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Interview with Nicole Hoffmann, Abernathy School, 2013 (audio)

Nicole Hoffmann

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PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW INDEX

INTERVIEWEE: Nicole Hoffman of Abernathy School

Interviewer: Nichole Bull

Date: May 21, 2013

Location of Interview: Portland State University Library

Research Assistant: Brianna Demko

Interview Series: SUSTAINABILITY HISTORY PROJECT

Recording Equipment: DIGITAL RECORDER (WINDOWS MEDIA AUDIO FILE) WITH AN
EXTERNAL, OMNIDIRECTIONAL MICROPHONE

Time Notes

00.01	Introduction
00:30	Background – never bought school food when I was a kid – no emotional connection
1:05	Background – studied History in college however she’s been cooking and working with kids for past 10-12 years.
1:31	Moved to Minneapolis and worked in a Feminist bookstore – feels sustainability ties in with that type of activism
1:50	Started working with the Youth Farm and Market program – community gardens in the neighborhood. All day program for the kids – and the kids assist to make lunch for the neighborhood- utilizing as much as possible from the gardens. Tied in cultural imperatives – making foods that they’re familiar with at home.
3:00	Flied to Alaska for 4 summers – worked on a farm up there with National Leadership School. Tried to use local foods as much as possible to feed people all summer. Farm to table – critical when food/grocery stores are hard to come by.
4:45	Land acquired in Minneapolis – through community partnerships.
5:10	Response/feedback from kids about Minneapolis garden program.
6:05	Grew up with gardening – grew up in Wisconsin – both parents came from families with farms – and parents always had gardens.
7:00	Realized wasn’t interested in educating adults but working on a farm was comfortable

	and large scale cooking.
7:20	Landed in Portland – went to culinary school and pursue food as a career. Volunteered a day per week while in culinary school.
7:45	Worked with Maria Hines in Seattle at Tilth – runs restaurants 98% organic.
10:00	Farm to Table was starting to be a concept – and Maria Hines took it to a higher level – with fine dining.
10:42	Cooking for children at Abernathy – school lunch program – must abide by restrictions – and dietary restrictions.
11:26	Incorporating foods from garden on pizza – such as beets or pizza to get kids exposed to it – even if they’re not eating it, at least they’ve seen it.
11:56	How returned to Abernathy / Portland – employed through Portland Public Schools
12:21	Job description – nutrition services
13:25	Shift in program towards sustainability – must be self sustaining and replicable to be equitable.

Time Notes

14:00	Transition to make program replicable and viable – which brought more oversight
14:40	Her main goal is to make it a replicable program- to roll out at other schools
15:00	Pizza – partnership with Hot Lips – however, now they have to feed 450 kids on a day. Now obtain pizza supplies from district then tie in elements from garden.
16:22	Portland has a very reputable school lunch program in terms of local foods.
16:42	Explanation of where pizza ingredients come from
17:48	Chef position- previously existed before she came on.
18:26	Transitioning/incorporating idea – to work with PPS –it’s very slow moving. Recipes are good ideas but must be changed – and must be made the same every time and entered into database so it falls in line with their procurement system.
19:00	System issues and contract issues with implementing certain recipes.
21:00	PE Program at Abernathy
21:20	Wellness/Whole Child is a large part of the school – garden program is a big part of that.
21:45	Garden education/ curriculum explanation
23:00	Funded from PTA – raised funds

23:25	Harvest of the Month Program – kids dissect/examine/learn about then eat Brussels sprouts. Kids then enjoy eating Brussels sprouts.
26:00	Sustainability in Education – very well engrained into the school – but it’s a difficult message to get out.
26:50	Financial sustainability/funding sustainability – program funded through PPS – operates similar to other schools within PPS. Their program is a little cheaper since they use a lot of scratch ingredients.
28:00	Other schools - Issues with design of school/kitchen – unable to run a dishwasher in some kitchens – which makes it hard to replicate
31:20	Need skill training with staff – in order to replicate program with other schools
32:00	Gardens used for education (rather than for food productions) – not enough produce to supply enough food for whole school.
34:00	Additional issues with replicating garden
36:00	Funding and pay for similar programs and positions – Hard to get grants for established programs- which there’s is – so keeping the funding sustainable is hard. For example- Americorps back out once the program is established.
38:00	Challenges – they’re almost at a point of losing the program due to the regulations. Regulations make recipes hard to work with. She’s not a dietitian. They’re now going to a weekly planned out meal vs. daily.
41:00	Everything requires a full nutrition analysis and must be approved by PPS.
41:20	Goal within program – would like to go to other schools that don’t already have a chef on site or similar program. Increasing volume of food serving is an issue to make work.
44:00	Donations – school doesn’t take donations in kitchen. There are also safety and equity issues. Garden programs do accept donations from local businesses such as Kroger’s for garden education.
46:00	Parents come in and volunteer- prepare veggies, wash dishes- a good resource that helps with program.
47:00	Items developed or created at Abernathy – have gone out to other schools – such as scratch ranch dressing or on-site assembled quesadillas.
48:00	District can manifest initially from scratch but then on-site assembled items vs. made from scratch at each school. Local manufacturer processes one of their recipes and serves to entire school district.
