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MILL CITY GROWS’ FARM TO TABLE COOKING CLASSES BRING LOWELL FAMILIES TOGETHER IN THE KITCHEN

Cooking with fresh, local ingredients while enjoying quality family time is the perfect recipe for building community and healthier families!

[LOWELL, MA] – As part of their mission to bring food education to the community, the Lowell-based non-profit Mill City Grows (MCG) brings kids and families together in the kitchen to further develop their cooking skills and strengthen the importance of enjoying meals at home as a family. Creating a fun learning environment is at the heart of Mill City Grows’ popular Farm to Table Cooking Class Series, led by guest chefs and MCG education staff. For the past five years, these classes have created a safe space for families to try a variety of recipes, learn hands-on kid-friendly cooking methods, and utilize locally sourced ingredients.

“The mission of Mill City Grows is to increase fresh food access for all Lowellians,” says Val Snowdon, Mill City Grows’ Director of Programs, Education & Community. “We do this through our community and school gardens as well as our Farm to Table Cooking Classes. By sampling new produce and preparing it in a variety of ways, class participants begin to develop their palates and eventually show a preference for more fresh fruits and vegetables.”

As participants in this year’s Farm to Table Family Cooking Class Series at the Lincoln Elementary School, Iris and her 9-year old son Jeremiah have made lasting friendships with fellow classmates. “What I love most about these classes is seeing the diversity in the families, especially in these times when neighborhoods can feel so divided,” says Iris, who lives in Lowell with her son. “We’re not just learning how to cook, we’re learning about food from other cultures and seeing what other families enjoy eating at home. These classes are actually helping us build and strengthen our community.” Iris also says that while Jeremiah has always enjoyed cooking at home, joining the class has dramatically increased his overall confidence.

“At its core, I don't think equity can exist without close relationships within a community,” says Mill City Grows FoodCorps Service Member Zoe Flavin. Flavin co-led the Farm to Table Family Cooking Class at the Lincoln School alongside fellow MCG FoodCorps Service Member, Giuliana Cappucci.

“Our Farm to Table Cooking Classes create a space for community members to build those relationships that are so important in creating an equitable city,” Flavin continues. “In class, our families develop their toolkit for cooking with fresh local food, which in turn strengthens their toolkit for nourishing their families. This development happens in class as they prepare meals together. To me, this is what food equity looks like.”

Mill City Grows’ Farm to Table Cooking Classes began in summer and fall 2015 with three pilot classes with families from Thom Anne Sullivan Center, Lowell Community Health Center, and Lowell Public Schools 21st Century Learning Center program. The success of those classes encouraged Mill City Grows to continue the program through additional partnerships with UTEC.
and Mill No. 5, both of whom provided kitchen space for the program. Farm to Table Cooking Classes have additionally been held at schools throughout Lowell, including the Bartlett Middle School, Stoklosa Middle School, Morey Elementary School, McAvinnue Elementary School, and Lincoln Elementary School. Classes have also been held at the Coalition for a Better Acre (CBA).

Mill City Grows is committed to continuing and improving the Farm to Table Cooking Class model to reflect the needs of local families while providing access to locally-grown food. MCG’s second 2018 Farm to Table Family Cooking Class Series is currently under way at STEM Academy at The Rogers School in Lowell. The session will wrap up on Tuesday, June 19. Classes will resume once again in fall 2018 at a different location.

Mill City Grows’ Farm to Table Cooking Classes are made possible with support from the Amelia Peabody Foundation, Circle Health, DCU for Kids, Greater Lowell Health Alliance, The Sudbury Foundation, the United States Department of Agriculture Community Food Projects, and an Anonymous donor. Additional support for classes held at Lowell Public School sites is provided by Lowell Public Schools Food and Nutrition Services.

For more information about Mill City Grows’ Farm to Table Cooking Classes, please contact Val Snowdon at Val@MillCityGrows.org.

About Mill City Grows
Since 2011, Mill City Grows has worked towards food justice in Lowell, Massachusetts, using the following strategies and programs: education in and out of schools, supporting community leadership through community gardens, increasing urban agriculture through urban farming, implementing a mobile market, and empowering people to produce their own food. Their Food Access and Food Education programs are rooted in the idea that a well-educated and well-resourced community will make healthier choices. Visit MillCityGrows.org to learn more.

Photos courtesy of Mill City Grows:
Farm to Table Family Cooking Class at the Lincoln School in Lowell, spring 2018
(left): Zoe Flavin holds a bowl as young class participants whisk.
(center): Iris and her son Jeremiah mix ingredients for a homemade egg bake.
(right): Zoe Flavin and Giuliana Cappucci look on as families prep their meals.

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