Local Foods Partnership

Connecting Growers to Consumers in Northwest Minnesota

www.localfoods.umn.edu
Who We Are

- Linda Kingery, MS, BS, Environmental Studies, Executive Director Northwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership (2000-2005)
- David DeMuth, Jr., PhD, Associate Professor (Physics) and Head, Math, Science, and Technology Department
- Andrew Sheppard, BS, Graduate Student, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis
Talk Outline

• Introduction
• Motivation
• Demonstration
• Lessons Learned
• Future Work
• Summary
• Questions
Introduction

• Build partnerships with local producers and other advocates of local foods.
• Increase the production, marketing and sales of locally grown foods in the region.
• Encourage the production of healthy foods and healthy landscapes.
University of Minnesota, Crookston

Land Grant Mission
Four Year College 1993
Nation’s First Notebook University (ThinkPad)
Information Technology Management and Computer Software Technology Programs
Regional Partnerships/Northwest Partnership

www.regionalpartnerships.umn.edu

• Established in 1997 by legislature, 3 regions in ’97, 2 regions in ‘99.
• Board of directors identifies regional priorities
• Support projects that engage University of MN and citizens.
• Agriculture, natural resources, tourism
• Local Foods and Energy Self-reliance

The Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships Program is a cooperative venture between the University of Minnesota and citizen leaders around the state. Click here for a Calendar of Events. For a map of counties covered by the Regional Partnerships, click here.
Why We Did It:

Motivation
Goals of Local Foods Project

1. Build partnerships with local producers and other advocates of local foods.
   - Facilitate discussion and action via a local foods group.
   - listserv http://nature.crk.umn.edu/mailman/nwp/

2. Increase the production, marketing and sales of locally grown foods in the region.
   - Provide research and demonstrations to help growers.

3. Encourage the production of healthy foods and healthy landscapes.
   - Organic variety trials, community garden demonstrations
   - Develop database to connect growers and consumers.
Northwest Minnesota’s Food & Farm Economy

• 205,000 residents
• $4 billion purchasing power
• 9,765 farm families
• 16% of Minnesota farms
• 23% of Minnesota farm acreage

Ken Meter, Crossroads Resource Center 2005
Finding Food in Farm Country

As farmers struggle...

• The region’s consumers spend $403 million buying food each year

• Most bought from outside region

Ken Meter – Crossroads Resource Center - 2005
## Finding Food in Northwest Minnesota

### NW Minnesota: markets for food

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meats, poultry, fish, and eggs</td>
<td>$ 54.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruits &amp; vegetables</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cereals and bakery products</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy products</td>
<td>24.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Other,” incl. sweets, fats, &amp; oils</td>
<td>76.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ken Meter – Crossroad Resource Center - 2005

[www.localfoods.umn.edu](http://www.localfoods.umn.edu)
Top 10 Global Food Trends

- Quick Fix
- Drive and Go
- **Inherently Healthy**
- Fancy That!
- **Farm-Friendly**
- Flavorizing
- Grazers
- Low, No and Not-so-much-of
- **Do-it-Yourself Doctoring**
- Global Gangbusters

- Naturally healthy foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts.
- Organic, natural, sustainably grown, free-range, grass-fed, fair-trade
- Whole grains, soy proteins, omega-3 fatty acids

*Food Technology* – April 2005

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Consumer Preferences

- Food challenge for 2006: satisfying the ethical consumer
- Consumers Union and eco-labels
- Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy: Food and Health Program
- UM Presidential Initiative: Healthy Foods, Healthy Lives Initiative
Why Buy Local?

• You’ll get exceptional taste and freshness.
• You’ll strengthen your local economy.
• You’ll support endangered family farms.
• You’ll safeguard your family’s health.
• You’ll protect the environment.
Ethical Considerations

- Cheap food? At what cost?
  - 50% of school students qualify for free and reduced lunch
  - Over half of adults are overweight
  - Half of elderly seeking medical care are malnourished
  - Medical costs of obesity are $118 billion per year—25% of what US consumers pay for food/year
Evidence closer to home

• Several Minnesota Universities and Colleges are sourcing food locally.
• St. Luke’s Hospital in Duluth sourcing organic food from local farmers.
• Local Foods Challenge at White Earth Tribal and Community College.
What We Did: a Demonstration

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Inspiration

• Nature Northwest Sourcebook
  http://www.nature-northwest.org
• 821 parks and other recreational areas
• Searchable database
• Northern Minnesota
Local Foods Partnership

- Connect producers ("partners") to consumers
- Searchable database, with a user-friendly interface
- Individualized pages per partner

www.localfoods.umn.edu
Finding a Partner
Location-based Search
Information Maintenance

• There is a lot of information to maintain
• Site allows producers to maintain their information themselves
  – Provides ownership and personality
  – Encourages use and promotion of the site
  – Information can be kept very current
• The goal – make it extremely easy to update the site
Administrative Features
Products & Photos
Joining / Adding a Partner
Partner Statistics

- Detailed statistics for each partner
  - System administrators can view site-wide statistics
- Includes how they found the site
  - For search engines, includes the search query used, if possible
Top Partners Visited

J&B Meats
Fargo Community Farmers Market
Klawitter CSA Garden
Two Fools Vineyard
Lynn Brakke Organic Farms
Minnesota Dehydrated Vegetables Inc.
Camp Aquila Pure Maple Syrup, LLC
Stordahl Farm
Ter-Lee Gardens
Carter's Red Wagon Farm
Important Concepts

• **Short, informative URLs**
  – Specific to each partner
  – Compare:  
    http://www.foodroutes.org/localfood/listing.jsp?id=4099  
    to  
    http://www.localfoods.umn.edu/klawittercsa

• **Meta tags – information about information**

• **Results quickly picked up in Google**
  – Many results at top of search page
  – Visitors sent directly to partner’s page
How We Did It: Lessons Learned

Building, growing, and maintaining a reliable database system
Early Development

• Initial data - class project
  – Brent Sorenson – “Ag Business Marketing”
  – Spring 2003
• Phone survey
• Identified 81 producers, distributors, and resources in Crookston and the surrounding area

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Building the System

• First a minimal web database system was created from the data

• The site was further developed through regular meetings with the Local foods group
  – Site became much more user friendly - meeting with actual users is critical!
  – Many important features (such as the short URLs) were implemented based on suggestions from the meetings
Growing the System

• On-campus training sessions
  – Provided further feedback

• Off-campus training
  – Student intern Joren Kandel met with several producers at their locations
  – Also took lots of pictures
  – Offered on-site training in how to update information

• Online training
  – Online manual
  – People can join online

• Now there are 100+ partners in the database
Maintaining the System

• Each partner can maintain their own information
  – Updates are tracked
  – Future addition: friendly reminder emails when a site hasn’t been updated recently

• Administrative tools
  – Site-wide statistics
  – Can update information if needed
  – Final say in adding/removing of partners
What’s Next:

Future Development
Future Work

• Identify organizations such as schools that will make a commitment to using local foods on a regular basis, e.g. Morris.

• Use the local-foods system to overcome the challenges of providing a reliable inventory to local foods enthusiast.

• Extend (scale) the system to a large network of regions in MN & ND. DB/web system is scalable but we require partners in this mission.
Future Work

• Multiple modalities in Local Foods
  • Mode 1: small local foods to consumers, e.g. tomatoes, bison, strawberries)
  • Mode 2: collate local foods to small local industry/packaging (Gluten-free pasta) - centralized management vs. kitchen incubator
  • Mode 3: ensure a reliable inventory to selected industrial sites (schools) - healthful eating, obesity...
  • Example: Working with Crookston, Mahnomen (public), Fertile-Beltrami, Circle of Life (tribal)
Conclusion

And Summary
Conclusions

• A Local Foods network has been established and supported by the NW-RDSP, UMN-Extension Service, UMC, 15-18 member group, 105 members (db).

• We have developed a custom, secure, and scalable web-based inventory system designed to connect growers/producers to consumer in the Red River Basin (MN/ND).
Thank you for your attention and interest.

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The End