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Sweet or tart? Kids taste and vote

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NORTHFIELD — Children packed the meeting room of Dickinson Memorial Library Thursday afternoon, their lips puckered after tasting sour foods and breaking into smiles over sweet ones.

Starting at 1:10 p.m., the library hosted a Healthy Snack Market with help from Just Roots, a nonprofit organization operating out of Greenfield that seeks to increase access to healthy local food across Franklin County. Children were invited to sample common fruits and vegetables as well as foods they may not have tried before, like fennel, mint, ground cherries and autumn olives.

According to Andy Grant, community outreach coordinator at Just Roots, the Healthy Snack Market was a smaller version of a 10-week program that Just Roots does at The Discovery School at Four Corners in Greenfield each fall to encourage children to try new healthy snacks.

“What we have found is children presented with novel food items will try them and, most of the time, like them,” Grant said. “They also influence one another. A kid who is reluctant and sees his friend try something becomes more ambitious.”

All of the food is locally sourced, with much of it grown at Just Roots’ Greenfield Community Farm. Just Roots also offered apples from Clarkdale Fruit Farms in Deerfield and blueberries from The Benson Place in Heath.

“The girls like local and healthy foods, so it was a very good fit,” said Mike Barry of Northfield, who brought his two daughters — Jaida, 11, and Kalyn, 6 — to the Healthy Snack Market.

Kalyn Barry had never seen anything like a ground cherry before, but was pleased to find it was her favorite snack of all the foods she sampled. Likewise, Jaida Barry had never tried fennel, and was pleasantly surprised to find it tasted like licorice.

After sampling each food, the children were asked to place a sticker on a chart to indicate whether they liked or disliked the food. The majority of the rainbow and star stickers indicated that the children liked what they tasted.

Nathaniel Pinto, 6, of Northfield, found he liked the sweet and spicy flavor combination of mint.

"I thought (the Healthy Snack Market) would be good for him because kids can be hesitant to taste new things," said Nathaniel's father, Tom Pinto.

Still, some simple, tried and true fruits and vegetables did not disappoint.

"The apples are delicious," said Sadie MacDonald, 9, of Northfield. "They're one of the best things here."

Marquita Wilchcombe of Northfield's Redemption Christian Academy brought five children, including her students at the academy and her 4-year-old son, Judah, because it allowed them to learn about where their food comes from.

"We want the students to be able to meet the people who make the community what it is," Wilchcombe said.

"Getting to know children, they don't necessarily know where food comes from," said Matt Atwood, programming librarian at Dickinson Memorial Library.

The Healthy Snack Market is the final children's activity in the library's summer program called "Exercise Your Mind." Events are held each Thursday.

"We thought (having a Healthy Snack Market) would be a tasty way to end the season," Atwood said.

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