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Press Release

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Vermont Commons Students Explore Where Our Food Comes From



Photo captions: (left) Josh Decatur, a junior at VCS from South Hero, prepares made-to-order omelets for his classmates during the localvore potluck lunch. Henry Sadler, a VCS freshman from Burlington, harvests beans while volunteering with his classmates at Shelburne Farms.



On Friday, October 9th, the entire student body at Vermont Commons School in South Burlington took a break from their regular classes to focus on two books by Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and *In Defense of Food*. These books were selected as the “common texts” for all students and faculty to read this past summer.

Common Text Day is intended to provide an opportunity for the entire Vermont Commons community to discuss a book and explore the issues raised by the author in more detail. Since



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Pollan's books explore the question of where our food comes from, the focus of Common Text Day was how our food choices affect our diet, our economy and our environment.

The day started with a screening of *King Corn*, a documentary about two college students who grow an acre of corn and follow it from field to market. According to an online review (on fandango.com), *King Corn* "is an informative and at times disturbing account of both the food Americans so readily consume without so much as a second thought and the alarming state of the contemporary agricultural industry." When asked what they thought of the books and the film, Josh Decatur, a junior at VCS, replied "Awesome! It's crazy to think that chicken nuggets have something like 38 ingredients. I've stopped eating fast food."

Following the film, students, faculty and parents gathered for a potluck lunch featuring local foods procured and prepared by VCS students. "Each class was assigned a specific food group," explains Mark Cline Lucey, instructor of Social Studies at VCS and one of the faculty members on the Common Text Day organizing committee. Seventh graders made dishes involving root vegetables while 8th graders used local fruits and juniors will focus on local dairy products. The dishes included homemade corn bread, beet gnocchi, spinach pie, apple cider and even omelets made-to-order by Josh Decatur of South Hero and Ted Retzliff of Underhill.

In addition, each class prepared a poster to educate their classmates about information specific to their food group. Seniors Joe Congdon of Charlotte and Eric Fournier of Shelburne explained how the lack of local meat processing facilities is limiting the amount of affordable, locally produced meat in Vermont.

The final component of the day involved VCS students going off campus to Shelburne Farms where they got their hands dirty in the market garden and dairy barn. "We're committed to getting our students out of the classroom and into the world," says Cline Lucy. "Like Vermont Commons, Shelburne Farms has a mission devoted to environmental education and cultivating



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the conservation ethic. They're an amazing resource for our school and a perfect place for us to wrap up Common Text Day.”

But this theme will not end after Common Text Day. VCS math instructor Jasmin Walker offered an intensive, week-long course on canning and preserving food during the fall Encounter Week in September. In addition, Spanish instructor Adriana Comtois is offering a Research and Service class this semester called “Feeding Our Neighbors.” Eighth grader Grace Seeley of Shelburne explained that this class is working with the local food shelf to learn more about how they can help combat hunger in Vermont. To that end, the R&S class has organized two food drives – one during the VCS Homecoming Dance on October 17th and a second during the “Halloween Hike for Hunger” at Mt. Philo on the morning of Saturday, October 31st. “We’re asking students to bring non-perishable food and cash donations to both events,” says Seeley. “Something other than beans, though. The food shelf has plenty of every kind of bean imaginable!”

About Vermont Commons School: Vermont Commons School is an independent day school for students in grades 7 – 12. The school offers a rigorous, college-preparatory curriculum that includes a focus on community service and experiential education. The mission of the Vermont Commons School is to provide a vision of education that crosses traditional boundaries and develops ecological citizenship, with the goal of empowering students with the knowledge, character, skills, and moral vision necessary to become responsible, pro-active members of the world community. For more information, please visit www.vermontcommons.org.

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