

THE DISTRICT CORRESPONDENT

CONNECTING OUR COMMUNITY



ALL IN. ALL ALIGNED. ALL FORWARD.

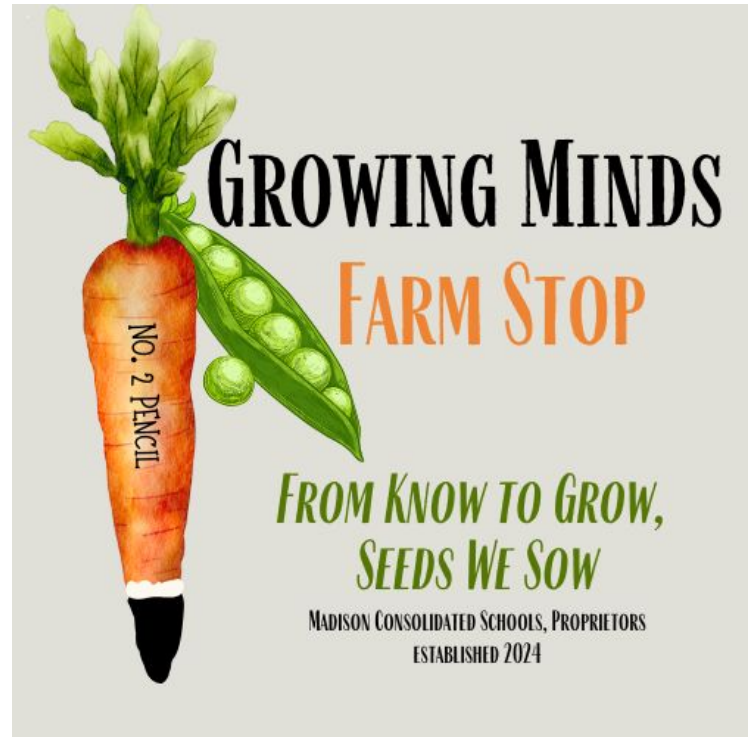
SPECIAL EDITION We are **BLOOMING!**

After years of dreaming, entrepreneurial planning, presentations, fundraising, and TONS of community support, the Growing Minds Farm Stop has launched!

“What started as an idea and very high-level discussions roughly three years ago has come to fruition for our students,” shared Superintendent Dr. Teresa Brown. “We knew that we could create a unique, hands-on learning experience to complement our classroom instruction.” MCS developed a curriculum capstone opportunity for CTE (Career & Technical Education) students while closing the gap on daily accessibility to farm-fresh food for our community. “We had early discussions with Madison Youth Unlimited (MYU), a local non-profit organization, committed to improving the quality of life for Madison area youth and their families, Brown continued. “They shared research on the concept of a student-led initiative, and we quickly realized we could do something special.”



Original Farm Stop team: John Schutte, CTE Coordinator and team mentor, Ava Armbrecht, Reilly Kuppler, Sophie Guirguis, Lilly Cox, Avery Clayton, Emma Wynn, and Anni Kempton.



In 2023, seven MCHS students (represented in our logo as the peas) embarked on a project guided by John Schutte, CTE Coordinator, to build a sustainable business plan from the ground up, where students run a business partnering with local and regional farmers to bring fresh produce, meat, eggs, honey, and other items to Main Street. “What we see today is the result of lots of hours of work, learning, research, field trips, discussions, and ideas brought to the table by a group of young ladies who committed to this project early,” shared Schutte. “Now, Class of ‘25 alumni, Lilly Cox, Reilly Kuppler, Emma Wynn, Sophie Guirguis, Anni Kempton, Avery Clayton, and Ava Armbrecht made up the original team members. They put together the business plan, were part of the building renovation, and were able to see the Farm Stop open just as they were setting sights on their next chapter.”

Staffing

The unique aspect of the Growing Minds Farm Stop is that it is a student-led and student-run business. “Our hours of operation are dependent on the schedules of our student employees,” continued Schutte.

“MCHS Co-op students from the Business Entrepreneurship, Agriculture, Culinary, Marketing, or other classes run the store during the day as part of their Capstone requirements for graduation.” Co-op spots are limited, and students are paid for their time while working. To cover the after-school and weekend hours, students apply for the job, are interviewed by a team of employees and mentors, are required to meet both GPA and discipline requirements, and, if hired, attend ServSafe and Customer Experience training before they are eligible to work in the market.

Lilly Cox, who has been a leader on this team from the beginning, will stay on as an Apprenticeship Manager for the market as she also attends classes to finish her degree in Agri Business. Lilly and Schutte will work closely to continue to learn, build systems, and create a sustainable non-profit model that will also help meet new state graduation requirements for work-based learning. “The goal over the next few years is for Lilly to grow into the role of Market Manager and program mentor and eventually have responsibility for the overall program into the future,” Schutte continued. “Lilly does a great job working with the students and has been instrumental in helping get the project launched, especially the cafe side of the business. Her prior experience as a barista has been very helpful in training our staff on our new equipment, perfecting their craft, and building confidence through relationships. The team is very dynamic, each bringing something fun and unique to the table, full of personality, and they are doing a great job in every aspect of our business.”



Cox, pictured above on the right, is working with teammates Ruthie Whitaker, Hannah Ferguson, Haley Ferguson, and Ashlyn Dryden during recent Point of Sale equipment training.



EMPLOYMENT APPLICATION

MUSKOGEE CONSOLIDATED SCHOOLS, PROPRIETORS
ESTABLISHED 2014

NAME: _____

EMAIL: _____

CURRENT GRADE: _____ SCHOOL YEAR: _____

PHONE NUMBER: _____

I AM INTERESTED IN BEING INVOLVED AS A:

☐ PRODUCER

☐ STORE EMPLOYEE

☐ BUSINESS CLASS MEMBER

WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN WORKING AT A FARM?

☐ YES

☐ NO

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN THE CULINARY OR BAKING ASPECT OF FARMSTOP?

☐ YES

☐ NO

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN A SEASONAL POSITION?

☐ SCHOOL YEAR ONLY

☐ SUMMER/SCHOOL YEAR

☐ SUMMER ONLY

WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN WORKING AT A FARM?

☐ YES

☐ NO

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN THE CULINARY OR BAKING ASPECT OF FARMSTOP?

☐ YES

☐ NO

Farmers & Offerings

The Farm Stop team has partnered from the beginning with four founding farms and the owners who have been instrumental in developing systems and processes for the market. In addition, they have provided the inventory, as well as helped to identify additional partners to supplement and expand our offerings.



Our Founding Farmers photographed during our Sneak Peak event in May from left to right: Joseph & Abby Monroe of Valley Spirit Farm, Liz Eaton of The Eaton Farm, Jesse Ernst of Splinter Ridge Farm, and Liz Brownlee of Nightfall Farm.

Valley Spirit Farm, farmers Joseph and Abby Monroe, are located in Campbellsville, KY. They grow a wide array of produce and vegetables, and grass-fed beef. They are always bringing something different to try!

Click to follow Valley Spirit Farm on social media!



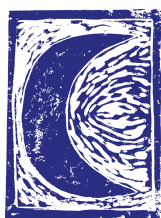
The Eaton Farm, farmers Jerry and Liz Eaton, is located on Scotts Ridge in Jefferson County. The Eaton Farm offers a wide variety of items to the market, including vegetables, eggs, pork, chicken, and goetta - a regional delight, quickly becoming a local favorite!



Click to follow The Eaton Farm on social media!



Nightfall Farm, farmers Liz and Nate Brownlee, is located in Crothersville, IN. They raise animals on pasture providing farm-fresh eggs, whole and cut chicken items, and turkey offerings, and we look forward to lamb arriving later this fall.



Nightfall Farm



Click to follow Nightfall Farm on social media!

Splinter Ridge Farm, farmer Jesse Ernst, has year-round offerings of organically grown produce and vegetables from his farm located in Jefferson County. We are pretty sure the garlic has its own following!

Click to follow Splinter Ridge Farm on social media!



Sweetwater & Sweetwater Ridge Honey, actually the first items stocked in the market, are crafted by Doug and Linda Jackson, and their granddaughter, Lilly Cox. Located in Canaan, these infamous hives have quite a following throughout the county and well beyond, and are available while supplies last from year to year. #IYKYK



Pure Local Honey

Bottled by Sweetwater Hollow

Pictured below are GMFS student employees stocking the shelves for opening. L to R: Ashlyn Dryden, Ruthie Whitaker, Kennedy Sheets, Ellie Whitaker, and Julian Torres.



Soon after opening, **Gray's Flower Farm**, farmers Bill and Rita Gray, also out of Canaan, began providing lovely fresh, seasonal flowers in both mixed bouquets and stems that you can mix and match to build your own assortment.



[Click to follow Gray's Flower Farm on social media!](#)



Inventory quickly expanded to include **Brawner Farms, LLC**, operated by the Brawner family of Hanover, who provided delicious varieties of watermelons.



[Click to follow Brawner Family Farm on social media!](#)



The **Ernst Farmstead**, farmers Sam and Whitney, bringing a wide variety of pork offerings.



[Click to follow Ernst Farmstead on social media!](#)

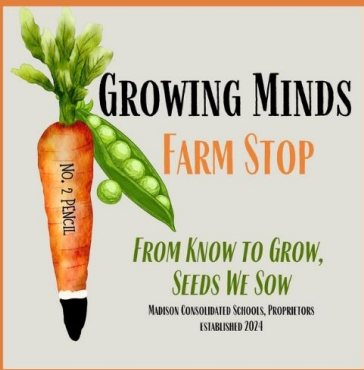
Ludwig's Sweet Acres, operated by the Ludwig family, located in Batesville, supplied us with fresh corn and will expand offerings later this fall.



[Click to follow Ludwig's Sweet Acres on social media!](#)

"The farmers have been great about bringing new, different things with every delivery," Schutte shared. "While we know what they have planned for us, they always surprise us with something unique, which makes every visit different. What we have found is that our customers are very adventurous and appreciate the variety! As a staff, we look forward to purchasing different items to try so we can share a first-hand experience with our customers."

So far, supply and demand have been well balanced, even through a challenging growing season. "The very warm, dry conditions made things a bit tricky and shortened the season for several items, such as corn and watermelon," shared Cox. "For other things like honey and green beans, it decreased the overall yield." The Farm Stop is always seeking additional farmers to round out what is available. "We want a variety of things for our customers to choose from," continued Schutte. "Our relationship with our producers is key; we are in constant communication with each one of them to see what they have available, what we need, and what is selling well. We work to find a balance, with the goal of not having more than three producers selling similar products. We want a variety, but we also want our producers to have confidence that we will be able to move their products without oversaturation. If we can't find something or our farmers are currently out, they work closely with us to reach out and find others who may be interested and can fill the gap or provide something completely new and different." If interested, all farmers/producers must begin by completing the [Growing Minds Farm Stop Producer Application](#).



GROWING MINDS FARM STOP

FROM KNOW TO GROW, SEEDS WE SOW

MADISON CONSOLIDATED SCHOOLS, PROPRIETORS ESTABLISHED 2021

BE SURE TO FOLLOW US TOO!




[@GROWINGMINDSFARMSTOP](#)

602 W. MAIN STREET
MADISON, IN 47250

Everyone's involved!

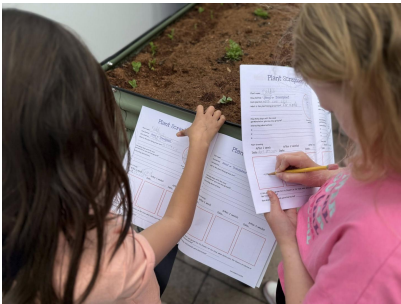
As part of the larger vision, MCS works closely with Laura Arico and the Madison Community Grocery Project (MCGP). A program of the MYU non-profit with a specific mission to build an equitable and sustainable local food system that grows community through education and access to delicious, nutritious food, Arico has helped further bring elementary programming to schools. “We want to create opportunities for all students to experience fresh, local food, have a better understanding of where it comes from, and what work goes into raising your food”, Brown shared. “With the help of Laura and MYU, we have been able to expand our campus garden projects, host cooking classes in our elementary schools for students and their parents, and have the resources to expand even further this school year.”



Pictured below are Kindergarten students from Deputy Elementary celebrating the arrival of their student-designed chicken coop custom built by Big Creek Metalworks. They also have a community garden cared for by students and their families all summer.



Hosted by Madison Youth Unlimited, Laura Arico and local chef, Gabby Hammersley, conduct a cooking class with students and their families.



Also with the help of Madison Youth Unlimited's Laura Arico and Garden Coordinator, Mike Bertelson, students at Lydia Middleton Elementary received raised bed gardens for their rooftop learning space. They learned about planting, documented growth, and the enjoyed the fruits of their labor with a club luncheon.



Funding & Sustainability/ Business Model

The school district invested \$150,000 in the project to kick things off. Additionally, the team received numerous grants to support the project. With the help of MYU and Laura Arico, they received a \$250,000 grant from the USDA to help cover the cost of contingency expenses. Grants Specialist, Shaun Pennington, was instrumental in landing a \$30,000 grant from the Indiana Department of Health to cover equipment, a \$15,000 grant from Bethany Legacy Foundation helped to purchase an oven, a \$8,200 grant from Dow for equipment, and a contribution from a private donor of nearly \$400,000 to help cover construction costs for market-area renovations and other equipment.

The Little Golden Fox, Cara and Doug Fox, have been huge supporters of this project from the beginning. “The retail space we have on Main Street is prime real estate,” stated Schutte. “Cara has opened her space, embraced our vision, collaborates daily on how we can grow our business, and is our biggest cheerleader.” The Farm Stop leases the retail space from Fox. “Foxes have also made a considerable renovation investment in this property to allow us to create a unique space and opportunity for our students. Plans for future crossover events, shared space opportunities, and unique experiences are all on the short radar!”

How it works:

The market side of the Farm Stop runs on consignment, with the producer getting 70% of the selling price they set. The other 30% goes to the Farm Stop and goes right back into the business to cover operating costs. The Cafe portion of the business is 100% profit to the Farm Stop and serves as part of the capstone graduation requirement for a number of our students. The Farm Stop partnered with Tinker Coffee Co., an Indianapolis coffee roaster, which sources a unique array of house-blended espresso and coffee that fuels the Cafe. Serving all of your favorites, stop by for a latte, frappe, tea, or lemonade. “Our baristas are learning more each day and getting creative, if you feel adventurous!” shared Cox.



Some of our team after our Customer Experience training meeting.

Front l to r: Addy Colen, Ellie Mahoney, Kennedy Sheets (r), Haley Ferguson, Lilly Cox, Laken Dickerson, Maggie Elles, Jane Jenner, Ruthie Whitaker, Hannah Ferguson, Taylor Miller, Owain Kelsey, and Silas Eaton.



Lilly Cox presenting our business model, mission, vision, and answering questions with the local Rotary Club at left and the Madison Pilot Club below. We love to share our story!



If the sign is out, pop in for a visit, fresh produce, or a coffee!



Check out the [Spotlight Feature WHAS 11 News](#) did on the Growing Minds Farm Stop.



Further expansion is coming soon!

Phase 3, coming soon, will be the industrial kitchen space that our culinary students, farmers/producers will have access to in order to create baked goods, sourdough bread, and other offerings to be sold in the Cafe. As part of our culling process, our culinary students and/or school cafeterias have access to ingredients (at an agreed-upon discount with producers) that would otherwise go to waste, which can be turned into things like soup, sauces, or spreads. “We are very excited about this phase of our business and look forward to growing into this space with our capstone students from MCHS,” shared Schutte. “We are just waiting for our ovens to arrive, and that should be within the next few weeks!”

The Growing Minds Farm Stop is located in the front space of The Little Golden Fox, 602 W. Main Street, Madison, IN, on the corner of Vine & Main Streets. Be sure to follow their social media feeds @GrowingMindsFarmStop on Facebook and Instagram to stay up to date on hours of operation, what’s available in the market, and lots of fun pictures. Check out the spotlight featured recently on WHAS 11.



Getting things ready! Taylor Miller, Haley Ferguson, and Hannah Ferguson work prior to opening to clean things up in the commercial kitchen which is set to open in the next few weeks.



Above, Taylor Miller, Hannah Ferguson, Lilly Cox, Haley Ferguson, and Hannah Combs for the reveal prior to our soft opening!

MCHS Culinary Arts Capstone student Julian Torres speaks with WHAS about what he looks forward to working on in the commercial kitchen. He makes a mean cheesecake!



The Farm Stop Cafe offers a full coffee and other drink menu. We will be adding fresh baked goods soon!