



The Minneapolis Mini Farmers Market Project



While some Minneapolis neighborhoods enjoy a bountiful supply of healthy foods, others do not. IATP's Mini Farmers Market project is helping to address this challenge by bringing fresh fruits and vegetables to neighborhoods that lack healthy food options. In 2010, 21 Mini Farmers Markets were operating across the city.

Farmers markets

IATP has helped launch a set of small farmers markets throughout Minneapolis. The markets are hosted and managed by local community organizations and are located in neighborhoods with limited access to healthy food. IATP provides training and technical assistance, promotional support, evaluation and other services to new and ongoing markets.

The markets provide healthy and affordable food options, support the local economy, and strengthen a sense of community. They sell only produce and flowers grown by local farmers. The markets bring food and farmers into the heart of participating neighborhoods with locations at community centers, senior housing facilities, churches and busy street corners, among other settings.

The markets also provide a valued sales opportunity for small farmers. The Mini Farmers Markets link farmers with new customers and provide additional opportunities to sell their product.

Food assistance

The Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) is a federal program enabling participants in the Woment, Infants and Children (WIC) and Nutrition Assistance Program for Seniors (NAPS) food assistance programs to purchase fruits and vegetables at farmers markets. Because the individual Mini Farmers Markets are too small to be authorized on their own, IATP serves as an umbrella organization for interested markets to obtain FMNP authorization from the State Department of Agriculture.



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The ability to accept FMNP coupons is a key strategy for improving food access among lower income residents. In 2010, the markets also began accepting WIC fruit and vegetable vouchers (FVV).

Food shelves

Many of the Mini Farmers Markets are also linked with local food shelves. Many food shelves are unable to obtain an adequate supply of fresh produce for their patrons. At the same time, local farmers often dispose of unsold produce after farmers markets close for the day. Through farmer donations, IATP's Mini Farmers Markets are helping provide food shelf patrons with high quality produce that is fresh from the field. Market vendors have demonstrated tremendous generosity in their food shelf donations.



Policy

One of the most important outcomes of the Mini Farmers Market project has taken place at City Hall. In years past, even the smallest farmers markets had to go through a costly and complex licensing process to start their market. In response, IATP worked with the City of Minneapolis to develop a simplified process for small markets.

This work led to approval of the City of Minneapolis' "Local Produce Market" permit for markets with five or fewer vendors that sell only locally grown fruits, vegetables, flowers and herbs. This permit process greatly reduces the time and expense of establishing small farmers markets, enabling community centers, senior housing facilities and other neighborhood organizations to host a market on their own property.



Impacts

Participating farmers and community organizations are successfully bringing seasonal produce into areas that have very limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables, which translates into increased consumption among neighborhood residents. Research conducted at several markets found a 20 percent increase in vegetable consumption among market patrons during the farmers market season.

Word is spreading and more organizations are asking how they can launch a market in their own neighborhood. To support further adoption of the Mini Farmers Market model, IATP has published a how-to guide. Please visit iatp.org/minimarkets for the guide and other information about the Mini Farmers Market project.