

Chilliwack students take a bite of BC



Journeyman cook Jacqueline Harrison (second from left) helps students Scott McLean, Emma Jessop and Hanna Preto prepare a turkey in the kitchen at Sardis secondary. The turkey is one of several food items that comes from BC farms as part of the Take A Bite of BC program.

JENNA HAUCK/PROGRESS

By [Katie Bartel - Chilliwack Progress](#)

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When Jessie Funk tastes a dish made from fresh ingredients, it's like heaven in his mouth.

His tongue knows when a cooked vegetable is straight out of the ground or pre-frozen; it knows when poultry is organically grown or mass produced; it knows when fruits are picked from local branches or have been transported thousands of kilometres.

"Fresh ingredients bring out the entire flavour of a dish," said Funk, a Grade 12 student in [Sardis](#)

[secondary's](#) culinary arts program. "Fresh always makes the dish taste way better, definitely more flavour."

Funk's finely honed palette for fresh, local foods is thanks in large part to [Take a Bite of BC](#).

Take a Bite of BC was started as a pilot program in 2009 to provide young chefs with an opportunity to learn about foods grown in their communities. The program, which was developed by [BC Agriculture in the Classroom Foundation](#), in partnership with the BC Culinary Arts Association, BC agricultural commodity groups and BC producers, provides secondary school teaching kitchens with BC grown product – 100 per cent donated.

"The goal is to give students an ability to work with fresh, B.C. product and understand what's grown in their backyard," said Tammy Watson, program operations manager with BC Agriculture in the Classroom Foundation.

"It gives students who want to go into a professional cooking career a real look at what they could be working with."

The program has [30 suppliers](#) from all over B.C..

Approximately every two weeks a large shipment of seasonal product is delivered to participating schools, which includes such things as fresh eggs, milk, cheese, root vegetables, greenhouse vegetables, cranberries, blueberries, turkeys, a side of beef, other meats and more.

Pretty much anything grown and raised in the province, the program tries to include, said Watson.

When Take a Bite of BC first started there were 14 schools participating, [now there's 38](#), including [Chilliwack secondary](#) and Sardis secondary.

The program has enabled teachers to expand their lesson plans. They're able to theme menus around the products, be creative in developing recipes, enlighten their students on the benefits of cooking with fresh and local foods, and perform thorough instruction on the different cuts of a cow using the side of beef donated to them, or on how to properly debone a chicken.

For Sardis secondary foods teacher Donna Frost, it was a no brainer to get involved.

"I do a lesson every year on eating and buying local, on the nutritional values of it, and the freshness of it," said Frost.

Take a Bite of BC has helped her broaden those lessons.

For the agriculture community, donating products isn't a loss, it's a gain, said Watson. The long-term benefits are huge.

"The top vocations that are going to be crucial in the next 10 years are woodworkers, mechanics and chefs. This program lends itself so wonderfully to that – if you watch these kids in the kitchen, it's amazing, intense, a very professional environment."

In a recent class, Grade 10 student Emma Jessop was assigned to washing B.C. grown turkeys and removing their insides. At the sink, Jessop didn't let her petite size or her thoughts get in the way of the job needing to be done.

"It was really slimy and disgusting, but at the same time it was a really good experience," said Jessop who enrolled in the class as a way of getting a head start in the job-seeking field.

"I thought maybe it would be a good job opportunity for when I'm in college," she said.

After four semesters of professional cook training courses at Sardis secondary, Jessie Funk knows his future lies with food.

"I enjoy working with food and creating different dishes," said Funk, who will be attending [Culinary Arts at the Art Institute of Vancouver](#) next year.

And working with fresh, local food, "the taste and the textures you get from them, you can't get that from frozen food."

For more information on Take a Bite of BC, visit the website at <http://www.aitc.ca/bc/programs/take-a-bite-of-bc/>.

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