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New Maine initiative to build ag literacy through immersive CTE culinary arts programs

July 20, 2021

A new University of Maine initiative to build agricultural literacy through an immersive culinary experience for career and technical education (CTE) culinary arts instructors is one of 21 projects funded nationwide by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

NIFA has invested \$6.2 million in the Professional Development and Secondary School Teacher grants to increase the number of K-14 teachers and educational professionals trained in the food and agricultural sciences. The grants to prepare more educators in food and ag science, and support best teaching practices that enhance student learning outcomes, are part of [NIFA's Agriculture and Food Research Initiative](#).

UMaine's Building Agriculture Literacy Through an Immersive Culinary Experience project, which received a \$300,000, four-year grant, is led by Kathy Savoie, University of Maine Cooperative Extension educator and professor; Willie Grenier, executive director of Maine Agriculture in the Classroom; and Rob Dumas, UMaine food science pilot plant manager. CTE culinary arts instructors will receive professional development experiences to increase their agricultural literacy, and enhance the connectedness between agriculture and food service in their culinary arts curricula.

A goal of the project is to help create a skilled, educated workforce that will increase the use of Maine grown, processed and produced foods in their programs and careers by changing the way students — tomorrow's food professionals — think about the importance and value of local food, according to the researchers.

"Providing professional development experiences for CTE instructors will help to shift culinary arts programs toward local food system education with the end goal to create a workforce that is proficient in Maine agriculture, and that will be poised to meet today's consumer needs and ultimately boost our state agriculture" says Savoie, the principal investigator on the initiative.

The project provides a holistic approach to uniting community partners to identify the best practices for agriculture literacy education at CTE culinary arts programs in Maine. UMaine Cooperative Extension and



Maine Ag in the Classroom will collaborate to provide experiential learning opportunities for CTE culinary arts instructors through a week-long Immersive Culinary Arts Summer Institute. Project activities will include hands-on experience in local food procurement practices, demonstrations of food system lessons, educational field trips, financial support for experiential activities through their existing school restaurants, participation in a UMaine Local Foods Competition and coaching during the school year.

The CTE instructors also will experience the educational power of job shadowing, flipped classrooms and working relationships with employers that could help students make career connections. Participating instructors will be eligible to receive mini-grants to support nontraditional learning experiences — on-site learning opportunities with farmers, food processors and butchers, for example, and at food hubs, food incubator labs, aquaculture facilities, food pantries and restaurants — to increase students' understanding of local food systems. In addition, the UMaine Food Pilot Plant will host local food competitions for CTE culinary arts students, challenging them to use Maine foods in creative and innovative ways to meet the demands of today's consumers.

An NIFA [news release about the Professional Development and Secondary School Teacher grants is online.](#)

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