

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT

Jeff Wilhite

217-416-1650

Jeff.Wilhite@SangamonIL.gov

**THE SANGAMON COUNTY BOARD AND PAWNEE SCHOOLS
ADVANCE CONCEPT OF FARM-TO-SCHOOL MEALS**

Locally produced food could become a mainstay of children's meals in the Pawnee schools with the help of a grant from Sangamon County. The Sangamon County Board approved a resolution this week that will launch a Farm to School pilot program in Pawnee CUSD #11 this fall.

"We hope this program is very successful in connecting our local kids to local and fresher food in a sustainable, cost-effective way," said Andy VanMeter, Sangamon County Board Chairman. "I believe when other institutions see that this is possible, they might become more interested in funding their own local food transformations, which will, in turn, support our local farmers in a big way."

"Our school district in Pawnee has been very enthusiastic about this concept from the very beginning," said Jeff Thomas, District 4 board member who lives in Pawnee. "We are very excited to be piloting this program in this area, and the community is very eager to get started."

Last year, the county partnered with the Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln (CFLI) and Beyond Green Partners to conduct an assessment report to study how to build a foundation for a local food system in Sangamon County. The first recommendation in the report was to identify pilot institutions in the region to secure early buy-in and support for the initiative and ensure consistent demand for local growers and producers.

Beyond Green Partners has done similar cutting-edge Farm to School work in Lincoln, Illinois, and across the country.

A Sangamon County Farm to Table advisory committee includes county board members: Casey Constant, David Mendenhall, James Schackmann, Vera Small, and Lori Williams. The committee wanted to start with local school districts and communicated with superintendents through the Sangamon-Menard Regional Office of Education to discuss Farm to School opportunities and made an offer to fund some preliminary assessments.

Several schools were interested in the idea. Sangamon County funded three additional preliminary assessments for Pawnee CUSD #11, Springfield's Lanphier High School and Jefferson Middle School.

Springfield District 186 plans to move forward with its own further planning and implementation.

Pawnee CUSD #11 was energetic about moving forward and partnering with Beyond Green Partners on a three-year training program to transform its operation to a scratch cooking foodservice program with a diverse menu that uses local and fresh ingredients, partnering with local farmers whenever possible. The Sangamon County Board has agreed to fund this pilot program, and the school will pay for staff costs and any equipment needs.

"We are so grateful to the county for partnering with us and funding this planning, training and implementation program," said Tim Kratochvil, superintendent of Pawnee CUSD #11. "Our staff and school community are so excited about this project, and we are eager to get started and connect with local farmers to begin serving fresher, more local food to our students."

Enhancing rural-urban initiatives were recommended by the CFLL in its "Next 10" visioning report in 2021. The Next 10 is a series of ideas and initiatives to improve the quality of life in the Greater Springfield Area.