

SHIP stories



The Statewide Health Improvement Program works with communities to increase access to and consumption of fruits and vegetables.

- In its first four years, SHIP communities supported 94 new or existing farmers markets and are currently involved in helping create food hubs to bring healthy local food to Minnesota tables.



PartnerSHIP 4 Health helps local farms grow

How do we get good healthy food to those who need it most, and support small growers along the way?

A good example of the creativity, hard work, and passion that is needed is Sundogs Prairie Farm. Megan Henry, her husband and two boys have a small sustainable family farm southeast of Millerville, Minnesota, where they raise diverse vegetable crops, sweet corn, soybeans, native prairie, and “We are especially proud of our pasture raised chickens.”

When they started out five years ago, they knew they wanted to focus their 87 acres on quality—quality of food, quality of life, quality of sustainability. But growing good food was only one of the challenges. How do you get it to market? As with most small growers, it’s been a struggle to make it work. Small growers don’t have the clout of large farms, plowing below the radar of mainstream agribusiness.

Early on, Megan was excited about working with schools. “We started doing farm to school about five years ago,” Megan said. “We do business with the Brandon School District.” Plus, “We work with Harvest for the Hungry,” Harvest for the Hungry is 35-year veteran food bank, providing quality, nutritious food and support services to over 200 hunger relief partners, including food shelves, on-site meal programs.

Farmers markets are another important source of customers for Sundogs Prairie Farm. In early July, Megan stood behind a table of beautiful lettuces, kale, and other greens fresh out of the fields. The Fergus Falls farmers market is supported by technical assistance, a small bit of money, and a great deal of enthusiasm from the local SHIP program,

PartnerSHIP4Health, and takes place on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Farmers markets give needed markets to small farmers like Megan’s and while offering the community good, healthy local Minnesota food.

All of which adds up for Megan and other small growers like her and her family. “We are able to make a living.” However, they are a long way from being where they need to be over the long run. Selling piecemeal is neither easy nor reliable.

The solution? The Fresh Connect Food Hub.

Food hubs serve as a collective middleman between growers and consumers. Take for example supplying schools. It’s like goldilocks: some growers have too little to meet demand and some have more than the school can use. A food hub brings together food from many growers and sells it to the schools, creating a more reliable supply for the school and a more consistent market for the grower. Everyone wins—growers, the economy, small towns, the schools, and, most of all, the people who now get good, healthy Minnesota foods.

That’s why PartnerSHIP4Health supports the Fresh Connect Food Hub. Increasing the availability and thus the consumption of healthy food—and, on the way, create win-wins for communities, farmers, schools, and businesses—is what SHIP is all about.

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The Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) invests in local solutions for better health. With the support of SHIP, communities across Minnesota are making healthy eating, active living and avoiding commercial tobacco use and exposure easier for more people. Find out more at www.health.state.mn.us/ship

