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Creating Opportunity

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**Testimony for Healthy School's Act**

3.26.10

My name is Allison Sosna and I am the Executive Chef of Fresh Start Catering, the social entrepreneurial venture of DC Central Kitchen. DC Central Kitchen is a non profit that works with the community through job training, meal distribution, and supporting local food systems to interconnect problems of poverty, hunger, and homelessness.

For just a year, Fresh Start Catering has been working diligently with local farmers and our partnering private charter school and child care agencies to provide over 400 meals a day to students in D.C using healthy, local, sustainable foods.

Through a fleet of 12 vehicles and a manager of food procurement, Fresh Start has been able to coordinate efforts with local farmers and artisans within a 200 mile radius. Because of this in-house distribution, Fresh Start chefs are able to plan, order, and create menus based on product availability through local farmers.

As a result of purchasing and supporting local agriculture, the students within each of our agencies have become more aware of their food source and their health in general. Brian Ray, Director of Finance at Washington Jesuit Academy has said that "...We've chosen to make **an investment in the health of our students** and it's paying off in the classroom."

Since beginning this purveying system with local farmers we have not only saved on food costs (about one third of major wholesale disturbers), but we have also offered weekly cooking classes with the service club at the private charter school, created a school garden, featured Tuesdays as "Local Fish Suppers", and seen an increase in attention and motivation from the students in the classroom. Students have a salad bar with more than 10 ingredients to choose from, 1/3 of which are local and prepared in the on site kitchen. Over the course of the year we found that the students are more likely to come back for seconds with the salad bar than with the portioned entrée.

Despite all the headway we have made, there are still major obstacles we face as a vendor and a distributor. Distribution systems and reimbursements for farmers, schools, and vendors are all needed in order to grow programs like these. A continuing issue we face on a daily basis is gaining clients. Last year we were declined 6 contracts from local area schools and agencies because we were not in line with their reimbursement restraints. Schools are not able to pay for any food service provider even if they want to buy local and support the community. Farmers and chefs also don't have a distribution system of their own and therefore rely heavily on wholesalers. If there was a distribution system in place for the chef and the farmer a lot more direct purchasing could be done for the schools and more money would be placed back into the local economy.

Fresh Start has seen the potential of bringing local foods into schools but now we need the support of local government to continue to make measurable strides in bringing local, healthy, sustainable foods to students in the D.C area.

Thank you for your time,  
Allison Sosna  
Executive Chef  
Fresh Start Catering  
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