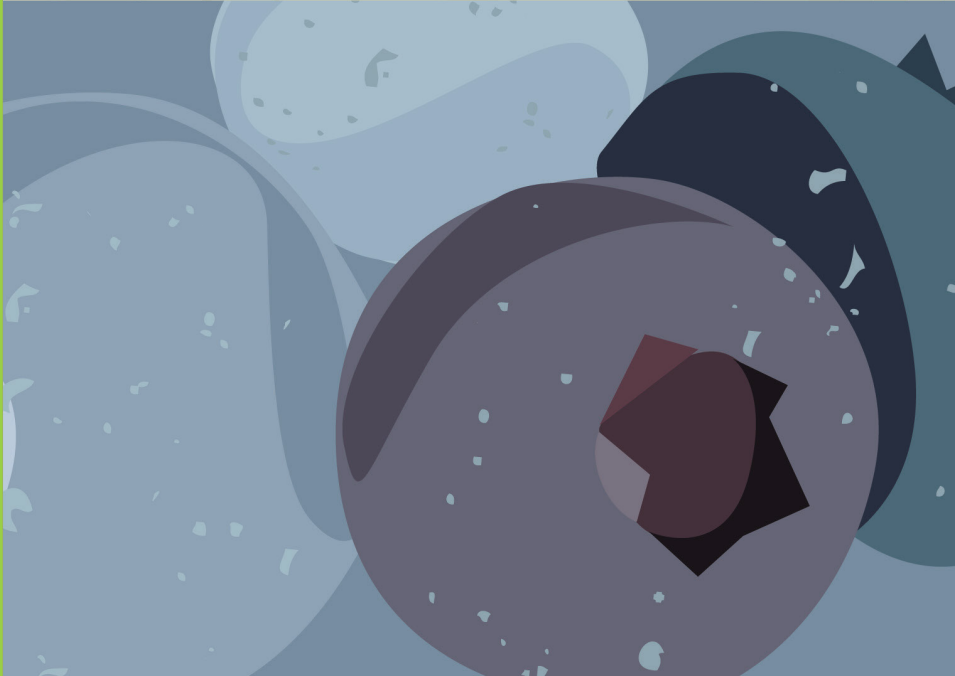




**ILLINOIS HARVEST OF THE MONTH**

# TASTE TEST TOOLKIT



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## INTRODUCTION

We know that students are sometimes reluctant to try new foods: it can often take multiple exposures and different preparations before younger eaters recognize and accept an item. Taste testing is a fantastic way for educators and foodservice staff to introduce students to healthy and local foods. Feedback from taste tests can also be used to improve recipes and increase the use of fresh, local foods in breakfast, lunch, and snack menus. Taste tests contribute to not only building healthier eating habits but also reducing food waste and increasing children's participation in meal programs.

The following guide is designed to help you conduct quality taste tests that will engage students to try new foods and expand their palate for healthy, fresh flavors. With proper planning, supplies, evaluation tools, and marketing, your taste testing venture will leave a lasting impact on student health!

### **Not registered for Illinois Harvest of the Month?**

It's a fun and easy program that celebrates a different in-season, locally grown food item every month. Registered sites get access to resources, recipes, curriculum, and one-on-one assistance.

Sign-up now: **[HarvestIllinois.org](http://HarvestIllinois.org)**



## PLANNING CHECKLIST

For long-term success, it's always a good idea to establish a plan before getting started with your taste testing program. Be sure to check all the boxes as you develop your plan!

- Tie your efforts to existing farm to school or student wellness activities.** If there is a farm to school committee or active wellness council at your site, be sure the leadership of those efforts are aware and involved in your taste testing program. They will help provide valuable input and ultimately make the effort more sustainable.
- Keep a regular schedule when planning tastings at your sites.** Children are accustomed to routine scheduling. School staff and parents will also appreciate the regularity.
- Be sure to plan for school closures, school events, and school holidays.**
- Choose wisely when trying new recipes.** Can you access and afford all the ingredients you need? Can you feature a new food in a recipe that is culturally appropriate to the populations you serve?
- Whenever possible and prudent, **use local and regional ingredients in new recipes.** Be sure to provide information about the farm source to your eaters to educate and generate enthusiasm over local foods.
- Can you involve the students in the process?** Consider when and where you can utilize students within planning and executing the taste test. For example, you can run a contest for recipes, organize a focus group on creative ways to utilize new foods, and recruit students to administer the taste test. Don't forget to collect student feedback of the items that you're tasting--this evaluation is critical for the development of your farm to school program!

## PLANNING CHECKLIST CONT.

- Promotion is the difference between a less-than-stellar success and a triumph!** Advertise your tastings and menu changes in every possible way to gain interest and generate excitement. Newsletters, school apps, school website, the morning announcements, and take-home folders are just part of your arsenal for promotions. Posters in the hallways and announcements over the intercom during passing periods will catch the interest of your students, staff, and parents. Involve students in creating artwork and voicing announcements and ads.
  
- Don't Yuck My Yum!** should be the standard of behavior during taste tests. Remind students not to say negative comments about how something tastes. Each student is entitled to an opinion, but opinions should be respectful. Remind your students to be polite and use language like "I don't care for it this time." Remember, it sometimes takes 7-10 tries before younger students enjoy a new taste.
  
- Get parents involved in the process, too.** Share recipes for the new taste item at home, online, and in your community. A reminder that IL Harvest of the Month has an Extension Kit which provides tools to share new recipes and spotlight local ingredients at home and even in local grocery stores!

**Mooseheart Health and Wellness Newsletter**  
 Mary Zupke, RD & Kelly Sodine, RD | November 2018

**NUTRITION FACTS: Brussels sprouts**

Serving Size: 1 cup (88 g)	
Calories per Serving: 38	
Fat: 0.3 g	0%
Cholesterol: 0 g	0%
Sodium: 22 mg	0%
Potassium: 342 mg	9%
Total Carbs: 8 g	3%
Fiber: 1.3 g	3%
Protein: 3 g	
Vitamin C: 124%	Vitamin A: 13%

Source: USDA

**RECIPE CORNER**

**Tart Cherry-Glazed Brussels Sprouts**  
 Total time: 30 m/Serves: 4

**Ingredients**

- ½ cup tart cherry juice
- 1 ½ tablespoons packed light brown sugar
- ½ teaspoon sriracha hot sauce (or to taste)
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 12 ounces Brussels sprouts, trimmed and halved
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- salt and pepper, to taste
- 1/3 cup sliced almonds

**Directions**

- To prepare glaze, combine cherry juice, brown sugar and sriracha in a small saucepan. Cook over medium-high heat, stirring regularly to prevent scorching, until significantly reduced and liquid is thick and syrupy, about 15 minutes. Remove from heat.
- Heat oil in a large non-stick skillet over medium-high heat. Add Brussels sprouts and toss to coat with oil, then turn with tongs so cut sides are facing down. Cook for 6 to 8 minutes or until bottoms are golden brown and sprouts are crisp-tender (slightly longer if your sprouts are very large).
- Stir in garlic until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Season with salt and pepper. Remove from heat and immediately add glaze; gently toss until evenly coated. Stir in almonds. Serve warm.

Nutritional Information per Serving: 279 calories; Total Fat: 20 g; Carbs: 20g; Fiber: 4 g; Protein: 6g  
 Adapted from [www.foodanddrink.com](http://www.foodanddrink.com), Nutritional Information from <https://www.calorieking.com>

**FUN FACTS ABOUT BRUSSELS SPROUTS**

- 1<sup>st</sup> grown in Brussels, Belgium in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (thus the name)
- Related to broccoli and kale, **Brussels sprouts** look like mini-cabbages
- **Brussels sprouts** are 86% water
- Grow in clusters along tall woody stalks
- Taste best when roasted, steamed or grilled
- Harvested after 1<sup>st</sup> frost for sweeter taste

Source: <https://easyscienceforkids.com/brussels-sprouts/>

**TIPS TO STAY ACTIVE**

- Schedule **Daily Activity** during the week
- Track your **Daily Activity** progress
- Try to new skill, make your **Daily Activity** FUN
- Turn off the screen and spent **Daily Activity** outside in good Fall weather

In their November newsletter, **Mooseheart Child City and School, Inc.** shared their Harvest of the Month celebration of Brussels Sprouts with families and the community. The nutrition and fun facts educate on the benefits of this harvest item to encourage its use in home cooking, and they even shared a recipe utilized by senior students for their Harvest of the Month taste test. By promoting the celebration in a newsletter, it sustains the lessons outside of just the classroom.

## SUPPLY SUGGESTIONS FOR TASTE TESTS

Think about what you will need for each tasting. Consider using compostable or re-usable supplies whenever possible to reduce waste. Can the tasting be served on a chip or cracker instead of with utensils? With older students, you might be able to self-serve directly from a large bowl or container. For younger children, consider serving directly on the meal lines using trays and serviceware instead of additional supplies.

### POTENTIAL SUPPLIES



- Signage
- Tasting table with colorful tablecloth
- Utensils (spoons, forks)
- Small cups, plates or napkins
- Response forms or other feedback tools
- Pens, pencils, or thumbs up/down stamps, stickers, etc.
- A container to collect response forms
- Containers, trays or bowls to transport samples
- Trash, compost, and recycling bins



## ILLINOIS-SPECIFIC TASTING IDEAS

When people think of Illinois agriculture, the first crops that come to mind are likely corn and soybeans. However, Illinois growers and processors produce so much more! Crops like pumpkins, peaches, apples, grapes, and melons are produced in quantity across Illinois. Also, did you know that Illinois is the largest producer of horseradish in the U.S.?! Check out Illinois Ag in the Classroom for more information about all the food we're growing.

The Illinois Farmer's Market Association, in partnership with Illinois Market Maker, also maintains a directory and map with 347 farmers markets and 994 individual farmers listed.

Creating Illinois-specific tasting events can be a fun and educational way to sample new, local foods for your menus. Drawing attention to where Illinois foods are grown and sharing fun facts will add interest and excitement to your tastings. With pumpkins, for example, you might share, "The Pumpkin Capital of the World is Morton, Illinois, home of the pumpkin' chunkin' contest!"

### **Celebrate the Jewish New Year**

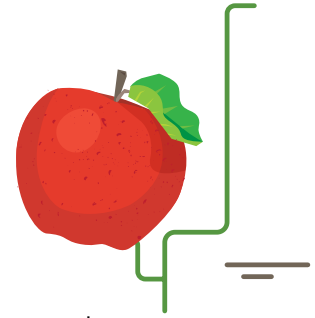
Celebrate and bring to the forefront the traditional Rosh Hashanah holiday, the Jewish New Year, in late September/early October by tasting Moroccan Carrot Salad for future use on salad bars or as a standalone side dish. Moroccan Carrot Salad, a traditional Rosh Hashanah dish in Israel, is a symbol of a sweet and fruitful year to come. Share Rosh Hashanah facts and traditions along with carrot facts and educate your kids about different cultures and local foods at the same time!

### **Turn Pumpkins into Planters**

Did you know Illinois is in the top three pumpkin producing states in the U.S.? In October, sample and celebrate new pumpkin recipes for your Harvest of the Month featured food with pumpkin plants growing out of pumpkin pots! To create pumpkin pots, in early September, hollow out small, local pie pumpkins, add soil, and plant 5 pumpkin seeds per pumpkin pot. Water and set outdoors in a sunny, protected location. Your pumpkin seeds need just 10-15 days to begin to sprout and grow in the potting soil. Soon, the young plants will trail out of the pumpkin shell planter. Add fun facts and information about where the pumpkins came from to posters or table cards, and you have provided an educational component to your October tasting!



## ILLINOIS-SPECIFIC TASTING IDEAS CONT.



### **Join the Crunch Heard 'Round the Region**

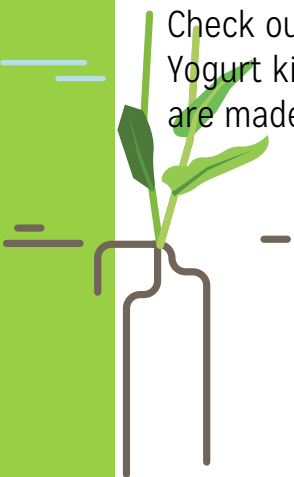
Add the Great Apple Crunch to your calendar when you register for this one-day event on the second Thursday of October in Illinois. Organize a full day focused on celebrating local apples on the second Thursday of October. The Crunch Guide and local apple sourcing tips will inspire staff and students alike. Feature apple recipes like Chicken Salad with Apples, Cranberries and Walnuts, or for younger eaters, Apple Yogurt Smoothies. Or, you can create a taste test using several varieties of local apples, allowing students to choose their favorite variety. Field trips and orchard grower visits are also great ways to educate your students about Illinois apples.

### **Eat and Play with Potatoes**

In late autumn, sample Southwest Sunrise Oven Roasted Potatoes. To create an interesting fun fact display, or share a fun craft with preschoolers, decorate with potato stamps! Cut potatoes in large, easy-to-hold slices to create a stamp base. Cut autumn designs, like leaves and acorns, into the potato chunks using cookie cutters or carving freestyle designs with a small knife. Dip your stamps in poster paint and decorate table tents and/or posters. Place the potato stamps on display so your kids can see how the festive posters were created. This process can also be utilized in October and November with local storage potatoes cut into holiday-specific decorations for Halloween and Thanksgiving. Stamped designs can also be placed on sneeze guards using non-toxic, washable tempera paints. You can watch a Potato Stamp tutorial [here](#).

### **Highlight Milk Products in the Colder Months**

Host new dairy recipe tastings during the winter months featuring cheese, yogurt, or buttermilk to introduce new menu options like a Strawberry Yogurt Banana Split for breakfast or a new baked item like Zucchini Muffins, which uses local yogurt to make a rich, tasty treat. For more ideas and recipes check out our local dairy tips [here](#). Sharing simple dairy activities can be fun and educational. Check out the Making Butter activity, Making Ricotta Cheese, or the Homemade Yogurt kids activity. Educating your students about dairy products and how they are made is a great way to encourage healthy eating.





## ILLINOIS-SPECIFIC TASTING IDEAS CONT.

### **Add Something Sweet**

In the winter, when fresh foods are not available through standard sources, try a local, shelf stable product like honey. Local honey taste tests can be a fun and economical way to educate kids about how Illinois honey is made and where honey comes from. Inexpensive, plain saltines or chunks of bread will become the perfect vehicle to excite and educate your eaters about this sweet, local food. Looking for easy and affordable ways to incorporate honey into meals? Vinaigrettes and glazes are a great way to add local honey to your menus and recipes. By incorporating local honey into a dressing, or glaze, you can boost flavor and add interest to the most common of foods. Check out our Harvest of the Month toolbox on local honey here.

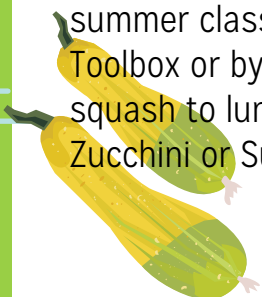


### **Go Green in Spring**

In early springtime, partner with teaching staff to germinate baby greens and easy-to-grow herbs indoors on sunny classroom windowsills. Share photos of the plants in various stages of growth for students to learn about during the taste test. Compare different varieties of greens and herbs and have students vote on which combinations are their favorites. Based on the student feedback, set up your salad bars with an influx of fresh, local spring green mixes in April and May. You can also share growing instructions with students to encourage them to try starting a few herb plants at home. Learn more about growing your own greens and herbs indoors here.

### **Use Summer Squash in the Peak Season**

Linking summer feeding and summer garden programs to Harvest of the Month is an opportunity to grow or purchase locally at the height of the season! During the summer when students are eating at summer meal sites, or in summer school sessions, it is easy to incorporate local produce education and celebrations into to everyday activities and meals. Here's an example. Summer squash, for example, is abundant and inexpensive throughout the warm summer months. Celebrate this summer classic with fun lessons and activities from the USDA SNAP Education Toolbox or by utilizing our Map Your Squash activities. You can add summer squash to lunch trays and snacks with easy to prepare Roasted Parmesan Lemon Zucchini or Summer Squash Casserole.



## CHOOSE THE BEST SITE

Choose a location for your tasting which best fits your target group and your program. Taste tests work best when implemented on a regular schedule, so consider creating a calendar of tastings that are consistently held in the same location. When deciding on the site for your tastings, consider the following:

- Logistics of moving food and supplies to the site
- Number of students reached at the site
- Opportunities for outreach
- Opportunities to tie in educational components at the site
- Time of day best suited for tastings at the site
- Staff or volunteers available at the site
- Hot and cold holding for food items

### CLASSROOM TASTINGS BENEFITS

- Teachers can easily integrate lessons and activities related to the tasting
- Activity is in a more controlled environment
- An ambassador or lead classroom can serve as leaders by example and can assist
- Taste test foods can be prepared in bulk, or for each individual classroom

### CAFETERIA TASTINGS BENEFITS

- Cafeteria staff or other school staff can prepare the foods in a certified kitchen
- Response collection boxes can be set up near garbage and tray return locations
- No classroom time is required
- Tastings can be sampled directly on the meal lines or at checkout
- Multiple tasting stations can be manned in the cafeteria

## CHOOSE THE BEST SITE CONT.

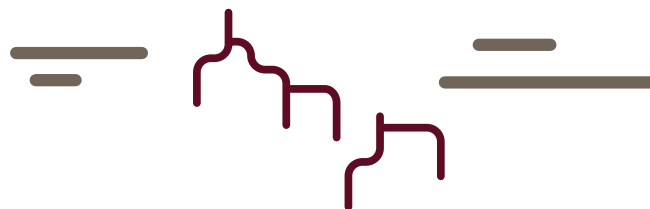


### GARDEN, CULINARY OR AFTER SCHOOL CLUB TASTINGS BENEFITS

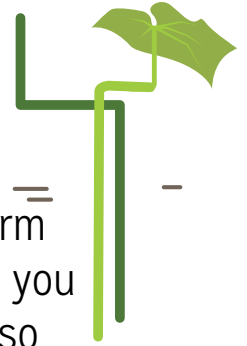
- Can funds be used from a specific club or program?
- School staff associated with the club can prepare the foods
- Indoor and outdoor garden produce can be utilized for tastings
- No classroom time is required
- Taste test foods can be prepared by students
- Activity is in a more controlled environment

### OFF-SITE OR SPECIAL EVENT TASTINGS BENEFITS

- Can event funds be used for the tasting?
- Can event staff or other school staff help prepare and serve the foods?
- Will you reach a wider audience that includes parents?
- No classroom time is required
- Outreach potential for the tastings and your program is higher and more diverse



## METHODS TO COLLECT FEEDBACK



Collecting student feedback on taste tests is key for long term success of your farm to school program. Not only will it help you make decisions about what to serve on the lunch line but also you can use this data for soliciting funds from the school board or grant funders.

Deciding on how you evaluate your tasting should be based on the age groups of your respondents and the time needed to complete a survey or answer brief questions about the item sampled. In each case, it is prudent to make the process quick, easy, and accessible. Here are suggestions for each age group.

### EARLY CHILDCARE PARTICIPANTS

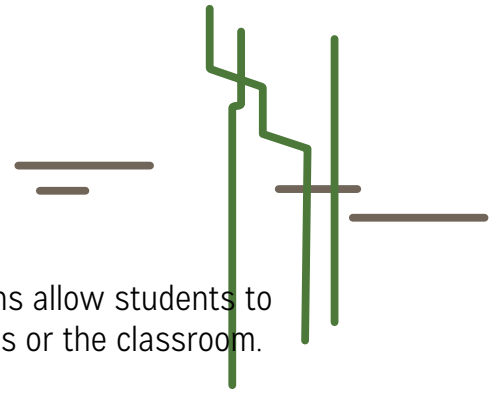
Create a pantomime when working with very young children to help them express their feelings about the item sampled. Example: Create a short rhyme or song using hand movements to show a positive or negative reaction to the sampled item. Have the children imitate the response associated with their reaction (ie: thumbs up and a happy tummy vs. thumbs down and a frown).

### K-2 PARTICIPANTS

Place two posterboard charts, one with a yummy face and one with a no thank you face, on the wall, low enough for the smallest child to reach. Using colored stickers, allow each child to vote for their reaction by placing the sticker on the appropriate poster. Tally and announce the results at the end of the day, or during morning announcements the following day.



## METHODS TO COLLECT FEEDBACK CONT.



### GRADES 3-5

Mini ballots with multiple choice answers to descriptive questions allow students to circle or check their favored option quickly on their way to recess or the classroom.

### MIDDLE SCHOOL

Use ballot boxes, cups or containers to collect simple yes/no ballots or use a multiple choice question form with a space for a recipe or menu suggestion write-in. Check out Edible Schoolyard's ballots here.

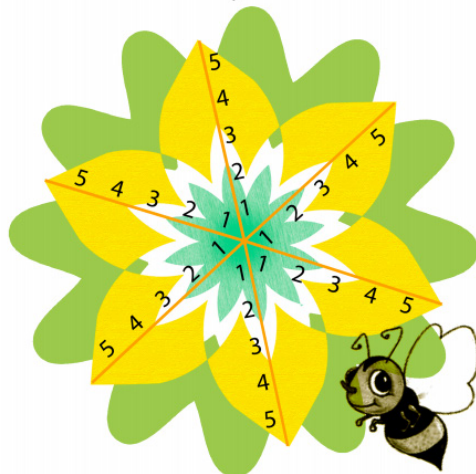
### HIGH SCHOOL

Ballots can be more complex. Asking students to write in ideas may help to discover interests in the group. Be sure ethnic recipes using the new food items are culturally appropriate.

Print this!

## Tasting Graph Flower

How do you rate it?



What are you tasting? \_\_\_\_\_

FoodShare

FoodShare Toronto ([www.foodshare.net](http://www.foodshare.net))

today we are tasting: \_\_\_\_\_

VARIETY	DESCRIPTIVE WORD	SYNONYM for your descriptive word	ANTONYM for your descriptive word

My favorite variety was \_\_\_\_\_ because it was \_\_\_\_\_  
and it was NOT \_\_\_\_\_.

Edible Schoolyard ([www.edibleschoolyard.org](http://www.edibleschoolyard.org))

## ADDING TASTE TEST RECIPES TO THE MENU

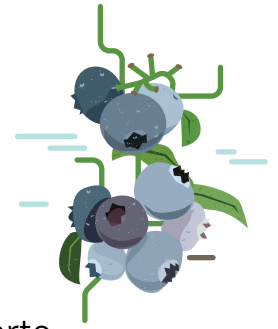
Once you have the results from your taste tests, you can begin to add well-received items and recipes to your menu. Individual, fresh food items like local greens and veggies can be incorporated into salad bar selections and added as an ingredient in plated salads and as a part of, or as a side, in entrees. Placing a sign describing the item, including where it was grown, nearby will draw attention to it, and help to build interest.

If you received mixed results on specific tasting items, it may be wise to expose your eaters to the item again before deciding to add it to your menu. Incorporating a second tasting with a different preparation (using a different dipping sauce or sampling the item cooked vs. raw) may help to receive a stronger positive response from students.

When you receive overwhelming negative responses to tasting items, it's okay not to add them to your menu. Remember, this is why you taste test--to determine whether your eaters will enjoy that item! Student-approved foods increase meal participation, reduce waste, and shift student attitudes about healthy eating.



## MARKETING AND PROMOTION



Food service managers know that advertising and promoting your efforts will help to improve your results and get more kids on your meal lines. There are multiple ways to promote your tasting events. Here are just a few:

- Use school newsletters and bulletins to share tasting days and featured items before they happen.
- Include a taste test advisory during the morning announcements over the school intercom. Recruit student announcers to lend a familiar voice to the event. If you are taste testing with specific grades, ask students from the relevant grade levels to help you broadcast the message.
- Utilize the school website and/or the school app to create ads about the tasting events. Using bright colors and fun clip art will catch the eye of both students and parents. A reminder that you can always use the IL Harvest of the Month logo and designs to spiff up your promotion!
- Get the message out on menu grids and any letters sent home to parents.
- Create posters featuring student artwork to advertise the taste tests in busy hallways.
- Connect your tastings to local grocery stores using IL Harvest of the Month's Extension Kit! With aligned branding and messaging about healthy food across the wider community, students are more likely to ask their parents to buy healthy foods.
- Print tray paper liners with colorful information about future menu changes and tastings.
- Hang meal line signage about new and upcoming items as a result of successful taste tests.
- Put up ads on school buses sharing information about upcoming taste tests and new menu items.
- Share your efforts on local community radio, television, newspapers, and blogs.
- Tag the Illinois Farm to School Network in your social media posts - we'll help promote your efforts on our Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter!

@IllinoisFarmtoSchoolNetwork @ILFarm2School

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

No Kid Hungry Virginia Tasting Toolkit  
[va.nokidhungry.org](http://va.nokidhungry.org)

Action for Healthy Kids Host a Taste Test Kit  
[actionforhealthykids.org/tools-for-schools](http://actionforhealthykids.org/tools-for-schools)

Harvest of the Month Vermont Tasting Toolkit  
[vermontharvestofthemonth.org](http://vermontharvestofthemonth.org)

FoodShare Taste Test Toolkit 2013  
[foodshare.net/Toolkit-2013CookingTasting.pdf](http://foodshare.net/Toolkit-2013CookingTasting.pdf)

Illinois Ag in the Classroom  
[agintheclassroom.org](http://agintheclassroom.org)

Illinois Specialty Growers Association  
[specialtygrowers.org](http://specialtygrowers.org)

Illinois Farmer's Market Association  
[ilfma.org](http://ilfma.org)

Illinois Market Maker  
[il.foodmarketmaker.com](http://il.foodmarketmaker.com)

Edible Schoolyard Tasting Ballots  
[edibleschoolyard.org/resource/tasting-ballots](http://edibleschoolyard.org/resource/tasting-ballots)



## CONTACT US

Still struggling to host a successful taste test? Contact the Illinois Farm to School Network staff at Seven Generations Ahead for additional help. We also love to share best practices with others around the state - if you have tips and tricks to contribute from your experience, let us know!



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