

FARM TO HFAA.....HEALTHY FOODS YOUR WAY...

A farm- filled fun experience at the HILLTOP HANOVER Farm and Environmental Center Westchester NY!!! Yes, HFAA of Greater New York joined the bandwagon of “FARM to..... TABLE, FORK, PLATE, COOKING, SCHOOL, HOSPITAL initiatives and the USDA “KNOW YOUR FARMER, KNOW YOUR FOOD or KYF2 initiative. Not because it’s a trend, it’s in, it’s revolutionary, or just politically correct, but because of the new job description facing the foodservice executive. As our mother organization AHF would put it..... the Foodservice executive should Make delicious food, Make choices for the patients/residents, Inspire Patients/Residents and be “The Trusted Expert”. Health, Sustainability and Flavor should be in their Menu. So off went the organization’s FARM TO HFAA initiative! And what better way for HFAA to sharpen knowledge and harvest actual experience in healthcare foodservice than to leave the conference-seminar room and go to the fields.

July 26, 2013, the HFAA group came all geared up in farming-fashion, with hats on their heads, outfit covered head to toe, and sprayed with insect repellants ready to brave the farm. Some even brought their garden shears for the “pick your own produce –vegetables” portion of the farm visit, while one member had her high boots on, for the rough, likely muddy terrain walk and maybe a cattle herding horseback ride in the farm.

A critical connection ensued between the farmers and the HFAA members. First hand agricultural literacy was cropped. Led by the Farm Director herself, the group was introduced to the on-going farming activities and services of the Westchester County- owned 187acre Hilltop Hanover Farm. Free range Chicken Farm, Field and Greenhouse Vegetable crops, Home Garden Plants farm were just a few of the areas visited. The spans of parkland complementing the farm offered diverse wildlife habitats, hiking trails and beautiful views of nature. Bee hives, bird feeding/water stations and exquisite Butterflies were all part of the breathtaking graphics of natural coexistence.

The farm offers agricultural educational activities for the farmers, soon to be breed of farmers, for the community, and for the various visiting groups both Adults and Kids. Topics and demonstrations that aimed at food sustainability and environmental stewardship, stretched from Field Work (seeding, weeding, harvesting and irrigation) to Home Gardening backyard/ patio (composting, crop rotation, lawn care) as well as food preservation. Also part of their community service is to donate harvests/food and give provisions to local food pantries (including soup kitchens) and to homebound seniors.

Among the fruits of the HFAA farm visit were the insights gained on the value of networking with local farmers, agricultural literacy, sourcing from local farms, and food sustainability. The activity culminated with most of the HFAA group doing hands-on field harvest of their vegetables/herbs/ornamental flowers, experiencing sun heat, bug exposure and dirtied footwear that come with the actual farming process. The others, however, did a short-cut and contented themselves with buying produce from the farm stand of the area. Every HFAA member, however, left the farm seriously realizing the need to compliment and support local farmers not only for the continuity of readily available fresh food supplies, but also for sustaining healthy foods.

The next stop of the HFAA Educational Trip was at BSE Marketing in New Hyde Park, N.Y. where the company’s latest models of cook and hold oven equipment were showcased, to meet optimal healthy cooking needs of the discriminate Foodservice executive. Apart from lower energy requirements, less labor, low emission/ no-hood ventilation needed, and user friendly characteristics, the versatility of their product equipment were strategically marketed through Chef support culinary program that comes with the package. Their culinary expert chefs engaged the HFAA audience in a

nutrition focused cooking demonstration of their tested standardized healthy recipes, while highlighting the equipment's positive capability in conserving nutrients, moisture and flavor in foods. Healthy menu and recipe ideas (including sauces) guided by Mayo Clinic references, were shared with the group. The activity concluded with a taste testing session of a complete array of fine dining foods cooked via their combi ovens. The HFAA attendees were all in awe with the taste, flavor, texture, and appearance of the foods presented... from the vegies to the entrée of salmon and chicken, up to the dessert of freshly baked dark choc chip cookie sandwich filled with ice cream made from scratch. HFAA ended the trip definitely earning greater wisdom in the field of healthcare foodservice.

Tired? Late in going back home? Yes, but the rough start of the trip due to no-show bus and driver, had a very happy and memorable ending. Bravo to the HFAA leadership capabilities of Mimi Wang and Steven Chow whose quick thinking and decision-making capabilities enabled the almost impossible replacement of transport bus and driver, and holding the group's trust and enthusiasm to the trip's finish line. The trip was really worth the wait !!!

Submitted by: Cecille P. Agustin, MS. RD. CDN Education Chair