



Minnesota's Good Food Access Program

2017 and 2018 Grant Recipient Profiles



Good Food Access Program Grant Recipient Profile

OUR COMMUNITY FOOD PROJECTS

Washington County, Minnesota

A cooler and storage system provides farmers with more certainty.

For Our Community Food Projects the central goal has always been to provide a source of locally grown, healthy foods for the residents of Washington County. Established in 2010, the organization began several farms that produce a diverse array of vegetables and greens. As demand for local produce has continued to grow, distribution now includes a corner-store, farmers markets and a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture).

But one of the challenges the organization and its participating farmers faced is trying to figure out just how much food to grow, and equally important, how to keep the harvested produce fresh. Several of the farmers had been harvesting what they could fit into their trunk and then rushing it home and putting it in their refrigerators.

"The farmers have always had a hard time figuring out how much to produce if they don't know that they have a secure place to store it," says Ben Devore, a young farmer in training at two of the farms associated with Our Community Food Projects.



A view of locally produced, peak-season vegetables for sale at a small farmer's market near Forest Lake, Minn. (Washington County).



"Having a mobile cooler ... is a huge step in helping distribute food out into the community and helping the farmers produce the food and store it."

Ben notes that investments like that provided by the Good Food Access Fund reach beyond individual farmers and the people they serve. It also has a widespread impact on farmers' markets in surrounding communities because if farmers have more stability in the handling and storage of the food they grow, that will positively affect the markets they provide food to.



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ABOUT THE GOOD FOOD ACCESS PROGRAM

Recognizing the need for food access solutions in Minnesota, the American Heart Association, together with local and state coalition partners, advocated for the creation of the Good Food Access Program within the Minnesota Department of Agriculture in 2016. The program provides grants, loans and technical assistance to local enterprises for innovative food access solutions.

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APPETITE FOR CHANGE Minneapolis, Minnesota Offering refrigerated foods at the West Broadway Farmers Market.

DeVon Nolen knows her community well, stating, “Amplified sound is direct marketing!” Every Friday from June to October, the West Broadway Farmers Market manager gets on the microphone and calls out to passersby with an invitation to purchase fresh produce from local vendors. Or, she works with youth and adult staff to run an open mic, or play music that entices neighbors to stop by and shop.

The ability to amplify sound was made possible because Appetite for Change (AfC) purchased a generator thanks to the Good Food Access Fund. As a mini farmers market operating in a predominantly African American neighborhood in North Minneapolis, these gestures are not merely cosmetic, they are crucial to making the market a welcoming place for community members.



“Milk, cheese, eggs, chicken — we’ll be expanding the kinds of foods the market can offer and attract a wider variety of community members.”

“People from all walks of life come here to partake in the common act of getting food,” says DeVon. “But in addition to being nourished by food, people get nourished by the community and social connections that get built here.”



Appetite for Change’s youth volunteers carry fresh produce to a mini farmer’s market in North Minneapolis.

In addition to powering the microphone, the generator will be used to allow the market to offer refrigerated foods for the first time, the primary reason AfC sought the funds. The stand-up refrigerated cooler will help to meet a big demand in the community. “Milk, cheese, eggs, chicken—we’ll be expanding the kinds of foods the market can offer, and attract a wider variety of community members,” says DeVon.

The market has become an oasis of fresh, affordable produce within walking distance for many residents, and staff and community members alike are looking forward to the expanded offerings that the generator will enable. “People want to be here,” says DeVon. “They want healthy foods. The West Broadway Farmers Market addresses both.”



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DARREL'S FULL-SERVICE FOODS

Hoffman, Minnesota

Meeting the demand of seniors and farmers for healthier foods.

The homepage of Darrel's Full-Service Foods exclaims, "Come see our new look and new line of foods!! There is still more yet to come!" Listed beneath that statement are some of the new offerings—a variety of new meats, fresh bakery goods and freshly made salads. Those healthy and nutritious foods have been made possible thanks to a grant from the Minnesota Good Food Access Fund, which allowed the Hoffman, Minn. grocery store to purchase new refrigerated display units.

"We're using the grant to put healthier foods out including fresh fruit, wraps and salads. More of a grab and go thing in the open display case," says Darrel Nehk, the owner of Darrel's. "Some of our elderly residents really wanted this, as well as farmers so they could take healthier food to work."



"We're using the grant to put healthier foods out including fresh fruit, wraps and salads... our elderly residents really wanted this, as well as farmers so they could take healthier food to work."

As the only grocery store in the farming community, Nehk makes every effort to accommodate his customers' requests. To his surprise, in the six years he's been running the store, more and more requests for healthier foods have come in.



A view of the new open display case that prominently sells fresh fruits and vegetables to local residents of Hoffman.

"Well, we never had sugar-free or low-salt items until now, and now we're selling them. And the fruits and the juices, things like that, will go in the new case," he says.

Nehk also works with an area farmer to carry local produce during the growing season as well as dairy and meats from the area year-round. "Customers enjoy knowing where their food comes from, and the quality and freshness can't be beat," he says.

For both Nehk and Darrel's, the Good Food Access Fund made all the difference in making this change. "It's a very good program to have, especially for a small-town grocery store. We just don't have the cash flow like the big stores do, and we don't have \$15,000 lying around to be able to purchase equipment like that," he says. "I wouldn't have been able to do it without the grant."

Nehk's commitment to his business, and his community, is clear. "It isn't a get rich thing. You make a living, but it's a struggle. But, you know, I enjoy it," he says. "The biggest thing is the customers, especially the one-on-one contact you have with them. It's a great community to live in."



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Healthy Food Access For All Minnesotans



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D & R GROCERY

Oklee, Minnesota

New refrigeration units help serve the grocery needs of small-town residents

Deb Sherman, the owner of D & R Grocery in Oklee, Minn., is excited about the store's new freezer, which she was able to buy thanks to the Minnesota Good Food Access Fund. "We're so happy for it. It's just so bright, and people can notice the food right away," she says. "I think that people buy those items more - it's like, oh! I didn't know you have that here!"

The fund also allowed three new compressors to be installed on D & R's existing refrigeration units. And while the new compressors aren't as noticeable to customers as the freezer, "we have taken people back there to show what was given to us," says Deb enthusiastically.



"I'm sure that just about every small town in any area would be more than grateful to have the extra support from the state ... It is a big eye opener how much good this program can do for small town grocery stores."

According to Deb, the grant keeps the equipment running, and well-running equipment keeps the store going. "If you can't keep your milk and eggs chilled and frozen food frozen, you can't afford to keep replacing the products."

Deb has seen the high cost of repairs sink other small grocery stores in the area, damaging the communities where they were located.



This new freezer in the D & R Grocery store is a welcome site for local Oklee, Minn. residents that can now purchase healthy, colorful frozen fruits and vegetables in town.

"If the grocery goes, then the people go and that impacts all of the local businesses," she says.

Ensuring that D & R Grocery can stick around also helps guarantee that people in Oklee and the surrounding area can access nutritious foods. The next closest grocery store is a 20-minute drive away. But, as Deb explains, "We have a lot of people here who don't drive, including elderly folks and younger ones who never got a license and those who don't want to drive in bad weather when it's hard to get out of town."

Deb loves what she does and would love to see the Good Food Access Fund continue to provide support to other small groceries like hers. "I'm sure that just about every small town in any area would be more than grateful to have the extra support from the state to help keep their business going," she says. "It is a big eye opener how much good this fund can do for small town grocery stores."



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KNUTSON'S GROCERY Roosevelt, Minnesota

Providing more healthy food choices – including locally grown – to customers.

One hundred years is a long time for a business to survive but Knutson's Grocery in Roosevelt, Minn. has done just that. Dean Knutson's parents bought the store from the previous owners in 1980, and in 1998 Dean purchased the store from his parents. Together with his wife he has been running the store since then, offering groceries and specialty meats that are made in-house.

With the next closest grocery stores being 12 miles in one direction and 24 miles in the other, Dean sees a wide range of local folks, as well as visitors to nearby Lake of the Woods. "When you have this business, you're a gathering place of sorts," he says. "We're able to sit and interact with people. And when you don't have these small businesses, it really takes something away from rural America."



"The new refrigeration is a tremendous help. Older equipment is hard to keep operating, and if we can't keep it operating then we won't be around."

Knutson's applied for and received a grant from the Good Food Access Fund to update their refrigeration and freezer equipment. "The new refrigeration is a tremendous help," says Dean. "Older equipment is hard to keep operating, and if we can't keep it operating then we won't be around."



The storefront sign of Knutson's has been a mainstay of Roosevelt, Minn., which can now serve healthier, refrigerated foods thanks to the grant.

With the grant they'll replace an older cooler with a larger one that will hold more fruit and dairy, as well as locally grown and Minnesota grown products. They will also replace two outdated freezers as well as a meat case.

Dean says that the grant will let Knutson's provide more and healthier choices to customers, since they'll now have the right equipment to keep produce fresher longer. "We're hoping that people will be able to make better choices that way. We can't twist anyone's arm but if you can better display things like apples and pears, we'll be more successful at it, that's for sure."

Dean feels that efforts like the Good Food Access Fund are beneficial to small business, and to rural America as a whole. "These small-town businesses have paid taxes all their lives and pay their employees well, but our customer base is smaller, and margins are tighter, so efforts like this are important," he says.



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LAMECKER'S GENERAL STORE Kerkhoven, Minnesota

New refrigeration units will help expand community's food options.

Kerkhoven, Minn. bills itself as “a small town with big possibilities.” But Scott Lamecker knows firsthand how quickly those possibilities can shrink with the loss of a community anchor like a grocery store. “When a town loses its main business, it hurts all the businesses in town, and it hurts the town,” he says.

Scott has been running Lamecker's General Store in the Swift County community since 2014. He has worked hard to keep up with customer demand for groceries, updating his store twice in five years, but reached the limit on his refrigeration and freezer equipment.



“Having a grocery store keeps people in town, and draws them in.”

That's where support from the Good Food Access Fund came in. Without the grant, Lamecker's would have been limited to purchasing smaller, used equipment—like the kind they bought several years ago, which is already experiencing problems.

“The grant allowed me to purchase the refrigeration units new. My store saves money in the long haul since modern units use less energy and are less likely to need repairs,” says Scott. “I'm also able to buy them in the size we actually need to stock the foods the community wants.”



The storefront sign of Lamecker's stands in the town center of Kerkhoven, Minn., a rural food desert community of 700 residents.

Kerkhoven residents are looking forward to the expanded grocery selection. Scott has been working with some of the town's newer Latino residents to offer culturally appropriate, nutritious foods. “I'd love to expand a whole section for healthy Hispanic foods,” he says. “The new freezer units will definitely help with that.”

The larger refrigerated cases will also be an important asset to Kerkhoven's senior citizens because they will hold more fresh produce, including locally grown. “With our home delivery service, our seniors will be able to get more healthy foods in their homes, even in the winter,” says Scott.

In Scott's view, the Good Food Access Fund is something that's going to help make Kerkhoven an even better town than it is already. “Having a grocery store keeps people in town, and draws them in,” he says.



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THE FOOD GROUP

Operates Statewide

Adding more food storage to help serve more Minnesotans.

“There are a whole group of people who don’t qualify for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), but are still struggling to make ends meet,” says Lori Kratchmer, the Executive Director of The Food Group, formerly the Emergency Foodshelf Network. “Food is one of the first things to get cut when family budgets are tight, especially healthy foods. With our Fare for All Program, we’re really trying to reach that group of people.”

Fare for All is a traveling grocery sales program that purchases nutritional foods at wholesale, assembles those foods into packs of produce and meats, and sells those packs at up to 40% off retail prices at nearly 40 sites across Minnesota. The program sets up shop at their walk-in sales sites once a month and has additional pre-pay sites that serve mainly Greater Minnesota residents. Fare for All encourages people of every income level to shop with them, since the more shoppers who buy from the program, the better deals the program can get on their wholesale purchasing, keeping prices low for everyone.



“The further out into rural Minnesota we have gone, the more success we’ve had, because people in those communities have to drive so far for healthy food. Unfortunately, storage has been a major limiting factor in being able to add program sites.”



A group of volunteers from The Food Group proudly stands for a photo. They are focused on fighting hunger across the state of Minnesota.

“We go where we’re needed,” says Lori. And that need is great—there is currently a waiting list of towns and cities that want to bring the program to their communities, particularly in more rural areas.

“The further out into rural Minnesota we have gone, the more success we’ve had, because people in those communities have to drive so far for healthy food,” says Lori. Unfortunately, storage has been a major limiting factor in being able to add program sites. “We have giant coolers and freezers that you can drive a forklift into, but we’re already at maximum capacity,” she adds.

That’s where the Good Food Access Fund comes in. In order to serve more communities, the Food Group has started construction on a second freezer, piecing together grants from a number of sources to fund the several hundred thousand dollars necessary for a project of this scale. The Good Food Access Fund grant is supporting the final steps on the freezer construction, adding a racking system and sealing the outside. “We so appreciate this grant,” says Lori. “It’s perfect in helping us complete the freezer.”



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