

FARM TO HEAD START

LAKES AND PINES

COMMUNITY ACTION COUNCIL



Mora, Minnesota



511

KIDS SERVED



Lakes and Pines Community Action Council Head Start Program is in a small, rural town and relies on the local school district to cater its meals. Lakes and Pines does provide its own snacks. However, due to a lack of needed licenses and proper food preparation facilities, they must purchase snacks that are preprocessed and individually packaged.

For Lakes and Pines, the decision to partner with the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) to launch a Farm to Head Start initiative was, as they put it, “a no-brainer,” because “Head Start is all about healthy eating habits, and healthy lifestyle

The school district does our catering for our breakfast and our lunch already. When we added this extra element, they were like “Bring it on! Absolutely!” It was an easy transition for them.”

and practices.” Farm to Head Start enables them to bring more affordable options to the children and families they serve. And, being in a rural community, they felt it was important to highlight local farmers and the hard work they do.

As is common for many small, rural Head Start programs, Lakes and Pines must rely on its local school district to cater their breakfast and lunch meals, which staff pick up from the school. When Lakes and Pines decided to get fresh local foods for their kids, their initial strategy was to try to work with the local school district to see if they could plan a lunch menu that included local foods aligned with the Farm to Head Start curriculum. Unfortunately, Lakes and Pines was unable to connect with the appropriate staff at the school district. Staff turnover and staffing capacity issues at Lakes and Pines also impacted progress. Eventually, as the growing season progressed, the opportunity to partner with the school district in the lunch menu planning process for the pilot season passed.

However, because Lakes and Pines is responsible for getting their own snacks, they decided to focus their local purchasing efforts there—with a long-term plan to work with the school district on local procurement



FARM TO HEAD START

THREE CORE COMPONENTS

1
Classroom
Activities

2
Local
Foods

3
Family
Engagement

WHAT IS “FARM TO HEAD START?”

“Farm to Head Start” is a type of Farm to Early Care initiative. Farm to Early Care initiatives connect young children with healthy, locally grown foods and support farmers in their communities. Farm to Early Care’s three core components are serving locally grown foods in Early Care meals and snacks, offering food and farming-related educational activities for children and organizing food and farming-related family engagement activities.

Want more information on Farm to Head Start?
Visit iatp.org/farm-to-institution

for meals in the coming years. Before starting the Farm to Head Start initiative, Lakes and Pines staff would make a special trip to buy prepared and packaged shelf-stable snack foods from the grocery store, such as prepackaged servings of baby carrots or individually wrapped cereal bars. Due to a small staff, these grocery trips were a significant inconvenience for employees and did not provide the desired fresh, local options. A major challenge for Lakes and Pines was finding local snacks that could be delivered in the ready-to-eat, pre-packaged individual servings they needed to fit their licensing restrictions. They initially wanted to purchase directly from farmers in their area, and IATP utilized its partner networks to connect with farmers and distributors in the area. However, local farmers did not have the ability to prepare and individually package the snacks. Additionally, due to its small program size, Lakes and Pines typically did not meet the farmers’ delivery thresholds to make it economically feasible for delivery. Staff also worried that individual purchases from local farmers would be difficult to track to ensure they were complying with the record keeping requirements of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).



A CREATIVE LOCAL PURCHASING SOLUTION



After running into these frustrating roadblocks, the breakthrough strategy was to look for a delivery already occurring in their area with a plan to “piggyback” Lakes and Pines’ snack order on to be delivered at the same time. This would eliminate the problem of the order being too small to justify a delivery of its own. IATP returned to the idea of connecting with the local school district and found out that the district had an account with Upper Lakes Foods—a distribution company that IATP partners in Brainerd and Little Falls were already successfully purchasing local foods from, and one that is capable of providing the processed and packaged snacks Lakes and Pines needs.

IATP was able to contact Upper Lakes Food and connect them with Lakes and Pines to open a new account. In addition to making it possible for Lakes and Pines to purchase fresh, local snacks for their Farm to Head Start program, this new relationship also solved a general problem for Lakes and Pines staff, who had been responsible for frequent trips to the store to purchase their snacks on top of normal work duties. Lakes and Pines now purchases all its snacks (local and not) through Upper Lakes Foods, which delivers the orders to the school district at the same time they are making their regular drop-off for the school. Lakes and Pines now receives its regular meals and snacks at the same time through the school district, thus streamlining the entire food procurement process and integrating local purchases into their regular way of operating.



The school district is already committed to healthier food options and going local. That part was rather seamless. We are lucky to be involved with school district committed to same mission that Farm to Head Start promotes.



FUTURE PLANS

Lakes and Pines focused its initial year on setting up and incorporating locally grown foods into its snacks. Now, with local foods as part of the snack menu, they plan on expanding other parts of the Farm to Head Start initiative, incorporating more Farm to Head Start activities into classroom curriculum, increasing family engagement efforts and working with the school to incorporate local foods into the lunch menu. Lakes and Pines also has plans to add kitchen facilities to its center, thus allowing more control over what foods the children are served.





ALLSTAR CHILD CARE'S PARTNER FARM TO HEAD START INITIATIVE



While supporting Lakes and Pines main initiative through this process, IATP also worked closely with one of their "partner centers," Allstar Child Care, and was able to support them in launching local purchasing. Allstar serves approximately 100 children (both pre-K and school-age), and is equipped with a full kitchen to cook most food from scratch. Although Allstar's director Linn Otto had been interested in local purchasing for several years, she lacked the technical support to do so and had not yet bought locally grown products

before the Farm to Head Start initiative launched at Lakes and Pines. With help from IATP, Linn was able to purchase local apples, squash and potatoes for its meal service from nearby Novak's Grown Right Vegetables. Allstar relocated to a new building in the spring of 2018, with plans to scale up their local purchasing with new kitchen equipment and has plans to apply for a Farm to Early Care grant from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture in the future.

One of the things that our kiddos absolutely loved about it was having a greater variety of fruits and vegetables that they could explore and try and experiment with. Things that they wouldn't typically have had the opportunity to try.



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Many thanks to Keri Ziegler, Dawn van Hees and all of the partners at Lakes & Pines Head Start, Upper Lakes Foods and beyond who contributed to the success of this Farm to Head Start initiative!

Thank you to Upper Lakes Foods for the use of their photos.

Funding for this project is provided in part by the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture.

July 2019

