

CDC FUNDING IN ACTION

FARM FOOD BOXES INCREASE FOOD ACCESS FOR MINNESOTA VETERANS

Food shares include cooking demonstrations, nutrition education



Challenge

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has determined that food insecurity is a critical concern for the well-being of our nation's veterans. The rural five-county region of Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd, and Wadena in Minnesota is home to 14,700 veterans. While agriculture is a primary economic driver for the region, many veterans in this area experience food insecurity.

Compounding the health impacts of food insecurity, the region's remoteness can cause social isolation resulting in mental health issues for many veterans



Approach

In 2019, the Region 5 Development Commission used Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs funding to provide free, community supported agriculture (CSA) food packages twice a month for 1 year to 50 local low-income veterans, widows, and their families. Program participants were taught how to properly prepare the CSA items through hands-on cooking classes and interactive demonstrations. The Regional Beyond the Yellow Ribbon and County Veteran Service Officers helped identify program participants, and Sprout, a local nonprofit kitchen and food hub, served as the hub for food collection and distribution. When possible, food for the CSA packages was sourced from local veteran farmers.



Results

Several of the veterans who participated in this program said that they now feel better prepared to shop for healthy foods and make healthier meals. After learning about new types of produce supplied in the CSA boxes, participants reported buying them and even trying different produce items from the grocery stores and farmers' markets. All the respondents on the post-program survey said that the program benefitted them and their families and felt it should be offered to other families. One unexpected outcome of the program was the increased social connectedness between the program participants. By picking up the CSA boxes in a central location and joining the cooking demonstrations together, several of the veterans told program staff that their sense of community belonging improved.



At A Glance

In Minnesota, five organizations partnered to increase access to nutritious food for veterans in five rural counties. The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs awarded the Region 5 Development Commission a grant to launch the VetCSA program, which sources healthy foods from low-income farmers and delivers them semimonthly to 50 local veterans and their families. The food shares include chef cooking demonstrations, nutrition education, and referral services. Participants said they benefitted from the program and wanted to see it offered to more veterans.

Contact: eva5@cdc.gov or visit [Region 5 Development Commission Military Connections](#)

The findings and conclusions in this success story are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position of the funding agencies or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

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