



Success Stories

Washington Farm to Early Care and Education
April 2021

Spokane Area Partnerships Bring Local Food and Garden Education to Head Start Classrooms

Located in Spokane and supported by Catholic Charities Eastern Washington, [Food for All](#)'s mission is to provide healthy, locally grown produce to those in need. By working with community partners, they are able to help Head Start centers serve local foods and maintain a school garden. The results include less food waste and changed eating habits.



Starting a Fruitful Partnership

In early 2018, Food for All (FFA) Project Manager Kendra Dean noticed a gap in the Spokane Community that wasn't being addressed.

"There was really nobody focused on farm to ECE...We decided that was where we were going to focus," she recalled.

Farm to ECE is a movement that brings local foods, school gardens, and farm education to children in early childhood education settings. With support from SNAP-Ed funding distributed through the [Spokane Regional Health District](#), the FFA Team approached Head Start Nutrition Specialist Claudia Hume to discuss the possibility of bringing local food to children in Spokane's [Head Start](#)

program. Claudia connected FFA with West Central Head Start Cook Teresa Reynolds, whose enthusiasm for local food helped fuel this partnership.

FFA also recruited farmer-owned food distributor [LINC Foods](#), who provided an easy online platform for Head Start centers to order local foods. By mid-2018, Teresa was ordering local produce from LINC Foods and serving it to the children at West Central Head Start center.

Growing the Program

Teresa has continued to order local foods from LINC Foods' ordering platform since 2018. She has added local lentils, hot cereal, and yogurt to the menu. According to Teresa, the yogurt is a particular favorite.

"The kids love the local yogurt. They say it tastes like ice cream!" she said.

Teresa was the first cook to order from LINC Foods, but several additional Spokane Head Start centers have also started ordering local items with FFA's help. Michelle Youngblom, crop promotions director at LINC Foods, praised Kendra for providing ordering assistance to Head Start centers.

According to Michelle, FFA has "been able to offer trainings and capacity-building for the centers to be able to fully understand how the ordering system works -- the order deadline, how it's delivered, things like that."

Teresa says that serving local foods benefits West Central Head Start, even though it does come with some higher costs.



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"I pay more, but I find that the produce will last a whole lot longer. I have a lot less spoilage. It's fresh, it's been picked two days before it arrives in the kitchen," she says.

Using local produce, Teresa has prepared and served zucchini chips, kale chips, asparagus, fresh salads, green beans, purple and pink potatoes, and lots of veggies with dip. In Teresa's experience, children are more willing to try fruits and vegetables if they have a unique color, such as purple potatoes, rainbow carrots, or yellow melons. In fact, she even played a game with the children when slicing a box of local melons, by having the children guess which color the melon would be on the inside!

Besides helping with local food procurement, FFA provides guidance, materials, and support to Head Start centers trying to start a garden or teach children about fresh produce. In total, FFA works closely with six centers and delivers gleaned produce to additional centers. FFA helped implement two garden beds at West Central Head Start, which have been well-received by the children.

"The kids had so much fun," noted Claudia.

FFA provides gardening supplies, seeds, and plant starts for West Central's garden. Kendra loves delivering supplies to Head Start centers, noting that the children are so excited that they help her carry the plant starts and other supplies. Teresa also raves about the school garden. She involves the children in the gardening process, which makes them excited about the food she harvests and serves.



Keys to Success

According to Kendra, FFA is able to provide farm to ECE support by "leaning on" their partners, such as Head Start and LINC Foods. Claudia acts in an administrative role by approving Head Start centers' purchases from LINC, and she even helped Teresa acquire additional kitchen equipment.

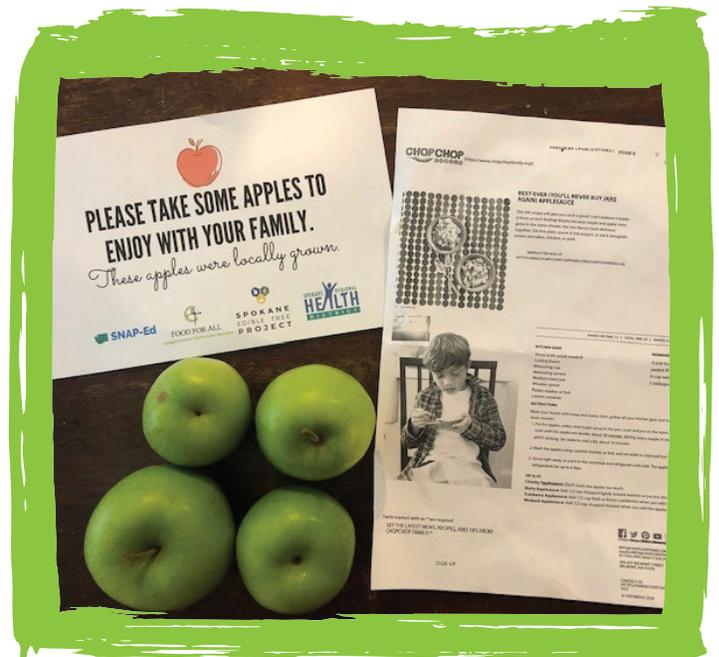
LINC Foods has recently helped fund Kendra's latest FFA project -- a subsidized local food box for Head Start families -- by adding a donation option on the customer checkout web page. FFA will use these donations to purchase local foods from LINC Foods and distribute them to families served by Head Start. LINC Foods firmly believes that FFA is a valuable partner, noting that "without FFA, it would be really challenging for LINC Foods to maintain relationships with the ECEs."

Teresa also praised FFA's dedication to farm to ECE, sharing, "This wouldn't be possible if FFA wasn't involved from the very beginning."

Kendra has plenty of valuable advice for other non-profit programs wanting to start farm to ECE work. Developing community partnerships is key, and check who is already doing similar work in your area. Even if an interested partner or ECE center is not ready to implement farm to ECE, Kendra suggests "maintaining that relationship. Keep reminding them 'I'm here, whenever you're ready.'"

Both Kendra and Claudia suggest knowing your audience before broaching the subject of farm to ECE. Kendra recommends becoming familiar with local procurement options and CACFP guidelines, while Claudia recommends understanding your audience's foodservice model and local food system.

Finally, Kendra advises programs interested in farm to ECE to start small if needed and celebrate the wins along the way!



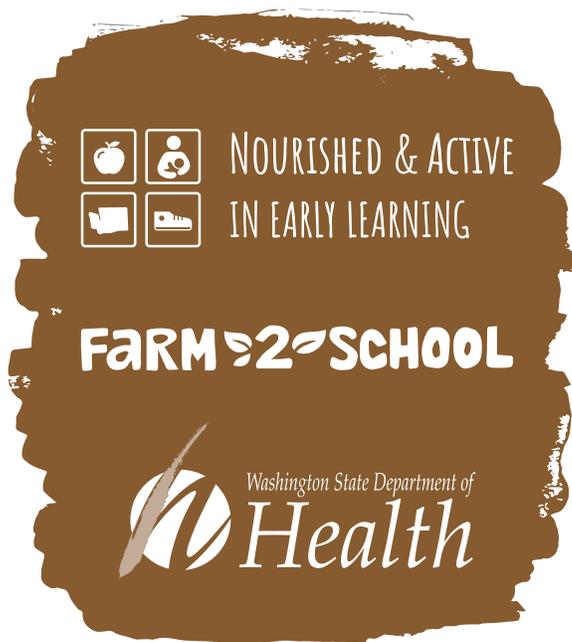
Looking Ahead

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Spokane Head Start centers closed from March 2020 to October 2020, which was the prime growing and harvesting season. The COVID-19 pandemic has also eliminated opportunities for in-person programming, such as farm visits and taste testing. As a result, Kendra and Michelle are currently producing a virtual farm visit on video, based on questions collected from current Head Start children.

Kendra is also looking forward to creating the subsidized food box to distribute to families, with support from LINC's donations program. Over at West Central Head Start, Teresa is looking forward to planting and maintaining the school garden for the season, and continues to provide local foods to children with the help of FFA.

Questions to Ask a Farmer from Children at Food For All's Head Start Centers

"Can I please help you grow vegetables?"
"Can you grow a big giant apple?"
"Can you grow a tiny tiny apple?"
"How do they pick noodles?"



Want to Learn More?

- Contact [Food for All](mailto:kendra.dean@cceasternwa.org) at kendra.dean@cceasternwa.org or 509-459-6163
- Learn more about implementing farm to ECE in your center by taking our [online Farm to ECE provider training](#) for 2 STARS credits
- [Washington State Farm to ECE Network](#) Join the network to connect with farm to ECE partners throughout the state
- [SNAP-Ed in Washington](#) Learn more about SNAP-Ed in Washington State, including current SNAP-Ed funded organizations
- [Funding Farm to School](#) National Farm to School Network's Fact Sheet to learn more about funding your farm to ECE program
- [The Washington Food & Farm Finder](#) can help you find local farms and food hubs in your area
- [CACFP meal pattern and nutrition standards](#) Learn more about CACFP standards as well as guidance and resources
- [Virtual Learning Resources](#) Explore virtual learning opportunities to engage in your own virtual farm visits

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