

# Local Food Advisory Committee

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Minnesota Farmers Union Headquarters, 305 Roselawn Ave. E, Suite 200, St. Paul, MN

Present:

Bruce Miller, MN Farmers Union  
Tim Jenkins, MDH Food Access  
Stephanie Van Dyke, Bush CIG  
Karen Lanthier, Bush CIG/Extension RSDPs  
Colleen Paulus, citizen  
Jane Jewett, MN Institute for Sustainable Agriculture  
Leah Gardner, Good Food Access Fund  
Mariah Williams, MDA  
Lisa Wetzel, MDA Dairy & Meat Inspection Program  
Jodi Nelson, MDA Ombudsperson  
Mary Jane Miller, Sustainable Farming Assoc. of MN  
Nikki Neeser, MDA Dairy & Meat Inspection Program  
Kathy Zeman, MN Farmers Market Association  
Jennifer Stephe, MDA Dairy & Meat Inspection Program  
Wayne Martin, Extension Alternative Livestock Program  
Cindy Weckwerth, City of Minneapolis  
Jim Witkowski, MDH Drinking Water  
Mike Lilja, Sustainable Farming Association  
Sarah Leach, MDH Food, Pools & Lodging  
Megan O'Hara  
Suzanne Driessen, Extension Food Safety  
Lauri Clements, Olmsted County Public Health  
Cecilia Coulter, MN Farmers Market Association  
Emily Paul, The Good Acre  
Nick Mabe, The Good Acre

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## Bush Grant “Portable Document”

Karen Lanthier and Stephanie Van Dyke

The “Portable Document” contains all of the pieces developed by the group over the past year, and will be fully available online.

Discussion about how to move the Bush grant work and priorities forward now that the grant term has ended:

- Include Bush grant priorities as a regular discussion item at future LFAC meetings
- Push out information about the Bush grant work in Sustag notices from MISA
- Look into setting up teams around the priority areas
  - Sharing of information
  - Hunting for funding to advance the priorities
- Assign “homework” to LFAC members to review the Bush grant materials
- Create a 1-page brochure that people can share
- Work on educating potential allies
- The materials are open-access; we all “own” them. Don’t wait, don’t ask for permission – if you see an opportunity, go for it.

## Good Food Access Fund

Leah Gardner

The Good Food Access Fund had a \$250,000 appropriation from the MN Legislature, with the legislation led by Representative Hamilton and Senator Sparks. Good Food Access Fund intends to go back and ask for more money for the issuing of grants to communities that have a food access issue. There will be an open RFP in September.

American Heart Association is the fiscal agent for the funds.

It’s difficult to figure out what the priorities are for just \$250,000 when the ask was originally for \$10 million. We have debated the relative merits of grants, loans, a feasibility study, and discussed urban vs. rural needs. Rural legislators supported this because they see the need in rural areas.

We need to show broad interest and a big demonstration of need, and we’re not going to see that if there’s a cumbersome RFP, so we’re working on a streamlined RFP and are looking at templates from several agencies.

The Good Food Fund can receive other funds into it. Other states have seen quadrupling of public funds like this from the addition of private funds.

Paul Hugunin is the main MDA contact for this.

## Government IT Symposium

Tim Jenkins

This symposium is scheduled for December and is billed as Technology and Human Solutions to Improving Customer Experience. Tim has an opportunity to give a presentation at this and would like to talk about the Bush grant discussion of the City of Minneapolis 311 model for government-public interaction.

This would be an opportunity to gauge interest and look for partners to move the 311 discussion forward at the state level.

Colleen noted that IT used to be integrated into agency programs, but then it was pulled out and centralized and departments had to pay for services; so the IT services ran a deficit.

Tim noted that the City of Minneapolis didn't make progress until they had an IT solution; then they built around that. The impetus for change came from the community.

Discussion:

- Lead with the concept of business process improvement; the IT piece is one stepping-stone to process improvement.
- Any IT solution has to be able to integrate with existing agency IT
- We don't have answers about what the system would look like and what it would cost. The Symposium includes small-group, problem-solving sessions; that could move us along toward better understanding of the system that would be needed.
- Then figure out how to make a joint presentation to the IT heads within MDA and MDH.

The group encouraged Tim to go ahead with a presentation at the symposium.

## Healthy Food Safe Food Project

Tim Jenkins

Efforts are being made to get healthy food to people vulnerable to poor nutrition, using multiple strategies and different configurations.

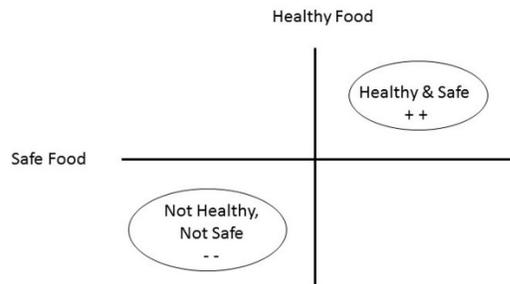
Example of an innovative strategy: Doctors writing prescriptions for vegetables that people redeem at farmers' markets or with CSAs.

Do we have to choose between health and safety? Or between food safety and food availability?

One in 5 kids in the U.S. report food insecurity. There are great disparities in health in Minnesota between majority and minority populations. The Wilder Foundation and the Federal Reserve released a joint report saying that Minnesota is among the 10 worst states in the US for access to healthy food.

The regulatory infrastructure wasn't ready for all of the change that came in the food system. Example: An ice cream truck that also offers packages of chips can go anywhere within the City of Minneapolis, but a mobile grocery store is not allowed.

Discussion of the graphic representation of healthy food/safe food:



What is meant by chronic vs. acute health effects related to food?

- Chronic health effects develop over time and are caused or exacerbated by continual consumption of low-nutrient-dense food.
- Acute health effects are, for example, an illness caused by a food-borne pathogen

Points about the food economy:

- Offering locally grown vegetables from producers – some people just won't eat their veggies.
- Many different types of labels cause confusion. Minnesota Grown is a trusted label.
- Components of food accessibility:
  - Presence of food at an accessible location
  - Cost of the food
  - Skills to prepare the food
  - Time for food preparation
- Stakeholders in the current food economy include large-scale distributors, insurance companies
- Tribal Food Code developed by University of Arkansas Law Center and Minnesota's Public Health Law Center; an example of efforts to improve access to healthy food.

How do we make it easier to make the easy choice the healthy and safe choice?

## Wabasha Farmers Market

Kathy Zeman

Aggregation of produce at farmers' markets is already happening around the state, but without correct licensing. The effort to get licensing for the Wabasha Farmers Market will enable other markets to come into compliance, or to start new aggregation & distribution efforts.

The goal is to create a model for farmers' market-based aggregation and distribution of produce that can be adopted by any market in the state.

A meeting was held in April between farmers' market and MDA people to sort through the legal and food safety issues. A draft fact sheet has been written, and other meeting will be scheduled sometime in July to continue the discussion.

It was advised that food service management companies be brought into the conversation about farmers' markets as suppliers of produce.

## Cottage Foods

Kathy Zeman, Suzanne Driessen

Some compliance issues with the new Cottage Foods Law have been noticed around the state. In some cases there has been confusion about who does or does not fall under the Cottage Food Law, and how someone can tell whether a vendor is registered under the Cottage Food Law.

Some people selling pickles, jam, salsa, etc. may have a license and be operating out of a commercial kitchen. Those people should have their license certificate on display.

Cottage Food Operators also get a certificate, but some didn't realize they were supposed to display it. The certificate is rather nondescript, and for a marketing advantage some Cottage Food operators want a flashier thing to display; possibly a sticker they can put on their product label. This kind of item would have to be approved by MDA.

## The Good Acre

Emily Paul and Nick Mabe

The Good Acre is a non-profit food hub with a mission to support immigrant and minority food producers. There is a commercial kitchen used both for teaching and food production. A goal is to create models and uses for the space that stay true to The Good Acre mission.

Some objectives:

- Broker connections for farmers; we want the right resources for doing this
- Purposeful about connecting farmers with food producers (manufacturers/processors)
- Skills development; community engagement and teaching
- Scaling up procurement of local food
- Diversification of revenue stream for farmers
- Opening doors for institutional sales of local food/education of institutional buyers
- Development of supply systems for local food; finding the right level of service and pricepoint
- Expanding sales of local meats to institutions

The Good Acre's current farming community:

- 19 core growers with the CSA
- About 10 acres per farmer

- Not sure yet what the right capacity is; how many farmers should be directly involved

#### Institutional buying of local food

- Why don't institutions buy local?
  - Price; perception that local is always exponentially more expensive
  - Time; ease and convenience of ordering from a mainline distributor
  - Ordering; it's difficult for cooks to know quantities with local food.
  - Execution of food preparation; we need to find ways to make it easier for the cooks.
- Sale of seconds to institutions is always a possibility and can hold down cost of procurement. This needs to be a continual conversation with producers.

#### Support group for food hubs?

- About 400 food hubs across the country are doing similar things as The Good Acre.
- Iowa had some support for communication among food hubs.
- An IT platform used by several food hubs was very helpful.

## Minnesota Department of Agriculture Update

Jennifer Stepes

- MDA is busy with some new meat processing facilities that are coming online. The MDA Meat Inspection program has 50 to 60 establishments at any given time. This is constantly in flux; some establishments move on to USDA inspection and some go back to custom-exempt status.
- Recently added inspection of three new facilities making sambusas. When a food product for wholesale contains more than 2% cooked or 3% raw meat, it needs to be made under continuous inspection.
  - Seafood products are subject to the seafood HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points) under the jurisdiction of FDA.
  - Lots of people are making sambusas or similar meat-containing foods at home and selling them; this is not legal.
  - It's a challenge in markets that serve ethnic populations with their preferred foods. It is hard to understand HACCP and the required paperwork for inspected manufacturing of foods containing meat, and MDA can't develop the HACCP plans for the entrepreneurs. They have to do it themselves.
    - Some HACCP courses are available but are very difficult for people for whom English is a second language.
    - City of Minneapolis hosts HACCP workshops; some of these are in Spanish.
    - HACCP requirements differ by product. There's a meat HACCP, juice HACCP, etc. You can get a baseline of information from a general HACCP course.
- Most Equal-To inspected food processors are in the metro area. We're seeing some expansion outside of the metro.
  - Evansville added a processing facility.
  - Kasson in SE MN added inspection to retail sales, but doesn't do slaughter.

- Funding and fiscal year discrepancies make it difficult to operate the MN Equal-To program.
  - Additional funding came from the MN Legislature but wasn't matched by USDA
  - The federal fiscal year is 3 months different from Minnesota's
- USDA does an on-site audit of the MN Equal-To program every three years; this was the year
  - Hours of operation was an issue. Standard hours are 8 am to 5 pm, Monday – Friday. Work done at plants outside of those hours is not “inspected” work. You can't do any part of an inspected operation outside of inspection hours. Example: Labeling of some product occurred outside of inspection hours, even though all other processing activities for that meat occurred during inspection hours. That labeling was considered “misbranding.”
  - Sourcing of trim for ground beef is an issue, especially for small operators. Plant operators are now required to have a certificate of testing for E. coli for that trim, which is more expensive.
- The Northeast Regional Correctional Center (NERCC) is trying to break ground for a new slaughter and processing facility that will allow it to offer Equal-To services to the community. Also they are hiring a coordinator for the education/training program.