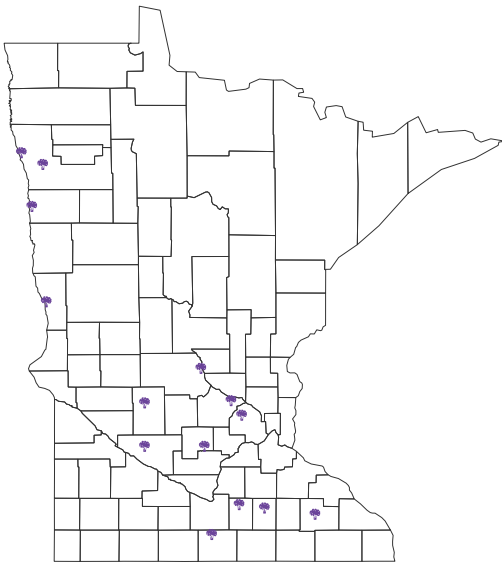


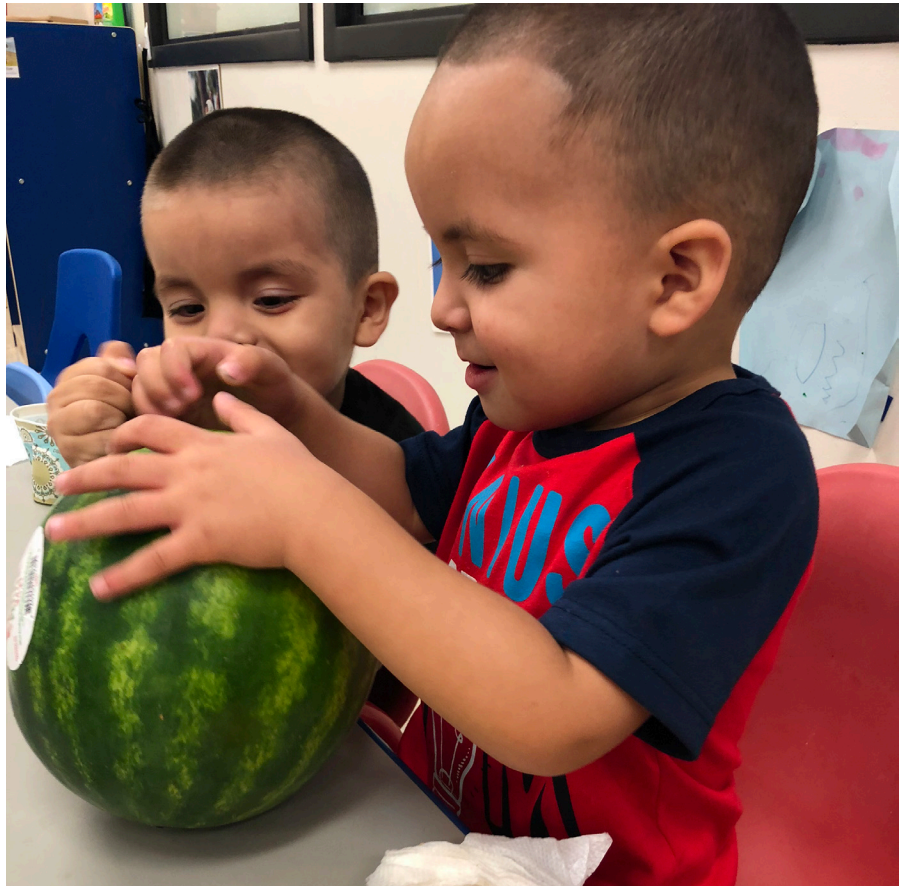
FARM TO HEAD START

TRI-VALLEY

OPPORTUNITY COUNCIL MIGRANT AND SEASONAL HEAD START PROGRAM



17 centers throughout Minnesota



Tri-Valley Opportunity Council operates a unique Head Start program, serving the children of migrant farm workers who travel to Minnesota during the growing season. The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) recognized the opportunity to create a meaningful connection for children between their families' deep ties to farming and the foods in their meals through Farm to Head Start activities. Relatively new to her position as Tri-Valley's Nutrition Services Manager, Jami Lee was eager to find new ways to help children develop positive eating habits. She also recognized the potential for Farm to Head Start to help meet that goal, and was enthusiastic about the idea of supporting farmers while teaching children where their food comes from. Both IATP and Tri-Valley saw Farm to Head Start as a chance to highlight the crucial work migrant families do to feed the community.

While Jami oversees compliance with the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and menu development for all locations, each site operates somewhat independently. For example, each has its own food service manager who orders food from different distribution companies or purchases from grocery stores at their own discretion. Locations also vary in their kitchen facilities and equipment, the capability to prepare food on-site (versus ordering pre-made food), and the level of engagement kitchen staff have with their jobs, many of which are seasonal.

Given the complex geographic and food service configurations across Tri-Valley's 17 sites, Jami decided to focus on three locations to pilot the Farm to Head

Start initiative during the first year, with a long-term goal of adding more locations. Jami strategically chose the pilot sites based on existing local foods infrastructure established through IATP's previous work with other Head Start partners. She identified the center in St. Cloud as a good choice due to its proximity to Reach Up Head Start, whose Nutrition Coordinator had built strong connections with local farmers that Jami could now utilize. Jami also chose Tri-Valley's Rochester location, whose food is supplied by another of IATP's partners, Families First Head Start. Finally, the Crookston and East Grand Forks sites were closest to where Jami was based, allowing her greater oversight and ability to engage with the initiative.

LEARNING FROM PREVIOUSLY ESTABLISHED MODELS

Identifying nearby farmers to supply local food for meals is often one of the most challenging parts of establishing a Farm to Head Start initiative. Tri-Valley's St. Cloud site was able to source locally grown fruits and vegetables successfully, partly due to teamwork between Jami and Reach Up's Nutrition Services Coordinator Haley Anderson. Together, Jami and Haley

connected with the Local Harvest Market, a regional food hub in Alexandria. Food hubs streamline local sourcing by aggregating products from multiple farms, providing one order form and bill, and making deliveries. Jami and Haley worked with Local Harvest to coordinate shared deliveries when both programs ordered the same food items. While Local Harvest originally planned



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?
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to combine Tri-Valley's orders with Reach Up's, they were able to add an additional stop and deliver directly to the Tri-Valley location in St. Cloud.

Similarly, Tri-Valley's Rochester location already had close ties to the Families First Head Start, whose nutrition staff caters Tri-Valley's meals. Families First Nutrition Coordinator Sarah Wenum continues to lead a strong local purchasing effort at her centers. Tri-Valley was able to follow Families First's food calendar and feature the same local foods in their menu and classroom activities. This had the added benefit of reinforcing Families First's commitment to local purchasing, as well.

This collaboration between partners shows the potential impact of IATP's "cohort model." This framework encourages peer learning and provides support to support to current and former partners in order to problem solve and learn from each other's experiences.

Jami developed partnerships with both Sarah and Haley via IATP's initial connection, and they worked together to compare notes and expand each of their individual Farm to Head Start initiatives.

Despite successes in St. Cloud and Rochester, building a supply chain with local farmers in the rural, far northern East Grand Forks and Crookston locations was more of a challenge during the pilot year. By year two, however, Jami was able to build a relationship with a new food distribution company that purchases from local farmers. Jami herself has also taken advantage of her proximity to those locations by leading some interactive food-related lessons in the classroom. "When I first brought peppers into the classroom the kids were saying "Ew, they're gross and they're hot," she remembers. "But after talking about the peppers and reading the book *Two Bite Club*, every child in that classroom took two bites of the pepper and every child liked them!"

YEAR TWO AND BEYOND

From a Distance

With sites spread widely across Minnesota, Jami cited distance as a key challenge during the first year of Farm to Head Start. "We're not local to [all of the center locations]," she said. "We can't just run over and give them a hand." She learned that finding one person at each site who shared her passion for the Farm to Head

Start initiative and cultivating shared ownership made all the difference. Now, Jami holds monthly remote meetings with members of each site's Farm to Head Start Leadership Team. "We have some pretty excited staff members," she said. "We need to find that person in the center that has [sic] passion for it. And they can run it, because we can't do it from a distance."

Expanding Farm to Head Start Success

Since launching the initiative, Jami has expanded some kind of Farm to Head Start activity to each one of Tri-Valley's 17 sites. In terms of purchasing local items, she has requested that their mainline food distributors source local produce when available. She has also added local sourcing (the ability to supply locally grown and raised products) as a selection criteria to her all theher programs' food service contracts, an important step for the long-term sustainability of Tri-Valley's Farm to Head Start work. Some centers have even started visiting local farmers markets to purchase produce for their meals. Recently, Tri-Valley has also started conversations with a farm with season-extending high tunnels, allowing the purchase of locally grown food almost year-round. Jami plans to continue expanding as time goes on. "It would be good for others to know to not be discouraged if the first year is slow," she said. "You have to take baby steps in order for it to be a success."

Tri-Valley has started adding community gardens at some of their centers. In Glencoe, center manager Eliza Tobon coordinates a garden where families can come and learn with their child and even take fresh produce home. For families that can't come to the garden, Eliza sends produce home with the children. Given the relationship many of the centers' families have to farming, Eliza encourages parents to talk with their children about the vital work they do to bring fresh produce to their communities.

Authors: Kelly Kramer, Katie Costello and Erin McKee

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Learn more at iatp.org/farm-to-institution

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