

The Heartland Food Network

The Heartland Food Network's History

March 2003: The Minnesota Project and the Experiment in Rural Cooperation sketch out a strategy to unite the efforts of the University, non-profit local food promoters, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and others in collaboration with Sysco Corporation to source more local foods to food service. The Minnesota Project subsequently contacted the CEO of Sysco Corporation, Rick Schnieders.

April 2003: The Minnesota Project convenes meeting with Rick Schnieders to discuss sourcing local foods through Sysco. Participants included Food Alliance Midwest, Organic Valley, and the Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships. The group agrees to develop a Local Foods Working Group and urges the inclusion of representatives from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture the University of Minnesota dining services, and other regional farming groups.

May – December 2003: The Local Foods Working Group meets and develops a plan of work to explore ways to source more local food through Sysco's distribution system. Participants now include representatives from Pride of the Prairie, the University of Minnesota Contract Dining Services, and some food service customers. Food Alliance Midwest and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture undertake a series of experiments. These included sourcing produce from local farmers, participating in Sysco Minnesota's food shows, and attempting to work with the University of Minnesota to source local products. Sysco Minnesota identifies key issues that may need to be addressed (packaging, product liability insurance, pricing, etc.) Minnesota Sysco develops the "Sysco Farmers Market" concept, a web-based announcement of local foods available through Sysco. Chefs and farmers convene to respond to the approach, and agree to take next steps. Chef Paul Lynch targeted the Friends of James Beard Dinner as a place to highlight the Local Foods Working Group's efforts to promote local foods.

February 2004: The idea for the Heartland Food Initiative is presented at the Friends of James Beard benefit dinner at Fire Lake Grill House. "The Heartland Food Initiative will unite the efforts of chefs, farmers, food processors, food distributors, grocery retailers, non-profit organizations, and public institutions to increase the availability of high quality sustainably-produced local foods, expand consumer awareness of the value and quality of these foods, and generate pride in Minnesota cuisine." Food Alliance Midwest and Minnesota Farmers Union join the Minnesota Project in making the announcement.

July 2004 – December 2004: The Minnesota Project convenes a steering committee for the Heartland Food Initiative (Jim Ennis, Food Alliance Midwest; Paul Hugunin, Minnesota Grown; Karen Lehman, Minnesota Project; Chef Paul Lynch, Fire Lake Grill House; Doug Peterson, Minnesota Farmers Union). The Minnesota Project secures funding from the Bush Foundation to develop the Heartland Food Initiative by sponsoring a series of dialogues and meetings over the following year. Food Alliance Midwest continues its work sourcing local foods for hospitals, universities and corporate campuses.

January 2005 – May 2005: The Minnesota Project convenes eight dialogues to test ideas and advance the development of the Heartland Food Initiative. Participants include chefs, farmers, processors, distributors, university staff, state and local officials, non-profit local food promoters, and food journalists. They discuss the pros and cons of creating a system to recognize the purchasers of local, sustainable and organic foods through the development of an emblem or seal.

July 2005: The Heartland Food Initiative sponsors a meeting with local chefs to involve them in developing the next phase of HFI.

November 2005: The Heartland Food Initiative sponsors a meeting with Minnesota farmers, chefs and distributors to discuss local product demand and distribution.

March 2006: The networks name is formally changed to the Heartland Food Network.