



SHELBURNE FARMS

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PHOTOS FROM 2016 JR IRON CHEF VT: <http://vtfeed.org/jrironchefvt/photos>

Ready, set, chop!

10th anniversary of Vermont's culinary competition for middle and high school students is scheduled for this weekend at the Champlain Valley Expo Center

Essex Junction, VT – On Saturday, March 18, 55 middle and high school teams from around the state will compete in Jr Iron Chef VT. This year, Jr Iron Chef VT celebrates its landmark 10th anniversary. As one of the first youth culinary competitions in the country, Jr Iron Chef VT has challenged and inspired more than 3,000 Vermont youth to learn about and source local ingredients, develop recipes that highlight Vermont ingredients, and cook whole, local foods from scratch. Jr Iron Chef VT is a program of Vermont FEED (Food Education Every Day) a partnership project of NOFA-VT and Shelburne Farms. Jr Iron Chef VT highlights student's voices in the growing farm to school movement. Nationally, 23.6 million students are engaged in farm to school. In Vermont, local food purchased by schools contributed \$1.4 million to the state's economy. A bill currently in the Statehouse to expand farm to school to more communities and to childcare programs (S.33) passed the State Senate unanimously last month.

"I now teach in the same district where I went to school," says former Jr Iron Chef VT participant Elizabeth Aerus. "It amazes me that the healthy food movement that was in its infancy when I participated in Jr Iron Chef VT in 2009 is still growing today in our schools. Students have gained a better understanding of where their food comes from through Jr Iron Chef VT and have been able to share their knowledge and experience with others. This progress is not only something Jr Iron Chef VT should be proud of, but also the State of Vermont."

This year's competition is unique in its celebration of cultural diversity through food. Original recipes include enchiladas, curries, samosas, kebabs, dumplings, latkes, Lo Mein, Tikka Masala, tacos, gnocci, ramen, and crepes, and include names like Justice for Migrants! Tacos, Fantastic Fried Rice with Tantalizing Tempura, and Pedal to the Meatball. Teams have just 90 minutes to prepare on-site their kid-tested, seasonal fare. Jr Iron Chef VT winning teams will also have the opportunity to prepare their recipes for legislators at the Vermont Statehouse, and their dishes will be featured on school lunch menus around the state.

"This is one of the most exciting culinary events of the year," says Megan Peek, Community Relations Manager at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Vermont. "We are proud to be long-time

sponsors of a competition that so effectively blends education and hands on practice, impacting life-long eating habits as well as supporting food system change.”

The judge’s panel includes 20 food enthusiasts including farmers, teachers, chefs, students, food writers, legislators, and other stakeholders in the Farm to School movement. For this special occasion we have invited four Jr Iron Chef VT alumni to participate as judges: Andrew Merinoff, Elizabeth Aekus, Andrew McQuinn, and Madeline Harper. Jerry Greenfield, co-founder of Ben & Jerry’s will also preside on the panel.

The 10th annual Jr Iron Chef VT will take place Saturday, March 18 from 9:00am to 4:00 pm at the Champlain Valley Expo Center in Essex Junction, VT. The entry fee is \$3 for an individual and \$5 for a family (up to four people). Award ceremonies for the two heats are at 12:30pm and 3:45pm. A special 10 year anniversary celebration with music and guests is scheduled for 12 noon.

Jr Iron Chef VT is made possible by many business and organizational sponsors, including Farm to Ballet, Full Circle Communications, and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Vermont. For more information, please visit www.jrironchefvt.org.

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Vermont Food Education Every Day (VT FEED) is a statewide Farm to School program that raises awareness about healthy food, good nutrition, and the role of Vermont farms and farmers in rebuilding healthy food systems. VT FEED offers professional development services and resources to teachers and school food service, provides technical assistance to farmers and school professionals, and connects youth with agriculture and healthy food through such events as Junior Iron Chef Vermont, established in 2008 as one of the first youth culinary competitions to focus on local food and school meals. VT FEED also published the first-ever school cookbook to incorporate new USDA nutrition guidelines in recipes created by and for school chefs, featuring local, seasonal ingredients. Called “groundbreaking” by Ann Cooper, a powerful voice for school food reform, New School Cuisine is helping transform the way we feed children across the country. VT FEED’s work has been featured in EatingWell, Associated Press, and The Boston Globe. Cultivating links between classrooms, cafeterias, communities, and local farms, VT FEED is a partnership project of Shelburne Farms and the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont.