta, to local sweet potatoes and fresh spinach in efforts to plan a delicious, healthy meal. He was not designing a menu for his Chatham County restaurant, The Farrington House, but a new lunch menu for the more than 8000 youth of Chatham County Public Schools.

The Abundance Foundation's annual Chatham Chef Challenge brings high-profile chefs into schools to help create healthier school lunches in Chatham County Schools. The purpose of the Chef Challenge is to increase consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables by students in grades pre K-12 while supporting GAP-certified local farms when possible. This project also works toward the Abundance Foundation's mission of bringing greater education and access to local food to all families.

This year, the Chef Challenge consists of 4 Chefs: Chef Colin Bedford of Farrington, Chef Jay Pierce of Lucky 32, Chef Gregg Hamm of CCC Natural Chef program, and the cafeteria managers of some schools.

Each chef or team is assigned a box of ingredients to create their recipe for a healthier school lunch. The menus designed by the chefs must be easy for the school cafeteria lunch teams to create and abide by the USDA requirements for the school lunch program. Each chef partners with cafeteria managers, cafeteria staff, teachers and principals to bring greater awareness to each school this spring. The 4 recipes are cooked by the staff and served to the students in all 17 Chatham County Public Schools on the Chef Challenge Days, which are April 19, April 26, May 3, and May 10th. Cafeteria Managers and Cafeteria Staff are extremely generous for volunteering their time to learn the new recipes designed by each of the 4 Chefs. The organization of Chatham Chef

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Challenge could not be done without the help of the dedicated team of superstar volunteers.

On Chef Challenge Days, over 8000 students have the opportunity to try the new lunch created by a superstar Chef with fresh and local ingredients. The students then take a survey to assess the Chef's lunch. The recipes liked most by students permanently stay in rotation on the County's school lunch menu.

Leading up to Chef Challenge Days, during the month of March the chefs meet with the Cafeteria Managers and staff for Training Day on their newly created recipes. The chefs and farmers also visit schools that choose to hold Chef Challenge Assembly. These school assemblies offer students the chance to meet the chefs and the farmers and understand where their food came from and how their meals were created.

Last year, the Chatham County Chef Challenge included Chef Colin Bedford of Ferrington, Chef Gregg Hamm of the CCCC Natural Chef Program, and Chef Jimmy Reale of Carolina Crossroads. Their menus featured 3-cheese pasta and vegetables, orange zest chicken, seasoned carrots and green beans, and fresh salads. Desserts included fruit parfaits, strawberries and bananas drizzled with chocolate sauce, and low fat chocolate cake with spinach inside, topped with fresh strawberry sauce.

Over 3 consecutive days in April, cafeteria staff across the county prepared the Chefs' new lunch recipes, bringing 5800 fresh, healthy school lunches to students. While going through the lunch lines, students tended to choose the chefs' meals 4 to 1 over the competing typical school lunch. About 80% of students preferred the Chefs' meals when competing against chicken nuggets, pizza, and nachos with cheese.

Since last year was the first ever Chatham Chef Challenge, this year we hope the project makes an even greater impact. To compliment the Chef Challenge with more learning opportunities for students and parents, teachers in all 17 schools will facilitate complementary classroom lessons promoting physical exercise and making healthier food choices. Also this year, local sweet potato farmer, Chester Pilson of C.V. Pilson Farm in Moore County, is providing all the sweet potatoes for Chef Challenge. His sweet

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potatoes are GAP certified, a status farms must attain in order to source produce to schools.

It is amazing how many folks work to make Chef Challenge a meaningful success; all 17 public schools participate in the 12-week Chef Challenge, as well as local “celebrity” chefs, farmers, all cafeteria staff, the PTA, principals, local farmers, the area USDA nutrition director, and Dairy Council director work together to bring healthier, fresher school lunches to students.

In addition to learning more about what foods our kids are being served, everyone learns something new about the USDA, what it’s like to work in a public school cafeteria, and how the Chatham PTA is working to improve the health and fitness of its youth. Onward and upward, always!

Chatham Chef Challenge is a critical piece to The Abundance Foundation’s mission to educate youth and adults on local food, sustainable agriculture, and increase access to education and consumption of local food.

THE CHEFS:

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Who: Chef Colin of The Granary at Fearington

Fresh Ingredients: Ground beef, sweet potatoes, whole grain pasta, Northern beans, peaches

Challenge Day: April 19th, 2012

Who: Chef Hamm of CCCC's Natural Chef Program

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Fresh Ingredients: Diced chicken, sweet potatoes, spinach, watermelon, whole grain tortilla

Challenge Day: April 26th, 2012

Who: Chef Jay Pierce of Lucky 32

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Fresh Ingredients: Ground turkey, sweet potatoes, brown rice, black-eyed peas, blueberries

Challenge Day: May 3rd, 2012

Who: Larry Robinson, Cafeteria Manager of Chatham County Schools

Fresh Ingredients: Chicken, Pinto beans, sweet potatoes, strawberries, whole grain rolls

Challenge Day: May 10th, 2012

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