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## Organic Fingers offers organic lunch options to schools and daycares

By [Joanne Scharer](#)

from Salem Monthly, Section [Green](#)

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Quiche, falafel, potstickers, rice rolls, and sweet potato tamales sound like meals at a posh metropolitan restaurant. In fact, in an inconspicuous 1,800 square foot, impeccably clean space on Broadway Street in Salem, Organic Fresh Fingers Inc. prepares these meals and other scrumptious entrees for children attending daycares, preschools, and private schools in the Willamette Valley. All the meals on Organic Fresh Fingers' menu meet USDA requirements, are certified organic by Oregon Tilth, and contain no pesticides, GMOs, or artificial flavors or coloring. They also use fresh (and, whenever possible, local) foods, which are nutritionally superior to frozen or canned foods. The menu includes 20 entrees, many of which are wheat- and gluten-free.

Evann Remington, CEO/President of Organic Fresh Fingers, a self-proclaimed "serial entrepreneur," started the business eight months ago after seven years' involvement with the organic food movement. After visiting daycare facilities in the area, Remington was shocked at the food being served to such young children.

"It was all highly processed, high sodium, and high sugar -- kids deserve better," she said.

While the Oregon Administrative Rule (OAR) includes standards for the nutritional content of meals and snacks that child care centers serve, it leaves room for those highly processed meals that were so disturbing to Remington.

With childhood obesity rates making headlines, child nutrition has become a hot topic; experts say that 10 percent of 2- to 5-year-olds and more than 15 percent of children between the ages of six and 19 are overweight. However, improving children's health is challenging for busy families who have few free moments to prepare nutritious meals.

"People have to be committed before we can see any change," Remington said.

With the differential cost between organic and conventional foods, some consumers wonder if buying organic is worth the money. A study conducted by the Department of Environmental Health, School of Public Health and Community Medicine at the University of Washington shows that children who eat primarily organic foods are exposed to fewer pesticides than children who eat conventional foods. High doses of pesticides can cause neurological or reproductive damage. Considering that infant reproductive organs are still forming, the brain develops through age 12, and that young immune systems and livers are less able to rid bodies of contaminants, eating organic is especially important for children and pregnant or breastfeeding women. With this in mind, buying organic despite the cost makes sense.

Remington has found that some daycares and preschools in Salem automatically think that they can't afford organic meals, but they don't necessarily have a good grasp on their existing food costs. Some of Organic Fresh Fingers' customers meet the eligibility requirements under the USDA Adult and Child Food program, a federal program that provides funding for nutritious meals and snacks to eligible low-income children and adults who are enrolled at participating child care centers, day care homes, and adult day care centers.

"Ironically, low-income kids are receiving the best food and that's great," said Remington, "I love that."

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