



We Bring the World to New Jersey

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**MOBILE FOOD LAB ARRIVES AT
MEADOWLANDS ENVIRONMENT CENTER**

Classroom on Wheels Provides Exciting New Way for Students to Learn About Food Science

LYNDHURST, N.J. – Students who participate in the Meadowlands Environment Center (MEC)'s renowned STEM-based education programming have an exciting new way to study food science and food literacy this year on the MEC's brand new Mobile Food Lab. The mobile classroom on wheels provides students in Grades K-8 a fun, multi-sensory educational experience.

"The Mobile Food Lab is an exciting and new opportunity for students to engage and learn about food science and food literacy," said First Lady Tammy Murphy. "New Jersey remains one of the nation's top states for K-12 education, and I look forward to the continued expansion of innovative, STEM-based learning programs throughout our state. Thank you to the Meadowlands Environment Center for promoting STEM learning and helping to prepare the next generation for the future."

The Mobile Food Lab is funded in part by a grant from the New Jersey State Health Department's Special Child Health and Autism Registry. The Meadowlands Environment Center received funding for the Lab program through REED Next, an initiative of the Oakland-based REED Foundation for Autism.

The MEC is also working on its food literacy curriculum with Newark-based Philip's Education Partner's EcoSpaces Education, a non-profit organization. Together the MEC, REED Next and EcoSpaces Education are united in a mission to support learning, innovation, and unique employment opportunities for adults with autism.

"The Mobile Food Lab is a wonderful addition to the Meadowlands Environment Center's many valuable resources that greatly enhance students' educational experiences," said Vincent Prieto, President and CEO of the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority (NJSEA). "The Food Lab also promotes STEM-based learning, a critical subject area that Governor Murphy has identified as a driver for the State to become a leader in the national and international economies."

“The NJSEA thanks REED NEXT and EcoSpaces Education for their generosity and important work and the MEC’s expert educators for their commitment to engaging young minds through hands-on learning,” Prieto added. The MEC is operated by Ramapo College of New Jersey through a partnership with the NJSEA initiated in 2003. The NJSEA funds MEC programming and provides its classroom facilities.

For students, the Mobile Food Lab experience will take place in three interactive sessions: Science, Cooking and Art. Students will find plants in an indoor growing system, a science lab with digital microscopes, a teaching kitchen and an art station. The bright, colorful 50-foot bus is designed to foster an interactive learning environment that will engage students’ senses and curiosity around food.

The Mobile Food Lab incorporates the foundation of the MEC’s food science curriculum with the EcoSpaces Education holistic approach to Food Literacy Education. By making healthy connections to food through science, cooking, and creativity, students explore nutrition, food systems, sustainability, urban/suburban agriculture, photosynthesis and plant growth, edible and medicinal plants, and historical and cultural use of plants.

Programs are tailored to specific age groups. For instance, students in Grades K-2 will paint using herbs and spices while those in Grades 3-5 will explore flavors and make a fresh herb salad with home-made vinaigrette dressing. Sixth through Eighth graders will be introduced to Vertical Farming and the future of food.

“We are thrilled to use the Mobile Food Lab as an integral part of our food science education program,” said Dr. Angela Cristini, Director of the MEC. “It is a prime example of the how the MEC strives to provide students with comprehensive environmental education experiences.”

“It is very exciting to collaborate with Meadowlands Environment Center with its already acclaimed educational program as we aim to bring food literacy education to more students and communities throughout the state,” said Frank Mentasana, Director of EcoSpaces Education. “By having a double focused mission, this multiple collaboration with REED Next allows us to think outside the box and work towards expanding our joint mission to also include how we can help raise awareness and get community members to think about hiring adults with autism.

The classroom on wheels will also travel to school districts throughout the region, bringing an invaluable learning experience directly to students who may otherwise not have the opportunity to participate. The Lab is scheduled to visit schools in Newark and Paterson in the next two months.

The Mobile Food Lab will benefit the REED Next mission to support jobs for adults with autism. “Adults in our REED Next Day program will have the opportunity to experience a variety of jobs in and around the Mobile Food Lab and at the Meadowlands Environment Center,” explains Jill Nadison, CEO of REED Next. REED Next is an initiative of the REED Foundation for Autism.

About the Meadowlands Environment Center

The nationally recognized Meadowlands Environment Center (MEC) is operated by Ramapo College of New Jersey through a partnership with the NJSEA initiated in 2003. The MEC is a leader in

developing and expanding comprehensive environmental education programs for students in Grades K-12, the general public and people of all ages living with disabilities.

MEC programs and curriculum include modules that promote STEM learning in the field and the laboratory. Programs cover a wide array of scientific disciplines including ecology, chemistry, biology, food science, physics, natural history and astronomy.

The MEC's extensive array of programs include classes and field trips for students; Gifted and Talented Conventions; the national model MarshAccess program for people of all ages living with disabilities; family science nights and after school programs in partner school districts; merit badge programs for Brownies, Cub, Boy and Girl scouts; educational summer camps; and professional development workshops for teachers.

This year more than 20,000 students from 81 school districts have participated in MEC programs, including 15 urban/special needs districts. Thirty-two schools have taken part in MarshAccess activities for those with visual, hearing, mobility, mental/cognitive and age related disabilities.

The MEC has been recognized by the National Academies of Sciences, which invited Director Dr. Angela Cristini to serve on one of its prestigious panels on STEM learning and has highlighted Environment Center programming in its publication, "Surrounded by Science – Learning Science in Informal Environments."

About REED Next

REED Next is an initiative of the REED Foundation for Autism, a foundation committed to providing individuals with autism the opportunity to live, work and thrive at every stage of their lives. The Foundation raises funds to support REED Academy and REED Next, ensuring that individuals with autism have access to high-quality education, adult services, and employment. Visit reedfoundationforautism.org for more information.

About EcoSpaces Education and Philip's Education Partners

EcoSpaces Education (<http://ecospacesed.org>) brings food literacy programs to schools, communities and educators. EcoSpaces is a co-curricular program designed to give students the tools to make good decisions to lead healthy lives. By linking food-based interactive activities to core curriculum in learning environments that include the school dining room, garden, teaching kitchen and indoor growing labs, EcoSpaces teaches kids to build healthy, lasting relationships to real food and our food system.

Philip's Education Partners is a non-profit organization whose purpose is to support the education of urban youth and to provide resources to institutions dedicated to helping urban youth to develop the intellectual competence and values necessary to live healthy, productive lives filled with options and choice.

To learn more about the Mobile Food Lab visit www.mobilefoodlab.org

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