



Local Foods Endeavors within Region Five

Minnesota's Region five is 5- county region in central Minnesota; Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd and Wadena. Federal Congressional Districts 7 & 8.

“Region Five” is comprised of many small towns, with a total regional population of 162,000 and 69,194 households spread over an area of 3,996,051 acres

over the five counties. There are a total of 65 incorporated cities, 155 Townships, one Army Camp, 24 school districts, one community college and one tribal band; The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwa.

Part of the region is very rural and comprises two of the poorest counties in the state (Todd, Wadena), made up of primarily agricultural communities, while two of the region’s rural counties (Crow Wing and lower Cass) make up the majority of the population and growth. Brainerd/Baxter in Crow Wing County, has been ranked one of the fastest growing micropolitans in the nation. The rapid growing lake counties have a seasonal population that expands from 10,000 to nearly 60,000 which can be considered an asset in the development of a successful Local Foods HUB.

The regions ag sector are primarily small family owned farms (40 acre average). The makeup of farmers include Amish, Latino, American Indian. Data shows that 3 of our counties are the highest producers of vegetables in a 3-state area. One county is a leading cattle producer in the state.

The history set forth in this paper is intended to inform partners of regional activities performed by numerous regional champions, whose purpose is advancing the supply and use of locally grown foods.

R5 Summary of local foods activity 2007 - 2008

Executive Director of the Region Five Development Commission (R5DC) joined the University of MN Regional Sustainable Partnerships: Pine and Lake Country Local Food Workgroup to identify how we could collectively improve access to locally grown commodities, and continued this activity through 2008, assessing the needs of this recognized economic opportunity.



2009

Concentration was given to supply:

- **R5DC Co-Sponsored our first Local Foods AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteer in Service to America)**

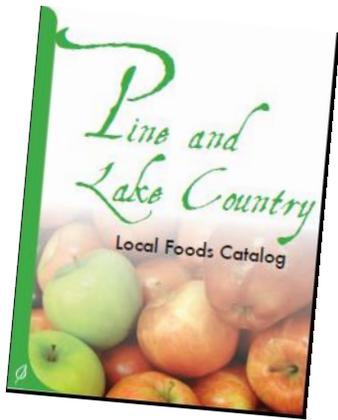
with UofM Regional Sustainable Development Partnership. Considerable amount of research was conducted by the AmeriCorps VISTA regarding national models of local foods distribution systems for consideration of the Pine and Lake Country Local Foods working group. (Supported by the MN Farmers Union and the Initiative Foundation)

- **Surveyed growers** to identify willingness to produce more local food for schools, hospitals, and restaurants, had more than 150 growers interested (All growers have less than 250 acres, many with less than 50).

- **Co-hosted forums** to teach growers requirements to sell commodities. Hosted workshop on how to access USDA value added Ag NOFA (22 growers).

- **Obtained funding and Published 5000 copies of a Pine and Lake Country Local Foods Catalog**, distributed to region. Supported by R5DC and the Regional Partnerships.

- **R5DC interviewed 22 chefs** to gauge interest in sourcing more locally grown foods, had high level of interest and commitment.
- **Started 9 community gardens**, some of which are now selling food at farmers markets. Teamed with Extension Services and Master Gardeners to provide training to growers. (Supported by Statewide Health Improvement Partnership "SHIP" funding)



2010

Focused on the **buyer side** by developing relationship with institutions interested in sourcing locally grown foods.

- Hired second Local Foods AmeriCorps VISTA, workplan supported building the demand side of the regional local food HUB.
- **Met several times with 3 hospitals**, one in particular which was sourcing nearly 2% of their food from local growers and increased commitment to sourcing up to 15% once distribution is in place.
- **Chefs began to meet regularly** to exchange buying BMP's and to understand the fair market rate of locally grown commodities.
- **Growers worked for FREE** in some of the restaurants a few hours a week to better understand the kitchen limitations the chefs are faced with and to build relations.
- **Speed Dating event with growers and Schools, hosted by the Regional Sustainable Partnerships. MANY introductions started through this event. Met Champions at this event. Notably, Arlene Jones, Farm on St. Mathias and Brainerd School District food service Manager; Collette Polkamp.**
- **Farm 2 School research** conducted by The Regional Sustainable Partnerships. Found at: <http://regionfive.org/departments/community-development.html>



Farm-to-School in Central Minnesota – Applied Economic Analysis
By Monica Haynes

Region Five Development Commission
CURA Community-Based Research Programs
U of M Central Regional Sustainable Development Partnership
University of Minnesota-Twin Cities Applied Economics Department

- **Growers gave school cafeteria presentations**, to assist in the educational opportunities of students for those districts who would source from local growers. Teachers loved this partnership!
- **Met several times with superintendents and kitchen managers** of several school districts to gauge interest. Resulted in great enthusiasm with the School Board of largest school district in the region (School District 181) committing to sourcing very specific quantities of locally grown foods, should a system be launched to deliver foods regularly....i.e., a distribution system.
- VISTA convened a committed group of growers, community Ed, public health and school district representatives to discuss how we could pursue the development of a model distribution system. **We** created a workgroup to complete a distribution system and climate controlled storage business plan and feasibility.

2011

Created a Business plan and sought research and supportive sources:

- January 4, 2011 **USDA** Rural Development assisted either alignment of RD programs with regions local food goals.
- Todd County Board of Commissioners agreed to pursue the **bonding process of \$500,000.00 to build a Community Kitchen** at the Senior Center in the small town of Eagle Bend. Effort failed via the bonding process, was later successful via a grant.
- Partnering as a workgroup member in developing the business plan, the opportunity was presented to the collective to **lease warehouse space from School District 181** at a very competitive rate. Conversations with Central Lakes College began regarding similar opportunities. Schools are seeking all sort of ethical alternatives to income generation in these economically distressed times. This effort aligns the schools with the local foods efforts and builds sustainable and lasting partnerships.



Expanded the “demand” and more private sector agencies want to participate in the local foods endeavor:



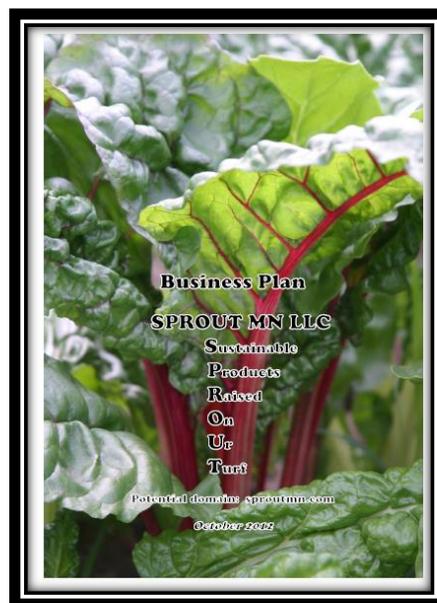
Feasibility Study and business plan formation completed for the value chain food hub **and** construction of additional **food processing facilities**, paid for by AURI, the Initiative Foundation, the University of Minnesota Central Region Partnership, and Happy Dancing Turtle. Found at: <http://regionfive.org/departments/community-development.html>

Offered **microloans to ag based businesses** to scale up production in order to meet the increased demand. (USDA RMAP program)

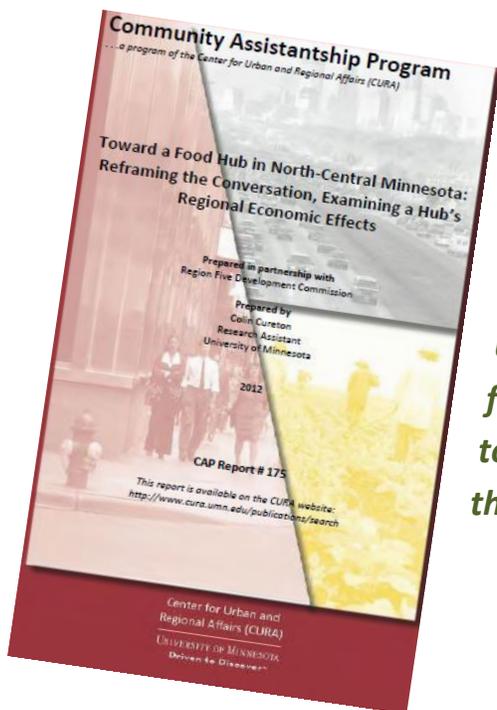
Completed the business plan

that formalize the **legal status of “SPROUT”** as a MN non-profit and a private LLC. The plan was completed by the Central Lakes College Small Business Development Center, a private consultant with the Farm of St. Mathias. Support was provided by Region Five to complete this work. Found at: <http://regionfive.org/departments/community-development.html>

The SPROUT collaborative consists numerous small family farms within the region, multiple school districts, Chefs and resort/restaurant managers, community college, sustainable farming association, government, public health, food shelves, 2 health care institutions, community ED and food related social advocacy groups.



- **New VISTA working on creation of a “Food Recovery Project,”** a gleaning program that allows low income families to harvest unused “seconds or culls” from local farms or for this locally grown and healthy food to enter into the food shelf systems.



More research completed on the effect on **Food HUBS** from the UofM – supported by the Initiative Foundation. Found at:

<http://regionfive.org/departments/community-development.html>

USDA funded Region Five with and RCDI to move forward this project and 9 others from the RR Plan toward implementation. One project was the launch the next phase of SPROUT MN.

A local restaurant, Prairie Bay, has purchased a **Food Truck** that will use as much locally grown commodities as possible. Recent grants support this truck to travel to very rural Food Desert areas as a way to provide education about how to prepare locally grown produce and then work to establish the distribution plan to GET LOCALLY Grown foods to those areas on a regular basis.



2013

Connecting with supportive partners for our self-sustaining model.



Report available at: www.resilientregion.org

Our Local Food value-added agricultural project represents a priority area selected by the region through the HUD-DOT-EPA-funded Sustainable Communities Regional Planning process, our Resilient Region Plan.

The project has three components:

- 1) Establish a regional food hub for the aggregation, distribution and processing of locally grown foods;
- 2) Extend the growing season through proving the use of locally manufactured solar thermal collectors combined with high tunnels; and
- 3) Coordinate outreach, education, and technical assistance activities that will expand the availability of local foods in the region, targeting both farmers and consumers.



Bio-fuel delivery truck converted and maintained by Central Lakes College mechanics class.



- Local food Champion Arlene Jones, the SPROUT food HUB manager was selected to partake in the BUSH Foundation Leadership Fellowship program to build the local food hub infrastructure.
- SPROUT and Arlene Jones hosted 25 growers at a Good Agricultural Practice workshop, instructed by the University of Minnesota in June of 2013 (see photo)
- Local Foods related MICRO-LENDING activity has been on the rise. (micro \$ used for a portion of the lending needs for 7 different loans to date)

Solar Thermal High Tunnels at two grower sites. The food grown 365 days a year is sold through SPROUT.





Facilitated conversations by USDA, SPROUT is learning from 4 other local food Hubs throughout the nation.

Exploration with Upper Lakes Foods to develop distribution relations.

Central Lakes College – Designation as a “Center for excellence” focused on food and fuel.

Video production of Arlene Jones representing SPROUT as a regional Champion-

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7axBvi1x42I&feature=youtu.be>

Video SPROUT and Region Five with partners in September 2013

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yC-](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yC-DMNkTFok&list=PLF_49nseueASKDICBnZ5Xz9HwXWhIwjNG&index=5)

[DMNkTFok&list=PLF_49nseueASKDICBnZ5Xz9HwXWhIwjNG&index=5](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yC-DMNkTFok&list=PLF_49nseueASKDICBnZ5Xz9HwXWhIwjNG&index=5)

2014

Building relations with Latino growers through Latino Economic Development Corporation and Amish growers. OVER 40 growers currently engaged!

Delivered nearly 100,000 pounds of locally grown fresh produce 2013 and just under 100,000 lbs. in 2014.

(Many new buyers; Schools, hospitals, restaurants etc.)

Local Restaurateur; Prairie Bay visited many food deserts alongside SPROUT MN with their Food Truck; “SIDE DISH” and provided chef demonstrations of how to prepare underutilized fresh produce. Intercept surveys conducted at locations, data collected.

New AG Instructor that support TWO K-12 schools to deliver student training at a local catholic convent farm in partnership with CLC and National Joint Powers Alliance.



CHOOSE HEALTH

Hunger Free Minnesota has funded a pilot program with Lakewood Hospital, SPROUT and Region Five called Choose Health:



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Region Five Development Commission and Partners Receive National Association of Development Organizations 2014 Innovation Award

WASHINGTON, DC – The Region Five Development Commission (R5DC), based in Staples, Minnesota, received a 2014 Innovation Award from the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) Research Foundation for the *Choose Health* project.

The Choose Health project expands access to locally grown foods in ways that address food insecurity through an innovative partnership. Funded by Hunger Free Minnesota, physicians from Lakewood Health System refer 50 families for a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) membership. Families receive locally grown/raised commodities bi-monthly from “SPROUT MN” (a 5-county regional food hub of 40+ local growers).

The program includes an extensive in-take process of pre & post health care screenings from Lakewood, and nutrition education, cooking and preparation demonstrations, and recipes from the University of MN Extension, alongside a concentrated community referral process and ongoing support for food insecure individuals offered by Todd County Public Health. Additionally, cooking demonstrations are offered by local premier chefs from Prairie Bay restaurant with participants of the program receiving small food prep supplies for those in need.

The program is administered by R5DC, and our region’s expert evaluation company, EnSearch, Inc.



For more information about the award-winning project found at:

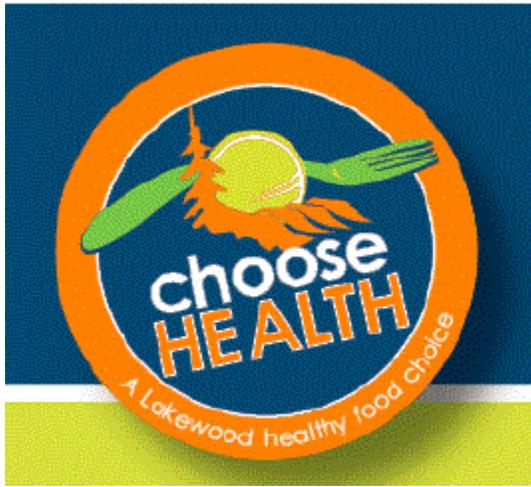
http://www.resilientregion.org/plan/u_implementation.html

or contact the Region Five Development Commission at (218)894-3233.

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Report available at: www.resilientregion.org



November 2014: Members of the region who have been actively engaged in the Choose Health Program (Stacey Stockdill, Arlene Jones and Kelly Coughlin, along with Ellie Lucas of Hunger Free MN, participated in a national webinar highlighting the success of the Choose Health Program:

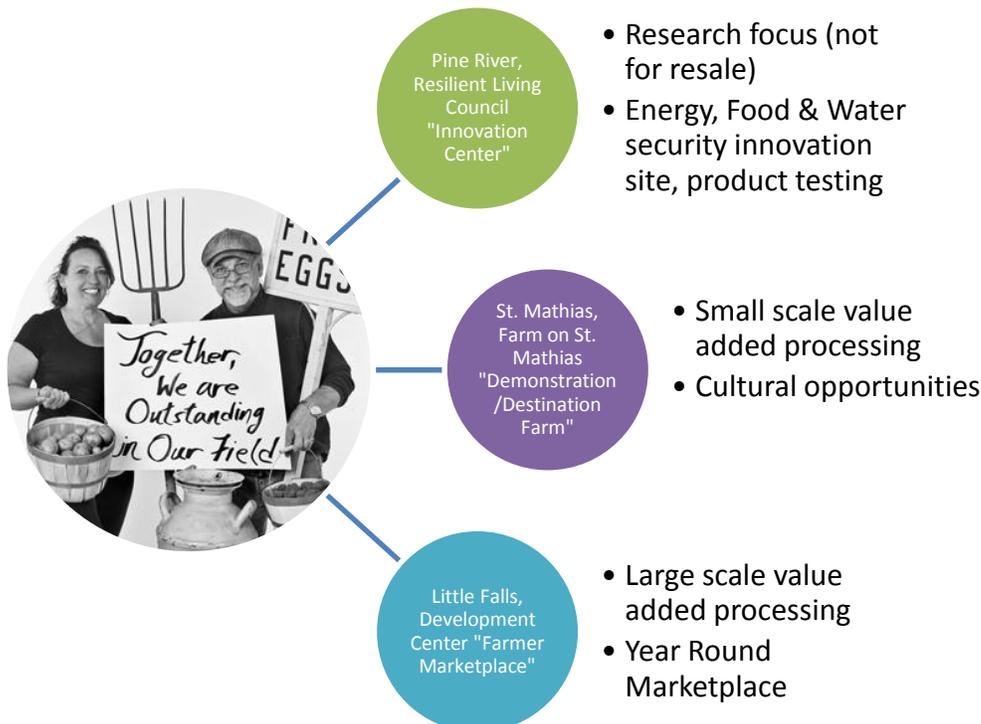
<http://www.nado.org/choose-health-webinar/>

Regions across the country are increasingly recognizing that a healthy and prosperous future will in part be tied to establishing a robust local food system. On November 13, 2014, the [NADO Research Foundation](#) hosted a webinar

addressing the intersection between local food, public health, and regional resilience, by exploring Central Minnesota's Choose Health program. The Choose Health program is one of several regional initiatives that is growing the region's local food economy and increasing access to healthy food options for disadvantaged populations.

Choose Health is made possible by an innovative partnership model that leverages knowledge and resources from the private, public, and non-profit sectors to provide fresh food to the area's most food insecure populations. The program relies on the local hospital to "prescribe" CSA memberships that are accompanied by health screenings, education, and ongoing support for participants. This remarkably comprehensive program serves as a model for the development of inclusive regional food economies that balance economic development with social equity to ensure that local food is reaching its fullest potential.

Feasibility study, business plan and equipment grants awarded by for 3 Food Processing Facilities that are part of the "SPROUT Distributed Local Food Network ". Each processing facility has with unique qualities at each such as;



The SPROUT Marketplace – processing facility.

SPROUT MN has now grown to a food hub network of 40+ low-income growers (including Amish, Latino & tribal) with several partners who have applied for and received some startup funds for the construction of a food processing facility and Marketplace in Little Falls, Minnesota as part of the regional local food hub.

The SPROUT Marketplace & processing facility is located in the Little Falls Manufacturing Development Center as an underutilized facility hit hard by the recession making it an attractive “re-use, in-fill” site that has strategic access to the trunk highway system.



SPROUT MN managed by: Arlene Jones who currently aggregates/delivers locally-grown commodities to 5-school districts/hospitals/community college/several restaurants and over 100 CSA's (many-of-which-are prescribed-by-local-physicians-through-a-hunger-prevention-program).

The food processing facility allows for growers to transform their fresh commodities to a processed (frozen, dried, canned, baked) product that expands the seasonal markets. The Marketplace allows growers to sell directly to consumers during the non-growing season.

By increasing grower incomes through value-added markets we add value to our agricultural industry which is the largest industry cluster in central Minnesota. The strategy stabilizes incomes which in turn stabilizes local tax base and enrollment of our children to our schools.

In addition to the food processing facility and the indoor Marketplace, SPROUT intends to partner with U of M Extension Food Educators, County Public Health professionals and hospital nutritionists **to teach the nutritional value of locally grown foods** and will additionally partner with local premier chefs to give cooking demonstrations of underutilized fresh commodities, such as a rutabaga and kohlrabi at the Little Falls Marketplace facility.



Additional relationships are secured with SBDC at Central Lakes College and the MN Department of Employment and Economic Development who will **provide growers with business planning** coupled with Morrison County Community Development and Region Five Development Commission offering **access to capital for those growers seeking to expand their operations**. We did not forget to partner with our Workforce Investment Board – Rural MN CEP, who will

also house an office out of the same facility to **help our growers and SPROUT operations fill our workforce needs**.

By spring of 2015 we would like to begin installing the equipment, refrigeration and commercial kitchens, with the goal of summer 2015 to have the food hub open and fully functional as a regional local food hub.



Fall of 2015 a partnership would be formed with the **Visitors Bureau, Arts Association and the Five Wings Regional Arts Council** to identify how we include art to make the Marketplace space visually attractive and offer performances and art shows during the times with the farmers market is open, to provide more of a destination location fully inclusive of the relationships in the community, and bridging arts and agriculture.

The final part of this vision includes a component of how to utilize the processing facility **to increase the regional access to healthy food for our food insecure residents**. Meaning....we hope to find ways that increase grower incomes through processing of our locally grown commodities AND fill the shelves of our food shelves and food banks.

As of December 2014 we have secured a grant from USDA/LFPP for working capital, and a grant from National Joint Powers Alliance to start the construction, however we are still seeking the balance needed to complete the build out of the facility.

Fall 2014

Expansion of Choose Health:

Additional funding was awarded from Hunger Free MN to extend the Choose Health CSA into the winter season. Currently, up to 50 families are receiving a once a month winter CSA, which is distributed at the Senior Campus of Lakewood Health Systems. Aligning the partnerships created in the early season, U of MN Extension educators are facilitating cooking demonstrations, recipe creation/sharing, and engaging CSA participants in further U of M Extension education in diabetes management classes.

Funding was also secured for Central Lakes College to start an Ag Rescue/ Gleaning program with students in 2015.

Policy Research:

In partnership with the Initiative Foundation and University of Minnesota Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships, a CURA CAP student has been secured to research BMPs in planning and zoning. The research will identify planning and zoning best practices that support local food systems in rural communities. As the local foods movement quickly spreads, ordinances struggle to keep pace with the new business models, thus creating significant challenges and an un-level playing field for small scale, non-urban producers.

The final product will be a report addressing each of the aforementioned research questions. The report will include interviews with key producers and decision makers as well as best practice ordinances template language, tools and lessons learned and will be posted on www.resilientregion.org

Community Kitchen:

Todd County public health secured \$400,000.00 to build a community kitchen to prepare and deliver meals on wheels. Food will be purchased from SPROUT (thus local growers) for this program. This town is centrally located in the county and many growers would have access to adding value to their commodities (value added AG) and could benefit from a distribution system as the market demand increases.



2015

Secured a grant from MN Department of Agriculture for \$100,000.00 to continue the build-out of the processing facility.

Created a evaluation plan for our Local Foods work in accordance to the WealthWorks value-chain model. Building all forms of rural community wealth from the activities of the SPROUT food hub.

Hunger Prevention and connection to SPROUT and our value chain:

Grant from Hunger Free Minnesota for \$50,000.00 for equipment of 10 sites (\$5k ea.) who would upscale their feeding programs to include an end of the day meal and utilize the USDA RD CACFP At-Risk program. The sites are typically serving only breakfast, lunch and an after school snack.

Grant from Hunger Free MN for \$25,000.00 to increase uptake of USDA feeding programs in the northern part of MN, another \$24k dedicated for evaluation of our programming. **All of the Hunger Free MN sites will access food from SPROUT.**

Jan & June, grower trainings; Post Harvest Handling & Food Safety Workshops.



May, Hosted a DESIGN PARTY with artists, elected officials, business owners, etc to add artistic expressions to the build-out of the processing facility. This was an amazing experience and the ideas were FANTASTIC.



Funding Activity

Secured grant activity 2012-2014 traced by Region Five

Hunger Free MN (SPROUT, Lakewood)	\$35,000.00
Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships – SPROUT	\$50,000.00
BUSH Fellowship - Arlene Jones	\$75,000.00
Otto Bremer –SPROUT	\$50,000.00
Northwest Area Foundation - SPROUT	\$75,000.00
Regional Sustainable Development Partnership – Side Dish Food Truck	\$35,000.00
MN Dept. of Ag- feasibility study Pine River	\$10,000.00
MN Dept. of Ag – feasibility study in Little Falls	\$10,000.00
MN Dept. of Ag- Farm St. Mathias processing facility	\$31,260.00
AURI study – HDT	\$30,000.00
Initiative Foundations - cure caps, processing feasibility	\$22,000.00
USDA – LFPP – processing facility working capital	\$99,500.00
USDA- RCDI – processing facility working capital	\$10,000.00
National Joint Powers Alliance - processing facility build out	\$100,000.00
MN Department of Agriculture - processing facility build out	\$100,000.00
TOTAL \$732,760.00	

With over 250 food distribution models currently in operation around the nation, we have benefited from learning opportunities through these various models, and have patterned our model from some of these successful examples in building a value chain food hub.

Let’s make the assumption that we can all make the connections to the value of creating a regional local food economy; reduction of VMT’s, increased incomes of small agricultural producers (wealth creation), reduction of sprawl (keeping ag land - ag), increased access to nutritional foods (health benefits), making the URBAN- RURAL connection, adding to our QUALITY OF PLACE and this list goes on and on. Several economic impact studies have been published regarding the positive community multiplier as a result of sourcing local foods.

As we continue efforts to build new partnerships we will document our process and create user friendly resources that will enable other areas to replicate this work. We are particularly interested in assisting immigrant populations into this model and our group is COMMITTED to assisting other regions who are interested in replication of a successful model.

