



Fresh Connect Food Hub Begins Pilot Year

"We are excited to be able to design a system that works for both the local grower and consumer that provides nutrient rich foods and a boost to our local economies"

Dana Rieth

Dietitian and Food Hub Director
Lakes Country Service Cooperative



After a busy winter of meeting, researching and planning, the Lakes Country Service Cooperative (LCSC) Food Hub, christened Fresh Connect, is poised to move from an idea on paper to a real service. With the help of a Minnesota Department of Agriculture grant, LCSC is purchasing a delivery truck and re-modeling their storage facility as a packing center with a walk-in cooler and stainless steel tables. LCSC has multiple organizations that serve meals committed to purchasing locally grown fruits and vegetables. Starting in August 2014, LCSC will be ready to run a pilot year of aggregating fresh, nutrient-dense, regionally grown produce, re-packing it into food service orders and delivering it to our member organizations who serve meals to students or residents.

Food hubs are emerging around the country as an answer to the need for infrastructure that can support the logistics of bringing food from the family farm to the plate, especially for schools and other organizations that feed students and residents. Small farmers are usually not equipped to enter the wholesale market on a large scale, and often lack the equipment necessary to store or deliver their product. Organizations, such as schools and healthcare also find it difficult to find enough produce from local growers that can be delivered to their kitchen on a regular basis.

Fresh Connect hopes to create a win-win situation by creating that "right-sized" coordination and delivery system within our region that will benefit both local growers and our school and healthcare members. Growers will diversify their market for sales, and students and residents will benefit from eating healthy foods. Schools and healthcare will be able to say they know where their produce is coming from and teach about the lifelong benefits of healthy eating.

Planning for the Fresh Connect Food Hub began in December 2013 with a core team from LCSC, PartnerSHIP 4 Health and the University of Minnesota Extension Service, led by LCSC Registered Dietician Dana Reith. The Food Hub has been helped immensely by our regional advisory team: Donna Twedt, Moorhead Area Public Schools; Gretchen Boyum, grower; Penny Doty, USDA NRCS; Harold Stanislawski, Fergus Falls Economic Improvement Commission; Guy Fischer, Becker County Economic Development; Ryan Pesch, Minnesota Extension Service; Janet Lindberg, PartnerSHIP 4 Health; Greg Wagner and Wendy Merrick, West Central Initiative.

11 schools in the 9 county service area of Lakes Country Service Cooperative have already pledged to participate in the pilot project.

Students who eat well learn better. Farm to School programs connect local farmers to schools to increase the number of local fruits and vegetables children eat during the school day while also lowering their intake of sodium, saturated fat and added sugar. Farm to school is also good economically for Minnesota farmers as well as helping kids learn about what they eat and where it is grown.



Article contributed by Jane Estes, Director of Operations for Lakes Country Service Cooperative

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