

October 15, 2010

Dear Council Members,

Board of Directors

Michael Rubin*
Chairman
Diana Conway*
President
L. Oakley Johnson*
Vice President
David Bowen*
Secretary
Jean Findlay*
Treasurer
Tufail Ahmad
Tina Brown
Denise Cohen
Leslie Cronin
Steve Dryden
Peter Eeg
Bennett Goldberg
Melane Hoffmann*
David Langstaff
Tom Leedy
Nichole Lewis
Dolores Milmoie*
Jim O'Connell*
Gwen Reese
William Sheehan*
David Shneyer

*Executive Committee

Staff

Caroline Taylor
Executive Director
caroline@mocoalliance.org

Kristina Bostick
Conservation
Associate
kristina@mocoalliance.org

Montgomery Countryside Alliance joins with other concerned individuals and organizations to call for the MCPS schoolyard garden ban to be lifted.

The local pilot program you are receiving an update on today is only the most recent study supporting school gardens as a powerful and cost effective teaching tool applicable to all academic disciplines.

Today's classrooms have a distinct focus on hands-on lessons that engage learners directly in what they are learning; this is the best way to teach new material to learners on all levels. Montgomery County Schools are among the best in the nation with many excellent tools at their disposal to engage and challenge students, but they are currently barred from using arguably the most effective hands-on resource available, the school garden.

In May 2010, the USDA's Economic Research Service released a report on local food systems and their impact on health, economic development and food security. The report outlines the ways a vibrant local food system can beneficially impact these areas by lowering the prevalence of obesity and other health problems, keeping food dollars in local communities and ensuring that healthy food remains available even in the poorest neighborhoods. Montgomery Countryside Alliance is working to increase the number of table crop producers in the Ag Reserve to supply more local food to our region for precisely these reasons.

In the USDA report, the most unequivocal improvements resulting from increased local food production are those that benefit children, "Children exposed to a garden-based education curriculum reported greater fruit and vegetable consumption, *even though no effort was made to improve the availability of these foods at the schools*(emphasis added)." ¹ In a time of sky high childhood obesity rates, the significance of this finding cannot be overemphasized.

The current MCPS garden pilot program in partnership with the Parks department is a great first step toward setting up a garden at every interested school. In the face of the monumental reported benefits of school gardens, it is time to lift the ban entirely so that our County's children can harvest the knowledge and the health benefits unique to a school garden experience.

Sincerely,

Kristina Bostick, Conservation Associate

¹USDA Economic Research Service Report #27, May 2010. P. 46
<http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR97/ERR97.pdf>