

# Big River Farms to hold summer classes for kids

By Suzanne Lindgren editor@countrymessenger.com | Posted: Wednesday, May 6, 2015 3:53 pm

Kids, chickens, vegetables and soil: Each will play a part in new classes for youth this summer at Big River Farms, thanks to a grant from the North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program.

Titled “Big River Farms Youth & Family Education,” the classes will be held once a month on Saturday mornings. They’ll start this June and continue through the growing season.

“We’re really excited to have a program for kids,” said Laura Hedeon, who coordinates education and community engagement efforts for the Minnesota Food Association [MFA], the organization behind Big River Farms. “It’ll be fun, with hands-on activities.”

The classes, tailored for kids ages 5 through 12, are an extension of the MFA’s farmer training program, said Hedeon.

“We were noticing that a lot of CSA families and other groups were interested in having kids learn more about sustainable farming,” she said. “We thought it fit with our mission. ... It makes sense if we want people to consider this as a career to start teaching them when they’re young.”

During each two-hour class, MFA staff and volunteers will teach kids about soil health, plant anatomy, a farmer’s role in plant’s lifecycle and poultry’s place on a sustainable farm.

“Kids will pretend to make their own soil from compost,” said Hedeon. “And we’ll teach about identifying parts of the plant you eat. ... They’ll get a chance to see chickens, geese and ducks up close and we’ll talk about how animals can be integrated into a sustainable farming system.”

Kids will also have the opportunity to meet a farmer from the MFA’s training program, which supports immigrant and minority farmers with the knowledge and resources needed to start farming.

“All of the farmers in our training program are on the same land,” said Hedeon. “[Kids will] meet them and they can find out more about farming and where the farmers are from.”

Although Hedeon is coordinating the program, she says the vision was collaborative among MFA



Laura Hedeon

Laura Hedeon, coordinator of education and community engagement efforts for the Minnesota Food Association, says kids’ classes are a natural extension of MFA’s mission. The organization will hold its first classes for youth this summer.

staff.

The \$2000 in grant funds will be used to pay Nan Roberts, a youth educator at Gale Woods Farm, who planned the program and will help run the pilot program.

“She’s done a lot of programming so we contracted with her to write a curriculum,” said Hedeem. “She’s going to help deliver it for the first year.”

The rest of money needed to run the classes will come from MFA’s general fund. Hedeem said they’re already looking at grants and fundraising for next year.

Parents interested in signing up their children will be able to do so soon on the Minnesota Food Association’s website, under the “Get Involved” tab. There is a small suggested donation.

For the program to work, Hedeem will also need volunteers who value sustainable agriculture and enjoy working with kids to help teach.

“I’m looking for people who can hold their own in front of a group of kids,” she said. “And I want them to believe what they’re saying.”

Bonus points to those who can commit to two or more Saturdays for the summer.

She invites anyone interested to email her at [laura@mnfoodassociation.com](mailto:laura@mnfoodassociation.com).