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FEATURED

Barry Elementary School harvests produce

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1 of 2



Third grade students at Barry Elementary School in Yuba City harvest lettuce on Monday that was grown in hydroponic towers.

Michaela Harris/Appeal-Democrat

After introducing hydroponic farming to the school in October, Barry Elementary School in Yuba City reaped over 21 pounds of lettuce during its third produce harvest on Monday.

Hydroponic farming is a type of horticulture that involves growing plants without soil by using water-based mineral nutrient solutions. Director of Nutrition Services Chelsey Slattery said that her department partnered with Barry Elementary School to start growing fresh produce in hydroponic towers on school

grounds.

Once harvested, this produce will be prepared in the district's daily choice salad bars during school lunch periods, Slattery said previously. The first of many harvests was held during the first week of December.

Third grade students lined up in the school's cafeteria to gather heads of lettuce, which are cleaned and readily available by lunchtime.

Principal Ben Moss was excited when Barry Elementary was approached with hydroponic farming, believing that it would further students' knowledge of plant science and contribute to the school's green reputation.

"We are the only school outside of city limits, so when the district comes to us with projects in mind, we're game for new things," Moss said. "(Hydroponic farming) ties into nutrition education and overall life sciences, so this is coordinated with some of the curriculum."

According to Cafeteria Manager Jacob Natalia, Barry Elementary maintains some of the lowest food waste in Yuba City Unified School District due to its commitment to composting. The school features a student-led garden which also contributes to school lunch and snack options. Any produce that isn't consumed is composted back into the garden, Natalia said.

Moss believes that hydroponic farming encourages students to take a hands-on approach to learning about where their food comes from, especially for students who may not have been exposed to farming or gardening.

"Since we've gone to a less agrarian society, kids have less experience with growing vegetables or raising animals. I feel that this project can enhance their experience and knowledge of how food goes from farm to fork," Moss said.

The idea to grow lettuce for school meals stemmed from Slattery's initial goal of introducing hydroponic farming to the district, she said. After getting approval from the California Department of Education, the Nutrition Services Department purchased Flex Farm hydroponic towers, which are the most efficient, scalable and transformative indoor hydroponic technology available, according to Slattery.

Currently, Barry Elementary and the central Nutrition Services office are the only two sites growing produce with hydroponic towers. Once the produce is harvested, it will be dispersed between several school sites throughout the district. The program will be offered to more school sites as it gains momentum.

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