

# Central Minnesota's Food Distribution Network — From Little Falls to Pine River

March 20, 2014 by [Deanna Olson](#)

Minnesota Connected

If you have ever traveled to the Brainerd Lakes Area, you more than likely have experienced the delectable cuisine served by [Prairie Bay Restaurant](#), checked out their big red food truck, or have taken your kids out to the St. Mathias Farm Corn Maze (in the fall). Each of these enjoyable opportunities share a common goal — connecting local community growers and producers to consumers. This has been made possible through the gallant efforts of [St. Mathias Farm](#) (Bob and Arlene Jones) and SPROUT MN.

SPROUT MN is a regional “food hub” for growers to connect with consumers seamlessly. It manages the collection, marketing, and distribution of locally farmed food products by fulfilling local Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) memberships, providing high quality produce for restaurants (Farm-to-Institution), and coordinating multiple district Farm-to-School food opportunity programs. The hub strengthens the relationship between producers and consumers and the local economy as a whole. Additionally, the “food hub” is establishing a local food security network.

## ***A Background on Food Security — What does it mean to be food secure?***



Our country is not only faced with the **issue of quality** in our food system, but we are also faced with matters of **food insecurity**. More than one in five American children go to bed hungry. While you typically imagine poverty stricken foreign villages when thinking of childhood hunger, it is much more obscure. The child in your classroom, your co-worker's son or daughter, or your own child's friend from school all may have or may be experiencing a form of hunger (food insecurity) in their homes. The existence of childhood hunger in the United States rests solely upon the complex relationship of individual and community resources (and their appropriate access). If an individual is already experiencing a deficiency in personal resources, they will undoubtedly rely on community resources in order to meet their needs (food, transportation, housing, etc.). The key element in being food secure is accessibility. This requires community and personal resources to complement each other. In order to achieve a community of food secure consumers, there must be an appropriate selection of available foods, a suitable transportation system or logistically placed food market places, and affordable food products. A community who focuses their attention to such initiatives will be a community with more food secure individuals and families.

### ***Growers are Growing***





The area's highway infrastructure to the planned processing facilities will also contribute directly to closing accessibility gaps by tightening the timeframe between harvest and distribution to schools, hospitals and other healthcare facilities where nutritionally-vacant persons reside. In order to address food insecure populations, the food hub coordinates with local extension educators and stake-holders to provide locally sourced food commodities (from local growers) to senior centers, mental health facilities, and hospice care facilities in order to ensure all citizens have access to high quality, locally sourced goods.

### ***Affordable and Secure***

The best way to obtain affordable, high-quality foods is to connect directly with a local grower/farmer. The largest obstacle to this direct connection is accessibility (most typically). Because a food distribution network or food hub almost eliminates the logistical issues of accessibility, it expands consumers ability to obtain healthy and affordable food products.



Growers are committed to serving their larger community through sustainable growing efforts. As a result, buyers also become committed to their growers who plan for their demand. This (successful) complimentary relationship is a win-win for all growers, consumers, and communities involved. Growers are connected to a larger network of buyers they may not have been able to connect to through their own networking efforts.

Consumers gain access to the most nutritious, sustainably produced commodities. In return, communities gain economic vitality, reduced environmental risk (locally and sustainably grown

products with low input), and progression to achieving food security among individuals and families.

**SPROUT MN** and St. Mathias Farm continue to work with low income and food insecure communities by coordinating Farm-to-School, working with the Prairie Bay food truck to demonstrate food preparation of locally grown commodities, and working with Hunger Free MN to provide access to food insecure households through expanded CSA's and farmer's markets. Remember to support local community growers and producers, especially when you visit the Brainerd Lakes (Little Falls or Pine River) Area.

Photos via: Google

© COPYRIGHT 2013 MINNESOTA CONNECTED

