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Scituate native pulls up trail of carrots to highlight healthy food

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COHASSET — You might call Jon Belber a modern-day Johnny Appleseed. Of carrots.

Belber, educational director at Cohasset's Holly Hill Farm, spent a day this spring riding his bicycle from Boston to his native Scituate while planting carrots seeds at a dozen school and community gardens along the way. On Monday, he made the journey again to collect the vegetables that had grown in the nearly four months since his last ride.

At the Lincoln-Hancock Community School in Quincy, Belber was helped by students from Ashley McCusker's fourth-grade class. The 9- and 10-year-olds kneeled around the edges of the school's garden and carefully pulled the carrots' stems from the ground.

Brushing the dirt off of each vegetable, they excitedly compared the different sizes of the carrots, which ranged from less than an inch to a few inches long. Belber joked with the kids that they looked like something you'd find in a gourmet restaurant.

"This could go to a Boston high-end restaurant for a lot of money," he said.

After collecting the carrots from the students, Belber put them into his backpack. Once the carrots are weighed and cleaned up, Belber will bring them back to the school so the students who helped pick them would be able to enjoy them for a snack.

"These will go on their cafeteria trays," he said.

Belber said one of the goals of the project was to highlight the importance of healthy eating, especially in school cafeterias and food pantries, where Belber said fresh, organic produce is often less available.

"These carrots, and every carrot that we're harvesting were grown organically, without pesticides," he said.

All of the carrots were either donated to food pantries, shelters or the schools' cafeterias. Holly Hill Farm is also raising money through their "Carrots by Cycle" campaign so they will be able to expand their Farm to Food Pantry program. With a goal of raising \$5,000, they had reached nearly \$3,800 on Monday.