



For Immediate Release:
Thursday, March 17, 2016

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*****Media Advisory:** Willow Cove Elementary students will be touring their garden and taste testing stone soup and green juice on 3/17 from 11:00am – 12:00pm. Interview and photo/video opportunities are available during that window of time. If you plan on attending, please contact Nicky Mora, District Communications and PR Specialist at (925) 473-2427 or nmora@pittsburg.k12.ca.us. Willow Cove Elementary is located at 1880 Hanlon Way, Pittsburg, CA 94565. ***

**Pittsburg Unified School District Joins 57 School Districts
in Statewide Celebration of Locally-Sourced Food**

Pittsburg, CA, March 17, 2016 ... Today more than 1.5 million California students – over a quarter of the state’s children – will be offered a school meal made from foods grown in California and prepared freshly just for them. Pittsburg Unified School District, together with other innovative districts in the [California Thursdays®](#) Network, is demonstrating that making school meals fresher and local can have a big impact on California children and the state’s economy.

How big? The California Thursdays® Network includes 58 public school districts across the state covering at least 2,878 schools. Collectively they serve over 283 million meals each year. When school districts come together like this and increase demand for

California-grown food, the supply chain can shift, supporting local businesses and helping children learn about where their food comes from and how to make healthier choices.

Here in Pittsburg, Matt Belasco, Director of Child Nutrition Services, is buying more produce from Cipponeri farms in the Central Valley of California, as well as Coke Farms in the Monterey Peninsula area. Pittsburg Unified School District purchases 15 tons of Oranges and 12 tons of Stone Fruit locally each year. According to economists, every \$1 spent on local food fosters \$2.56 in local economic activity, meaning that the California Thursdays® program pays significant dividends for local taxpayers.

“Fresh and healthy local school meals are great for our students and make perfect financial sense,” says Child Nutrition Director Belasco, who leads the local California Thursdays® program. “It’s worth investing in quality meals that kids want. In addition, we are working with several other schools in Contra Costa County to develop a buying collaborative, to pool our resources and increase our buying power to attract local growers right here in our area, to plant and harvest crops for use in our schools. What could be better than farm fresh produce delivered to our school within days of being harvested? This is extremely exciting.”

A Growing Model for the State and the Nation

The California Thursdays® program is predicated on the simple logic that California children will benefit from eating more fresh California-grown food. The program’s organizer, the [Center for Ecoliteracy](#), recognizes that freshly cooked meals made with local ingredients are more likely to appeal to students. This theory was proven in the pilot year of the program, when districts reported a 13 percent increase in school lunch participation on days featuring kid-tested California Thursdays® meals.

“Whenever we serve fresh, locally grown food with these recipes, students devour it,” says Zenobia Barlow, executive director of the Center for Ecoliteracy. “That alone is a victory. And when we connect the food back to the people, the places and the farming practices they came from, kids get excited.”

Building on student support, California Thursdays® has grown at a rapid clip. What started as a pilot program with 15 school districts in October 2014, expanded to 42 districts by April 2015 and now includes 58 districts in 24 counties statewide. Altogether, it accounts for 32 percent of California’s school meals.

Other school systems around the country are also becoming inspired – Minnesota Thursdays recently launched in Minneapolis and St. Paul. New York Thursdays has just

sprung up in schools across New York City.

“We are proud to support the expansion of California Thursdays® through our Farm to School Grant Program,” says Jesus Mendoza, western regional administrator for the USDA Food and Nutrition Service. “Children in schools with farm to school programs eat more fruits and vegetables, and are more willing to try new healthy foods – important steps in the fight against childhood obesity. California Thursdays® helps to make the healthy choice the easy choice for children.”

A Tasty Way of “Going Green” This St. Patrick’s Day

In Pittsburg, Pittsburg Unified students will enjoy menus featuring healthy, student-tested recipes cooked onsite from scratch with local ingredients. Options range from Grass fed beef Macho Nachos, with beef sourced in Marin County to a California turkey wrap made with turkey from Foster Farms in Turlock, and whole grain flat bread from California Lavash in Gilroy.

For more information about the California Thursdays® program, or to see family-sized versions of some of the California Thursdays® recipes and learn the “Five Things Parents Can Do,” visit www.californiathursdays.org.

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EDITORS: A full online pressroom that includes contact information for every participating school district, press kit materials and photographs of meal prep, students eating and product shots is available at: www.californiathursdayspr.org.

About Pittsburg Unified School District

Pittsburg Unified School District (PUSD) is a K-12 district serving the community of Pittsburg, California. Founded in 1933, the school system is committed to providing an excellent opportunity for all students to learn. Comprised of eight elementary schools, three junior high schools, one comprehensive high school, one alternative education high school, an adult school, independent study, alternative learning experiences, and early childhood education services, the school district serves more than 10,500 students. PUSD is located in the San Francisco Bay Area, fifty minutes outside of downtown San Francisco.

The Center for Ecoliteracy is a Berkeley-based nonprofit dedicated to education for sustainable living and a pioneer in school lunch reform. For more information, visit www.ecoliteracy.org.