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little farm, BIG IMPACT

BY JENNIFER CHANDLER

I have to admit, I did a double take when I saw my daughters' school supply list. "A pair of rubber boots or slip-in garden shoes" is probably not required by many schools around town...or even across the nation.

This past Spring, Hutchison School created a farm.

For years, I had been reading—with a bit of jealousy—about the farm school movement that Alice Waters, of Chez Panisse fame, was creating out in California and the similar programs celebrity chef Jamie Oliver was implementing in England to promote healthy eating in schools.

I wanted my children to appreciate good food. As infants, I had made all their baby food. Nothing processed went in my sweet babies' mouths. But when school started, they were introduced to things like Cheetos, fruit roll-ups and fast food. I was horrified to see how my children preferred foods in electric rainbow colors over the healthy foods that they had at home. There seemed to be a huge disconnect about what was "real" food versus what was processed junk.

Thanks to our wonderful farmers' markets around town I have spent the past couple of years trying to educate my girls on what was good and natural. They like going to the markets, meeting the farmers and trying new things but, to be honest, my children still didn't quite comprehend where food comes from.

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This year, my children, and all the girls at Hutchison School, will have the rare opportunity to have a different experience with food. They will plant, tend and harvest fresh produce. They will experience hands-on that food comes from the ground...not a box.

"I really wanted the girls to have the creative experience of understanding how one grew food and flowers," explains Hutchison Head of

School Annette Smith on the school's decision to create a farm, "We want them to experience the full cycle of how we live on this Earth."

Dr. Smith has ensured that her school's little farm will have a big impact on its students' educational experience by integrating it into various parts of the curriculum at each grade level.

"First and foremost, the girls will learn responsibility. If you don't tend your garden, it will not flourish," adds Dr. Smith. What a valuable life lesson for every child, at any age, to learn.

Older students will learn financial literacy and entrepreneurship by deciding how to sell the harvest and manage the profits. All grades will cultivate the spirit of philanthropy by sharing part of the harvest with those in need. Students, with the guidance of faculty, are working with The Food Bank to develop a donation program.

"We have also integrated the farm into our science and social studies curriculum," adds Dr. Smith. "Science will come alive for our girls with hands-on activities."

First and second graders will study the life cycle of plants in both a text book and on the farm. In conjunction with their Social Studies curriculum, fifth graders will plant many of the same foods as the pilgrims. Seventh graders will compare and analyze the results of both a control and experimental garden.

"Each grade has their own bed at the farm," explains school horticulturist Annie Kate Sanford. "In the Spring, many grades started plants from seeds in their classroom windows and then planted the seedlings. In the Fall, they will harvest what they planted last semester."

Outside of the normal school curriculum, Hutchison is also offering numerous after-school farm activities.

Some classes offer hands-on opportunities to tend the farm; other offerings, such as "Scarecrows for the Garden," are art-based. Many



focus on the environment; and, since the school mascot is the honeybee, bee science is also included.

“I like bees because they pollinate things and, without bees, we wouldn’t have fruits, vegetables and flowers,” were wise words from third grader Mia Colombo, who also admitted she really liked dressing up in a bee keeper suit.

As part of the summer camp program, I had the chance to teach a “Cooking from the Garden” class for kindergarten through third graders. Having hand-picked the fruits and vegetables themselves, youngsters were more willing to try new foods. I was amazed at how each inquisitive student eagerly tasted the raw squash, cucumbers and herbs they had picked...foods they normally would have snubbed. “My favorite new food we tried was ratatouille,” exclaimed first grader Katie Higginbotham as she finished her second bowlful of this classic veggie dish. Her mother was both shocked and pleased.

For high school students, the school will host panel discussions on the environment and sustainability. Jill Forrester of Whitton Flower and Produce Company was one of many who addressed students at the “Leaving a Light Footprint: A Panel Discussion on Sustainability” this past summer. “I was excited to see how genuinely attentive and interested these girls were when it came to the environmental issues the panel discussed. Many young ladies had questions and concerns about

a variety of environmental, food safety, and recycling problems our country is facing today. I was very impressed with how many were eager to learn ways in which they can better their home life, personal health, and community through recycling and eating locally grown foods,” Jill commented about her participation.

The students at Hutchison are going to reap a bountiful harvest from their new little farm. My hope is that the valuable life and health lessons learned from this hands-on farm experience are something that will stay with my daughters for the rest of their lives. *eM*

Once a restaurateur, Jennifer Chandler is now a contributing food writer to several magazines both locally and nationwide. She is a food stylist and the author of *Simply Salads*.

For more information on **Hutchison School Farm courses** open to the public, check out their Center for Excellence program catalog at www.hutchisonschool.org.

Above: Sarah Chandler and Katie Higginbotham harvest basil to make fresh pesto.