EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The number of Minnesota school districts engaged in farm to school practices rose from just 18 districts in 2006 to 268 districts in 2014. Key organizations and individuals have shepherded this evolution and exponential growth of farm to school in Minnesota. These critical players saw the need to work more closely together and joined forces in 2011 to form Minnesota’s Farm to School Leadership Team, with the mission to work through partnerships across Minnesota “to build Farm to School initiatives that help kids eat healthy, support nearby farmers, foster economic vitality, and strengthen communities.” Specifically, they envisioned a cross-sector team designed to leverage resources, improve communications and collaboration, avoid duplication of organizational efforts, and ultimately maximize the impact of farm to school in Minnesota.

This report is a confluence of historical milestones, relationships and opportunities that highlight a shared farm to school story in Minnesota. Through skilled outside facilitation and building upon the strong foundation of collaboration that had already been laid, the Farm to School Leadership Team developed a team agreement as a basis for shared leadership, responsibility and accountability.

In 2015, the leadership team decided to evaluate its efforts. While farm to school partnerships have flourished in Minnesota, the team set out to learn what, if any, role it has played in this tremendous growth. Additionally, the leadership team recognized a number of dynamic tensions held within the team and decided the time was ripe to examine its processes and the outcomes of its collective efforts in order to support continued collaboration, share best practices with others, and make improvements where necessary.

This report tells Minnesota’s farm to school story as reflected in key stakeholder interviews with 22 former and current leadership team members. The report documents the history of the farm to school movement nationwide and in Minnesota through a detailed timeline of milestones. Analysis of interviews and secondary data revealed a number of key benefits of the leadership team, including the benefits of connecting sectors to increase the credibility and legitimacy of farm to school practices while leveraging resources and building capacity around the state for those practices. In addition, policy education was seen as integral to advancing farm to school funding opportunities.

This report is organized in several distinct sections to appeal to a wide audience. While some readers may be most interested in the quick overviews found in one of the two infographics, others may be interested in reviewing the detailed history of Minnesota’s farm to school milestones. Still others may be interested in the synopsis of key recommendations because they too, are involved in cross-sector collaborations. While each section in this report stands on its own, reading all the sections will provide a better understanding of the team’s work and benefits.

In summary, cross-sector collaborations are most likely to create public value if leaders demonstrate resilience and engage in regular evaluations and assessments of their efforts. This report outlines a formal evaluation of Minnesota’s Farm to School Leadership Team efforts five years after its creation. The evaluation reveals considerable accomplishments, but continued investment and commitment are necessary for the team to fully realize its mission.