Local and Regional Foods in Minnesota

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**Introduction**

For the past 18 months Minnesota Rural Partners, through a USDA Rural Development agreement, has been investigating various aspects of rural urban connections in Minnesota. The intention is to create greater understanding, appreciation, and mutual support among rural and urban communities. The growing local foods movement is bringing a diverse array of interests and talents to a key issue that has united both urban and rural communities: the provision of and access to local and healthy food. This report highlights strategies currently employed throughout Minnesota to build and strengthen local and regional food systems through production, distribution, processing, consumer education, and marketing of local foods.

**Production – Growing Food and Farmers**

One hundred years ago, nearly all the food that was produced on Minnesota farms was for farm family and local consumption. The infrastructure was in place to process excess farm production locally through small town creameries, canning plants, and local butcher shops. Since World War II, that local emphasis has ceded to a food system where Minnesota farms produce commodity crops for the global marketplace. Currently, Minnesota is an agriculturally productive state with over 19 million acres harvested annually. The current commodity cropping system has an elegance of efficiency and a supply chain that functions relatively seamlessly.

As the industrial food system has grown, food consumed in Minnesota has increasingly been imported from outside of the state. While this system has enabled Minnesotans year-long access to bananas, oranges, and lettuce, the agricultural sector is significantly less diversified, less versatile, and potentially more susceptible to economic shock due to environmental, political, or global agricultural factors.

An increasing number of farms within Minnesota, however, are producing organically or producing food for local consumption. The Minnesota Department of Agriculture’s Minnesota Grown program has increased the number of farmers listed in its directory every year for the past 20 years and now includes more than 1,000 farms that market their products locally.

Although the small number of very large farms in Minnesota continues to increase and medium sized operations (which make up slightly more than half of Minnesota farms) diminish, small farms seem to be more prevalent than in previous years. According to the USDA, \(^1\) between 1997 and 2007 farms between 1 and 99 acres increased faster than any other segment from 32.8 to 40.4 percent of Minnesota farms. As these farms are more likely to grow food for local consumption, this pattern may reflect the growth of the local food movement in Minnesota.

\(^1\) [http://www.ers.usda.gov/statefacts/mn.htm](http://www.ers.usda.gov/statefacts/mn.htm)
The Changing Face of Farming
The USDA’s most recent census reported that the average farm operator age in Minnesota has continued its increasing trend reaching 55.3 years. Meanwhile rural populations are decreasing as more rural youth leave for opportunities in the cities. As a farm transference crisis looms, many organizations are seeking opportunities to excite young agricultural entrepreneurs with the prospect of small-scaled local based diversified farming. The increase in farms between 1 and 99 acres identified in the last agricultural census might be an indication that this trend is taking root.

Sustainable Farming Training Programs
Although traditional agricultural education remains focused on training students in the commodity farming system, there are increasing opportunities to learn sustainable agricultural techniques. Programs and networks are emerging to advance and disseminate farming practices such as rotational grazing, succession planting, and direct marketing. These programs are important for those looking to change the way they have been farming by incorporating more sustainable techniques and to individuals new to farming who do not have generations of experience to fall back on when starting up a new farm operation. The following examples demonstrate opportunities for learning to become a locally-based and sustainable farmer.

Sustainable Food Production Program -- Minnesota State Community and Technical College
Minnesota State Community and Technical College in Fergus Falls, Minnesota offers a 30 credit program in sustainable food production. Students in this program learn about principles of sustainability and farm ecology. In addition, students learn about grass-based livestock systems and sustainable crop management systems that include crop rotation, cover cropping, conservation tillage, and compost production and use. Additional courses cover topics such as farm marketing and management, value-added-agriculture, and practical farm skills. Students must also complete an internship that gives them valuable hands-on experience working in sustainable agriculture.

University of Minnesota Extension
To serve the increasing number of small farm’s in Minnesota, Extension offers educational opportunities in crop and livestock production, natural resources conservation, and business management through its Small Farms website. The program offers a variety of workshops designed specifically for small farmers who are interested in following sustainable practices. The Small Farm U workshop, for example, has sessions that teach participants about subjects like building a chicken tractor, direct marketing, and developing a business plan. Another workshop series, Living on the Land, is an eight-week course that helps small farmers understand basics of farming including topics like regulations, water quality, soils, woodlands and wildlife, weeds, and pasture maintenance. Extension also provides small farmers with additional information such as the foodshed calculator and online advice on direct farm marketing.

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2 http://www.extension.umn.edu/smallfarms/
Farm Beginnings Program

Farm Beginnings is a farmer-led educational, training, and support program developed and coordinated by the Land Stewardship Project. The program combines seminars, mentorships, and conferences that give people the tools they need to begin a successful farming operation. Classes begin in the fall of each year and meet nine times into the spring. Class participants learn goal setting, financial planning, business plan creation, alternative marketing and low-cost sustainable farming techniques. Participants are encouraged to develop a sustainable business plan that enhances their quality of life goals – a plan factoring in sound environmental practices while being economically viable. On-farm workshops and skill sessions demonstrate methods from a wide variety of farm operations. Mentorships and networking provide on-going support.

In the first 8 years of the program 222 people have completed the course in Minnesota. Over 60% of those graduates are now farming more than 6000 acres of land through a broad spectrum of enterprises including beef, dairy, hogs, meat goats, poultry, wholesale vegetables, community supported agriculture, organic grains, and flowers. Qualified beginning farmers have access to no-interest revolving livestock loans provided through a partnership with Heifer International. The Farm Beginnings curriculum has been applied successfully for over 10 years in many locations across Minnesota and beyond.

Lake Superior Area Farm Beginnings: An Example

In 2007, the University of Minnesota’s Northeast Regional Partnership, Carlton Soil and Water District, University of Minnesota Extension, and the Sustainable Farming Association came together to develop a plan to start a Farm Beginnings program. This program was intended to fill a gap in service to prospective beginning farmers from Mille Lacs, Pine, Carlton, St. Louis, and Cook Counties in Minnesota as well as Douglas, Bayfield, and Ashland Counties in Wisconsin.

The collaboration of organizations developed a steering committee made up of individuals from the Land Stewardship Project, the Sustainable Farming Association, local producers, the University of Minnesota, University of Wisconsin, and the Soil and Water Conservation Districts. The committee helped determine key objectives; financial and human resources needs; partnership roles; and a plan for working with the Land Stewardship Project to initiate and implement the program.

In 2008 they offered a year long program for new farmers interested in developing their skills in areas of business planning, holistic farm management, and sustainable agriculture. A major goal of this initiative was to facilitate sustainable community development by helping rebuild and maintain critical infrastructure for farmers and their local food systems. Each year a group is selected to participate from a pool of qualified applicants. In the first year, 22 farm units were involved surpassing the initial goal of 20 farm units. Some participants of this program went on to purchase and start new farm operations while others utilized the skills and knowledge they learned to adopt sustainable agricultural practices on their existing farms.

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3 http://www.farmbeginnings.org

4 http://www.lakesuperiorfarming.org
Local Food Systems Planning

Foodshed Analysis
A foodshed is a geographic concept that refers to the size and location of land required to feed a given population. The foodshed concept is analogous to a watershed which represents an area of hydrological flow into a given body of water. Just as all rainwater that falls upland flows downhill, all food that is produced flows toward consumers. Although today’s global-scale industrial food system would necessarily complicate a literal foodshed analysis, analysts use the foodshed concept to identify the potential for locally produced food to feed population centers. A foodshed analysis, then, must specify a geographic region (e.g. a particular city, county, state, etc), determine the food needs required within that region, and then calculate the amount of land required to grow or raise that food taking local or regional consumption patterns into account. Additionally, a foodshed analysis would summarize the existing local agricultural activity and determine what is currently produced for local consumption.

While it is unlikely that a particular geographic unit would source all of its food from local farms, a foodshed analysis is useful to examine unmet potential within a given market. Farmers can use data from foodshed analyses to identify products that are consumed locally, could be easily produced locally, but are currently sourced predominantly from outside the region. Economic analysts can use foodshed analyses to make estimations about economic benefits a region would receive if a given level of food consumed in a region was produced locally. Although mostly a hypothetical practice, a foodshed analysis can provide useful insight to potential opportunities to take advantages of markets for a variety of agricultural crops and products.

Integrated Foodshed Analysis and Research: The Southeast Minnesota Foodshed Planning Initiative
The Southeast Foodshed Planning Initiative (SEFPI) is a multidisciplinary research effort coordinated by the University of Minnesota Southeast Regional Partnership. SEFPI brings the analytical strength of the University of Minnesota’s decades of food systems projects and partnerships to the southeast region’s efforts to build an integrated self-reliant food infrastructure. This initiative engages collaborative research that responds to issues articulated by citizens to “scale-up” the regionally-based food system. SEFPI participants are made up of farmers, grocers, non-profits, local government, schools, community and private interests.

5 http://www.regionalpartnerships.umn.edu/index.pl?id=5835
Students and faculty have completed a variety of academic projects in support of the SEFPI to build an understanding of the components of the local foodshed. These projects provide a foundation of information that can be utilized by the community and the University for future action or further research. Projects include:

- **An Evaluation Strategy** identifying indicators to measure foodshed planning efforts
- **Mapping and Illustration Design** including the creation of a GIS library of relevant data, a capacity study to measure the ability of the region to supply population with food, and a land use policy impact analysis
- **Food Production Assessment** to determine what and how much is produced in the region
- **Foodshed Analysis** to estimate the optimal area requirements and location for local food production
- **Economic Modeling of Household Expenditures** to estimate household budget shares for different food products
- **Assessing Minority Consumers** to identify purchasing behaviors, barriers to purchasing local foods, and opportunities to increase local food consumption
- **Survey of Current and Ideal Food Systems** to find out how people interact and value their regional food system
- **Program and Policy Analysis** to explore different approaches to foodshed planning in the United States and determine best management practices

**Food Systems**

Food systems represent all of the factors involved in food from production to waste stream. These factors can be broken down into five general parts: food production, food processing, transportation and distribution, consumption, and waste disposal or recycling. In our current global food system much of the food we eat is produced in distant states and countries. The food is then transported for hundreds or thousands of miles to facilities where it is processed, packaged, and transported again to large distribution facilities where it awaits delivery to large grocery outlets. After consumption, large amounts of food waste are thrown in the trash and transported to municipal waste facilities where, if lacking adequate sunlight and oxygen, it might slowly decompose over dozens of years.

Of course not all food needs to follow this path from production to consumption. Advocates of smaller more locally-based food systems believe that there are considerable environmental, economic, and cultural benefits that result in participating in alternative food systems. Local and regional transparent food systems can function where food is grown using less intensive practices, minimally processed, transported shorter distances, and consumed. Additionally, food waste can be composted, turned back into vital nutrients, and added back to the soil in order to grow more food. Such a system could benefit soil and water quality, reduce carbon dioxide emissions, strengthen local agricultural economies, and can even promote a regional sense of place and food-based identity.

Elements of the food system continuum range from personal gardening to the global sourcing of industrial food products (Figure 1). The local and regional food systems covered in this report address Sectors B and C—individual farm sourcing and aggregate farm sourcing through direct marketing, retail, and institutional outlets. Farms in local food supply chains represented in Sector B maintain a diverse portfolio of products and market outlets, which may help defray large fixed costs across multiple revenue streams.
Local Food System Planning

Homegrown Minneapolis

Recognizing that strong local food systems impact health, food security, the economy, and the environment the City of Minneapolis launched the Homegrown Minneapolis initiative to investigate ways in which the city could positively impact the local food movement and foster a more sustainable food system. Through Homegrown Minneapolis the city seeks to analyze the role it can play in supporting residents’ efforts to grow, sell, distribute, and consume fresh, sustainably produced, and locally grown food.

The city convened a large number of stakeholders representing the city, schools, parks, local businesses, neighborhood organizations, non-profits, residents, and others. These stakeholders voluntarily divided themselves among four subcommittees in order to develop recommendations around farmers markets; community, school, and home gardens; small enterprise urban agriculture; and commercial use of local foods. The city is currently in the process of determining implementation steps around many of these topics. Several implementation work groups have been formed to determine the best alternatives for action. These groups and their scopes of action include:
Regulatory Review
- Clarify and revise problematic regulations

Community Garden Program
- Develop guidelines related to community gardens on city land
- Streamline the process for obtaining necessary gardening resources

Long-Term Food Policy Advisory
- Explore the need for and the structure of a food policy council to guide the city’s local food efforts

Local Food Sustainability Indicator
- Develop local foods indicators to help measure progress on local food-related goals

Food Access
- Community kitchen inventory
- Food distribution pilot projects
- Farmers’ market promotion in diverse communities
- Creation of city-wide EBT system for farmers’ markets

Municipal Farmers’ Market
- Showcase local food and local growers at main Minneapolis farmers’ market

Urban Agriculture Policy Plan
- Advise on the development of an Urban Agriculture Policy Plan to guide land use issues related to urban agriculture

Local Food Purchasing
- Advise on establishing a local food purchasing policy at the City of Minneapolis

The Minneapolis Planning Commission recently approved the urban agriculture land use plan which will set official city land use policy regarding urban agricultural issues and will remove some restrictive barriers to local food production. The plan now must go before the zoning and planning committee and then the city council for final approval.

Also as a result of the Homegrown Minneapolis initiative the city is now leasing certain vacant city-owned parcels for conversion to community gardens; collaborating with community partners to offer a number of small business training and financing opportunities to potential local food entrepreneurs; and providing a list of community kitchens to connect potential food processors of varying scales with available facilities.
Supply Chain and Agricultural Infrastructure

**Direct Sales to Consumers**

In the current local and regional food system most farmers are connecting with consumers through direct marketing which includes sales and delivery directly to individuals through outlets such as farmers’ markets, community supported agriculture (CSA), and farm stands. The ability to sell directly to consumers provides farmers with better prices for their products than they would receive in the wholesale market through sales to distributors. In addition to direct sales to consumers, many farmers sell their products directly to restaurants, grocery stores, food coops, or through other outlets as well.

**Farmers’ Markets**

Farmers sell locally grown fresh produce directly to the general public in farmers’ markets which are usually held outdoors in public spaces. While farmers’ markets were commonplace before the Industrial Age, they declined with the rise of grocery stores which were able to sell cheaper and more convenient industrially-grown and processed goods. The rise of the modern environmental movement in the 1970s brought with it a renewed interest in locally-grown, chemical free, and organic products. As a result farmers’ markets have experienced a resurgence growing from fewer than 2,000 nationwide in 1994 to more than 6,000 in 2009.

In Minnesota, the increasing interest in farmers’ markets mirrors this national trend with new markets appearing regularly in communities throughout the state. The Minnesota Farmers’ Market Association was created to present a unified voice in the growth and regulation of local farm markets. There are 60 registered members of the MFA but far more markets are held regularly throughout the state. Local markets are more prevalent in the southern portion of Minnesota where the climate and landscape is more conducive to agricultural production. However, the use of high tunnel hoop houses, and greenhouses, has extended the growing season in the northern part of the state as well.

There is also a growing trend toward year-round farmers’ markets. In Northwest Minnesota, the Mentor farmers’ market moves indoors during the winter months and is open one day each month to sell locally produced food. In the central region, the small community of Verndale is also experimenting with an indoor year-round market.

**Community Supported Agriculture**

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms provide a unique and increasingly popular service to their customers. At the beginning of each season CSA farms sell ‘shares’ of the season’s produce or agricultural products to their customers. Throughout the season the farmer divides the products grown or produced among the number of shares sold and either delivers the product (often to centralized...
delivery sites) or sets the shares aside for customers to pick up. While CSAs often sell produce, a variety of products may be available including meat, dairy, eggs, or value-added products.

CSAs offer farmers stability by enabling them to obtain revenue at the beginning of the growing season to cover their costs. Customers obtain regular shipments of fresh produce (or other products) that frequently are picked from the field the day before delivery. Customers, however, also share the risks with the farmer. If weather or pests wipe out a particular crop customers must be prepared to receive a smaller share of produce. CSA farms are prevalent across Minnesota and many farms in neighboring states serve Minnesota as well. The Minnesota Grown directory lists 74 member CSA farms within the state. Local Harvest, has identified 139 CSA farms in and around Minnesota that serve the state.

**Direct Sales to Other Outlets**

**Food Cooperatives**

Food cooperatives are member-owned and member-governed businesses that operate under democratic principles where member/owners elect leadership and set policies. The International Cooperative Alliance sets forth seven principles under which cooperative businesses must adhere: voluntary open membership; democratic member control; member economic participation; autonomy and independence; education, training, and information; cooperation among cooperatives; and concern for community. While many coops have traditionally focused on providing organic produce and foods, increasingly coops are focusing on providing locally grown and produced products as well.

Minnesota is home to more cooperatively run grocery stores than any other state. The 2008 National Coop Directory had 42 food coops listed in 35 cities across Minnesota. From Grand Marais to Albert Lea, these coops are distributed throughout the state with more than half located outside of the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The Wedge Coop in Minneapolis with its 13,000 member-owners has grown to become one of the largest food coops in the nation.

**Direct Sales to Grocery Stores**

In 2007 the University of Minnesota’s Endowed Chair in Agricultural Systems sponsored a survey of grocery retailers throughout the state to determine grocery store demand for locally-produced organic products at the retail level. Surveyors from the Minnesota Center of Survey Research conducted telephone interviews with grocery store managers and buyers of produce, meat, and dairy products in the state.

Results indicated that grocers anticipated significant growth in organic products over the next one to five years. Moreover, those same grocers had positive attitudes toward sourcing directly from local farmers. Independent grocers and (to a lesser degree) chain stores did have the flexibility required to purchase direct from farmers. In some regions of the state a large majority of grocery stores surveyed reported buying directly from farmers. Smaller stores that might have troubles sourcing from traditional large-scale distributors might find that sourcing appropriate quantities directly from nearby farmers is a better option.

In most cases when grocers sourced directly from farmers, it was the farmers themselves who initiated contact. Many buyers said they do not actively seek out farmers when they can access local products through a wholesaler or distributor. Those buyers, however, said they would be receptive to growers who contact the store directly to arrange sales.
Local Food in Restaurants
Many restaurants in Minnesota are sourcing the products and ingredients they sell to their patrons from local growers and producers. Some restaurants take great pride in providing the freshest local foods possible. These restaurants offer an interface to local foods that may be an introduction to local foods for many consumers. Common Roots in Minneapolis, for example, proudly displays posters on their wall showing what portion of the month’s invoices came from local sources. The Craftsman, also in Minneapolis, features a menu that changes frequently to adapt to the seasonality of local products. These are just two of dozens of restaurants that focus on or feature local foods.

The Heartland Food Network of the Minnesota Project recognizes 88 restaurants and caterers in Minnesota that serve local foods. While the Twin Cities metropolitan area is certainly a dominant force among local foods restaurants, the Heartland Food Network also lists local food availability in restaurants in Grand Rapids, Wabasha, Brainerd, Amboy, Duluth, Buffalo, and Grand Marais. This list is not necessarily complete and other areas almost certainly contain restaurants with local foods on their menus as well.

Despite its popularity, preparing and featuring local food in restaurants can provide a wide variety of difficulties for many restaurants. Coordinating menu planning and seasonality can be tricky. Working with a variety of farmers might also require a different approach for chefs than the traditional method of buying through a distributor. In order to help restaurants make this transition, The Minnesota Project published the guide “Buying Local Food for Food Service in Minnesota”. This guide provides information that a kitchen manager or chef would need to source food locally including a list of local organizations that advocate for local agriculture; advice on seasonality and menu planning; and making relationships with growers, CSAs, coops, and buying clubs. The guide also provides many profiles of restaurants that use local foods and offers personal stories of kitchen managers who explain how and why they source products locally.

Farm to Institution
Of the farm to institution programs in Minnesota, farm to school programming has received the most attention and systematic study. Other institutions like hospitals or nursing homes provide opportunities to expand local foods programs. Such institutions lack seasonal limitations implicit to school systems and a natural connection between health and the provision of local, fresh, and healthy foods could complement programming.

The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, Land Stewardship Project, and Institute for Sustainable Future conducted a survey of hospitals to find out about local food sourcing in various regions of the state. They found that Minnesota hospitals are increasingly providing some amount of local, nutritious, and sustainable foods in their cafeterias. For example, 68% are purposefully buying Minnesota grown produce when available. Thirty-five percent of respondents reported purchasing directly from farms while 70% purchased local products through distribution partners. Of those hospitals purchasing locally, all but one spent between $1000 and $10,000 per year. While these figures are not staggering, given the small-scale of the local food system and larger logistical impediments like distribution, they represent a promising trend. Indeed many hospitals are still dependent on their large distributors that carry few local products.

St. Luke’s Hospital in Duluth is putting in the extra work it takes to procure local foods. While the short growing season in the frigid north makes large quantities of many produce items harder to come by in farmers’ markets, hospitality services director Mark Branovan contracted with a farm in Two Harbors to plant fields of lettuce just for the hospital. Branovan also broke with his group purchasing organization
(GPO) in order to source rBGH-free milk from a Minnesota dairy. Eventually the GPO began carrying the rBGH-free milk in order to get Branovan’s business back. Other local products St. Luke’s is able to source include produce from farmers’ markets, Lake Superior salmon, bison from Esko, maple syrup, and Caribou Coffee.

Another example of farm to institution efforts is Lakewood Health Systems in Staples, which has made a commitment to implement a local foods program in its system through an institutional pilot program in 2011-2012. Two years ago the facility started a farmers’ market in their parking lot which has provided connections with local growers. The facility has purchased some local foods in the past but intends to step up this sourcing through a variety of activities including:

- coordination with local growers regarding growing schedules, products, availability, etc
- determining product availability
- price negotiation
- evaluating economic viability
- establishing a functional delivery system
- identifying how to incorporate foods into menus

Farm to School
According to the 2007 Minnesota Student Survey, fewer than 20 percent of elementary, middle, and high school students surveyed reported eating the recommended daily five servings of fruits and vegetables. With more than 750,000 school meals served to Minnesota students per day, there is an enormous opportunity to promote healthy eating habits by providing fresh locally produced food in school cafeterias. Studies indicate that schools operating farm to school programs demonstrate increased consumption of fruit and vegetables among students. In addition to health and educational benefits, farm to school programs provide a large economic impact in local communities. For every dollar spent on local foods in schools, up to three dollars is generated in the local economy through the multiplier effect.

A recent study ⁶ conducted by the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality found the potential annual economic impact of Farm to School programs in a five-county central Minnesota area ranged from $20,000 for a monthly special meal to $427,000 for sourcing a large amount of easily adapted products. The economic impact of Farm to School programs varies depending

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on the ways schools utilize locally grown products and on the price paid. This report only analyzed the impact for one five-county region. The economic impact of involving all 87 counties in Minnesota could be quite significant.

A 2009 report from the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy and the Minnesota School Nutrition Association surveying school food service directors in Minnesota reported that 69 districts (71% of those responding to the survey) purchased Minnesota grown foods in 2009. The most commonly used local foods were apples, potatoes, peppers, winter squash, sweet corn and tomatoes. Seventy-six percent of this group indicated their intention to expand their Farm to School programs in 2010.

Farm to School Survey Analysis
There are several barriers toward implementing a farm to school program. The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) received Communities Putting Prevention to Work (CPPW) funds to conduct an analysis of farm to school efforts in Minnesota to study these barriers. They interviewed approximately 50 individuals associated with local farm to school programs and received a variety of responses.

Respondents among farmers and school representatives alike expressed the need for access, storage, simple processing, and distribution. Many respondents suggested regional solutions like regional systems for growing, processing and preparing foods. While farmers have the ability to grow food that schools need, the infrastructure is often not in place to get food from its raw unwashed and unprocessed form into something that cafeterias can serve to students. Regional processing and preparing systems might be able to address scale issues by allowing small growers to participate in a system that otherwise might favor large producers.

Aggregation and Distribution
Nationwide efforts to build local and regional food systems have focused on production and consumption of local foods. Many people working in local foods have identified aggregation and distribution issues as a major gap for further growth in this sector. Retailers and institutional buyers are often unable to efficiently participate in the local food market because they require products in large volumes; products that have been minimally processed to remove dirt, stems, and other impurities; and products that may need to have some minimal packaging or labeling. While corn growers can all take their crop to the grain elevators at the end of the season, growers of green beans or tomatoes have no such aggregation facility. In order to bring the local food movement to the next level a more efficient aggregation and distribution infrastructure will need to be developed.

Efficient transportation of local foods is also an issue. While foodshed studies seek to identify the geographic area required to provide food for a given population, these analyses rarely look at roadway or transportation variables. Such infrastructure, however, is required in order to realize and implement optimal agricultural systems. Failure to adequately study and implement transportation systems threatens to weaken the sustainability of such efforts. Fuel costs, time, and carbon dioxide emissions are wasted if multiple half-full delivery trucks drive long distances to the same market. Likewise large delivery trucks driving to the Twin Cities from distribution centers in Iowa return empty. A lack of back-hauling is an inefficiency that could be addressed through adequate attention to transportation issues.

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7 [http://www.agobservatory.org/library.cfm?refID=107270](http://www.agobservatory.org/library.cfm?refID=107270)
The Ridgeway Community School (RCS) near Winona is attempting to address aggregation and
distribution issues in a new pilot-project. In the 2009-2010 school year, RCS sourced an average of four
pounds of locally grown food per student each month. To increase their capacity to source local food in
following years, RCS is working with three farmers, the Land Stewardship Project (LSP), and a medium-sized
distributor to create a more efficient delivery system. This system will enable RCS to order directly
from LSP and have their order arrive by truck two times per week. In addition, LSP will coordinate and
simplify several elements of ordering by acting as a single contact point for availability lists, billing and
invoicing, packaging, and order schedules. Farmers will be able to utilize this distribution system to sell
sustainably raised products to schools within a 50 mile radius of Winona.

As this distribution system develops, LSP will encourage other schools in the Winona area to participate
by demonstrating that it can offer a simpler system for implementing farm to school programming.
Optimally such a system will enable farmers to control the time and costs associated with transportation
and, therefore, strengthen their capacity to provide product for the institutional market. If this system
is successful it could serve as a model for other local and regional producers looking to expand their
market capacity.
Processing

Meat and Dairy Processing
Minnesota contains a wide variety of food processors ranging from giants General Mills, Hormel, and Cargill to a number of very small award winning artisan processors including Pastureland, Shepherd’s Way Farms, and B.T. McElrath. Over time, however, the number of food processors in the state has decreased. Through consolidation a few large companies have taken over the bulk of the state’s processing. A renewed interest on local sustainable agriculture, however, poses opportunities for smaller processing firms seeking to add value to local agricultural products. This summary is a rough analysis of a number of food processing sectors. It is by no means exhaustive.

Meat Processing
Meat processing has been identified as one of the more complex areas of building a local foods system. Through the years, increased regulation, inspection standards, and vertical integration have evolved a meat processing system that is not immediately decipherable to producers and consumers of local foods. To address these issues, a group is forming in Minnesota to address issues related to niche processing and identify opportunities for strengthening and growing the specialty local meat industry in Minnesota. The group includes meat producers, state regulators and inspectors, the Farmers Union, University of Minnesota, meat processors, and others. Important issues the group will address include access to processing facilities; workforce development and succession plans for an aging butcher shop workforce; inspection constraints; and education of the rules around meat processing and sales.

In Minnesota, processing facilities that slaughter meat are divided into three categories:

- Custom-Exempt
- USDA Federally Inspected
- Minnesota Equal To (E2)

Custom exempt plants can slaughter both domestic livestock and game for the owners of the animals. This meat, however, cannot be sold to the public. These processors serve hunters and producers who raise livestock for their own consumption. There are 140 custom-exempt slaughtering facilities in Minnesota.

USDA Federally Inspected plants meet strict guidelines where animals are inspected before and after slaughter by a USDA inspector. The meat processed in these plants can be sold to the public in Minnesota as well as anywhere in the United States. There are 30 federally inspected plants in Minnesota that process red meat and 29 that process poultry.

The Minnesota Equal To (E2) program is regulated by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. These
plants have similar standards to the USDA, but meat slaughtered in an E2 plant can only be sold in Minnesota. Minnesota State Department of Agriculture lists 27 E2 plants that process meat and 6 that process poultry.

Figure 2 shows the number of federally inspected plants in Minnesota that slaughter cattle, hogs, sheep, goats and bison from 1970 to 2009. It also shows number of heads slaughtered. (Goat and bison data are only available for recent years).

![Figure 2: Number of Federally Inspected Meat Processing Facilities in Minnesota](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cattle Plants</th>
<th>Cattle Head</th>
<th>Sheep Plants</th>
<th>Sheep Head</th>
<th>Hogs Plants</th>
<th>Hogs Head</th>
<th>Goats Plants</th>
<th>Goats Head</th>
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<td>1970</td>
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<td>1,654K</td>
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<td>360K</td>
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<td>5,567K</td>
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<td>1980</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>872K</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>5,577K</td>
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<td>1990</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1,008K</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>57.8K</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>5,813K</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>28</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>1.5K</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7,982K</td>
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<td>2009</td>
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<td>15K</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9,787K</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.4K</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.6K</td>
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</table>

Since 1979, the number of plants that slaughter cattle and hogs has decreased by nearly half. Over that same period of time, head of cattle slaughtered has decreased by nearly half whereas head of hogs slaughtered has nearly doubled.

While there are a variety of meat processing facilities throughout the state, several issues concerning farmers remain:

- processors are not distributed geographically throughout the state
- lack of understanding about rules and regulations
- lack of knowledge among farmers about how to work with a processor
- lack of ability to aggregate animals for long haul transportation to processing facilities

**Dairy Processing**

The USA Reference business directory identifies 278 dairy-related businesses in Minnesota including manufacturers, wholesalers, and makers/retailers of milk, cheese, yogurt and other dairy products. Businesses range from 1 employee to 900 employees and annual sales volume ranges from $115,000 to $122 million.

According to the National Agricultural Statistic Services (NASS), the number of plants producing butter in Minnesota has decreased drastically from 146 in 1970 to only 4 in 2000. The amount of butter produced in 2000 was one-fifth of 1970 amounts. NASS stopped publishing butter data in 2000, but a search in the USA Reference database indicates there may now be over 13 businesses producing butter in 2009. In 2009 there were 11 cheese plants in Minnesota, down from 18 plants in 1970. During this time period, however, the amount of cheese produced in Minnesota quadrupled. By comparison, Wisconsin had 126 cheese plants in 2009, down from 481 in 1970.
Vegetable and Fruit Processing

Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) defines processing and limited processing as follows: *Processing* includes slicing, heating, canning, freezing, drying, mixing, coating, bottling, enrichment, or similar actions. Any addition of off-farm ingredients (e.g., salt) prior to use or sale is also considered processing. *Limited processing* includes sorting or trimming (e.g., topping carrots or husking corn) as part of the harvesting process, or washing (e.g., to start the cooling process or to remove extraneous soil and debris).

Farmers are permitted to do limited processing without a license including such activities as removing leaves and washing. Further processing generally requires additional licensing and may require special equipment as well. Small-scale processing, however, might be eligible for exemption under Minnesota’s Pickle Bill[^8], which allows farmers to sell home-processed or home-canned pickles, vegetables, or fruits with a pH of 4.6 or lower as long as they meet the following requirements:

- they are only sold at farmers’ markets and community or social events in Minnesota
- the food products are properly labeled according to the Minnesota Department of Agriculture guidelines
- sales do not exceed $5,000 per year

To address the licensing barriers that small businesses and entrepreneurs often face, various organizations in Minnesota are beginning to make small licensed commercial kitchens available for rent. While this trend is relatively new, the City of Minneapolis already has five such “kitchen incubator” facilities available. Other such kitchen facilities are also available in Willmar, Northfield, and Wadena. While there are likely other such facilities in Minnesota a complete list is not readily available. Kitchen equipment and capacity in each facility may vary. Should the demand for commercial kitchen incubators increase, there are numerous kitchens in churches, schools, and recreation centers that could potentially be upgraded to serve as licensed kitchens.

Larger scale processing occurs in a variety of venues including restaurants, grocery store delis, and institutional kitchens (schools, corporate cafeterias, meal service organizations, etc.) These venues, if they are in compliance with local, state and federal laws, are able to process fruits and vegetables for sale or to give away in their establishments. Licensed caterers also process fruits and vegetables provided they have licensed facilities. According to the ReferenceUSA database, Minnesota has 627 licensed caterers.

At the next scale are wholesale enterprises that do most of their business in whole or processed fruits and vegetables. This includes distributors like Bix that provide fruits and vegetables in various stages of processing to food service facilities. Also included are businesses like Sno Pac Foods that grow, harvest, freeze, and package fruits and vegetables for sale through retail outlets. According to the ReferenceUSA database there are 65 enterprises that process fruits and vegetables in Minnesota. These companies’ annual sales ranged from $178,000 to nearly $500 million.

Profiles of Local Growers and Processors

There are numerous small and medium sized farms producing products for local market in Minnesota. In addition, a handful of farms and food processing companies have grown large enough to develop

product lines that can be found in grocery stores and coops in Minnesota and beyond. While a comprehensive list of Minnesota based food producers and processors would be beyond the scope of this report, the following list provides some examples of Minnesota based companies that have had success in growing and marketing a variety of local products.

**Thousand Hills Cattle Company**
The Thousand Hills Cattle Company works with family farms throughout Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, and Wisconsin to produce 100% grass fed beef. They actively train farmers and ranchers to raise cattle up to their standards to help ensure quality. Farmers who sell to Thousand Hills agree to provide cattle that are naturally raised without antibiotics and hormones. Cows must also be fed on pastures that are not treated with chemical pesticides or herbicides and that do not contain genetically modified annuals. Farmers and ranchers are not allowed to feed their cows grains, corn silage, GMOs, or animal/fish by-products. Thousand Hills products are available in over 150 stores in six states.

**Larry Schultz Organic Farm**
Larry Schultz and his family have been farming in Owatonna for multiple generations. They raise free range cage-free chickens and turkeys as well as certified organic eggs which can be found in co-ops throughout the Twin Cities. Schultz’s chickens are fed a diet of grains, grass, and bugs as well as organic flax meal to increase omega-3 content and diatomaceous earth to help take care of parasites. Larry Schultz believes that organic eggs should be affordable to everyone. Although he is unable to sell as low as industrial egg producers, he purposefully downgrades the eggs from grade AA to grade A in order to ensure a lower price for a higher quality product.

**Hoch Orchards**
Hoch Orchard is an organic small family farm that has about 8000 apple trees on 25 acres near La Crescent, Minnesota. A few of the trees in the orchard are as old as 40 years but most are newer and all are organic. Hoch Orchard grows more than 50 apple varieties as well as a few acres of raspberries, blackberries, plums, apricots, cherries, and peaches. All of these products, as well as a variety of ciders, jellies, sauces, and preserves can be found in food coops in the Twin Cities and La Crosse, Wisconsin metropolitan areas.

**Pastureland**
Pastureland is a cooperative operation of three family farms in southeast Minnesota that produces butter and cheese made from 100% organic grass-fed cows. The farms use no antibiotics or hormones to enhance cattle growth or production and each farm utilizes intentional year-round rotational grazing and soil management practices. All of the farms have been certified organic by the USDA and certified for sustainable practices by Food Alliance.

Pastureland farms are committed to building healthy diverse farm ecosystems. Members actively mentor other farmers who are converting existing dairy farms to pasture or starting new organic dairy operations. They also frequently participate in local and regional conservation studies on wildlife species and water quality in the area in addition to pasture quality and nutrition studies. Pastureland products are sold in more than 100 stores throughout the Midwest.

**Whole Grain Milling Company**
Whole Grain Milling in Welcome, Minnesota grows and process organic grains into a variety of products for sale including corn chips, pancake mix, hot cereal, and bread mixes. In addition, Whole Grain Milling grows oats, high lysine corn, buckwheat, yellow and white popcorn, soybeans, spelt, and rye. They sell
these in bulk in addition to many other beans, grains, and flours that are sourced from the Midwest including (among many others) black beans, garbanzo beans, barley, millet, sorghum, and flax.

SnoPac
SnoPac has been an organic family owned farm and processing plant for four generations beginning around 1900. The company, which had its origins in lumber and ice harvesting early in the 20th Century, began growing and freezing berries and vegetables to keep up with the changing nature of the ice business. The company continues to grow, freeze, and package green beans, peas, and edamame on site at their farm in Caledonia, Minnesota as part of their product line that is distributed and sold throughout the country. SnoPac’s other products include frozen berries and vegetables that are grown in various areas in the Midwest including corn (Minnesota), blueberries (Michigan and Canada), and cranberries (Wisconsin) as well as other frozen berries and vegetables grown in California.
Consumer Demand, Education, and Outreach

Minnesota Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP)

In 2009, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), under its Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP), awarded $47 million to Minnesota communities to help lower the number of Minnesotans who use tobacco or are overweight. Forty grants were awarded to 87 counties and 11 tribal governments. Grantees were awarded one of two types of grants: Phase 1 for planning and assessment of future work (29 grants) and Phase 2 for implementation of interventions (11 grants). Grants were given for programs that promoted healthy behaviors in communities, schools, and work sites by addressing issues like physical activity, good nutrition, low/no tobacco use, and breast feeding. Grants for interventions supported changes in policy, organizational systems, and community land use and design.

A majority of grantees supported nutrition intervention objectives to increase access to high quality nutritious foods through policy, systems, and environmental changes. Grantees working through these interventions have brought a new wave of energized and resourceful public health staff and community leaders to food systems work in Minnesota. SHIP is supporting the development of community and school gardens, farm to institution initiatives, and healthy vending and snacking. Stories of new, effective partnerships can be found across the state and in all arenas.

Local food-related nutrition Interventions for Community Health Boards and/or Tribal Governments

Schools
- School gardens
- Farm to school initiatives

Community
- Facilitate the development of farmers’ markets and promote their use
- Facilitate the development of community gardens and other small-scale food production strategies
- License and facilitate the development of new farmers’ markets and promote their use
- Create zoning ordinances that facilitate the development of new community gardens and other small scale food production strategies
- Increase access to and promote the consumption of nutritious traditional local foods.

Work Sites
- Access to community supported agriculture for employees
**Olmsted County: SHIP Grant Example**

Olmsted County Public Health has utilized SHIP grant money in the cities of Eyota, Byron, Stewartville, and Rochester to work on community garden projects, provide healthier school food, and improve nutrition at work sites. Communities Putting Prevention to Work (CPPW) grants enhance ongoing SHIP projects including a ‘Market Bucks’ initiative at the Rochester Downtown Farmers Market that allows eligible individuals to use Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) and WIC to purchase produce at the market. The program also provides a five dollar incentive to every EBT or WIC customer at every Saturday market. Additional plans are in place to open three additional markets in Olmsted County in 2011.

**Cooking Skills Training**

A lack of cooking skills poses a barrier for many to the consumption of local and fresh foods. Over the past decades, society has changed placing increasing importance on convenience foods to fit the busy schedules of working families. As a result, many people lack the skills and knowledge required to cook and prepare whole fresh foods. A number of programs throughout Minnesota address this problem by providing remedial cooking skills to a variety of audiences.

**Simply Good Eating**

Many children and their parents do not have access to healthy foods or the knowledge to make the best possible food choices. The University of Minnesota Extension Simply Good Eating programs help parents and families learn to make better food procurement and preparation choices through a variety of customized training courses and educational materials.

This program is funded through the USDA Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) and the Expanded Food and Nutrition Program and serves between 70,000 and 87,000 participants from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds each year. Twelve Extension educators, 14 program coordinators, and more than 100 community nutrition educators all serve Minnesota counties. During the 2010 fiscal year, 3,823 Minnesota SNAP-Ed courses took place in over 1,300 sites including schools, food shelves, churches, senior dining facilities, adult education and job training facilities, community centers, public health centers, shelters, and public housing.

In 2009 Simply Good Eating committed to increasing its emphasis on local foods, including farm to school activities. Simply Good Eating recognized the bountiful opportunities throughout Minnesota to purchase fresh, seasonal, locally-produced foods using SNAP benefits and other financial resources; encourage home gardening; and to teach children about healthful foods using local foods served at school and from school gardens. This local foods emphasis became important for Simply Good Eating’s key performance measures of increasing intake of fruits and vegetables, improving intake of low-fat or fat-free calcium rich foods and beverages, and daily physical activity.

**Cooking Matters**

Cooking Matters is a national program sponsored by ConAgra Food Foundation and Walmart to end childhood hunger. Cooking Matters is a hands-on, cooking-based nutrition education program that teaches low-income families how to prepare healthy meals on a limited budget using foods that are commonly available in stores and from emergency food providers. In Minnesota, this program is delivered by University of Minnesota Extension in the Twin Cities and is expanding to other cities in the state including Mankato, Duluth, and St. Cloud. Cooking Matters offers six different courses targeting low-income audiences of different age groups including adults, teens, and children. Each course meets once per week for six weeks and is taught by a local chef volunteer and a nutritional education assistant from Extension.
Great Trays
Great Trays is a two-year collaboration between the University of Minnesota Extension, the Minnesota Department of Health, and the Minnesota Department of Education to reduce childhood obesity and the onset of chronic diseases through the improvement of school meal quality. Through updating school meal planning and purchasing policy the Great Trays initiative will increase access to foods that meet dietary guidelines set forth by new recommendations from the Institute of Medicine. The initiative will also develop a sustainable statewide system for ongoing skill-based staff training in order to increase school nutrition professionals’ core competencies.

To integrate locally grown foods, Great Trays has allocated funds to the Minnesota Department of Agriculture to create a new wholesale database of farmers who are willing to sell their products to schools and other institutions throughout the state. This work is funded by a Center for Disease Control and a Communities Putting Prevention to Work grant.

Project Example
The Winona Food Shelf and the WIC program received a $5,000 grant to educate their clients on cooking, storing, and preserving fresh produce from the farmers’ market through an eight-week educational program. Surveys of 138 participants revealed that 97 people had gained knowledge or increased consumption of local fruits or vegetables. Some specific statements from participants included:

“I had never used kohlrabi before, in fact, I didn’t know what one looked like. I now use the coleslaw recipe we made in class every time it’s available with my vouchers for the farmers’ market.”

“I didn’t know that we could grow bok choy in Minnesota.”

“I am excited to try freeze the fresh berries I got now that I know how.”

“I made the vegetable garden soup recipe you taught us in class and my five-year old enjoyed helping me scrub the vegetables. Thank you.”

4-H Program
In Minnesota the 4-H Program offers a Foods and Nutrition Project that teaches youth how to make healthy eating choices, prepare nutritious meals, and make smart food purchases. Cooking skills materials and manuals range from topics that include microwave cooking techniques, food purchasing, nutritious meal planning, altering recipes, food nutrition related careers, and food safety and preservation. 4-H participants take part in projects that are self-driven with local clubs and local educational support.
Labeling
Labeling is a consumer tool that provides information about who is growing the food, how it is grown and where the food was produced. While motivations for consumption of local and regional foods are diverse, labeling helps consumers identify those issues that are most important to them by providing the information they need to make food choices based on their values. Farmers use labeling as a marketing tool that sets their products apart from others. Various labeling campaigns focus on a variety of concerns including food safety, care and treatment of livestock and workers, and geographical origin of food.

Local & Regional Foods Labeling Efforts
Current organization and labeling efforts in Minnesota include: Food Alliance Midwest; Minnesota Grown; Buy Fresh Buy Local (Upper Minnesota River, Red River Valley, St. Croix River Valley); Superior Grown (Western Lake Superior Region); Pine Lakes Country Local Foods; P6; Lanesboro Local; and Homegrown Minneapolis (these last two are considering a labeling program).

Food Alliance Midwest
Food Alliance Midwest is a non-profit program of the Land Stewardship Project and Cooperative Development Services. The labeling program identifies food products that are grown or raised in the Midwest (Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Michigan, Nebraska, and the Dakotas) and are produced in environmentally friendly and socially responsible ways. The program has grown from 12 certified farms in the year 2000 to over 60 growers with more than 100 certified foods including fruits, vegetables, meats, and dairy products. This third party food quality label is for larger operations selling in multiple venues, often going through intermediaries, processors, and distributors in a blind transaction between the farmer and the consumer.

Minnesota Grown
Minnesota Grown is managed by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and contains over 1,100 members including farmers’ markets, CSA farms, garden centers, wineries, fruit and vegetable growers, and pick-your-own farms. People who grow, raise, or process products purchase an annual license from the Department of Agriculture and are allowed to use the Minnesota Grown logo. Retailers that sell Minnesota Grown products are not required to purchase a license. In addition to distributing millions of stickers, price tags, and other point-of-sale materials, the Minnesota Grown program distributes a popular directory of over 840 members who offer products grown in the state for sale directly to consumers.

Of the approximately $300,000 yearly budget, $186,000 comes from state appropriations, $110,000 comes from license fees and advertisement revenue. Funding is consistent through annual state appropriations. Currently 1.35% of the 81,000 MN farms are members and that rate is increasing each year. The presence of the Minnesota Grown label exceeds the percent of farmers involved. In 2010 Minnesota Grown distributed more than 1.4 million promotional items to members and retailers.

Buy Fresh Buy Local
The Food Routes Network is a non-profit organization located in Pennsylvania that offers promotional materials, communication materials, and organizational support to its Buy Fresh chapters throughout the country. This program enables farmers to further differentiate their products by identifying the specific region in which products are grown. In Minnesota the Land Stewardship Project acts as the regional affiliate and coordinator for the Buy Fresh Buy Local (BFBL)
program. There are three BFBL chapters in Minnesota: Pride of the Prairie/Upper Minnesota River Valley; Red River Valley; and St. Croix River Valley. Each chapter coordinates such activities as tasting events, farmers’ markets, and farm tours. Area stores, markets, restaurants, and farms use this label to show a commitment to local foods.

Local Label Promotion Efforts
Superior Grown and Pine & Lake Country Local Foods are local efforts to inform consumers about the products that are locally available for consumption. These efforts, which have been mostly the result of volunteer labor and time, have experienced mixed label exposure and success. The central region of Pine & Lake County considered using the Buy Fresh, Buy Local label but ultimately chose to partner with Minnesota Grown in creating a joint label to denote products both with state and regional affiliation. Superior Grown has had mixed success, but the trademark label holds a great deal of potential for the region’s local foods future. The organization also hosts a popular web directory of local farms.

Principle Six (P6)
P6 is a new initiative created and launched by the worker-owned cooperative Equal Exchange and six other consumer co-operatives (including the Seward Co-op in Minneapolis) to promote small farmers and producers; local farmers and producers; and co-operative and non-profit businesses. A producer or farmer’s products can receive the P6 label if they meet at least two of three of those criteria. The Seward Co-op considers products local if they have been grown or raised within the states of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, South Dakota, or North Dakota.
Organizational Capacity

The local food movement in Minnesota continues to grow bolstered by a number of organizations dedicated to a variety of issues embedded in local and sustainable agriculture. Some of these groups like the Land Stewardship Project and Prairie Country Resource Conservation and Development focus on sustainability and improving farming’s environmental impact. Others like the Anishanaabe Center and the Sahkahtay Indigenous Preservation Society are concerned with indigenous farming and restoring the traditional crops and techniques used for thousands of years. The U of M Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships and the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture use the University of Minnesota’s resources to further encourage sustainable agricultural practices. Other groups focus on labeling sustainably grown products, identifying and telling the story of unique and successful alternative agricultural entrepreneurs, and leading a variety of programs dedicated to expanding markets for locally sustainably grown foods.

The following map displays the distribution of these organizations across the state demonstrating that local foods are neither limited to a metropolitan interest nor a strictly rural agricultural concern. Rather, this is an issue that spans the urban-rural divide as city-dwellers and rural farmers alike realize that they must depend on each other for their livelihoods and nourishment.

Figure 3: Distribution of Local and Sustainable Agriculture Organizations in Minnesota

This map and others can be created at: http://localfoods.umn.edu/map/explore  

9 http://localfoods.umn.edu/map/explore
Conclusion

Minnesota has vibrant and growing local and regional food systems. Sustainable agriculture in Minnesota has deep roots represented by the organizational capacity in the nonprofit, cooperative, and public sector efforts throughout the state and the countless number of farmers who have been careful stewards of their land for decades. Enthusiasm for these local and sustainably produced foods is growing. Evidence can be found in the increasing number of community supported agriculture farms, the growing amount of local foods available in many grocery stores, increasing number of farmers’ markets, and the growing list of restaurants serving locally grown foods. Minnesotans understand and value the connections between healthy agricultural systems and the quality of their environment, water, and communities and they express these values in their food choices.

Many efforts are underway to expand the availability of locally and sustainably grown foods. The Homegrown Minneapolis initiative will, among other things, seek to identify roles the city can take in the local food economy. The Land Stewardship Project helps upstart idealist farmers, who may not have generations of experience behind them, to learn the skills necessary to start their own farming businesses. Farm to School programs throughout the state are simultaneously providing revenue to local growers and feeding healthier food to Minnesota’s children.

Despite the growth of the movement and the valiant efforts of those involved, many hurdles remain. The infrastructure system in place for agricultural commodities is inappropriate for local food producers. In order to increase participation in Farm to Institution programs, provide products for large-scale retailers, or even enable small farmers to participate in the export market improvements will have to be made in local agricultural infrastructure. Such improvements would enable growers to efficiently wash, process, aggregate, and transport products to a larger variety of markets than are currently accessible. The existing local and regional agriculture systems in Minnesota are healthy and growing but still have vast unmet potential with which to expand.