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Pat Osterberg
Food Service Director
Minnewaska Schools



What would make it easier for schools to serve fresh local foods? The Fresh Connect Food Hub did just that in its pilot year in 2014 as it picked up, aggregated, and delivered 34,173 pounds of fresh produce to local school districts. Proving itself through quality and affordability, the hub pleasantly surprised participating food service directors. During this pilot year, PartnerSHIP 4 Health contributed to the success as members of advisory and core planning committees.

When Pat Osterberg, Food Service Director of Minnewaska Schools, agreed to participate, he was not fully convinced of its value. His priority was obtaining good produce at a good price, rather than supporting local businesses. After the pilot year, Osterberg changed his point of view: “I was really wondering what I was getting myself into when I promised to buy a certain amount of produce from Fresh Connect. I was very surprised by the quality of the product. Pricewise it’s in the ballpark. Anyone that does what I do for a living and with the rules that I have to live with, this is a great thing...Fresh Connect is pretty convenient for those who live in this area; there aren’t really any excuses [for not participating].”

Osterberg was not the only food service director to find Fresh Connect a positive addition to the school meal program. Dilworth-Glyndon-Felton Food Service Director, Chelsey Newton, found appealing that it offers a wide variety of produce from a single source. In addition, she noted the quality and flavor of the produce is superior to that of distributors. The students at her schools have responded positively as well: “Students take a lot more from the salad bar because of the flavor and variety. We’re able to provide watermelon which we would normally never provide because the watermelon offered by distributors is too expensive and not as tasty.”

Food Service Director Donna Tvedt, from Moorhead Area Public Schools, enjoys going through the lunch line and hearing students’ excitement related to their connection with local producers: “Part of what was offered through Fresh Connect was posters depicting local farmers. Students discovered that they knew the farmer or that their classmates were part of the farm family. One of the farmers depicted was the school counselor, so students knew that some of the food was from that family’s farm.”

Tvedt mentioned that one of the most rewarding parts about working in food service is “being able to give a meal to a student that doesn’t get a meal at home or gets very little to eat at home.” Several of the food service directors mentioned this as an important part of their work, making it even more important that they provide fresh, local, healthy options. Fresh Connect creates an accessible, affordable, and local way for schools to provide students with the nutrients they need for health as well as to achieve academically during the school day.

March 2015

PartnerSHIP 4 Health is community and public health partners in Becker, Clay, Otter Tail, and Wilkin counties working together to create an environment that supports improved health for all.

Supported by the Statewide Health Improvement Program Minnesota Department of Health.

