SuperShelf: Transforming Food Shelves to bring Good Food to All

Food shelf managers are busy. Very busy. Between managing volunteers, food deliveries, client visits, and all of the other tasks needed to run a food shelf, there is rarely time to think about new and innovative ideas to better serve clients. Much less implement them.

We understand the challenges and remain committed to helping our food shelf partners meet the growing, diverse needs in our community. And like you, we’re committed to helping them meet these needs in the healthiest way possible.

Enter SuperShelf - a collaborative project that supports food shelf transformations to provide a welcoming and respectful environment to access healthy food.

Over the last few years, The Food Group has helped build this project to transform Minnesota food shelves. We joined hands with local organizations across the hunger relief spectrum who are dedicated to fostering healthy lifestyles - Health Partners, Valley Outreach, University of Minnesota-Extension, and the University of Minnesota Department of Family Medicine and Community Health.

SuperShelf trains and assists food shelves in the Six Steps to SuperShelf Systems Change (see diagram on the next page), which includes creating standards and introducing techniques that promote healthy eating. Our efforts have led SuperShelf to receive funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for a five-year grant to expand our efforts. This funding speaks to the significance and potential impact of the approach this partnership has created.

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The summer growing season always brings an abundance of opportunities. Opportunities to heighten our fight against hunger by partnering with local growers. Neighbors who can provide the nutritious food struggling families need.

As you read this newsletter, our team is reaching out to local growers to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables grown in the fertile soils of Minnesota and Wisconsin. They are rescuing produce at local farmers markets – fresh, edible produce otherwise destined for local landfills. And now, with the addition of Big River Farms, we’re helping expand local sustainable agriculture and breaking down the barriers that exist to growing good food locally.

But, the summer season also brings the chance of storms. Thunderclouds bubble in the horizon and sweep through our community. Last month, the hailstorm that swept through the metro area also passed over Big River Farms. Plants were peppered with hail and perished. But with the help of supporters and volunteers, farmers replanted what was lost. Their crops now thrive.

I see another potential storm on the horizon. It’s not a thundercloud; it’s the threat of federal budget cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). In Minnesota, more than 450,000 residents receive support from SNAP benefits. Most are children, senior citizens, and people with disabilities. If legislation passes, the SNAP program will lose about one quarter of its funding over the next decade, forcing states and nonprofits like us to tackle the issue.

Many of our neighbors continue to struggle with hunger each day. 2016 marks the sixth consecutive year with over three million food shelf visits across our state. Our economy continues to recover, but wages do not. Families and individuals continue to struggle with making ends meet.

I remain confident our political leaders realize and understand the vital role SNAP plays in our community. As a supporter in the fight against hunger, I urge you to take notice and lend your voice in helping ensure our neighbors receive the assistance they need.

Last month, our supporters and volunteers helped farmers replant what was lost. In the coming months, I hope you will also help fight for our neighbors so they can keep the assistance they need.
In our last newsletter, we were excited to share with you the news that Minnesota Food Association (MFA), operator of Big River Farms, is now a program of The Food Group. Our public announcement was picked up and recognized by local newspapers interested in spreading the news of our fight against hunger and improving local food access. We are proud to share a few excerpts with you.

“A New Hope-based nonprofit with a 41-year track record in hunger relief is teaming up with an educational farm in Marine on St. Croix to put fresh produce in the hands of hungry Minnesotans. The minds behind the new business model say it bridges two crucial links in the local food chain: growing and distributing.”

-2 Twin Cities nonprofits blend efforts to tackle hunger (Star Tribune, 2 June 2017)

“Dan Tilsen, board chair of Minnesota Food Association, said he believes the merger will increase administrative support for existing programs at Big River Farms. “This opportunity presents innovative ways for us to work together to become stronger in supporting local farmers and alleviating hunger in our community,” he said.”

-Minnesota Food Association joins The Food Group (County Messenger, 18 May 2017)

Our announcement was also included in the nation-wide daily blog of BoardSource, a national nonprofit dedicated to inspiring and supporting excellence in nonprofit governance and leadership. Their daily SmartBrief blog included our announcement in their Boards in Action segment.

You can view all the local press articles at www.thefoodgroupmn.org/inthenews
Network News

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Hunger Bash

dinner • auction • entertainment
Join us September 8 at McNamara Alumni Center for the 6th annual Hunger Bash gala benefiting The Food Group. The event includes auctions, games, great food & drink, live music & a brief program. Hosted by Rena Sarigianopoulos, KARE 11 News.

Hunger Bash 2017 is sponsored by:
Luther Automotive, PricewaterhouseCooper, Michael Foods, MidwestOne Bank, Affiance Financial, Barnes & Thornburg, Dorsey & Whitney, Ryder Wells Fargo, and Minnesota Monthly.

Learn more & get your tickets: www.thefoodgroupmn.org/hunger_bash

Sophia's PIGGY BANK CHALLENGE

Recently, you may have heard the story of five-year-old Sophia’s generosity. She donated the contents of her piggy bank to help fight childhood hunger in our community at a local food drive. We hope you will consider joining Sophia in the fight against hunger and match her $45 donation “Because all kids should have food to eat.”

Read more about Sophia’s story and meet the challenge: www.thefoodgroupmn.org/sophia