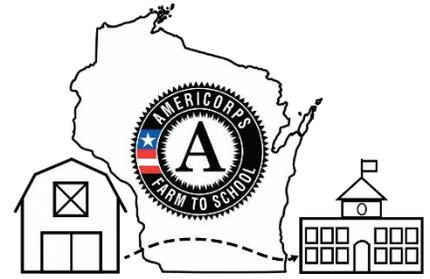


# When the Going Gets Tough, the Tough Get Going

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It's been a rough year. I think we can all agree on that. But, to borrow a popular witticism: *When the going gets tough, the tough get going.*

I'm finding this especially true as I look back on the past few months as a Serve Wisconsin AmeriCorps member. In every corner of the state, we have witnessed how 'the tough get going': communities united to support local business, friends and family staying socially distanced to protect one another, educators, healthcare providers, and so many others finding new ways to get the job done. If there is anything good to be said about living through a pandemic, it is that it presents (more so demands) opportunities for growth. Opportunities to find new solutions, think in new ways, build surprising partnerships, and act on our compassion in bold ways. Although growth is often uncomfortable, it is vital to the success of our communities -- in the midst of a pandemic or not.

In my world, which is the world of Farm to School, our goal is to support and enrich the connection between school communities and local farms. Some of the ways we work towards this goal is through nutrition education, school gardens, and procurement of local foods for school meals. With empty schools, we've had to entirely reimagine how we can keep building these relationships.

Rather than seeing students every day in the garden, classroom, or cafeteria, we are now reaching them where they are: at home. I've had the opportunity to collaborate with the Oregon Public Library and the Oregon School District Food Service to provide a variety of take-home activity kits to students with their delivery or pick-up school meals. From experiments on cranberries and squashes to windowsill herb gardens, and even food artwork competitions, I believe these at-home activities have continued to spark some joy and interest in students and their families for making local, healthy eating a part of their lifestyle. As one family wrote to us after receiving a cranberry experiment kit, "My first and second grader LOVED this surprise! Thank you for going above and beyond during this crazy time."



In a time of fear and uncertainty, it is important to continue fostering a sense of wonder and exploration in our students. We are continually seeking more ways to keep farmers connected to their communities, including collaborations to create virtual farm field trips for students and sharing recipes and information about Wisconsin-grown foods within the grocery store, where eating habit decisions are made daily.

Perhaps my favorite new Farm to School program is the Kid's Cooking Club that began this summer. Each week, students from nearly every school in the district come together virtually to try out new recipes with Wisconsin-grown ingredients. Though we are each in our own kitchen, there is something undeniably magical about coming together to laugh and learn over delicious food. When students share with me that they want to cook more meals at home now or want to eat more Wisconsin-grown foods, I know that the magic is real. Something as simple as learning basic culinary skills, like dicing an onion or shredding a carrot, is enough to get students active and engaged in their own nutrition.



As we look towards spring, it is hard to know what to expect. Of course, I dream of once again spending time in the garden and classroom together. But for now, I am focused on looking for more ways to embrace growth and to continue building strong relationships between our community and our local Wisconsin foods. I take inspiration from the hard work, compassion, and creativity of the community around me. Thank you, to each and every 'tough' one of you, for bravely looking forward.