



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA | EXTENSION

CENTER FOR FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

Healthy Food, Safe Food: Summary of Key Informant Interviews

AUGUST 2015



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BACKGROUND

The Healthy Food, Safe Food (HFSF) Project is a partnership between University of Minnesota Extension Center for Family Development and Minnesota Department of Health's (MDH's) Office of Statewide Health Improvement Initiatives (OSHII). HFSF's goal was to conduct a formative evaluation to aid in developing a plan of action to address regulatory barriers to improve access to healthy foods, while simultaneously maintaining and enhancing food safety. Between July 2015 and July 2016, the HFSF project team conducted a listening session, key informant interviews, and focus groups, followed by analysis and planning meetings.

Summaries of the listening session, key informant interviews, and focus groups, as well as the health equity review, are available here: <http://z.umn.edu/hfsf>. This report summarizes what was learned through the key informant interviews.

These interviews were the first part of an information-gathering process. They formed the foundation for the second stage — focus groups with front-line staff in local public health, including SHIP staff, Tribal staff and Extension staff; farm to table growers, producers, and food businesses; and food regulators. The key informant interviews were an opportunity to cast our net widely to identify a range of ideas, problems, and concerns. By contrast, the focus group process allowed for a narrower, more focused discussion of topics of greatest concern or potential.

Methods

Our team of interviewers generated a list of people with diverse knowledge and experience with food access, food safety, and regulatory infrastructure. Team members conducted recorded interviews during July and August 2015, and then prepared summaries of each interview. We gathered on August 19, 2015 for a group analysis process, led by Richard Krueger. We summarized the findings in this report.

Interview Team

- Katie Myhre, Intern, University of Minnesota Extension, Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships
- Karen Lanthier, Assistant Program Director, University of Minnesota Extension, Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships
- Amanda Corbett, Evaluator, University of Minnesota Extension Health and Nutrition Programs
- Deb Botzek-Linn, Extension Educator, University of Minnesota Extension Food Safety Program
- Mary Anne Casey, Consultant, Krueger and Associates, LLC
- Mary Ann Van Cura, Independent Consultant
- Richard Krueger, Consultant, Krueger and Associates, LLC
- Tim Jenkins, Project Leader, Food Access Coordinator, Minnesota Department of Health

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

We identified several themes in interviewees' responses about what hinders Minnesotans from choosing healthy, safe foods, including:

- Policy, systems, and environmental issues such as unlivable wages, structural racism, and farm subsidies.
- Rules and regulations that favor safe food over healthy food.
- Concerns about liability, which cause organizations to choose safe foods over healthy foods.

- A licensing and certification system that is confusing and, in some cases, emphasizes enforcement over helping.
- Lack of education, information, and/or skills about how to do things in a better way.
- Safe foods are quick, cheap, and easy to access. Healthy foods are less so.

We also heard that there are barriers to changing policies, systems, and environments, including these thoughts:

- Time and collaboration required to eliminate barriers.
- Questions about the roles of SHIP and Extension staff and what kind of work is rewarded.
- Funding and support requirements.
- Minnesota's local control model in the statutory and regulatory environment, which is valued, but also makes changing rules, regulations, and policies difficult.

These barriers, which we find overwhelming, are described in more detail later in this report.

On the plus side, we heard things that could be harnessed to move the effort forward, including:

- People are passionate about helping more people eat healthier foods.
- People care deeply about advancing health equity.
- Extension, MDH, and local public health staff (including SHIP staff) across Minnesota have expertise in healthy, safe foods and in building relationships to serve their clients and communities.
- Interviewees generated innovative and insightful ideas about what might be done to help make the healthy choice the easy choice, especially for people who face the greatest barriers to accessing healthy food.
- Interviewees believe that food safety and food safety education are high priorities.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FOCUS GROUPS

Based on these key informant interviews, we identified several ways the focus groups could be structured.

- **Build on the expertise Extension and MDH can contribute.** University of Minnesota Extension, including SNAP-Ed staff, and the Minnesota Department of Health, including SHIP staff, have strong traditions and expertise working with communities on nutrition and food safety. Therefore, ask staff to identify how conducting policy, systems, and environmental projects is similar to and different from what they currently do. How does changing policy, systems, and environments build on what they currently do? What are next steps they could take? Where have local and SHIP public health staff and Extension staff been successful in changing policy, systems, and environments in the past in Minnesota and around the country? What lessons have been learned from these past experiences?
- **Generate ideas that could be implemented at the local, regional, and state levels and strategies for implementing them.** Making healthy, safe food the easy choice is complex. It is difficult to know where to focus attention for maximum benefit. Focus group participants could offer advice on the pros and cons of where to begin, who should be involved, and how to get buy-in from key partners. In these focus groups, we place attention on how professionals within and across organizations might work together and how they might gain public support and enthusiastic volunteer efforts.

- **Pilot test and prioritize potential ideas, based on potential benefit and doability.** Present focus group participants with an array of ideas to change policy, system, and environments, which could include strategies for engaging the community, creating public awareness, and influencing policy decisions. Ask participants to weigh the pros and cons, and offer opinions on which ideas offer the greatest benefit and which ideas are most likely to succeed (doability).
- **After prioritizing potential projects, ask what they need to be successful.** The first step is to identify projects or efforts that have the potential for success. The second step is to identify the specific supports needed for that success.
- **Present five top problems generated by the key informant interviews and ask how to address them.** For example, what might be done to make it easier for childcare facilities to provide healthy, safe foods? What might be done to get healthier, safe foods into food shelves? What might be done to redistribute healthy, safe foods that would otherwise go to waste? What might be done to change the Minnesota food code?
- **Look for ideas with energy.** In all the focus groups, we should pay attention to enthusiasm and energy. Ideas with lukewarm support are less likely to be successful. People are more likely to contribute their personal energy and support to ideas that capture their interest and generate excitement. These ideas are more likely to be successful.

FINDINGS: HINDRANCES AND HELPS

This report starts with comments that cut across the food system. Here are recurring themes from interviewees' comments about food safety issues that **hinder** Minnesotans from making healthy food choices.

What Hinders Healthy and Safe Food Choices — Crosscutting Themes

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
Health versus safety	There is an imbalance between health and safety. Safety is winning. For example, according to the Minnesota Food Code, childcare facilities without a three-compartment sink and other equipment to insure food safety can only feed children pre-packaged foods, like crackers and juice.
Liability	Concerns about liability and risk are leading organizations to choose actions perceived to be safer, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only buying foods from big food suppliers. • Discarding still edible foods from grocery stores. • Throwing out leftovers rather than redistributing. • Not accepting donations from gardeners. • Not composting.
Inconsistent rules, regulations, and policies across boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minnesota has a local control model in the statutory and regulatory environment. As a result, cities and counties can enact more stringent ordinances than are in the Minnesota Food Code, even though the state has ultimate authority for food protection. This situation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Enables communities to address local issues and meet local needs, but makes regulatory continuity difficult. For example, local zoning and licensing ordinances override the state's cottage food law. ○ Means local, county, and state inspectors are saying different things. ○ Means schools, farmers, childcare providers, and businesses are given different instructions across city and county lines. ○ Creates confusion for regulated parties. As a result: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Agency employees and the people they are trying to serve distrust each other. ▪ Regulated parties find it difficult to navigate the system. • Creates confusion about implementing regional and statewide nutrition strategies.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates a high learning curve for everyone involved. • Creates inefficiencies resulting in added costs and time. • Sometimes several different units of government, each of which has different aims, license a regulated party. For example, in certain areas, childcare facilities are licensed by the city as a food establishment and by the county as a childcare facility. This creates confusion. • Inconsistent interpretations of rules among officials within agencies, between agencies, and at different levels — local, state, and federal.
<p>Difficulty writing and changing rules, regulations, and policies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is difficult to balance general versus specific language in law. • It is difficult to amend or modify state-level laws and policies when issues arise during implementation. The bureaucracy of the state feedback loop and the time it takes to secure approval for a change are huge obstacles.
<p>Issues with inspections</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear. There is an unequal power relationship between inspectors and those being inspected. This creates fear and disempowerment for small retailers, childcare providers, etc. • Unhelpful inspectors. Some inspectors in the food world make it hard to see what actually needs to be done and aren't willing to work with small vendors and retailers. • Enforcement. Are regulations enforced correctly and uniformly? Different inspectors answer the same question differently. • Expenses (cost, time, paperwork, hassle) limit people from getting certified or licensed or from upgrading facilities, licenses or certifications. In addition, having to deal with multiple authorities at different levels of government and different agencies multiplies expenses. • A “one-size-fits-all” regulatory structure creates barriers for small businesses, including producers, childcare providers, and retailers. • There is a lack of inspectors with cultural knowledge, experience with and understanding of “non-dominant” cultures, and fluency in languages other than English. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The inspection process over-emphasizes enforcement and does not take time to understand that different cultural communities may not understand the law. ○ Inspectors emphasize science, while some cultures emphasize relationships and tradition. ○ There is a lack of culturally appropriate materials in multiple languages (related to licensing).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Licensing staff can't explain things in cultural terminology that makes sense.
Specialization, silos	High degrees of specialization and silos (within and among agencies) limit communication and present barriers to action.
Action versus process	Some people favor action and outcomes over collaboration and community-based processes, while others want a less top-down approach. Quick action and collaborative processes often don't go together.
Relationships and continuity	Things get done because of relationships. Funding cuts, short grant cycles, and leadership changes interrupt relationships and continuity.

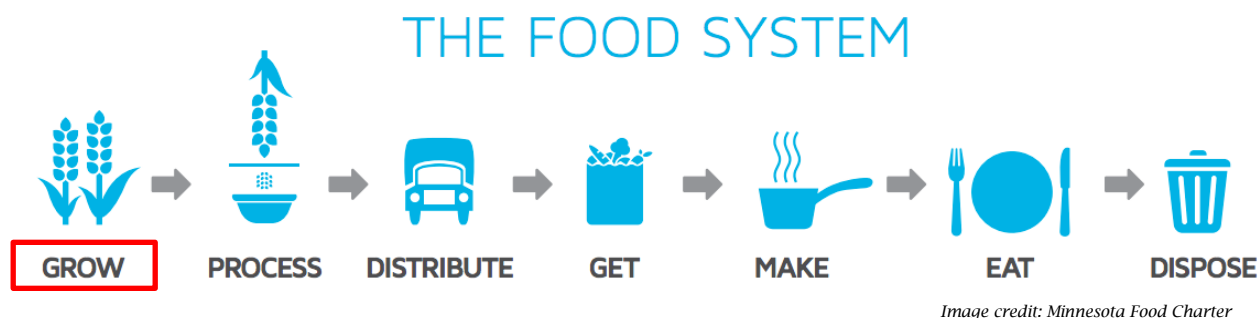
What Might Help Healthy and Safe Food Choices — Crosscutting Themes

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
Safe foods versus healthy foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find a balance between supporting safe foods and healthy foods. According to one key informant, “Nobody wants to say they are against food safety, but the trade-off between food safety and food access is torn between whether you are focused on chronic disease [e.g., diabetes, heart disease] or acute disease [e.g., food poisoning].” • Safe foods are quick to gain regulatory approval, easy to prepare, inexpensive, and accessible. Make healthy foods quicker, easier, cheaper, and more accessible.
Certification, licensure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn from inspectors who are able to ensure food safety in a manner that is valued by the regulated parties and the community. • Change the role of inspector from enforcer to technical assistant. Promote a cultural and mental-model shift from regulation and compliance to support for community health. • Use culturally appropriate strategies, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hire culturally sensitive inspectors and licensing officials to work with tribes, if invited. ○ Respect traditions. ○ Take time to build relationships. ○ Take time to learn cultural groups' perceptions of food, nutrition, and food safety. ○ Create materials in multiple languages. • Provide training for inspectors.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Include soft skills, not just how to enforce regulations. ○ Provide opportunities for local sanitarians to meet, share ideas, and receive standardized state training. • Coordinate inspections by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Coordinating among agencies (e.g., USDA, FDA, local food) to minimize inefficiencies and extra costs. ○ Defining licensure to cover more than one area, so multiple inspectors don't inspect different parts of a business.
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capitalize on the expertise that already exists in Extension and public health. These two groups are good at ensuring food safety and building relationships. Bring their expertise into the healthy food policy arena. • Mentor, recruit, and hire educators and specialists interested and experienced in policy. • Create consistent messages to share across local, county, regional lines. This requires clarifying regulations, dispelling misperceptions about food safety, and answering questions such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How dangerous is it to use local foods in schools, childcare facilities, food shelves, and the like? ○ What is the liability of using local foods? ○ Do organizations need liability insurance to purchase local foods? ○ Do producers need liability insurance? • Use culturally appropriate education strategies, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Respect for traditions. ○ Taking time to build relationships. ○ Taking time to learn cultural groups' perceptions of food, nutrition, and food safety. ○ Support and maintain the healthy eating habits of immigrant populations. ○ Create materials in multiple languages. • Use more technology for outreach, such as social media and teleconferencing, especially for remote locations.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a mechanism to funnel insights from front-line providers to decision makers.
Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise the Minnesota Food Code rules and regulations. “[The code] has become an embarrassment,” said one key informant. Revisions should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reflect the FDA Model Food Code. ○ Amalgamate rules. ○ Create uniform regulations. Variation makes it difficult to do training and learn what has worked somewhere else. ○ Collaborate with Blue Cross Blue Shield, Minnesota Farmers Market Association, Minnesota Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, and other interested groups on how to create and implement policy. • Help American Indian tribes that want to adopt a food code.
Relationships	<p>Things get done because of relationships. This takes time, particularly when working with tribal communities.</p>
Increase coordination among agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Break down silos. • Involve both public health and environmental health staff in comprehensive planning. • Work with U of M School of Public Health. • It would be good if all agencies could support healthy children together. Childcare facilities are licensed by the city as a food establishment and by the county as a childcare facility. The two agencies coordinate little now. Another example is that counties adhere to Minnesota Department of Human Services requirements, which do not require training in physical activity and nutrition.
Tribal Food Safety	<p>Due to a long history of trauma and limited access to safe, nutritious food, American Indians suffer with obesity, type 2 diabetes, and other nutrition-related health issues at much higher rates than other population groups. Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy, safe, and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. Therefore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support tribal food sovereignty, as requested, such as the development a comprehensive a model food and agriculture code to be customized and adopted by tribal nations. • Assess food regulations for areas that hinder or limit tribal food sovereignty.

This report continues with interview comments that are specific to different parts of the food system. We used this food system diagram from the Minnesota Food Charter as a framework for categorizing what we heard during key informant interviews.



What Hinders Growing Healthy, Safe Food

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
Certification, licensure	Good Agricultural Practices and organic certification: The costs of certification (out-of-pocket, time, paperwork, etc.) are a burden and limit the number of producers willing to go through the process.
Liability	Some communities are not allowing community gardens because they are concerned about liability.
Zoning, local ordinances	Zoning and local ordinances can limit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community gardens. • Rooftop gardens. • Poultry, egg, and meat production.

What Might Help Growing Healthy, Safe Foods

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
Certification, licensure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a tiered system of organic certification to make it easier for small producers to be certified. Some growers don't qualify as organic but do use fewer chemicals. • Make state standards for organic certification more straightforward, transparent, and easy to understand. • Address cooperative licensing requirements. Small farmers could benefit by forming a cooperative, but licensing requirements are a barrier.
Educate	Teach producers how to meet regulations and grow healthy, safe foods more effectively.
Liability	Support liability insurance for community gardens.

THE FOOD SYSTEM



What Hinders Processing Healthy, Safe Foods

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
Certification, regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certification and licensure requirements limit the number of USDA certified butchers in rural Minnesota. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The cost of equipment keeps some butchers from becoming certified. ○ Federal regulations around custom exempt processing gets in the way of farmers selling healthy meat products. ○ There are not enough inspectors to start a new meat processing facility in northwestern Minnesota. • It is difficult to meet minimum requirements to become a licensed vendor. • Regulations limit fruit and vegetable producers' ability to work together with aggregation and processing facilities. • The Minnesota "Pickle Bill" is too strict in what it allows and won't allow for sale.
Lack of infrastructure, resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of access to affordable commercial kitchens in rural areas is a barrier to small producers. • There is no place in southern Minnesota for farmers to aggregate their crops and share storage. • There is no USDA inspected or "Equal To" plant in northwestern Minnesota for processing red meat for sale at farmers markets.

What Might Help Processing Healthy, Safe Foods

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
Certification, licensure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make it easier for butchers to become USDA certified. Perhaps create a tiered system. Decrease costs for equipment. • Make it easier for producers to share aggregation and processing facilities.
Inspections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a new system where employees are trained to inspect the meat plant and report to the inspectors, so inspections don't need to take place on site. • Reform inspector hours and increase the time inspectors actually spend with animals in slaughterhouse.
Regulations	Reform food labeling. One key informant said, "You should be able to read a label and know exactly what is in your product. The government allows producers to hide additives from the label — for example, yellow dye in dairy products."
Support processing	Provide resources to schools and food services to assist with processing and preparing healthy foods.
Education	Train and support small- to medium-sized farms to meet food safety guidelines, including washing hands and produce.

THE FOOD SYSTEM



What Hinders Distribution of Healthy, Safe Foods

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
Liability concerns, misperceptions	<p>There is a misperception across the state that food from local farmers and farmers markets is not an approved food source.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some food distributors are telling hospitals and schools there is liability associated with buying from local producers. Inspectors are telling organizations that they can't or shouldn't buy from local farms. They should buy from distributors who sell more processed products.
Food distributor requirements	Distributors require minimum orders. Small grocery stores and convenience stores can't meet minimums for healthy foods, so distributors won't deliver healthy foods there.
Logistical challenges	It is difficult to deliver safe, perishable foods. Mobile food shelves are more conducive to sharing processed foods rather than whole, fresh, healthy foods.

What Might Help Distribution of Healthy, Safe Foods

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educate inspectors, hospitals, schools, and retailers about approved sources. Address concerns about liability.
Support	Support the healthy food financing initiatives that provide tax breaks to small groceries and convenience stores to provide healthier food options.



What Hinders Getting Healthy, Safe Foods

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
Liability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some hospitals and schools create policies against buying local foods due to concerns about liability. Locally grown foods may not be approved sources so schools buy commercially processed foods instead. There is a belief that commercially processed foods are safer than local foods.
Regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minnesota Department of Agriculture tells Twin Cities Mobile Markets (TCMM) that they can only offer pre-packaged or wholesale foods. TCMM interprets this as they can buy from the Hmong American Farmers Association, but can't buy from local producers. There is confusion about what is permissible for farm to school practices based on rules and regulations for the schools, as well as for farms. People are confused: Can schools, food shelves, and TCMM accept donations of locally grown foods from corporate gardens, or Future Farmers of America gardens, producers, or gardeners?
Contracting with food service management companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is much easier to get commercially processed foods for school lunches because they are recognized as an approved source. Schools may not have the contractual right to select local food vendors. Schools may not be able to influence what commercial vendors provide.

Lack of healthy foods at convenience stores	Many rural kids are eating breakfast, lunch, and afternoon snacks at convenience stores, loading up on junk foods.
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What Might Help Getting Healthy, Safe Foods

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require hospitals and schools to submit local food purchasing plans to credentialing agencies. • Have the state do preferential purchasing with local producers. • Change food safety requirements (hand washing, etc.) at farmers markets to provide education to low-income children and adults to taste new and healthy foods.
Research	<p>What can we learn from Woodbury County, Iowa, about preferential purchasing? That county has been successful; see the policy details: http://bit.ly/2j6IKdQ</p>
Education, outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with convenience stores to add healthy options like fresh fruits and vegetables. • Work with schools to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Remove unhealthy options from vending machines. ○ Think creatively about serving healthy, safe foods. ○ Figure out how to preserve foods they receive. They may have to vacuum pack, but may not have the equipment, storage facilities, training, or license to do so. • Provide childcare providers and early learning programs with education on the Healthy Food, Safe Food project. • Educate Extension and public health staff, and, in turn, the audiences they work with, about certified organic foods.
Support, funding	<p>Provide incentives to childcare providers and early learning programs to use healthy, safe foods.</p>



What Hinders Making Healthy, Safe Foods

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
Food safety regulations	<p>Licensed food service establishments — NSF, UL Sanitation, and ETL Sanitation-certified equipment is more expensive. Is it always needed?</p> <p>Childcare facilities — They must offer prepackaged foods, like crackers and juice, or get more expensive license and equipment.</p> <p>Food shelves — Must have hand-washing station to offer food samples.</p> <p>Farmers markets — Must have hand-washing stations to offer food samples.</p> <p>Churches and other houses of worship — Many have appropriate equipment but aren't licensed to offer food demonstrations, teach food skills, or cook meals for people who need better access to healthy food.</p> <p>Schools — Several issues affect schools, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A refrigerated salad bar is expensive, but less expensive models increase food waste. • Federal regulations require two inspections of the school lunch program each school year, which is more than the current requirement for restaurants, and Minnesota has excellent school food service with high standards for food safety. This requirement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Results in additional paperwork for school personnel, taking time from other more positive tasks. ○ Takes inspectors' time away from inspecting restaurants.

Low wages, no benefits	A top food-safety concern centers on low-wage employees with no benefits working when they're ill because they need the money and don't have paid sick time.
Technical support, funding	Costs for business startups are high for such aspects as facilities, equipment, and testing recipes. Are technical assistance and funding available?
Specialization, silos	Some public health practitioners don't know environmental health rules. One key informant said, "As a public health practitioner, I was totally unaware about licensing and food safety regulations. I went to a childcare center to promote serving fresh fruits and vegetables. The participants said, 'We can't do that, the inspector won't allow it. We don't have the required license or equipment.' I had to make amends for the training."

What Might Help Making Healthy, Safe Foods

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
Regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change food code to make it easier for childcare providers, and other small-scale providers, to serve fresh fruits and vegetables. As part of this, develop and approve a low-cost method for washing produce and sanitizing equipment. Also find a low-cost alternative to the expensive three-compartment sink and the separate prep table. Change policy that requires commercial equipment for food shelves and farmers markets to do food tasting. <p>Give schools and communities in low-income and rural areas more time to implement food safety changes. They don't have the resources or infrastructure to make changes quickly.</p>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educate childcare providers about healthy, safe foods. For example, they should not be giving kids juice — even though it is pre-packaged and approved. Teach the public food safety and preparation skills. People no longer have these skills. If people don't know what to do with produce or how to cook healthy food, it will go to waste. People don't know basic food safety. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educate parents in quick, healthy, safe, cost-effective food selection and preparation. Teach students cooking and preparation skills. Teach food preservation to SNAP participants when produce is readily available. Connect at the right time of year. Teach food professionals the science and "why" behind policies and regulations. Communicate the rationale behind policies.

THE FOOD SYSTEM



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide food safety training in multiple languages. • Educate the public about how to start a food business. Provide technical assistance, including information related to food licenses. • Train and empower onsite school food managers.
Funding	K-12 education funding needs to support the extra time, training, and resources needed to use local, fresh foods in food service.
Zoning	Change zoning to encourage innovative business model aimed at increasing access to healthy, safe, local foods. Support communities in assessing and modifying zoning ordinances to allow cottage food businesses, and increase access to land for small businesses and growers.

What Hinders Eating More Healthy, Safe Foods

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
Regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence supports that helping children develop healthy eating habits ultimately will have the greatest impact on public health, but regulatory barriers are preventing education to do so. For example, some childcare

	<p>providers have a license that allows them only to offer a snack that is prepackaged, which tends to be crackers, cookies, and juice. There are not healthy snacks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulations for peer breastfeeding programs are unclear. • There is confusion and inconsistency between county and state agencies regarding breastfeeding and breast milk. Breast milk is considered a food, not a bodily fluid. This needs to be communicated statewide, especially among child care providers so that usage and handling practices reflect the fact that breast milk is a food.
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What Might Help Eating More Healthy, Safe Foods

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breast milk rules need statewide clarification. (It is food, not a bodily fluid.) • Address barriers to serving fresh fruit and vegetables in childcare facilities.
Education	Educate children in childcare facilities. Childhood is a good time to establish healthy eating, food skills, and food safety habits, such as hand-washing behaviors.
Support	Support state taxation of soda pop.
Vending machines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vending machines typically contain unhealthy but safe foods. These methods were suggested for addressing this problem: • Get rid of vending machines, particularly in schools. • Keep vending machines, but include healthy foods in the selections. • Make healthy foods in vending machines less expensive.

THE FOOD SYSTEM



What Hinders Using Healthy, Safe Foods that Otherwise Would Be Disposed

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
Liability concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concern about liability hinders people from mobilizing to redistribute foods. For example, Mankato recovers food from restaurants and redistributes to the Salvation Army and other charities. Other communities have expressed interest but don't start because of concerns about liability. Some grocery stores throw away foods rather than redistributing them. In addition, some stores guard their dumpsters to prevent passersby from taking food to avoid liability. Some schools throw away foods but wonder if the Good Samaritan law would protect them against liability if they donated it.
Regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Minnesota Food Code encourages waste. For example, schools have to throw out unpeeled oranges that students take but don't eat. It is disturbing to Native people to throw away leftovers, but some food safety practices suggest throwing food away. In addition, the Elder Nutrition Program prohibits taking home leftovers, and the food is thrown away.
Ordinances	Some communities have ordinances against composting, which fosters waste.

What Might Help Using Healthy, Safe Foods that Otherwise Would Be Disposed

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
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Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support liability insurance for food recovery and redistribution efforts. • Increase incentives for grocery stores to donate healthy foods that would otherwise be thrown away to food shelves.
Rules, regulations, policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise regulations around food waste to respect Native core cultural values. For tribes, throwing away food because of concerns about food safety seems like wasting food and goes against a cultural value. Regulations need to be as noninvasive as possible for community gatherings and powwows. • Clarify the regulations and liability for retailers to redistribute foods. • Require grocery stores to redistribute food that they are throwing away but is still safe. • Require large institutions to compost pre- and post-consumer food waste.
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide technical assistance to groups trying to repurpose foods to ensure food safety. • Provide education about liability related to food redistribution, including information about what and who the Good Samaritan law covers. • Offer education to American Indian tribes; include information about the following issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Food is sacred to tribes, and wasting food goes against their values. Therefore, it's important to clarify regulations around food waste. ○ Provide training for tribes on food handling and food safety. ○ Provide training to local, state, and Extension staff about the cultural aspects of tribal foods, covering areas such as traditions, the spiritual nature of food, and food as medicine. • Provide education about composting and address concerns about the transmission of foodborne illness that limits composting.
Repurpose, redistribute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help people access freezer space to avoid wasting foods. Shared freezers may be an option through churches, assisted living sites, and the like. • Promote consumption (and avoid waste) of foods that are near or past expiration dates by selling them at reduced cost in stores or giving them away in schools.

FINDINGS: MOVING FORWARD

We heard from interviewees that there are challenges to working on issues related to healthy, safe food. We also heard about how to move this work forward.

What Makes it Hard to Work on HFSF Issues?

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
Complexity and multiple systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving access to healthy, safe foods involves addressing many parts of complex, societal systems, including wealth distribution, benefit systems, structural racism, federal food policies, housing, and cultural issues, such as what people value and how they use their time. The issues are complex. Systems are complex. Policies are complex. Therefore, processes used to create or change policies are complex.
Philosophical differences	The public consists of many segments, each of which has different views on the role of government, self-sufficiency, rules and regulations, and helping others. What’s more, the “public” encompasses diverse world views, communities, food traditions, cuisines, and definitions of healthy, safe foods. Thus, it’s challenging for public health and Extension staff, who are charged with serving the public, to balance everyone’s viewpoints.
Lack of funding and support	Funding and support for HFSF work is inadequate and inconsistent.
Doubt about top level support	Those interviewed expressed doubt that high-level MDH and U of M administrators support employees working on food policy. One key informant said, “They want someone else to do it.”
Role definition	Some employees believe that it is not their role to influence ordinances or policies. They believe their role is to provide education and be neutral on policy. They would like training and communication to better understand differences between education and advocacy.
Rewards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extension rewards working on programs, not policies. Policy change is more complex, time consuming, and hard to document. There are not clear ties between the amount of effort required and outcomes; it is hard to justify the work.
Not knowing what issues to tackle	With so many complex systems involved, it is difficult for employees to know where to start. What are the main things they could do that would make a difference?
Silos	Professionals are isolated in their silos and unsure of how to make changes in other systems.
Community organizing	Organizing community members, identifying key players, and getting them to work together is complex and difficult work.

What Role Can Public Health and Extension Play in Changing Policies, Systems, and Environments?

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
Identify:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs, issues, or problems — stay current with the pulse of the community Opportunities Roadblocks Potential partnerships What other communities have done that we can learn from
Educate:	People about the issue and what can be done; deliver information and research
Advocate for:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People who can't or don't advocate for themselves Policies, based on individual practices, studies, conversations Health equity Access to fruits and vegetables Less paperwork More action
Organize, facilitate by:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obtaining buy-in and involvement from agencies and audiences Inviting people to the table Making sure the process stays on target Making sure the group isn't making assumptions Strategically collaborating between MDH and Extension

What Kind of Training, Tools, or Support Do Extension and Public Health Staff Need?

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the food safety rules, regulations, and policies issues? Tap into the Public Health Law Center at the Mitchell Hamline School of Law in St. Paul. What could we work on that would make a difference? How could we change policy? Tap into Change Lab Solutions in Oakland, CA.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food safety liability • Transitioning from working with individuals to PSE • Facilitation and group skills • How could people without authority lead? See Kansas Leadership Center for a model, Ohio State University Leadership Center, and Oregon Food Bank for ideas. • Engaging the community in policy issues • List of state and local organizations working on HFSF issues • Best practices
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term funding • Time to do the work • Support for collaboration between public health agencies and Extension • Cross-disciplinary positions, like inspectors who specialize in both healthy and safe foods • MDH collaboration between health improvement and food safety • A SWAT team that could go from community to community to implement the Minnesota Food Charter one community at a time by educating and implementing ideas and then moving to the next community.
Strategy	Set top priorities. Develop a plan, a process, and a logic model. Don't try to do too much. Dedicate time and resources to top priorities. Commit to continuity.

What Advice Do you Have as we Conduct Focus Groups on this Issue?

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
Ask:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is their (focus group members') perspective on this? Try to understand where people are starting from. • What do you see as some of the challenges and problems? • What do you want to change? Also ask: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What policies would you like to see changed to address those challenges or problems? ○ Where are short-term changes that can happen?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What are the long-term efforts to focus on? ○ What opportunities have yet to be explored? • How might you work together in the region to address issues that surface? • What might MDH and Extension do to change the unhealthy habits of people who have grown up in the United States and are used to cheap, but unhealthy, foods? • How can we maintain and support the healthy habits of immigrant communities who come to the United States with good eating habits? • Do you think you engage with the community enough? What would be possible if a larger group of community members supported you in your work? • What can we do about rules regarding waste services and landfills? Can we subsidize composting projects?
<p>When questioning focus group members:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word questions in concrete, unambiguous language. • Give clear examples of what you are talking about. • Provide a scenario to illustrate an issue, and then ask a question about it. • Provide context so focus group members understand what you are looking for. • Use the food system diagram from the Minnesota Food Charter. • Frame the discussion according to the target audience. • Frame questions based on local, county, state, and federal perspectives. • Give focus group members ownership of the session; don't be married to an agenda. • Invite experts to flesh out information and help focus group members understand the issues they're being questioned about. • Use sticky notes to record ideas.
<p>Invite:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Producers and restaurant owners. • Participants from solid waste handlers, equipment sales, vendors such as Appert's, and Asian Foods. • Somali speaker to explain halal practices. • Health insurance providers and medical centers.

Instead:

One key informant said, "Instead of developing questions, conduct field trips where MDH and Extension staff experience what it is like to live in a trailer with 17 other migrant workers and have to go to the corner store to get lunch for the week with only \$56.00 and that has to cover bus fare too."



QUOTES TO REMEMBER

Nobody wants to say they are against food safety, but the trade-off between food safety and food access is torn between whether you are focused on chronic disease or acute disease. A conversation needs to be had around finding a balance between the trade-offs.

There are so many agencies, policies, and regulations and...Who is responsible? It is a huge tangled mess! There are people [agency staff] who know the problems, but they don't know who can help solve it. Sometimes, they [food business operators] think they are calling the right agency and they [agency staff] are like "Sorry! Not our job." That's a huge, huge, huge issue. We need to encourage, not discourage, people from doing something about a specific problem.

Somebody [a citizen, official, or advocate] will say, "Let's make our food healthier" or "Let's help clean our drinking water" and nobody will disagree... but when you get to "Let's stop producing so many plastic bottles" or "Let's help small farmers produce food," then nobody wants to talk about that.

If I come into your facility to inspect, that has a much different feel than if I come into your facility to [help] you get healthy food to the community you're serving.

I discovered an antagonistic relationship between food inspectors and childcare providers. The providers feel like the inspectors have the power to shut them down, so they are scared of the inspectors. I went to talk to the inspectors and they are the nicest people, and they say, "We are here to help them. They can ask us anything. We will help them through this. We will not shut them down." I tell the child care providers "Call the inspector. He really wants to help you." [But the childcare provider says] "No, no. Is it OK if I just tell you and you ask? Don't tell them who I am or what program I am at." I didn't understand why they felt that way, but it is because the inspector is the law and they [childcare providers] feel powerless.

It is my understanding that we are not supposed to change policies. We can get the players together, but we need to stay neutral. I can't go to the Capitol and insist on policy changes around food sampling. At least that is my interpretation of it. If that's not a correct interpretation, then that is a barrier.

It is easier to work on a program than a policy. It takes time to develop relationships; it might seem like you are wasting time. It is easier to measure what you have done and evaluate a program.

To change people's eating, we have to change hearts.

At [a Minnesota] Food Charter [convening], the Department of Ag [staff] talked about how they are putting more money into the farm to school program through ethanol plants. Super great. But the more of that [growing corn for ethanol], the less local fruits and vegetables you have grown in the region. So where are the schools getting produce for farm to school? ...We have the richest soil in the region but we are in a food desert.

We can talk about schools and gardens as much as we want but we still live in Minnesota and 70 to 80 percent of our products come from the grocery store. That is the bigger system that has to be talked about.

GLOSSARY AND RESOURCES

Cottage Food Law: The Minnesota Cottage Food Law replaces what used to be known as the Pickle Bill. The 2015 law is an exemption from food licensing for non-potentially hazardous foods, such as breads, cookies, jams and jellies, cookies, etc. made in home kitchens, as long as specific conditions are met by the cottage foods producer.

Learn more: <https://www.mda.state.mn.us/licensing/licensetypes/cottagefood.aspx>

Custom Exempt Meat Processing: A custom exempt meat processor is defined in State and Federal law as a processor that does not require continuous inspection because they only process meat for the owner of the animal. The meat or poultry cannot be sold and can only be consumed by the following: the owner of the animal, the owner's immediate family, or non-paying guests. Learn more:

<http://www.mda.state.mn.us/licensing/inspections/meatpoultryegg/custom-meat-processing.aspx>

FDA Model Food Code: The U. S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) publishes the Food Code, a model that assists food control jurisdictions at all levels of government by providing them with a scientifically sound technical and legal basis for regulating the retail and food service segment of the industry (restaurants and grocery stores and institutions such as nursing homes). Local, state, tribal, and federal regulators use the FDA Food Code as a model to develop or update their own food safety rules and to be consistent with national food regulatory policy. Learn more:

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/RetailFoodProtection/FoodCode/>

Good Agricultural Practices and Good Handling Practices: Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Good Handling Practices (GHP) are voluntary audits that verify that fruits and vegetables are produced, packed, handled, and stored as safely as possible to minimize risks of microbial food safety hazards.

Learn more: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/auditing/gap-ghp>

Good Samaritan Law: This federal law is aimed at encouraging the donation of food and grocery products to nonprofit organizations for distribution to needy individuals by providing a national standard of liability protection for both food donors and the nonprofits accepting these donations.

Learn more:

<http://www.publichealthlawcenter.org/sites/default/files/resources/Liability%20Protection%20Food%20Donation.pdf>

Minnesota "Equal To" meat processing plant: These plants are able to produce and process meat and poultry products for wholesale within Minnesota; these plants are under continuous inspection.

Learn more: <http://www.mda.state.mn.us/licensing/inspections/meatpoultryegg/state-inspection/equal2plants.aspx>

Minnesota Food Charter: A roadmap designed to guide policymakers and community leaders in providing Minnesotans with equal access to affordable, safe, and healthy food regardless of where they live. Learn more:

<http://mnfoodcharter.com/>

Minnesota Food Code: The Minnesota Food Code, Minnesota Rules Chapter 4626, contains the minimum design, installation, construction, operation and maintenance requirements for all food establishments in Minnesota. These rules are the standards with which food establishments must comply in the handling, storing, preparation and service of food to the retail food consumer.

Learn more: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/food/code/>

NSF, UL Sanitation, and ETL Sanitation-certified: These certifications are given by organizations that test food equipment for use in commercial and institutional settings.

NSF: <http://www.nsf.org/>

UL Sanitation: <http://services.ul.com/service/sanitation-certification/>

ETL Sanitation: <http://www.intertek.com/marks/etl-sanitation/>

Organizations involved in policy, systems, and environmental change:

Kansas Leadership Center: <http://kansasleadershipcenter.org/>

Ohio State University Leadership Center: <http://leadershipcenter.osu.edu/>

Oregon Food Bank: <https://www.oregonfoodbank.org/>

Change Lab Solutions: <http://www.changelabsolutions.org/>

Public Health Law Center at the Mitchell Hamline School of Law:
<http://publichealthlawcenter.org/topics/healthy-eating>

Statewide Health Improvement Partnership, Minnesota Department of Health (SHIP): SHIP is designed to improve health by reducing risk factors that contribute to chronic disease, resulting in reduced health care costs. SHIP grantees include 10 Tribal Governments; 41 Community Health Boards, covering all 87 counties plus the cities of Bloomington, Edina and Richfield; the City of Minneapolis; and the City of St. Paul, with Ramsey County. Learn more: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/oshii/ship/index.html>

University of Minnesota Extension Health and Nutrition: These Extension programs improve food literacy, physical activity, and healthy food access for Minnesotans to promote health and reduce disparities using University resources and proven educational and engagement strategies.
Learn more: <http://www.extension.umn.edu/family/health-and-nutrition/about/>

Zoning, Local Ordinances: For assistance with addressing food system change through the local planning and zoning process, the Minnesota Food Charter Food Access Planning Guide provides tools, resources, proven policy strategies, and recommended planning and zoning language for comprehensive plans, so planners and community food advocates can collaborate to design communities that promote access to healthy, safe, affordable food. Learn more: <http://mnfoodcharter.com/planningguide/>

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Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

1. **Mail:**
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410
2. **Fax:** 202-690-7442
3. **Email:** program.intake@usda.gov

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For any other information dealing with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) issues, persons should either contact the USDA SNAP Hotline Number at 1-800-221-5689, which is also in Spanish or call the MN Food HelpLine at 1-888-711-1151.

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