

Assisting Rural Grocers

Building Business Resiliency, Efficiency, and Profitability

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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA EXTENSION

Presenting Issue

Rural grocery stores are anchor businesses in communities of 2,500 or fewer residents that provide a full range of fresh, frozen, and shelf-stable foods. When rural grocery stores go out of business, they are generally difficult to reopen, impacting the well-being of the surrounding community. While working with communities across Greater Minnesota, the UMN Extension Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships (RSDP) observed that the needs of rural grocery stores were not adequately identified and supported.

"The average age of rural grocery store buildings is 54 years old."

From the MN Rural Grocery Store Survey Report (2020)

HOW OLD IS THE BUILDING WHERE YOUR GROCERY STORE IS LOCATED?
(n=123)

AGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
0 - 15 YEARS OLD	14	11%
16 - 50 YEARS OLD	56	46%
51 - 100 YEARS OLD	40	33%
> 100 YEARS OLD	13	11%

Extension's Programmatic Response

- Connecting stores to funding for increasing energy efficiency, and upgrading aging infrastructure
- Providing produce handling workshops for grocery store managers and staff
- Providing one-on-one technical support



Ryan Pesch teaching a produce handling workshop at Bakken's Market in Clearbrook, MN in 2023. Photo by Zachary Paige

Target Audience

Grocery store owners and managers are often in need of resources, advice and education for improving their stores in rural communities. This program targets grocery stores in Minnesota cities with populations of 2500 or less.

"RSDP was invaluable to help write and receive funding for energy efficient equipment which increased product selection and sales in my grocery store, Hub 71."

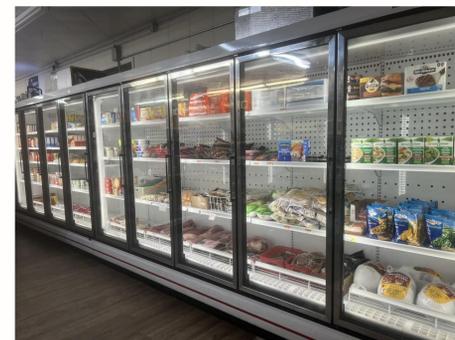
Store owner and Recipient of the Good Food Access Fund.

Why Extension?

With RSDP's focus areas of food systems, clean energy, and resilient communities, they are uniquely situated to work with rural grocery stores. Small local grocery stores are a keystone of rural Minnesota communities providing access to healthy fresh food.

Behavior or Action Outcomes

RSDP staff provided the Bronson Market located in Kittson County with one-on-one technical support aid in grant writing for the Good Food Access Fund (GFAF) grant to replace and upgrade rural grocery equipment and infrastructure, pictured below.



Before and after photos at the Bronson Market. Open display coolers are not as energy efficient as closed door. Photo by Marilyn Bronson

- Over \$70,000 was funded through the GFAF to three stores that worked with RSDP staff
- At Bronson Market new coolers helped store food for longer, brought in more foot traffic and saved on energy costs

Broader Impacts

- Providing small communities with higher quality, longer lasting produce
- Increasing access to fresh vegetables and local foods
- Supporting energy efficient small independent businesses while reducing greenhouse gas emissions
- Energy cost savings resulting from increase energy efficiency

QR code for RSDP Rural Grocery Website for further resources



References

The MN Rural Grocery Store Survey Report
Olive, Ren; Draeger, Kathryn; Kim, Hye-Young; Hanawa Peterson, Hikaru; Jarvi, Monica; Park, Dojin; Jorgenson, Alma. (2020). 2019-2020 Minnesota Rural Grocery Survey Report. Retrieved from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, <https://hdl.handle.net/11299/217207>.

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