

" GARDEN PROGRAM "

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**Cullen, Thomas**

**Sent:** Thursday, September 23, 2010 11:40 AM  
**To:** All Principals; Mary Hogue  
**Cc:** Central Office Administrators; Fitzpatrick, Joann; Cleary, Sands  
**Subject:** Gardens at Schools  
**Attachments:** School Gardening Guidelines.doc; Garden Inspection Form.doc; Garden Rules.doc; Harvesting Inspection.doc

Dear Principals,

I need a moment of your time.

Anna Cutaia-Leonard and I are chairing the Wellness Committee and we have an item to discuss with you that involves your schools.

**" GARDENS "**

The topic of gardens at school building sites has been something we have been working on for 2010. Gardens have grown in popularity. We have developed a **Fairfield Garden Program** in conjunction with the Fairfield Department of Health and the PTA Council. We need to share this with you because ultimately it will be the principal of the school that will be responsible for working with the PTA garden representative for each school to make sure compliance is in order and all documentation is completed and forwarded to my office. I have the responsibility of providing the Fairfield Department of Health regular updates regarding our compliance. We must follow the State of Connecticut, Environmental Protection Agency regulations as well as our Food and Nutrition Department standards to comply with these gardens. I appreciate your help with this new program.

The gardens we are speaking about are the ones that will be included in the student curriculum and may produce fruits and vegetables for possible use in the school kitchens. Students will be involved with working in the gardens, planting, harvesting, and then actually consuming the fruits and vegetables in their lunches (as quantities allow and/or dictate). All this will be a part of teaching the students about the program and to promote healthy guidelines and eating habits for the students.

Please take a moment to review the enclosed attachments. You will want to forward these and/or meet with your garden PTA representatives to review and complete. Our goal is to have all work and compliance measures completed by February of 2011 so your garden PTA reps can roll out the planting season for Spring of 2011. All paperwork must be submitted and approved prior to any students being allowed to work in the gardens. I understand that not all Fairfield Public Schools have gardens at this time but the PTA's goal is to work on this so that all schools are participating.

One of the requirements per the garden guidelines is to provide lead testing of soils. This is due to the fact that students will be working in the gardens and ultimately eating the fruits and vegetables from the school gardens. We took this testing project on this past summer with the leadership of the Fairfield Department of Health and I will provide a separate e-mail of information on this with attachments to you immediately.

Thank you and if you have any questions please feel free to contact me.  
Tom Cullen

## **School Gardening Guidelines**

### **Food Safety and Your School's Garden Produce**

Establishing and maintaining a school garden is an excellent learning experience for students, school staff and the community. Gardening promotes a sense of pride and accomplishment as the garden yields fruits and vegetables that participants planted, nurtured and harvested. An important aspect of safe and healthy gardening is learning and consistently applying basic food-handling safety practices. Students can share this important information with their families and promote safe food handling at home as well.

Increasingly, foodborne illness outbreaks are being traced to lettuce, tomatoes, cantaloupe and other raw fruits and vegetables. These outbreaks are caused by pathogenic (disease causing) bacteria, viruses, molds and parasites found on raw produce. These microorganisms are a natural part of the environment and can be a problem with either organic or conventional gardening methods.

The levels of these microorganisms can be reduced with sound gardening and harvesting practices. Thorough washing and careful preparation will further reduce the level of the pathogens found on the outer surface of fresh fruits and vegetables.

It is also possible to get sick from produce contaminated with cleaning solutions, fertilizers, pesticides, heavy metals (lead) and other chemicals that may be present in garden soil or well water.

### **Five Steps to Food Safe Gardening**

Here are five simple steps school gardeners can follow to reduce the risk of foodborne illness developing from eating produce from your school garden.

#### **Step 1-Prepare the Garden for Planting**

- Test soils for contaminants, particularly lead, prior to the beginning of planting. The Fairfield Health Department will sample and test the soil of all school gardens prior to planting.
- Locate the garden away from manure piles, well caps, garbage cans, septic systems, run-off from any potential sources of contamination, and areas where wildlife, farm animals, or pets roam.
- Use compost safely. Compost is the natural breakdown product of leaves, stems, manures and other organic materials—and also a source of pathogens. To be safe for gardening, your compost must reach a temperature of at least 130° F. Check the temperature with a compost thermometer. Please contact the Fairfield Health Department if you do not have a compost thermometer. Do not use any animal waste, including pet waste, meat scraps or dairy product waste in your compost bin. Weeds should not go in the compost bin.
- Work with maintenance staff at the school to ensure safe environmental practices on the school grounds near the garden.

- Materials used for the garden bed, containers, stakes and trellises should be constructed of non-toxic, non-leaching material (no pressure treated wood or used tires).
- A Garden Inspection Form must be filled out and sent to the Fairfield Public Schools Central Office before the first harvest.
- The Garden Rules and Permit to Operate must be posted in a visible place in or near the school garden.

### **Step 2-Maintain the Garden**

- Schools must water their gardens with water from an approved public water system. Water from a municipal or public water system is safe and potable (drinkable).
- Surface water (lakes, ponds, rivers and streams) can be polluted by human sewage or animal waste, fertilizers and pesticides from lawns and farm fields, or chemicals from industry and should not be used.
- Instead of using chemical herbicides, control weeds by using mulch or by pulling them out.
- Keep cats, dogs and other pets out of the garden, as animal waste can be a source of bacteria, parasites and viruses.
- Curtail nesting and hiding places for rats and mice by minimizing vegetation at the edges of your fruit and vegetable garden.
- Do not feed wild animals, including birds, near your garden. Fencing or noise deterrents may help discourage wild animals.

### **Step 3-Harvest Garden Produce**

- Do not work in the garden when suffering from vomiting, diarrhea or other illnesses.
- Always wash your hands before and after harvesting fresh produce.
- Use clean gloves (that have not been used to stir compost or pull weeds) and clean hands when picking produce.
- Use clean, food-grade containers. Food-grade containers are made from materials designed specifically to safely hold food. Garbage bags, trash cans, and any container that originally held chemicals such as household cleaners or pesticides are not food-grade.
- All tools used in the garden must be used solely in the garden and must be cleaned regularly.
- Do not eat fresh produce while harvesting.
- A Harvesting Inspection Form must be filled out for each harvest. The inspection forms must be sent to the Fairfield Public Schools Central Office at the end of each month.

#### **Step 4-Store Garden Produce**

- If you choose to wash fruits and vegetables before storing, be sure to dry them thoroughly with a clean paper towel. (Do not wash berries until you are ready to eat them).
- If you choose to store produce without washing it, shake, rub or brush off any garden dirt with a paper towel or soft brush while still outside. Store unwashed produce in plastic bags or containers. Be sure to label the container in a way that makes it clear to others that it must be washed prior to use.
- Keep fruit and vegetable bins clean.
- When washing produce fresh from the warm outdoors, the rinse water should not be more than 10° colder than the produce or the outside temperature. If you are washing refrigerated produce, use cold water at 45° F or less.
- Fresh fruits and vegetables stored at room temperature (onions, potatoes, and whole tomatoes) should be in a cool, dry, pest-free, well ventilated area away from household chemicals.

#### **Step 5- Preparing and Serving Fresh Garden Produce**

Fresh fruit and vegetables are frequently eaten raw, so the heat of cooking cannot be relied upon to destroy pathogens that might be on the lettuce or tomatoes. It is particularly important to prepare raw produce with food safety in mind.

- Always wash your hands before and after handling fresh produce.
- Rinse fruits and vegetables under cool, running, potable, clean water even if you do not plan to eat the skin or rind.
- Never use soap, detergent, or bleach solution to wash fresh fruits or vegetables. These solutions can affect flavor and may not be safe to ingest.
- Avoid cross-contamination when preparing fruits and vegetables. Cross-contamination occurs when a clean work surface, such as a cutting board or utensil (paring knife) or uncontaminated food, is contaminated by dirty work surfaces, utensils, hands or food. Be sure to wash your hands (as well as the knife and cutting surface) before preparing any ready-to-eat foods such as salad, fresh fruit or a sandwich.
- If you have leftover produce that has been cut, sliced or cooked, store it in clean, airtight containers in the refrigerator at 45° F or less.

Additional resources to be noted: *University of Connecticut Five Steps to Food Safe School Gardening*, *FDA's Guidance for Industry: Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables*; *Fresh, Healthy, and Safe Food: Best Practices for Using Produce from School Gardens by National Farm to School Network*; *Food Safety in the Garden from Univ. of Maryland Extension*

## Agreement Form

I have read the above School Gardening Guidelines and agree to follow them and help the students to follow them.

School \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Principal Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Cafeteria Manager Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Garden Coordinator Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

If applicable:

Student Operator Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Student Operator Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

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FPS - Central Office Use Only

Date Received \_\_\_\_\_

Garden Inspection Form Received \_\_\_\_\_

Lead Test Results \_\_\_\_\_

Permit to Operate Issued \_\_\_\_\_

Inspection Conducted \_\_\_\_\_

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

Approved \_\_\_\_\_

(Principal)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

**Garden Inspection Form**

Name of School Garden \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Garden Coordinator \_\_\_\_\_

Student Operator(s) \_\_\_\_\_

1. Was the soil tested for lead? YES NO
  
2. What kind of materials are you using as fencing/trellis/post materials? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
3. What tools are you going to use in the garden? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - a. Are they only going to be used in the garden? YES NO
  - b. Where will the tools be stored? \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. What are you using for fertilizer? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. Where is it being stored? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. If you are using compost, is it at least 130°F? YES NO N/A
  - c. What kinds of materials are going into the compost? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
5. What are you using to water the garden? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. Where are they being stored? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Is it used only used in the garden? YES NO
  
6. What are you doing for insect and pest management? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - a. Is your insect and pest management non-toxic? YES NO

7. What will be planted in the garden? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Are the Garden Rules and the Permit to Operate Posted? YES NO

9. Have you filled out and submitted the School Gardening Guidelines Agreement Form? YES NO

Please attach a photograph and a sketch/map of the school garden.

Is there anything else you would like to tell the Fairfield Public Schools?  
(comments, suggestions, questions, concerns)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Approved \_\_\_\_\_  
(Principal)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

## Garden Rules

- 1. Wash your hands before working in the garden.**
- 2. Only work in the garden if you are healthy.**
- 3. Always use tools that are only used in the garden and make sure they are clean.**
- 4. Always clean and brush off the harvest before putting it into the containers.**
- 5. Make sure all containers used for the harvest are clean and made to hold food.**
- 6. While in the garden, please do not eat.**
- 7. Please leave any food that falls to the ground on the ground.**
- 8. Make sure the garden is pest and rodent free. If you see any, let an adult know.**
- 9. Wash your hands after working in the garden.**
- 10. Always fill out a harvesting inspection form and turn it in to your teacher or garden supervisor.**



**Harvesting Inspection**

1. Have you washed your hands before going into the garden? YES NO
2. Is anyone sick or not feeling well? YES NO
3. Did you remind everyone not to eat while harvesting? YES NO
4. What kind of containers are you using for the harvest? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. Are they clean? YES NO
  - b. Are they designed to hold food? YES NO
5. If you are using tools, are they used only in the garden? YES NO DON'T KNOW
  - a. Are they clean? YES NO
6. What did you harvest? \_\_\_\_\_
7. What did you use to clean the food you picked? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Did you exclude food on the ground or that dropped to the ground? YES NO
9. Did you turn the harvest over to the school cafeteria staff? YES NO
10. Did you wash your hands when you were finished in the garden? YES NO

Is there anything else you would like to tell the Fairfield Public Schools?  
(questions, concerns, comments, suggestions)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student who Performed Inspection

\_\_\_\_\_  
Adult Supervisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of School Garden

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Approved \_\_\_\_\_  
(Principal)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)