

Fresh Bites: Gulf Islands Secondary School Serves It Up Local Style



Chef Mark Kilner arrived at Gulf Islands Secondary School (GISS) on Salt Spring Island in 2010 with a big dream: To change the way students looked at food and the overall culture of food at the school. His first action? To rip out the school's deep fryers and start up a salad bar.

Today, just four years later, GISS is proud to be running a highly successful Farm to School program, with gorgeous food coming out of their kitchen each day.

Chef Kilner says that with the generous help of some knowledgeable members of the community, he and the students have been able to do some amazing things with their school food that the whole community is very proud of.

In addition to the school's now popular salad bar, GISS has a 20x30 insulated greenhouse that functions on a hydroponic system (currently home to an impressive 380 heads of lettuce), an organic, year round outdoor garden of raised beds, sprouting machines, a rainwater collection system, vermiculture boxes, and a new aquaponic system they've just kicked off that is designed to hold large rootball plants such as tomatoes, cucumbers

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and peppers. And as if that wasn't enough, Chef Kilner also has dreams of a future orchard, henhouse, rooftop gardens and more.

"We're trying to do as much with local food as possible to really help students understand where their food comes from," says Chef Kilner. Salt Spring Island is a world unto itself - our students have a great base knowledge of food, and we want to encourage and grow that, as well as give them lots of food choices at lunch. I think it says a lot that these days we sell more salads at lunchtime than hot food."

It Takes a Village

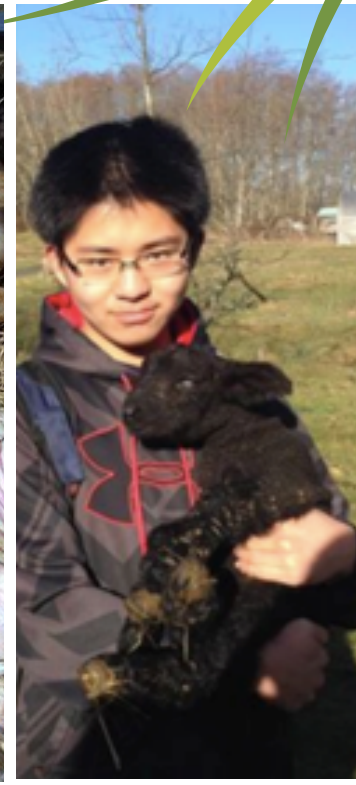
About a hundred students take Chef Kilner's program each year (grades 9-12), and many love the course so

much they come back year after year. Chef Kilner is quick to point out that without the help of the community, the program wouldn't have near the amount of traction that it does.

"It's hard to even try to recognize everyone who has helped, because community support has been tremendous with so many people pitching in. Salt Spring Island is home to a group of very kind, creative people, and our program has benefited hugely from their expertise. I always have ideas on what I want to do, but it's these folks and our students who've helped bring those ideas to life. I think it's really important to get people on board, to find mentors and let them guide you."

"The school administration has also been very supportive, that's important too. They ask me to slow down sometimes," he adds with a laugh, "but as long as our ideas have sound plans, they've never said no to anything."

Ea's Milly Sinclair and Susan Lercher have also been great assets of the program. Milly has been a big supporter of the salad bar and garden, and Susan has been introducing



alternative ingredients into the bake shop: flours such as Kamut, and spelt, and gluten free, fats such as coconut and avocado, and white sugar alternatives such as organic and sustainable palm sugar, and coconut sugar.

Chef Kilner believes that ultimately it's about teaching students that they have options when it comes to preparing healthy food. He says that many are learning a lot about the true nutritional value of the food that they're eating and have a better toolkit of choices.

"At the end of the day they're still teenagers and still might want a burger and fries, but if we can give them the option to grind their own grass-fed beef, bake their own made from scratch buns, make homemade ketchup and oven

bake some fresh yam fries, we've given them a valid nutritional choice. If you make it, they will come."

"These are funny, young, bright, energetic kids who have a real interest in food," says Chef Kilner. "We're doing good stuff, and I'm proud of it."

What's next? Mark is currently investigating the idea of opening a food cart in the summer months. The food trailer would use produce from the garden and offer salads, soups, fresh smoothies and juices. Money will go back into the program so they can continue to by local Island foods and ingredients and students would also receive credits based on a entrepreneurship curriculum.

Curious to learn more? Visit the Facebook Page, at GISS Garden to Market Initiative

