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New Collaboration Brings Opportunity for Scratch Cooked School Meals to Western Nevada County

Nevada City, CA – Sierra Harvest, along with all nine school districts in Western Nevada County and the Nevada County Superintendent of Schools, are thrilled to announce a partnership to bring fresh, scratch-cooked school meals to all students Pre-Kindergarten through young adult. The school districts and the community are enthusiastically behind moving toward a more sustainable model that features local and regional foods and reduces waste. This provides a way for all children to eat well and fully engage in the enriching opportunities within their school communities.

In expressing his enthusiasm for the project, Scott W. Lay, Nevada County Superintendent of Schools, shared, “In partnership with Sierra Harvest, we have the opportunity to transform our student meal program to provide high-quality, nutritional meals using locally-grown food and substantially reducing waste.”

The first step in this groundbreaking project will be a thorough assessment process conducted by the Chef Ann Foundation out of Boulder, Colorado. Founded in 2009, the Chef Ann Foundation is the nation’s leading nonprofit supporting school districts to help schools create healthier food and redefine lunchroom environments. To date, they have reached over 11,000 schools and 3 million children in all 50 states. “Small rural school districts across this country struggle with their school meal programs,” according to Mara Fleishman, CEO of the Chef Ann Foundation. “Fewer students means fewer meals and less funding. The more meals you serve the more funding you get, and your ability to spend on higher quality food increases. The partnership in Western Nevada County CA is so important as a model for communities across the country to band together to create higher quality school meal programs.”

Based on an evaluation across the many elements of school food including food, finance, facilities, human resources, and marketing, the Chef Ann Foundation will provide a road map for the successful transformation of school food in our community. The many benefits will include improved student learning outcomes, reduced hunger, reduced incidence of behavior problems and boosting the local economy with job creation and support for small scale regional farmers. Additionally, a collaborative effort across multiple small rural school districts will provide a model for communities across the

country, thereby putting Nevada County on the map for our commitment to providing students fresh, healthy food they need to succeed.

Leadership across the nine school districts and Nevada County Superintendent of Schools have been working together toward this vision in partnership with Sierra Harvest and with encouragement from parents and community members. A pilot program launched in 2017, Foothills Fresh, established a successful model with the Nevada Joint Union High School District producing scratch cooked meals for students in the Nevada City School District. The goal is to extend these benefits to all children in our community as the districts collaborate to move to a scratch cooked meal program. As Brett McFadden, Superintendent of Nevada Joint Union High School District stated, “The creation of this new partnership will fundamentally reshape school nutrition in Western Nevada County. The opportunities to improve the lives and futures of our students, especially those in need, will increase ten-fold.”

Both Mr. McFadden and Aimee Retzler, Co-director of Sierra Harvest, are passionate about solving the inequities in the national school lunch program. Good food as a basic human right should be available to all children since some rely on getting 60% of their daily calories from school meals. Nevada County will most likely see for the first time in history, that more than 50% of school aged children will be eligible for free/reduced meals this coming school year. Retzler has been advocating for this transformation for thirteen years and “Now is the time to ensure that all children have equal access to nutrient dense and delicious, whole foods. We will create a just food system that is self-sustaining and treats the people who grow the food and the planet with the highest amount of respect. What we feed our kids tells them a great deal about how we care for them and all nine school districts have prioritized seeing happy, healthy kids in line for their freshly made scratch cooked meals.”

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Sierra Harvest was established in 2008 to transform lives and strengthen community through fresh, local, seasonal food. Their commitment and successful track record for improving school food includes assistance in sourcing local, pesticide-free foods, professional development for culinary teams, marketing and promotion of fresh ingredients, taste testing new recipes, and advocating for healthier food choices.

[Learn more about the project](http://www.sierraharvest.org/?p=123) and how you can join the effort at www.sierraharvest.org/?p=123