

# FOOD CORPS



**One in four U.S. children struggle with hunger, while one in three is obese or overweight. Yet the root cause is the same: lack of access to healthy food.**

**Schools are poised to be the front lines in our nation's response to childhood obesity: 32 million children eat school food – the source of half their calories – 180 days of the year. What we feed our children, and what we teach them about food in school shapes how they learn, how they grow and how long they will live.**

**Give children nutrition education in the classroom, hands-on learning through school gardens, and nourishing food in the cafeteria, and a lifetime of healthy eating can take root.**

**Enter FoodCorps.**

*"We get very excited to eat things we usually don't like, like broccoli, spinach, peas, and carrots..we grew it, so we like it a lot more."*

*Eva Muraga, age 10*

## ABOUT FOODCORPS

FoodCorps places motivated leaders in limited-resource communities for a year of public service. Working under the direction of local partner organizations, we implement a three-ingredient recipe for healthy kids.

### OUR SERVICE MEMBERS:

- deliver hands-on nutrition education
- build and tend school gardens
- bring high-quality local food into public school cafeterias

### WITHIN THE FIRST FEW MONTHS OF SERVICE, THEY:

- reached more than **25,000** children
- built or restored **137** school and community gardens
- recruited **245** community volunteers
- harvested **4,200** pounds of garden-fresh produce for hungry children and families



Looking beyond the statistics, the anecdotes our service members share with us each week—of salsa taste-tests, broccoli biology lessons and bringing 200 pounds of local sweet potatoes onto the school lunch menu—are inspiring. FoodCorps wants this accomplishments to expand exponentially.

## OUR VISION

We envision a nation of well-nourished children: children who know what healthy food is, how it grows and where it comes from, and who have access to it every day. These children, immersed in a healthy food environment at a young age, will learn better, live longer, and liberate their generation from diet-related disease.

We also envision a bright future for our service members: emerging leaders who will graduate from FoodCorps to become farmers, chefs, educators and public health professionals. Armed with the skills to improve school food, these leaders will go on to improve all food.

We envision a world in which affordable, fair, healthy food is expected and enjoyed by all.



## OUR PROGRAM

FoodCorps Service Members are highly motivated individuals who spend a year-long term of modestly paid public service in high need communities. FoodCorps invests heavily in service members' professional development. In addition to mentorship from national leaders in their chosen field, Service Members receive ongoing training and support from FoodCorps at the national, statewide, and local levels.

Rather than creating a new national infrastructure and imposing a one-size-fits-all solution from the top down, FoodCorps identifies local organizations that are already doing effective work on the ground, then arms these partners with the human resources necessary to increase their impact.



Current service sites are in Arkansas, Arizona, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, New Mexico, North Carolina, and Oregon.

## SUPPORT

FoodCorps is an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, funded by a combination of public and private funds. We are a part of the AmeriCorps network, the government's national public service program, which comprises less than one-third of our budget. The vast majority of FoodCorps' funding comes from foundations, corporations and individuals who recognize the urgency of addressing childhood obesity and diet-related disease.

There has never been a better time to make a tangible, lasting difference in the life of a child. We hope you will join us in our ambitious goal to reach 1,000 service members working in every state in the country. We can't change the way kids think about food without you.



You can make a donation on our website at [www.foodcorps.org](http://www.foodcorps.org) or by sending a check to FoodCorps, Inc. 281 Park Avenue South, NY NY 10010.



The Washington Post

# FOOD

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2011

MG PG VA

“WCR’s World Fare street food event: a good cause, and an unexpected source of tailgating recipes.” E8

**BLOG** Check out our daily postings: [washingtonpost.com/allwecaneat](http://washingtonpost.com/allwecaneat)

**CHAT** We answer questions at noon today: [live.washingtonpost.com](http://live.washingtonpost.com)

**GOOD TO GO**  
**Eat & Joy in Georgetown**  
 Fresh Turkish food, made fast and delivered to your office or dorm-room door. E3



**DINNER IN MINUTES**  
**Modern makeover**  
 New touches transform an old favorite. E2



**MORE RECIPES** Sesame-Coated Chicken E2 Roasted Curried Potatoes With Sweet Onion E2 Coffee-Spiked Banana Bread ONLINE, PLUS MORE AT [WASHINGTONPOST.COM/RECIPES](http://WASHINGTONPOST.COM/RECIPES)

## SMARTER FOOD



FRED FIELD FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Nora Saks, a FoodCorps service member, updates pupils at East End Community School in Portland, Maine, on the results of each class's vegetable garden harvest.

# The pizza starts here

On the ground in 10 states, **FoodCorps** adds fresh, local ingredients to school fare

*Editor's note: Smarter Food is a new monthly feature about innovative people and programs on the front lines of the effort to change how food is produced and consumed in America.*

BY JANE BLACK  
 Special to The Washington Post

PORTLAND, MAINE — The garden at the East End Community School looks as if it has been staged for a magazine photo shoot. It sits on a hill with a panoramic view of Portland's Casco Bay, which even on a gray, early-autumn day shimmers silver. There are tomatoes, peppers, celery, cucumbers and carrots, each with a hand-painted sign to identify the crop for newbie gardeners: on this particular day, a class of second-graders. Nora Saks, a 26-year-old dressed in tan Carhartt overalls and a worn baseball cap, instructs them to take their imaginary cameras and go ex-

amine the vegetables before gathering at the stone table to taste what they've grown.

On looks alone, it would be easy to think East End Community is a posh private school. In fact, it serves primarily low-income families here, many of them immigrants from Cambodia, Somalia and Sudan. Saks is not their teacher but a member of a new national service program, FoodCorps, which operates as a kind of Teach for America to improve school food.

Launched in August, FoodCorps has 50 members in 10 states, from Maine to Oregon and Michigan to Mississippi. Next year, FoodCorps plans to double its ranks and add several new states, not yet chosen. By 2020, it hopes to have 1,000 service members in all 50 states.

FOOD CORPS CONTINUED ON E7

# Kids get a taste of what fresh food is all about

FOOD CORPS FROM E1

FoodCorps targets a key weakness in the growing and ever-more-fashionable effort to teach children where food comes from and wean them off french fries and pizza in the cafeteria. It puts boots on the ground to develop the programs that many educators believe are important but, in an era of drastic budget cuts, don't have the resources to fund.

The idea for FoodCorps was born on Earth Day 2009, the same day President Obama expanded the AmeriCorps program through the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act. Executive Director Curt Ellis, who co-directed the 2007 documentary "King Corn," about his post-college attempt to grow an acre of corn, initially envisioned a program for beginning farmers. But he and his co-founders soon realized they could reach more young people by developing nutrition education and school gardens and putting more wholesome food in the cafeteria.

The average American student receives between four and five hours of nutrition education each year, according to the School Nutrition Association. "We realized that what was needed was a holistic approach to a healthy school environment," Ellis said.

The response to FoodCorps has been enthusiastic, to say the least. More than 100 organizations in 38 states and the District competed to lure FoodCorps members to their communities. And 1,229 people applied for the 50 spots. This, for a job that pays \$15,000 a year — a salary that makes service members eligible for food stamps. "My interests have always been food and kids, and I wanted to do something that brings those two things together. So FoodCorps was pretty much a no-brainer," said Laura Budde, a member based in Gardiner, an hour northeast of Portland.

At 22, Budde has a degree in environmental science and has spent summers on farms in Washington state and Virginia. In Maine, she is working at four schools in three towns. Mondays and Thursdays, for example, she is restoring a greenhouse in nearby Augusta, where she will grow food for culinary students at a vocational high school. On Wednesday mornings, she helps lead the Bowdoinham Food Freaks program, which teaches gardening skills and cooking to elementary school students.

Bowdoinham is a progressive rural town with more than its share of young organic farmers. The Food Freaks garden reflects that. There are the usual tomatoes, peppers and herbs. But the junior gardeners also grow rhubarb, asparagus, squash and Jerusalem artichokes. Whether they like to eat them is another matter. The week I visited, Budde's students had made pizza crust from summer squash, flour and eggs and topped it with tomatoes and cheese, a creation that apparently didn't quite measure up to the pizza pockets on offer in the cafeteria that day. According to a survey, 44 percent of the students who tasted it said they didn't like it.

"I think school food-service directors are interested in healthy and local food, but the question is, how do they pull their heads up from the grind and make that change?" says Kathy Savoie, a nutrition educator at the University of Maine Cooperative Extension, who is overseeing Budde's work. "The FoodCorps program puts someone on the ground, right there to help with these efforts



First-graders Gavin Snyder, left, and Ian Rawding check out a carrot at Edna Libby Elementary School in Standish, Maine, as part of their FoodCorps program.

PHOTOS BY FRED FIELD FOR THE WASHINGTON POST



that are so close to being successful."

Maine's intemperate climate doesn't always help the cause. There was rain and hail on the September day that member Jane Spencer had hoped to take a class of first-graders to the garden at Edna Libby Elementary in Standish. Instead, the slender 26-year-old sat with the pupils indoors and explained how seeds develop into seedlings, then flowers and fruits.

Like Budde, Spencer has an impressive agricultural résumé. She worked on farms in Hawaii and Connecticut and on fishing boats in Alaska. If the weather cooperates, she says, she hopes to work with the students outdoors until the end of October, when the snow comes. In winter, she'll teach in a greenhouse and help to establish connections between local farmers and school cafeterias.

"You watch the things they bring for lunch, and you want them to eat something good," said first-grade teacher Linda Wilson, who has taught for 31 years and is herself an avid gardener. "Education is so prescribed these days. We don't have the time or the resources. If someone comes in and is prepared to do it, it's wonderful."

Because FoodCorps is part of the AmeriCorps network, about a third of its budget comes from

federal dollars. The rest comes from private foundations such as W.K. Kellogg Foundation. (Full disclosure: I am a fellow with a nonprofit advocacy organization that also receives funding from Kellogg.)

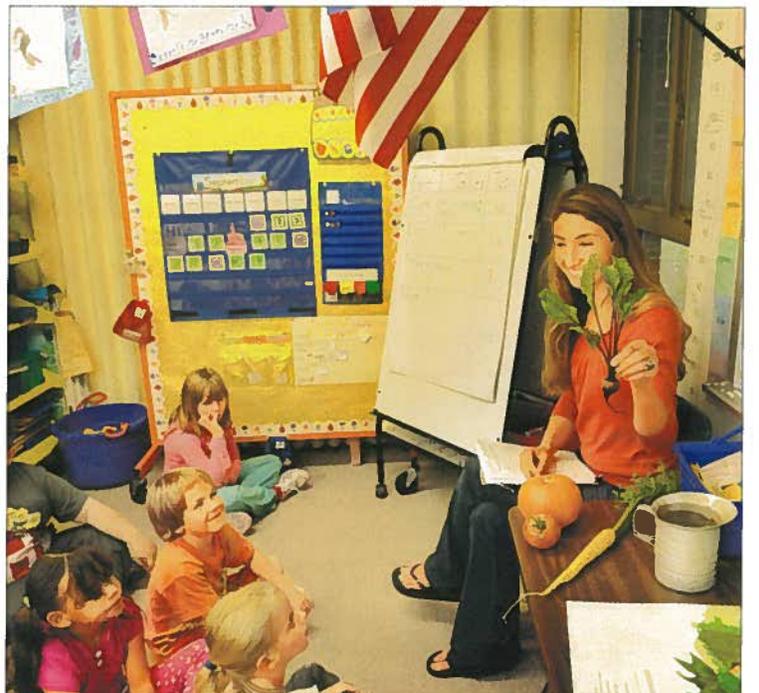
What happens next depends on the experiences of this first FoodCorps class. Each member is required to assess his or her impact, such as the number of children and parents engaged, the total dollar amounts spent on local food, and, through surveys, the change in attitude toward healthful food among students.

Anecdotally, the future looks promising.

"I never thought about eating healthy before," said Ifrah Abdi, a 16-year-old at Portland High School who is also a member of the high school culinary corps that Saks is teaching to garden and cook. "The fact is, you can grow good food and cook it, and it's better than going to the supermarket. Not everyone, especially immigrant families, can afford organic food. This makes a real difference."

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Black, a former Food section staffer, is a Brooklyn-based food writer who is working on a book about one West Virginia city's struggle to change the way it eats. Follow her on Twitter: @jane\_black.



Above, FoodCorps service member Jane Spencer shows first-graders at Edna Libby Elementary School what a fresh beet looks like. Above left, she explains how a seed grows into a tomato plant.

# The New York Times

• 2011 The New York Times

NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 24, 2011

MARK BITTMAN

## Food's New Foot Soldiers

FoodCorps, which started last week, is symbolic of just what we need: a national service program that aims to improve nutrition education for children, develop school gardening projects and change what's being served on school lunch trays.

I've been looking forward to this for months, because it's such an up: 50 new foot soldiers in the war against ignorance in food. The service members, most of them in their 20s, just went to work at 41 sites in 10 states, from Maine to Oregon and Michigan to Mississippi. (FoodCorps concentrates on communities with high rates of childhood obesity or limited access to healthy food, though these days every state has communities like that.)

I'd be even more elated if there were 50 FoodCorps members in each state. Or 5,000 in each, which approaches the number we're going to need to educate our kids so they can look forward to a lifetime of good health and good eating. But FoodCorps is a model we can use to build upon.

Curt Ellis, co-creator of the movie, "King Corn," is running the show with Debra Eschmeyer, formerly of the National Farm to School Network, and Cecily Upton, formerly of Slow Food USA. FoodCorps is part of the AmeriCorps, from which it receives about a third of its budget. Most of the money comes from sources like the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and individual donors.

Is FoodCorps necessary? The organizations that are fighting childhood obesity on the front lines seem to think so: 108 groups from 39 states and the District of Columbia applied to host FoodCorps, which chose to work at locations that had already begun to improve school food and needed help in expanding their work.

Potential participants were turned away at a crazy rate: More than 1,230 people applied for 50 positions. (It's easier to get into Harvard.) Nor is this a program for the college grad who wants to do some soul-searching by playing in a garden for a year. "Many service members," says Ellis, "have firsthand experience with the communities they're serv-

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### Getting kids smarter about good eating.

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ing. Some are going back to the towns they grew up in; others were raised on food stamps or overcame obesity. They understand these challenges from the inside."

They're also smart, well informed, and articulate; Ellis told me there wasn't a day last week that he didn't tear up from something that one of them said. (I'm going to post some of their initial sets of beliefs and, I hope, ongoing reports from the field on my blog: [nytimes.com/bittman](http://nytimes.com/bittman).)

FoodCorps members will be paid \$15,000 for the year. On this they must find places to live and pay for food, though those without other sources of income are being encouraged to apply for help from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (usually called SNAP, and formerly known as food stamps), so they'll live like many of those they're serving. (Those eligible will also receive a \$5,550 federal education award to apply to their student loans when they finish.)

How, I asked Ellis, will we know if FoodCorps is successful? "This year we expect about 60,000 kids to benefit from improved food education," he says. (This will be sadly easy to achieve: currently, elementary-age kids typically get less than five hours of nutrition education annually.) "Gardens will be begun or fortified to try to get kids more excited about fruits and vegetables; fresh food will be sourced from local farms; and parents and community members will be more invested in school food."

FoodCorps will cost less than \$2 million for the first year. Thus for less than a million bucks of our money we are getting a program that will start to roll back the \$147 billion it costs us each year to deal with the health consequences of obesity, while changing the way thousands of young people grow up thinking about food.

Not to burst any bubbles, but let's note that this in no way levels the playing field. That \$2 million invested in FoodCorps — well conceived, raised with the best possible nonprofit intentions, and ultimately well spent (a bargain!) — was starkly contrasted last week with the \$30 million that a new group of corporate farmers and ranchers intend to spend to promote the idea that they're "committed to providing healthy choices." As anyone who's followed the news in recent years knows, agribusiness has done pretty much the opposite, relying on direct federal subsidies (also our money) to the tune of at least \$5 billion annually to produce precisely the kind of junk food that is largely responsible for the tripling of childhood obesity in the last 30 years.

Here's the problem: raising \$30 million for a corporate public relations campaign to defend the rights of Big Food to continue to produce junk is easy; raising \$2 million to promote healthy eating in our children is hard. Ellis says that his dream is to have 1,000 service members a year working in all 50 states by 2020. I say let's have 10,000 by 2015.

But let's end on a happy note: FoodCorps is up and running. Hallelujah! □

# TIME Health

GOING GREEN

## Can FoodCorps Get America to Eat Healthfully?

By **BRYAN WALSH** Tuesday, Aug. 23, 2011

As a member of both the Hopi and Pima tribes of Arizona, David Pecusa is more than familiar with the ills of the American food system. The Hopi and Pima, like many other Native American tribes, suffer from dangerously high levels of obesity, higher than Americans nationally — and it's not like the rest of the population is in great shape. The possible causes are many — genetics, stress, poverty — but there's little doubt that one of the biggest problems is simply food. Native Americans who live on reservations often lack access to fresh, wholesome food, while at the same time they've lost connection to their own healthier traditional diets. "Hopi people call themselves the 'farmers of the desert,'" says Pecusa. "Growing food and living off the land is who we are as a Hopi people, and if we don't do this anymore we can't call ourselves Hopi anymore."

That's something Pecusa is trying to change — and he's not alone. Pecusa is one of 50 members of the inaugural cohort of the FoodCorps — a new national service organization that aims to fight obesity and diet-related disease through promoting school gardens and farm-to-school programs. A partner of the AmeriCorps service program — which annually sends more than 85,000 Americans into volunteer work for at least a year — FoodCorps will cast its 50 fellows to host sites in 10 states, like seeds for a better American food system. "There's a lot of passion out there from folks who want to serve," says Debra Eschmeyer, the co-founder of FoodCorps and its program director. "This is a chance for them to share and a chance for them to learn."

I've written before that the modern sustainable-food movement has more energy and momentum than the traditional environmental movement has been able to generate in recent years. FoodCorps is just one more example of that success: 1,229 people applied for just 50 slots — which, as the irrepressible Eschmeyer notes, makes FoodCorps more competitive than Harvard or Teach for America. "There were excellent people out there waiting for this," says Eschmeyer.

Among those who made the cut is Nora Saks, a Maryland native who has worked in organic farming for the past few years. Already an AmeriCorps veteran, Saks says she was waiting for a similar opportunity in the food movement, and jumped when she heard about FoodCorps. All 50 FoodCorps fellows met last week for several days of training — appropriately, at the Wisconsin State Fair in Milwaukee — and Saks says that what excited her the most was the chance to meet other people as committed to changing the American food system as she was. "I've been growing food and learning about farming for seven years now," she says. "All that time I felt almost like I was hoarding that knowledge, but with FoodCorps there's a chance to share with people and learn from them."

Saks and her fellow FoodCorps members begin their year of service this week, working at sites like the Michigan Land Use Institute, the Rippling Waters Organic Farm in Maine and the Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health in Arizona. Obviously, the program is still small — just a tiny fraction of the tens of thousands of young Americans who work with AmeriCorps each year. A tight fiscal environment hasn't made it any easier to get the program off the ground — much of the funding has come from private donors, including the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and Whole Foods' Whole Kids Foundation.

But the potential to grow is there — and not just because FoodCorps turned away so many applicants. Whatever your politics, it's clear that America has a food problem, with the number of obese children tripling over the past 30 years, and the cost of weight-related health problems expected to reach \$344 billion by 2018. Programs that help improve access to healthy food — a key part of the FoodCorps mission — remain one of the best tools we have to reduce the toll from obesity. "I feel like if we can get people excited about growing their own food, that will make a real difference," says Pecusa.

Which, ultimately, is what Pecusa and the other FoodCorps fellows are really aiming for. "This is what I've always wanted to do," he says. "I want to reconnect Native youth with the agriculture they've been missing." The food movement, after all, has always been about more than food. It's about ideals — and 50 very smart young people are about to get the chance to put those ideals into practice.



Casey Bilyeu from the Underground Food Collective prepares a healthy lunch at an orientation for FoodCorps members, who begin their year of service this week

Whitney Kidder

# Stirring Some Soul into America's Food Obsession

How one new organization targets kids for deeper connections.

**W**HAT ARE WE TO make of the fact that this country is swooning over food, chefs, and cooking, yet plainly has a serious food *problem*? We are developing a lively food culture to rival that of France or China, adding our own modern, global-fusion spin. Yet obesity and type 2 diabetes stalk the land. Farmers' markets are proliferating, yet in some places it's hard to find a decent selection of fresh vegetables, even at peak season. Small communities and poor urban neighborhoods have very little acquaintance with the benefits of the revolution in American eating.

Vexing issues, these, setting off whistles on political teakettles to the right and left. But let's talk broadly about culture rather than politics. For all our emphasis on the individual, we also deeply value family, connection, and heritage. And



**WE VALUE FAMILY, CONNECTION, HERITAGE. THEN, OFTEN, WE FEED OUR KIDS JUNK.**

food is deeply about all of those. At the school level, however, let alone at the mall, we often feed our kids junk. And by feeding them junk, says Curt Ellis, the cofounder of FoodCorps, "We teach children that this is America's food culture. In schools and other institutions, we just decided that cost matters more than quality. I think that's a choice you can feel OK about in the short term, but now we're facing the long-term consequences."

There are signs of light. FoodCorps, founded in 2010, is attempting to

shed some by using a Peace Corps model: sending young women and men into schools (that ask for help) to work on nutrition, gardening, farm outreach, cooking, and cafeteria initiatives. They are paid a nominal stipend for a year of service, often spent far from home. When the organization announced 50 initial spots last spring, more than 1,200 young Americans raised their hands.

FoodCorps, and efforts like it, represents a crucial grassroots response to the red-hot food revolution—a revolution that, without soul and soldiers of this stripe, can be too elitist, too precious, too *foodie*. These young people understand what "local" actually means. What we have here is a case of good, old-fashioned American optimism.

"I think," Ellis says, "we have something much better to offer. Kids can grow up with a different sense of

what food is about. They can believe food matters culturally—that food is part of family, and love, and community."

I'm happy to say that, beginning this year, which is *Cooking Light's* 25th anniversary year, this magazine is the media sponsor of FoodCorps. You'll find field reports from FoodCorps projects in *Cooking Light*, starting in March. You can read more about the stories and motivations of members at [foodcorps.org](http://foodcorps.org), under the "About Us" banner. And join us in spreading the word. E-mail thoughts to me at [Scott\\_Mowbray@timeinc.com](mailto:Scott_Mowbray@timeinc.com).

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