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# Farm to school program visits Morgan County schools

Editor I

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By Tia Lynn Lecorchick staff writer

The Farm to School Pilot Program, a collaborative effort to bring local, healthier food to Morgan County public schools, debuted on May 13 at the Morgan County Middle School. According to Chris McCauley, executive director of the Madison-Morgan Conservancy, the new program is a partnership between the conservancy, Kelly Products, Inc., and the Morgan County Schools. "The goals of this Farm to School project are to support nutrition and agriculture education, expand markets for local farmers, and to promote the consumption of minimally processed foods," said McCauley. "We have been working for a couple years now trying to figure out how to incorporate local food into our school system," explained McCauley. "The obstacles are significant but not insurmountable, and we hope this pilot project expands in years to come. Incorporating local food in out schools is good for the students' health and good for the farmers businesses. A win, win, I'd say." "This effort is the culmination of the work of a number of people and groups who have been hard at work championing our local farms and farmers for many years.

We are pleased to have been at the table for this specific initiative to help support and bring it about," said Brad Kelly of Kelly Products and board member of the conservancy. Every month, a different local farmer and farm product will be featured in the Morgan County Elementary School cafeteria. The Morgan County Middle School also requested to be part of this program. "I like the fact that we can partner with the community. They fill a need we have and we can help local business," said Lydia Norburg, principal of the middle school.

Verner Farms in Rutledge was the first farm to kick-off the program, providing the middle and elementary schools with locally-produced burgers for lunch. Verner Farms is designated as a Centennial Family Farm by the State of Georgia and is listed on FARMeander, which is a map-based tour guide of local farms in Morgan and Newton Counties, with over 1000 acres of land. Alan Verner, a fourth generation owner of the farm, sells a wide variety of beef directly to the public. "We are breaking new ground," said Verner. "Hopefully, it will get the kids interested in nutrition. It's an important thing on people's minds. They want to know where our food comes

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Unfortunately, we don't know where a lot of our food comes from in this country. But this program let's parents and kids know where the food came from, how it is grown, how its processes and how the animals were treated and fed," said Varner. In addition to McCauley, Kelly, and Verner, several influential community members showed up to the Middle School for the program's debut, including Sarah Burbach, superintendent of schools, Misty Friedman, school nutritionist for the department of agriculture, and Dave Belton, school board member.

"This program is very important for our children. Agriculture is the number one business in Georgia. It's important to teach these kids where their food comes from and how it was grown. Many of these kids will likely go into the agriculture business themselves when they grow up," said Friedman. "This is another example of One Morgan. Everyone coming together to do the best thing for the community at large, regardless of our affiliations. Everyone does what is right for the community and for our children. We all work together," said Belton. According to McCauley, this program represents the heart of the conservancy's motto, "Serve, Safeguard, and Sustain."

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The Morgan County Citizen is Madison and Morgan County, Ga.'s weekly newspaper, and sole source for accurate, hyperlocal information.

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