

Fremont school lunches get fresh produce from district's garden

SEPTEMBER 23, 2011

FREMONT -- Jalapeno peppers, summer squash, purple kale and other homegrown produce are becoming part of the daily diet for Fremont Ross High School students, as the cafeteria incorporates more vegetables and herbs grown in its own yard.

The produce comes from the Fremont City Schools garden program, a project that's part of a bigger push for healthy students.

Kim Theller, district director of facilities and operations, said the two gardens -- one behind the Ross High School tennis courts and the other a hydroponic garden -- are one component of the district's Comprehensive Continuous Improvement Plan.

The plan includes the garden, expanded recess, a new physical education curriculum and other initiatives designed to increase student achievement and promote health and wellness.

"We're just a piece of the big puzzle that takes care of our kids," Theller said.

Michaeleen Rogers, child nutrition supervisor for the district, stood in the Ross cafeteria kitchen Thursday and pointed to buckets filled with jalapeno and green bell peppers.

Some of the produce has been added to the Ross salad bar, with some herbs and vegetables used in recipes for walnut parmesan pesto and marinara pasta dishes, Rogers said.

"They go on the salad bar," Rogers said of the jalapenos. "They love them on their salads."

Construction on the garden beds started in spring 2010.

Theller said the school district has partnered with WSOS, Phil Collison of the Sandusky County Youth Works Program and county Magistrate Sara Sherick on the project.

"Last year, we decided we were going to make it a goal to make it work," Theller said.

The garden behind the tennis courts consists of 15 raised beds, with each bed measuring about 15 feet long and 4 feet wide.

Vegetables planted include cabbage, collard greens, peppers and lettuce.

The dirt for the flower beds came from the new Fremont Middle School construction site, Rogers said.

The district has a hydroponic garden set up closer to the high school, where it produces herbs used in cafeteria recipes.

That garden came about through a Feed Ohio grant written by WSOS, Theller said.

"We're trying to make that real connection with the students and the cafeteria," Theller said.

District garden guides, complete with information about produce grown, are available at every school office.

Rogers said there is information on the garden program posted on the district's website, www.fremontschools.net.



Michaeleen Rogers, Fremont City Schools' child nutrition supervisor, holds up buckets of jalapenos and green bell peppers Thursday at Fremont Ross High School's cafeteria kitchen. The produce was grown in a garden by the Ross tennis courts as part of a district-wide garden program. / Daniel Carson/News-Messenger photos