

## Farm to School in three area school districts

By [Denton \(Denny\) Newman Jr.](#) on Sep 5, 2013 at 11:02 a.m.

The Brainerd, Pierz and Staples School Districts are participating in the Farm to School through a growing partnership with newly formed food hub, SPROUT MN, led by Arlene Jones and staff at The Farm on St. Mathias.

Working with more than 30 area farms, Jones coordinates the procurement and aggregation of locally grown foods for the districts. When the bell rang on Tuesday, more than 2,500 pounds of locally grown foods from sweet corn to tomatoes, to hydroponically produced romaine, were on the student's plates.

SPROUT MN is working with farmers from eight central Minnesota counties. Beginning with Brainerd in 2010, this collaborative now includes Pierz that is in its second year with the program and Staples is in its first. Working in small steps and beginning with fresh vegetables for salad bars allows both students and kitchen staff time to acclimate to the exciting new colors and flavors of yellow tomatoes and purple carrots, and allows kitchen staff additional time to adjust to working with garden fresh vegetables.

Farm to School is broadly defined as a program that connects schools and local farms with the objectives of serving healthy meals in school cafeterias, improving student nutrition, providing agriculture, health and nutrition education opportunities, and supporting local and regional farmers.

With season extension techniques rapidly growing in Minnesota, including solar thermal high tunnels, it is forecasted that these programs which grown good food, small family farmer incomes and positive health outcomes, will continue to expand and have the potential to become year-round initiatives.