

# 10 Ways to Get Healthy, Local Foods into Low-Income Neighborhoods

## A Minneapolis Resource Guide

**W**hen it comes to access to healthy food in low-income neighborhoods, it would be difficult to design a program that serves residents worse than the present system. In many urban neighborhoods, healthy foods like fruits and vegetables are either nonexistent, very expensive or of poor quality. Residents frequently do not have access to a car and often resort to purchasing unhealthy foods at local convenience stores.

A study recently published in the journal *Public Health* found that children who live in areas where fruits and vegetables are more expensive are more likely to gain excessive amounts of weight.<sup>1</sup> The growing correlation between unhealthy eating habits, obesity, diabetes and other food-related disease has pushed this issue to the forefront of public health concerns. Nearly one-third of American adults are now obese and two-thirds are either overweight or obese.<sup>2,3</sup> These proportions have steadily increased over the past 30 years. The direct and indirect costs of obesity alone have been estimated at \$117 billion.<sup>4</sup>

**A**mericans today are repeatedly fed mixed messages: Dietary guidelines and health articles advocate for a balanced, wholesome diet with regular exercise. In contrast, food industry mega-ad campaigns permeate the media with advertisements for cheap, “ready-made” snacks and meals containing added fats and sugars that contribute to obesity. Low-income populations in cities such as Minneapolis are most likely to shop at convenience stores and consume highly processed, unhealthy food because they lack fresh, healthy alternatives. The results are the seemingly disparate problems of hunger, food insecurity and obesity.

Fortunately, a growing number of people are choosing foods that are less processed, grown locally or raised in accordance with environmental or social criteria. As demand for fresh, local foods has grown, consumers are enjoying greater opportunities to purchase these foods in restaurants and high-end grocery stores. This, however, does not often reach people that need this food the most—families living in low-income neighborhoods.



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- According to 2003 U.S. census data, over 110,000 children in Minnesota live in poverty.<sup>5</sup>
- In Minneapolis, American Indians and African Americans living in low-income neighborhoods have the highest rates of obesity.<sup>6</sup>
- Nationally, low-income, African-American and Latino households have less access to private vehicles than higher income and white households.<sup>7</sup>
- Among Minneapolis families that participated in the Hennepin County Medical Center's Nutrition Assessment Program, one in three households with infants and toddlers report food insecurity.<sup>8</sup>
- Supermarkets have rapidly fled the inner cities over the last 40 years and have relocated in affluent suburban areas.<sup>9</sup>
- North Minneapolis, with a population of about 70,000 people, has only one grocery store.<sup>10</sup>

This Minneapolis resource guide is for community leaders interested in addressing public health issues associated with poor diets and food insecurity in low-income neighborhoods. Its purpose is to provide ideas, links and contacts to help these leaders get started in addressing food access issues.

## 1. NEIGHBORHOOD FARMERS MARKETS

A farmers market is where growers sell directly to the public. Farmers benefit by selling directly to consumers, while customers have a face-to-face connection with their food. Farmers markets typically operate weekly through the local growing season. The direct farm-to-market connection allows the community to get fresher, healthier food than they often find in a regular supermarket. Farmers markets also help sustain local family farms.

### Project profile links

Farmers markets are now widespread in cities and towns throughout the country. There are many flourishing markets but few are intentionally sited to improve food access in low-income neighborhoods. The following are farmers markets dedicated to low-income populations in need of healthy foods:

**Midtown Public Market, Minneapolis:** This market is located at Lake and Hiawatha in Minneapolis. It is a successful market in a low- to middle-income community featuring solely local products. It recently started another satellite market at the new Midtown Global Market. [www.midtownpublicmarket.org/mpm.htm](http://www.midtownpublicmarket.org/mpm.htm)

**West Oakland Food Collaborative:** The Environmental Justice Institute connects organizations, leaders, and community members to address food insecurity in West Oakland, Calif. The organization works specifically at getting at the roots of food insecurity in inner city neighborhoods and addresses the problem through community empowerment and cultural respect. [www.wo-foodcollaborative.org](http://www.wo-foodcollaborative.org)

**Washington Heights Farmers' Market, New York:** This is the busiest low-income market in New York City, located at the corner of 175th and Broadway; it serves an impoverished African-American and Latin American community. For more information, contact: Jose Ramos, Market Manager, (718) 584-9037 or (917) 374-4695 or Gabrielle Langholtz, Public Relations and Promotions at (212) 477-3220 (x14)

**Waverly Farmers' Market, Baltimore:** This farmers market attracts a diverse group of community residents including African Americans, low-income Koreans and students from nearby Johns Hopkins University. Waverly Market has been successful in serving a diverse group of customers through their variety in offerings, cultural sensitivity and prime location. For more information, contact: Marc Rey, president of the Farmers Market Board, (410) 889-6388.

### Other links

**"Tools for Rapid Market Assessment,"** an Oregon Small Farms technical report, provides great information on evaluating farmers markets. [www.oregonfarmersmarkets.org](http://www.oregonfarmersmarkets.org)

**"Starting Your own Farmers Market,"** produced by the Minnesota Farmers Market Association. A useful guide that lets organizers know what steps are involved in initiating a market. [www.mfma.org](http://www.mfma.org)

**USDA Agricultural Marketing Service:** Useful tips and resources on marketing your farmers market. It includes information and links on market promotion as well as funding sources. [www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets](http://www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets)

**North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Association:** This trade association works to support and protect family farms through direct sale of farmer's crops. This site includes resources for market managers and others in the farmers market industry. [www.nafdma.com](http://www.nafdma.com)

**National Association of Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs:** Its mission is to encourage opportunities for growers to sell fresh, local food to community members by utilizing Farmers Market Nutrition Program coupons. This site provides useful links and resources. [www.nafmnp.org](http://www.nafmnp.org)

### Making it happen in Minneapolis

- **City of Minneapolis:** Any proposed farmers' market in Minneapolis requires approval by the health and zoning departments. The required forms are available online. [www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us](http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us)
- **Start the process months before expecting to begin the market.** Although the process can be expensive, it is feasible on many commercial and institutional properties.
- **Get approval to participate in the Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP).** This will allow local eligible residents who qualify for food assistance to use coupons to buy fresh produce at an authorized farmers market. In Minnesota, the state Department of Agriculture is in charge of approval and funds. Contact Minnesota Department of Agriculture to get market approval ([www.mda.state.mn.us](http://www.mda.state.mn.us)). Individual farmers participating in the market will also be required to go through a short training before being approved individually to accept FMNP coupons.

### Challenges

- **Rules and ordinances** for acquiring a city permit are specific and can interfere with the start-up of a market. Location of the market and setup may have to be adjusted to fit city regulations.
- **Start-up and operating costs** can total several hundred dollars in fees to initiate a new market. Research sponsors and possible funding sources.
- **Community support** will help markets to eventually be self-sufficient. Community members should be involved from the start. The proposed market should have the support of the appropriate neighborhood organizations as well as the neighborhood city council representatives. Having this community support is crucial for sustaining the market, attracting enough customers and maintaining the interest of the participating farmers.
- **Insurance** is not specifically required to start a market. Some large markets have insurance that covers all of their vendors. Other markets leave it up to the farmer to decide whether or not to get insurance. Insurance can add a major cost for farmers.



*Right: West Bank Farmers Market in Minneapolis's Cedar-Riverside neighborhood. (Brian Noy/IATP)*

## 2. COMMUNITY-SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE

Community-supported agriculture (CSA) involves primarily urban residents investing in a particular farm or group of farms. Through purchases of farm “shares,” local farmers can pay for their initial costs and be guaranteed an income no matter what the season brings. In return, CSA members receive fresh produce from the farm every week, seasonal recipes and information about cooking with local foods and a direct connection with the source of their food.

### Project profile links

CSAs have been most successful in upper- and middle-class communities although churches and community organizations have helped increase membership in other communities. Two opportunities for community organizations to increase neighborhood participation are by subsidizing membership in CSAs and serving as drop-off sites to facilitate the distribution of food.

**Community Design Center, St. Paul:** Uses immigrant, refugee, minority or otherwise disadvantaged youth as interns for their community-supported gardens in St. Paul. A main goal of the program is to help youth interns further develop work and life skills so that they can become well-spoken and self-sufficient leaders within their community. [comdesignctrmn.org](http://comdesignctrmn.org)

**May Farm:** This local CSA sponsored by the Minnesota Food Association follows all the organic standards of soil building and animal husbandry. Food shelf shares or regular family shares can be purchased. [www.mnfoodassociation.org](http://www.mnfoodassociation.org)

**Angelic Organics and CSA Learning Center:** This site provides background and resources on community-supported agriculture. Angelic Organics runs a Harvest Share program for people with low incomes. Angelic Organics delivers to more than 20 sites around Chicago and Rockford, Ill. [www.csalearningcenter.org](http://www.csalearningcenter.org)

**Canticle Farm:** Canticle Farm’s CSA provides special opportunities for low-income individuals and families to participate. This farm, located in Allegany, N.Y., offers a revolving loan fund and partnership shares to help those in need become CSA members. [www.fsalleg.org/everyone.htm](http://www.fsalleg.org/everyone.htm)

### Making it happen in Minneapolis

- **Connect with an existing Minnesota CSA farm** to make fresh, local food available in your community. Organizers can increase participation if up-front costs of membership are spread over the growing season, or if a church or community organization pays a group rate and is later repaid by individual members.
- **Land Stewardship Project CSA Farm Directory:** This directory provides a list of nearby CSAs including contact information and descriptions. [www.landstewardshipproject.org/csa.html](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/csa.html)

## 3. COOPERATIVE GROCERY STORES

The Twin Cities are fortunate to have several natural foods cooperatives that support communities and local farmers in many ways. A cooperative grocery store is equally owned and controlled by each of its members. Co-op members support it with their purchases, are actively involved in decision making and share in the profits gained through organization activities. Cooperatives often are a source of new jobs, sell food from local farmers when feasible and support the community.

### Project profile links

**North Country Co-op:** This local Twin Cities co-op has been providing the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood with wholesome food at a reasonable price since 1971. The co-op has become very active with the Somali community in the neighborhood. [www.northcountrycoop.com](http://www.northcountrycoop.com)

**Wedge Community Co-op:** The Wedge in Minneapolis started off in the basement of an apartment building on Franklin Avenue, and is now the largest single-store food co-op in the country. This successful cooperative gives donations and Wedge-Share grants to community projects. [www.wedge.coop](http://www.wedge.coop)

### Other links

**Local Harvest Directory:** This directory allows you to enter a city, state or ZIP code to locate co-ops around the country. [www.localharvest.org/food-coops](http://www.localharvest.org/food-coops)

### Making it happen in Minneapolis

- **Partner up with an existing co-op** to further their involvement in the community or encourage them to open another store in a low-income Minneapolis neighborhood.

### Local food cooperatives

- **Eastside Food Co-op** [www.eastsidefood.coop](http://www.eastsidefood.coop)
- **Just Food Co-op** [www.justfood.coop](http://www.justfood.coop)
- **Wedge Community Co-op** [www.wedge.coop](http://www.wedge.coop)
- **Linden Hills Co-op** [www.lindenhills.coop](http://www.lindenhills.coop)
- **Hampden Park Co-op** [www.hampdenparkcoop.com](http://www.hampdenparkcoop.com)
- **Mississippi Market** [msmarket.coop](http://msmarket.coop)
- **Seward Co-op Grocery and Deli** [www.seward.coop](http://www.seward.coop)
- **Lakewinds Natural Foods** [www.lakewinds.coop](http://www.lakewinds.coop)
- **North Country Co-op** [www.northcountrycoop.com](http://www.northcountrycoop.com)
- **Midwest Natural Food Co-ops** [www.mwnaturalfoods.coop](http://www.mwnaturalfoods.coop)

## 4. COMMUNITY GARDENS

Community gardens provide a neighborhood location to grow food and build community. Gardens beautify the neighborhood and have been found to reduce crime and increase property values. Minneapolis city-owned lands host dozens of gardens. St Paul has a similar number of gardens assisted by strong support from the Department of Parks and Recreation.

### Project profile links

**GreenSpace Partners, Minneapolis:** GreenSpace Partners, a project of the Minneapolis-based Green Institute, works to improve urban livability with green space. GreenSpace partners has received awards for their vegetable gardening and improvement of local parks and land around town. [www.greeninstitute.org/greenspace](http://www.greeninstitute.org/greenspace)

**Youth Farm and Market Project:** YFMP operates urban gardens in three Twin Cities neighborhoods, including Lyndale and Powderhorn in Minneapolis and the West Side of St. Paul. Youth learn to display and sell produce and crafts made in activity groups through participation in community farmers markets. This project uses urban agriculture to teach responsibility, empower youth and organize for social change. [youthfarm.net](http://youthfarm.net)

**Farm in the City:** This garden project in St. Paul has a supportive gardening program for new Americans that helps them connect with the community and find resources in their new home. Farm in the City also runs a special garden market program that works with the deaf Hmong population. [www.farminthecity.org](http://www.farminthecity.org)

**Growing Power:** This Urban Garden project works with Chicago's diverse community. Adults and youth learn the basics of sustainable farming from growing to selling to marketing. [www.growingpower.org](http://www.growingpower.org)

**Marra Farm:** A model urban farm dedicated to serving the community and especially those in need. This garden is located in the South Park neighborhood of Seattle. [www.fremontpublic.org/client/moremarra.html](http://www.fremontpublic.org/client/moremarra.html)

**Homeless Garden Project:** This program is located in Santa Cruz, Calif., and uses the garden model as a tool for job training and a transitional employment opportunity. [www.homelessgardenproject.org](http://www.homelessgardenproject.org)

### Other links

**American Community Garden Association:** The association's Web site provides a good resource for working on local garden projects. [www.communitygarden.org](http://www.communitygarden.org)

**Urban Harvest:** This Houston-based organization helps to build communities by growing food on urban lands. [www.urbanharvest.org](http://www.urbanharvest.org)

**SEEDS: SEEDS,** based in Durham, N.C., promotes gardening, gathering and education. [www.seedsnc.org](http://www.seedsnc.org)

## Making it happen in Minneapolis

- **Identifying land for a garden:** The Park and Recreation Department may have land available. Parks and Recreation staff may be able to share their skills and resources or may be able to sponsor a garden. City of Minneapolis Parks and Recreation: [www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/citywork/other/parks.html](http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/citywork/other/parks.html). **The Green Institute** can help with most of this work. Contact them at (612) 278-7100 or [www.greeninstitute.org/greenspace](http://www.greeninstitute.org/greenspace)
- **Contact the Department of Public Works:** Find out the cost of water use and negotiate fee waiver or sponsorship of community gardens. [www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/public-works](http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/public-works)

## 5. PUBLIC MARKETS

A public market is a permanent, often open-air or indoor setting where vendors can sell their fresh produce, fish, meat, art and other food locally. These markets are generally open year-round and function during regular business hours.

### Project profile links

**Pike Place Market:** This Seattle market has been in operation for about 100 years now and is called "the soul of Seattle." This market has been connecting consumers with producers for generations. [www.pikeplacemarket.org](http://www.pikeplacemarket.org)

## Making it happen in Minneapolis

- **Midtown Global Market:** Located in the Phillips neighborhood, the Midtown Global Market has a variety of ethnic restaurants and food stands that represent the area's diverse culture. [www.midtownglobalmarket.org](http://www.midtownglobalmarket.org)

## 6. CONNECT GROWERS WITH NEIGHBORHOOD CONVENIENT STORES

Neighborhood convenience stores work with local growers who supply food for farmers markets to incorporate fresh produce into their store.

### Project profile links

**School Market:** Read about "school market," a corner store transformed into a neighborhood resource for healthy, local food with the help of California's Food Policy Advocates. [www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0KAY/is\\_2\\_8/ai\\_n15378589](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0KAY/is_2_8/ai_n15378589)

**Corner Store Campaign:** The Food Trust's Corner Store Campaign uses marketing techniques to help children and teens make healthier snack choices in corner stores. [www.thefoodtrust.org/php/programs/corner.store.campaign.php](http://www.thefoodtrust.org/php/programs/corner.store.campaign.php)



## Making it happen in Minneapolis

Both store owners and growers will benefit from collaboration. Meet with store owners in neighborhoods with a need of fresh produce and let them know why connecting with Minnesota growers could be good business:

- **Store owner benefits:** Store owners cut costs associated with a middleman while getting the freshest produce.
- **Grower benefits:** Growers can supplement their income by adding another location for sale of their local food.

## 7. NEIGHBORHOOD CHURCHES AND COMMUNITY CENTERS

**N**eighborhood churches and community centers could purchase produce from local farmers to be sold to congregants or members following church or community events held at their facilities.

### Project profile links

**Whole Farm Coop:** This Minnesota organization delivers food to different sites, primarily churches. Whole Farm Coop may be interested in setting up additional sites at churches and community centers in neighborhoods with need. [www.wholefarmcoop.com](http://www.wholefarmcoop.com)

**Hope CSA:** Hope CSA is a teaching ministry that offers experiential learning and academic study to link pastor and pasture, human and humus, soil and soul. This local foods project connects church with sustainable agriculture. [www.hopecsa.org](http://www.hopecsa.org)

**Religious Communities and Centers on the Land:** This site provides a directory of churches and religious organizations throughout the country that are committed to environmental issues. These contacts are good resources for ideas on connecting local churches with local food. [www.nrlc.com/communities\\_database01.html](http://www.nrlc.com/communities_database01.html)

## Making it happen in Minneapolis

- **Identify churches, synagogues and other religious or community centers** in key neighborhoods of need. Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches: [www.gmcc.org](http://www.gmcc.org)
- **Contact outreach or community leaders** at those institutions to discuss possible local foods opportunities
- **Connect institutions with local growers** or CSA farms to work out arrangements.

## 8. LOCAL PRODUCE AND COMMUNITY CLINICS

**C**ommunity clinics could provide access to local produce to patients during clinic visits as part of a nutrition education initiative. Fruits and vegetables could be used as a tool to educate patients about healthy habits, nutrition, and staying healthy.

### Project profile links

**Kaiser Permanente Farmers Markets, California:** a chain of hospitals pushing for farmers markets and local food at their facilities. [www.noharm.org/details.cfm?ID=981&type=document](http://www.noharm.org/details.cfm?ID=981&type=document)

**Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy Food and Health Program:** Making connections between local foods and hospitals in the Twin Cities. See IATP's report *Healthy Food, Healthy Hospitals, Healthy Communities* at [www.healthobservatory.org/library.cfm?refid=72927](http://www.healthobservatory.org/library.cfm?refid=72927). For more information, contact Marie Kulick at [marie@iatp.org](mailto:marie@iatp.org)

## Making it happen in Minneapolis

- **Contact clinics in Minneapolis** to assess interest in distributing local food to patients at (651) 489-CARE.
- **Contact farmers** to discuss their willingness to donate a portion of their unsold produce to clinics in need.
- **Ask clinic staff** to provide nutrition education and refer patients to other nutrition resources.

## 9. EMERGENCY FOOD PROVIDERS

**E**mergency food providers are increasingly struggling to obtain produce. While large distributors have chosen to discount rather than donate, some local food banks have been turning towards local producers to provide for their needs.

### Project profile links

**Sister's Camelot:** This organization provides organic or local produce obtained from organic food distributors, food co-ops and the Midtown Farmers Market. They distribute food directly from their large bus that travels to ever-changing sites throughout the city of Minneapolis. [www.sisterscamelot.org](http://www.sisterscamelot.org)

**Emergency Food Shelf Network:** Over the last few years, this large, local food bank has contracted local immigrant producers to supply much of their summer vegetable needs. By contracting directly with producers they receive extremely high-quality food at very reasonable prices while offering farmers a secure and fair market. [www.emergencyfoodshelf.org](http://www.emergencyfoodshelf.org)

**Second Harvest Heartland:** Beginning in 2006, this food bank worked with two St. Paul farmers markets to capture leftover produce at the end of market days. The food bank provided each vendor with a box to fill with their donations of fine quality produce that would not be marketed again. [www.2harvest.org](http://www.2harvest.org)

## Making it happen in Minneapolis

- **Talk to soup kitchen and homeless shelter administrators** to develop local food purchasing. The challenge is that much of the food at these places is donated, not purchased. If funding is not available, obtaining donated produce from farmers markets is possible. Contact IATP for assistance on finding the best market for your needs. [www.iatp.org](http://www.iatp.org)

## Challenges

- **Restrictive budgets** may limit the amount of money that can be spent on food, forcing shelters and food shelves to look into cheaper options.
- **Purchasing contracts** might force shelters to buy only from one food service corporation and could restrict local purchasing.
- **Kitchens may not be staffed** or equipped for the extra work involved in buying raw produce.
- **It may be difficult logistically** to move donated produce from vendors at the market to the transporter.

## 10. MOBILE STORES

**M**obile stores could serve low-income neighborhoods by bringing local produce, meats, and dairy products to drop spots or right to the doorstep. Mobile stores could be full service local market providers or sell just fruits and vegetables in an ice cream truck fashion.

### Project profile links

**People's Grocery, West Oakland, Calif.:** This book-mobile-style market sells natural and organic food in West Oakland's low-income neighborhoods. [www.peoplesgrocery.org/learn.html#mobile-market](http://www.peoplesgrocery.org/learn.html#mobile-market)

**Mobile Meals:** Mobile Meals of Toledo, Ohio, began its service in 1967 to supply food to people who are unable to prepare or obtain adequate meals with an emphasis on the aging population. [www.mobilemeals.org/about\\_us.htm](http://www.mobilemeals.org/about_us.htm)

**The Hartford Food System Grocery Delivery:** The grocery delivery service provides affordable food to almost 80 low-income homebound seniors living in Bloomfield, Hartford, New Britain, West Hartford and Wethersfield, Conn., by delivering food directly to their homes. See the frequently asked questions on their site as a resource for starting a similar service in Minneapolis. [www.hartfordfood.org/programs/grocery\\_delivery.html](http://www.hartfordfood.org/programs/grocery_delivery.html)

**Store To Door:** Store To Door is a nonprofit, volunteer-supported grocery shopping and delivery service for frail elderly and disabled residents of the Twin Cities. Annually, 1,300 households order and receive products from Cub Foods through the organization's delivery system. [www.storeto-door.org/05/what.htm](http://www.storeto-door.org/05/what.htm)

## Making it happen in Minneapolis

- **City of Minneapolis:** Currently, the city of Minneapolis only allows selling ice cream and other highly processed foods from mobile vehicles. Special variances or possible changes to the city code must be made for this to develop [www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us](http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us)

## Challenges

- **Significant funding** is required for both the construction of a mobile market, and the continual subsidization of operations is likely.

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