

LOCAL FOOD DIGEST:**Food Hub Overview**

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OVERVIEW OF GREATER MINNESOTA FOOD HUBS

Food hub development has become a focus in the local food movement as an opportunity to provide scale-appropriate infrastructure to small and mid-sized farmers. As more farmers seek to serve niche and local markets outside of traditional produce producing areas, difficulties often arise. Farmers producing in rural areas may lack lucrative direct sale markets that those near urban metropolitan areas can access. Likewise, smaller scale producers may not produce enough product alone to break into wholesale markets.

FOOD HUBS EMERGING IN MINNESOTA

While many prominent food hubs throughout the country have gained success due to proximity to metropolitan areas (e.g. Red Tomato near Providence and Boston; Fifth Season Coop serving Madison, Twin Cities, and Chicago), rural areas are also seeking to establish food hubs to serve local farmers and customers. In Minnesota, many such food hubs are seeking to become established in their community. These hubs vary in size, number of farmers and customers served, and time in existence (some ongoing for years, others not yet operational). They are evenly distributed geographically throughout the state and represent each RSDP region.

**OVERCOMING BARRIERS**

In February, 2013 the RSDP Statewide Coordinating Committee met in St. Paul to determine shared statewide priorities around local foods and sustainable agriculture. At this meeting aggregation and distribution emerged as a main issue. The USDA recognizes that food hubs can provide small and mid-scale infrastructure by acting as aggregation and distribution facilities that involve the needed partners along the local foods value chain. Very low profit margins, lack of subsidies, dispersed rural populations, however, are among difficulties to implementing food hubs in greater Minnesota and rural areas elsewhere. Many food hubs seeking to overcome these barriers are emerging in Minnesota and in each RSDP region—many with RSDPs as project partners.



Greater Minnesota Food Hubs

The following is an updated list of known food hub projects in greater Minnesota that exist or serve the RSDP regions. This list was updated on August 2, 2016. **Notice: This list only includes food hubs in Greater Minnesota. Food hubs located in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Region are excluded.**

NORTHWEST

FRESH CONNECT

Fresh Connect is a food hub operated by the Lake Country Service Cooperative (LCSC) that hopes to serve as the connection between local growers and food service providers like schools and hospitals. They have received two grants from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and are using the money to explore how a food hub could serve the cooperative's nine-county area (Becker, Clay, Douglas, Grant, Otter Tail, Pope, Stevens, Traverse and Wilkin counties). They now act as both an aggregator and delivery service in order to free growers from marketing and delivery constraints.

CENTRAL

FARM MARKET CAFÉ

Farm Market Café is a producer owned and operated business that sources grocery items from the area around Onamia. These items include maple syrup, wild rice, honey, eggs, meats, and seasonal fruits and vegetables. Their mission is, "to bring the talents of local farmers and gardeners...together with our neighbors." The boutique portion of the café features local authors, artists, and crafters. Farm Market Café founder, Barb Eller, is on the Central Region food systems work group.

SPROUT MN

SPROUT MN operates out of the Brainerd area, serving Central Minnesota, and will soon be opening a commercial kitchen and distribution center in Little Falls. They coordinate marketing, aggregation, and distribution of products from 40 area producers to schools, resorts, and restaurants. SPROUT currently aggregates and delivers locally grown products to five school districts as well as area hospitals, community colleges and several restaurants. The Central RSDP has provided resources and funding for SPROUT MN in the past and worked with the Region Five Development

Commission to help support a feasibility study for a food hub in the Central Region. SPROUT MN's founder, Arlene Jones, is on the board of directors in the Central Region.

LOCAL HARVEST MARKET

Local Harvest Market operates out of the Alexandria area and serves Central Minnesota. They were formed by a group of west central Minnesota producers and consumers primarily to build a market bridge between local farmers and local consumers. In 2014, they launched an online market for consumers to shop for produce and value-added products from local producers. In June 2015, they added a wholesale business to their operations, with pick-ups and deliveries to restaurants, schools and other locations in Alexandria, St. Cloud, and surrounding regions. Their long-term plans include building storage capacity (frozen, refrigerated, root storage), a mixing center for staging wholesale customer orders, and expanded distribution capability in central Minnesota.

SOUTHWEST

WILLMAR FOOD HUB

The Willmar Food Hub is in the process of opening a food hub in Willmar that will serve as a center for various enterprises relating to local foods, food systems, and community development. The hub currently houses a craft beer tap house and has plans to open a restaurant and catering business in the near future. Long-term plans for the hub include a Community Food Center that will aggregate, process, package, and distribute product. Other food related activities include working with a passive solar greenhouse for food production and ¼ acre land plots for education purposes and to new growers, both located within five miles of the food hub. The Willmar Food Hub has received support and funding from the Southwest RSDP.

SOUTHEAST

MINNESOTA VALLEY ACTION COUNCIL FOOD HUB INITIATIVE (MVAC)

The Minnesota Valley Action Council in Mankato started up their operation in 2014 with help from grants from the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation and the MN Department of Agriculture. They currently operate out of Mankato, purchasing food from local farmers and sell to area institutions (including Gustavus Adolphus College) and through a CSA program. MVAC has incorporated food processing facilities within their hub to add value to farm products moving through their system.

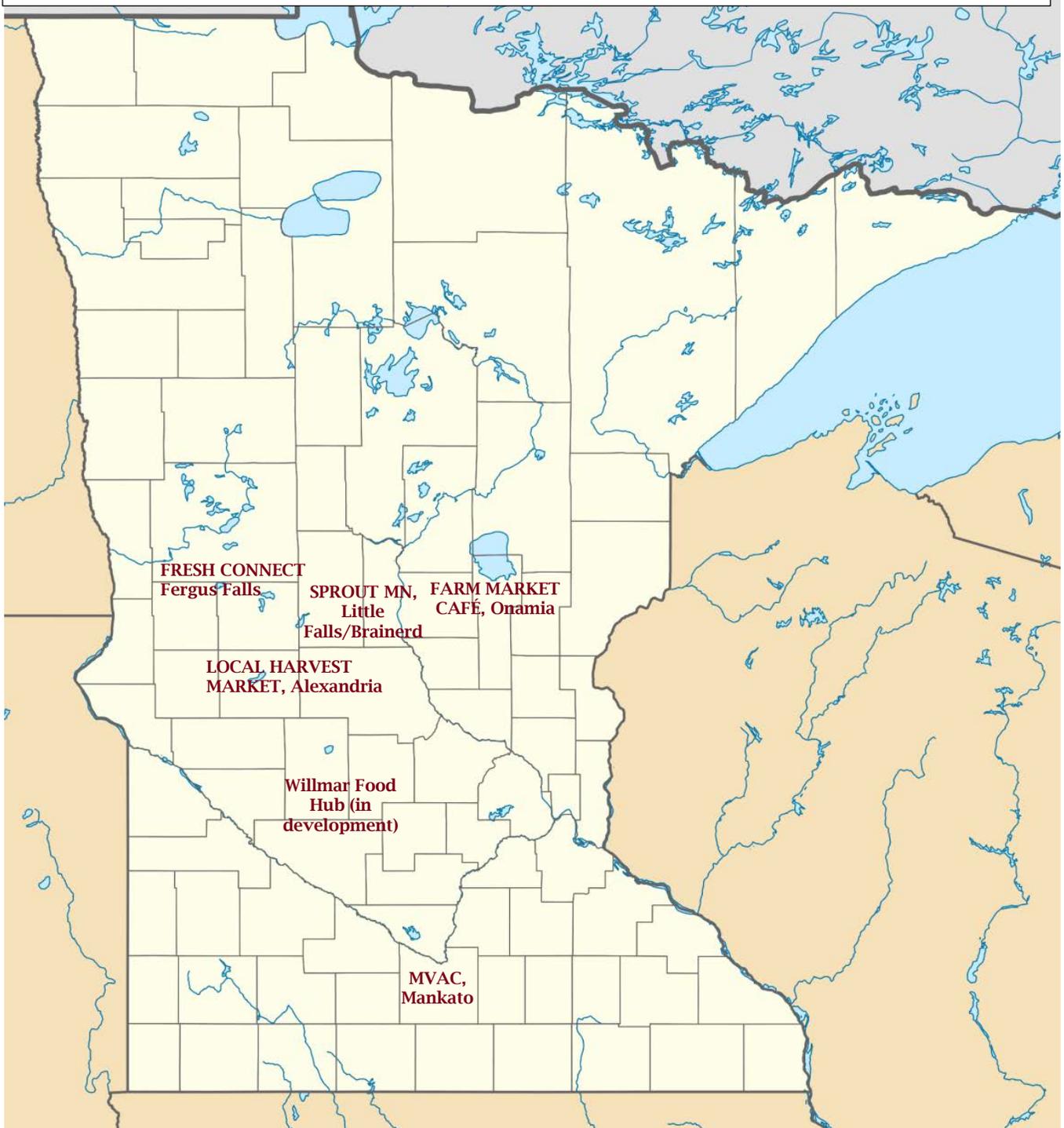


If you are interested in food hub research, outreach, and networking efforts in greater in Minnesota, please contact:

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LOCATION OF GREATER MINNESOTA FOOD HUBS



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