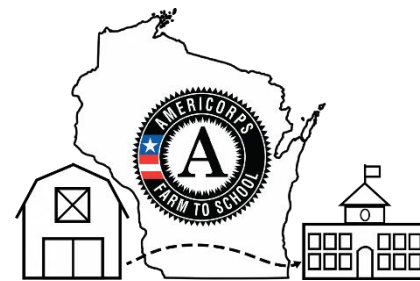


Virtual cooking lessons get students out of their seats and into their kitchens

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Serving at FoodRight, Inc.



The pandemic has taken an immense toll on everyone, no matter the age. We all feel it: the anger, frustration, exhaustion. We can get so wrapped up in our adult feelings, it is easy to forget the weight our children are bearing, too. Kids of all ages are experiencing virtual learning for the first time, implemented by school staff who are also new to this style of learning.

Some people are worried that students are not receiving the same level of education and socialization as in-person learning. According to a Soglin article in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel from August 2020, “Many are concerned about the quality of remote learning and the effects of social isolation on their kids.” Educators everywhere agree that being able to quickly adapt has been key to keeping student learning on track.

FoodRight, a Milwaukee non-profit specializing in culinary and garden education, did just that — immediately pivoted when COVID-19 hit. Instead of group-based classroom cooking, FoodRight staff partnered with two AmeriCorps Farm to School members to provide individual meal kits for students to prepare at home during virtual cooking lessons.

The partnership between FoodRight and the AmeriCorps Farm to School program is a part of an innovative approach to building a healthier Milwaukee community. Together, they are able to provide the weekly virtual cooking lessons along with other farm-to-school activities including nutrition education for Milwaukee’s youth, changing the school food environment with school gardens, partnering with school food service directors to increase access to local and fresh foods, and participating in community events that will increase capacity of the program.

“This was just what [the students] needed to stay positive about school & learning.”

-Kali, 7th grade MPS teacher



But, even with the extra help from the AmeriCorps members, the shift from classroom cooking lessons to virtual cooking lessons has not been easy. Ingredients are purchased by the FoodRight organization and are then individually packaged and delivered to schools with help from the AmeriCorps members. Parents pick up the ingredient kits the day before the scheduled lessons, which allows for safe, social-distanced procurement.

This past Fall semester has been busy, with approximately 115 meal kits going to students from 3 different schools, every week, for the majority of the semester. It is anticipated that the Spring semester will be even busier, with several more Milwaukee schools interested in participating.

The cooking lessons are currently offered to 5th-8th graders in Milwaukee schools, and are tailored to the skills and abilities of the different age groups. Each recipe takes about an hour and half, starting with food safety and ending with sharing a virtual meal or snack together. The meals are plant-based, made from scratch, and globally-minded with flavors from around the world. FoodRight predicts they will distribute over 8,000 meal kits by the end of the 2020-2021 school year, if able to reach their year-end fundraising goal of \$45,000.

And it's about more than just cooking! The lessons give students practice with geography, math skills, food science knowledge, and even allow them to flex their artistic abilities. They might spend time garnishing with parsley or arranging a radish slaw to make the colors pop. Or the instructor might ask, “How does the orange of these carrot ribbons look against the green of the salad?”

FoodRight recognizes the silver lining of virtual learning brought on by the pandemic. It means that kids are cooking at home with their families, sharing fresh, whole produce and nutritious meals. It means children from 1,200 Milwaukee families can feel proud about the food they create, which in turn will empower them to make healthy food choices for life.