

New Food Hub and growers' marketplace is sprouting in former Crestliner building

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The space in the Little Falls Manufacturing Development Center (former Crestliner complex) that will be leased by the Food Hub is large enough to accommodate an indoor Growers and Makers Market, a growers' food processing facility and a demonstration kitchen.

Progress by a new cooperative business called the Food Hub looms large. A tour of the building being leased in the Little Falls Manufacturing Development Center (former Crestliner complex), showed the large spaces to be filled by an indoor Growers and Makers Market, a growers' food processing facility, for wholesale to institutions and a demonstration kitchen.

"I'm delighted that the build-out of the Food Hub has begun," Community Development Director Carol Anderson said. "The space has been cleaned and a local general contractor has been engaged. They are hoping to have the hub open in three or four months, as well as the indoor market this summer."

The Food Hub development is being spearheaded by Sprout MN.

"Sprout's mission is to promote the health, economy and self-reliance of Central Minnesota by facilitating the availability of fresh, locally produced food in the region," Sprout educator and organizer Arlene Jones said.

Jones can foresee 500 visitors from other communities in the space on a Saturday, visiting 30 booths of food and artworks, produced locally, then visiting local restaurants, buying gas and much more.

The former boat manufacturing building that the Food Hub will share with stainless steel businesses was toured by a group of 52 people, while another 32 sat in a food processing

instruction workshop on the other end of the large open area. Their instructor's voice was not audible to the tour group due to the spaciousness of the Food Hub's confines.

The class was conducted by Lisa Baker, affiliated with Sprout MN, who said, "We spend a lot of time educating our growers about how to safely handle and process their produce."

The classes will continue as more growers ask to use the processing facility.

"Farmers can sell their produce to the Hub," Anderson said. "The Hub then sells it to schools, hospitals and other interests."

The growers will be able to be part of a much more widely marketed, regional food hub.

"Growers can use the commercial kitchen to further process their food and add value to the product, and to produce frozen, dried, canned and baked food," she said.

Morrison County Community Development has been working with Sprout MN to develop the food processing facility and indoor Sprout Marketplace in Little Falls, as part of a regional food hub. Sprout MN is an existing food hub and distribution network already including more than 40 growers.

"Morrison County has always been a place where agriculture is an important part of our economy," Anderson said. "This food hub will allow our smaller farmers a bigger market for their produce.

"I am hoping that now other food companies will look to Morrison County to locate because of the food hub," she said.

"Institutions wishing to procure local and source identified foods often face barriers in accessing local farmers and assurances regarding food safety and liability issues. Regional food hubs are an effective food service management tool to overcome those barriers," the Sprout mission statement says.

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