



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
EXTENSION

Connecting Rural Grocers, Healthcare, and Community Nutrition Access

National Rural Grocers Summit
May 6, 2026

Session Objectives

1. Define nutrition security
2. Food is Medicine approaches
3. Highlight grocery + produce prescription programs
4. Explore how rural grocers can engage in PPR programs
5. Generate ideas for how a PPR might work with your business and community



VEGGIE RX

PROGRAM OVERVIEW



Nutrition Security & Health Status

medical_services

The Health Crisis

Poor nutrition is the leading cause of illness in the U.S.

- Risk of obesity, diabetes, heart disease
- Mental health disorders in youth

shopping_basket

Food Insecurity

13% of U.S. households were food insecure in 2023

- Nearly 50% include children
- Impacts development & school experience

groups

Equity & Access

Disproportionately affects minority populations

- Rural communities face higher risks of diet-related chronic disease



Definitions

Food is Medicine

Definition: An umbrella term for food-based approaches specifically designed to address health needs.

Moving beyond general 'healthy eating' advice to specific, prescribed interventions for people with diet-related health conditions.



The Intervention Landscape: Three Pillars of Care



Medically Tailored Meals (MTM)

Inter

Fully prepared meals designed for patients with complex needs.



Medically Tailored Groceries (MTG)

Inter

Selected raw ingredients for patients capable of cooking but requiring specific nutrients.



Produce Prescriptions

Inter

Vouchers or programs specifically for fresh fruits and vegetables to treat or prevent conditions.

Context: These are not general suggestions; they are structured interventions.

The potential to bend the cost curve

“In both simulations and practice, Food is Medicine approaches have demonstrated the potential to lower the cost of health care over time.”



Society: Lowered costs of chronic disease management.



Participants: Improved health health outcomes.



Economy: Economic benefits to producers and distributors of healthy foods.



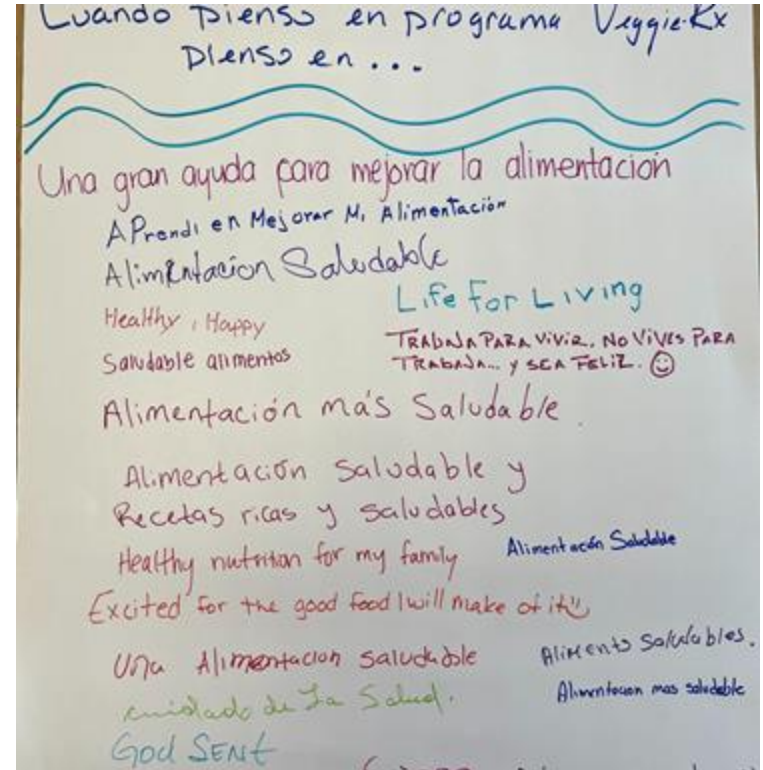
Example Programs

Navajo Nation Fruit & Vegetable Rx

Dakota Food Rx

Delta Health Alliance

DC Greens Produce Rx



Navajo Nation Fruit and Vegetable Rx

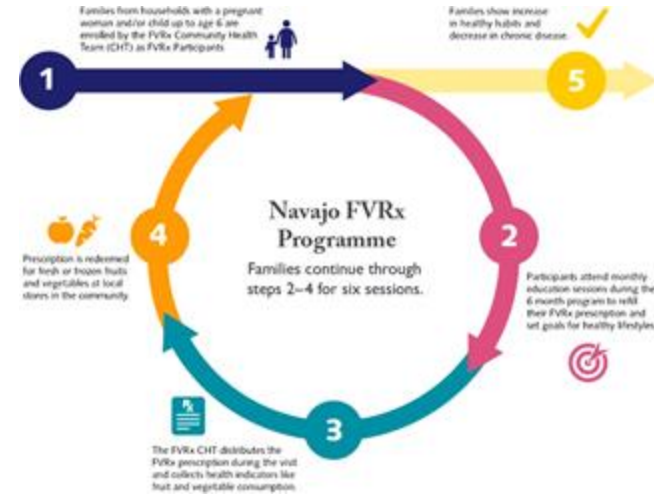
Grocer-direct model

What they do:

Participants receive monthly vouchers reserved for produce purchases.

Involvement with grocers:

- Program works with retailers to improve stores' storage and display of produce.
- Voucher system increases grocery visits with a low dollar amount but high quantity of vouchers per participant.



Dakota Food Rx

Who They Are:

- Pilot program aimed to improve diet and food insecurity.

What They Do:

- Eligible participants are identified by medical providers and become CSA members free of charge, allowing them to receive shares of produce from the CSAs.

Connection to Rural Grocers:

- This example shows how grocers have the potential to work with local agriculture to increase the produce they sell.
- Produce boxes also offer a different approach to grocery sales compared to individual sales allowing more grocer autonomy.

Delta Health Alliance - Delta Produce Rx

Who They Are:

Nonprofit in the rural community of Leland, MS that improves health and education of residents.

What They Do:

Eligible participants receive prescription cards by medical providers to purchase produce at the local grocery store.

Healthcare Involvement:

Increased produce purchases and reduced household food insecurity and medical spending.



DC Greens Produce Rx

Who They Are:

- Nonprofit that works with clinics, grocers, and the community to increase produce purchases and consumption.

What They Do:

- Eligible participants are identified by medical providers and get prescribed a Fresh Connect Card to use at participating grocery stores.

Connection to Rural Grocers:

- This urban based program has expressed the challenges of working with large scale retailers and populations, calling to the strength of rural grocers capability to offer produce prescription programs.

Benefits

trending_up

Revenue Growth

Increase revenue through ancillary spending.

groups

Community Connection

Establish strong community connections and foster customer loyalty.

store

Infrastructure Upgrade

Improve store infrastructure: coolers, display cases, POS labeling, and technology.

favorite

Community Health

Actively contribute to the improvement of overall community health.



Financial Instruments

toll

Token

card_membershi
p

Loyalty card

confirmation_nu
mber

Voucher & Coupon

point_of_sale

Discount at register

account_balance
_wallet

Loyalty account

credit_card

EBT Card



How can rural grocers engage with PPR?

**medical
_service
S**

Healthcare

**Partner with clinics
and hospitals to fulfill**



groups

Local Extension

**Collaborate with
Extension programs to
provide nutrition
education and program
outreach.**

public

Public Health

**Work with local health
departments to
integrate PPR into
broader community
health initiatives.**

Peer Consultation

Work out an idea or framework for connecting rural grocers to healthcare, and community nutrition programs.

Step 1. Work in pairs

Step 2. Each person thinks of an idea that was sparked from our presentation

Step 3. Decide who will be consultant #1

Step 4. First person talks about their idea

Step 5. Consultant asks meaningful questions

Step 6. Switch places

Resources

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Nutrition Incentive Hub

Brick and Mortar Retail

Downloadable Resources

Ex: It's a SNAP: The Value of Nutrition Incentives
for Brick and Mortar Retailers



Rural Food is Medicine Toolkit

This toolkit is intended to be a practical, user-friendly guide for those planning and operating produce prescription programs in rural areas. It provides an important framework and steps to consider.



Sources & Further Reading

Key Resource:

Produce prescription programs and network needs in Minnesota



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Questions?

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