



## Embarking On A Whole Foods Hot Lunch Program

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Story by Chef Heather Forrester

**As a parent and a trained chef, the Administration of Aurora Waldorf School hired me to provide a whole foods hot lunch program with an emphasis on organic and local foods, and oh yeah, whatever you do, don't lose money! Embarking on this challenge, the first thing we did was to test the waters...**

We provided a hot lunch consisting of soup and homemade bread once a week, and offered quarts for sale to parents for dinner. It was a huge success. Not only were the parents pleased with not having to cook dinner, the students were soon eating the likes of Sausage Escarole White Bean Stew, Thai Corn Chowder, Baked Potato Soup and the ever-popular Chicken Noodle. Within the first few months we made enough profit to fund our lunch program. So on a shoe string budget, with no government assistance, no processed cheese, no prepackaged nuggets, no taco in a bag (What is that anyway?!), our lunch program was born.

In our first year, we were not only successful but profitable and stayed true to the mission of Aurora Waldorf School of nourishing the whole child, helping to build strong, healthy bodies and promote optimal brain development.

I am the only paid kitchen employee. I do the shopping, delivery, menu planning, cooking and clean up. I am fortunate to have a small base of volunteers who work with me in the kitchen. We offer a hot meal 4 days a week including, pasta broccoli, grain bowls, burritos with homemade refried beans and cheese, oatmeal pancakes with sautéed apples, and even the ever popular pizza, but this is real pizza.

85% of the menu is vegetarian and at least 25% of the time, meals are vegan. Every effort is made to serve local and organic with an emphasis on whole grains. Every meal has fresh produce: fruits, vegetables and herbs, and carrots, celery, bananas and soup stock are always organic. Local farmers provide organic apples, oranges, grapefruit, watermelon, cantaloupe, eggs and maple syrup. Gluten free and vegetarian options are always available. We have never served any processed food, high fructose syrup, artificial preservatives, flavorings or colorings and cool filtered water is always available. 80-150 eaters are fed every day for \$3 a lunch.

This opportunity has been not only a huge challenge to me, as a chef with a chef's ego (this is not the kind of position you dream of finding yourself in), but after working for some of the most prestigious restaurants, country clubs, and homes in the area I have found it immensely gratifying, although not quite as glamorous, to nurture these children, to be able to effect so many in a positive way, to expose them to real food, to bond with them over their hate of polenta pizza (great idea, bad execution on my part) to interact with them on a daily basis, to get hugs in the hall, to hear that a nursery student wants to stay for a full day so he can have lunch, to have parents come in and pick up their sick child's lunch "to go" because they didn't want to miss pasta broccoli...these are amazing benefits I never anticipated.

I have been very privileged to be able to be such a large part of bringing such an innovative, productive, healthy and happy program to our amazing school. I have been rewarded in many surprising ways, not in the least is the acceptance and appreciation shown by our students. Many days I'll be cooking escarole, or something equally healthy, and standing over the stove I am thinking they are never going to eat this...I am not feeling the love...and then, the first student is served, tastes the meal, carries it down the hall, wafting wonderful smells and soon there is a line out the door, ahhh it's going to be ok...

**About the Author:** Chef Heather Forrester brings over 25 years of experience as an executive chef, pastry chef and private caterer to Aurora Waldorf School (AWS) in West Falls, NY. Celebrating 20 years of teaching the Right Lesson at the Right Time preschool through high school, AWS upholds rigorous, classic academic standards without the burden of standardized testing. Students at AWS play outdoors and indoors every day with joyful, purposeful engagement through the arts and hands-on projects. A beautifully warm environment and a delicious lunch make AWS students not only love learning, but also love school. [www.aurorawaldorfschool.org](http://www.aurorawaldorfschool.org).