



Farmers Market Food Rescue Grant Program Funding Guidelines

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Introduction

In Minnesota, metropolitan counties are responsible for waste management policy and programs to achieve state goals for waste management (Minn. Stat. § 115A.551) and support the State Waste Management Hierarchy, with waste prevention being the most preferred waste management method (Minn. Stat. § 115A.551) because it has the greatest environmental benefit for managing waste. Food waste prevention has the greatest benefit for managing organics. The goal of the Farmers Market Food Rescue Grant Program is to keep edible food out of the trash.

The County's Farmers Market Food Rescue Grant Program can assist organizations that operate at seasonal farmers markets to recover produce that would go bad or spoil before it can be sold at the next market and would otherwise be disposed and redistribute it to food shelves.

Available Assistance

Dakota County is offering financial assistance to eligible organizations.

Funding

Funding is available for the 2026 farmers market season. The total amount of funding available in 2026 is \$85,000. Eligible organizations can apply for funding for eligible items as described below. There is a \$10,000 per project minimum, the maximum grant amount that can be requested is \$85,000. No matching funds are required. 2026 grants will only be available until the 2026 funding is awarded. The Department evaluation team has discretion to award an applicant a grant for a portion of the amount sought by an applicant.

Application Process

Applications for food rescue must include plans to collect unsold produce and redistribute food from farmers markets that would have been discarded.

Eligible organizations must complete the County-provided Application. Applications are accepted on an ongoing basis through August 14, 2026, from eligible organizations. Applications must be submitted through the online form. During the review process, County staff may contact the applicant for additional information or to clarify proposed project activities in the Application.

Evaluation and Selection Process

A Department evaluation team will select the project(s) that best meets the funding criteria, including, but limited to, demonstrated experience to divert the greatest potential of produce that would have otherwise been disposed and redistribute it to Dakota County food shelves. The Department Liaison shall inform applicants in writing of the applicants selection and the amount

awarded, subject to the applicant's execution of a Farmers Market Food Rescue Grant Program Agreement and providing a W-9 form acceptable to the County.

Eligible Organizations

Applicants should be experienced in collection and redistribution of surplus food, although applicants with new ideas and projects are encouraged to apply.

Organizations with the following characteristics are eligible to participate

- Be an eligible organization: organizations that operate farmers markets in municipalities within Dakota County
- Be in "active/good standing" status with the Minnesota Secretary of State.
- Ineligible organizations: Individuals, home-based businesses, government organizations and private businesses unless partnered with a food shelf or food recovery organization.

Eligible and Ineligible Expenses

Grant funds will provide funding support to implement food waste prevention activities at farmers markets including to educate and train farmers market vendors on food waste prevention opportunities, collect edible produce that would have otherwise been landfilled or disposed, track and store collected food, provide vendor compensation at a seconds-rate for produce that would have been disposed, and redistribute produce to Dakota County food shelves. Food recovery and redistribution must be within Dakota County.

Eligible Expenses

1. **Staff Time**

- a) to implement activities directly related to planning, implementing and promoting Grant Program activities conducted during farmers market season (estimated to be July - October), including support for outreach and training to farmers market vendors on waste prevention and program participation opportunities.
- b) the collection of produce on predetermined pick-up dates from vendors that complete the verification form stating surplus produce would otherwise be disposed.
- c) tracking and reporting the amount of produce collected and donated.
- d) submitting invoices for reimbursement.
- e) other administrative activities relevant to the program.

2. **Mileage** to collect produce that would have otherwise been wasted and deliver it to Dakota County food shelves.

3. **Storage** such as temporary storage of produce as needed to ensure acceptance by the food shelf.

4. **Partnership Development** including development and documentation of partnerships with Dakota County food shelves that will receive collected produce and redistribute it to County residents.

5. **Vendor Stipends** at a seconds-rate that is less than what a vendor could sell the produce at (i.e., no more than \$1 per pound for excess produce).

The County reserves the right to negotiate with the applicant prior to contract execution for reasonable pricing of eligible items.

Ineligible Expenses

Ineligible expenses generally include activities and staffing not related to the Grant Program such as: produce that is not certified as excess and could have been sold at an upcoming farmers market, activities that are non-waste abatement; grantee-generated waste.

Participation Requirements

Participants must agree to the following:

- Complete and submit a full Application.
- Execute a Farmers Market Food Rescue Grant Program Agreement with the County.
- Implement the project as outlined in the Application
- Provide a completed W-9
- Attend at least one check in during the grant duration (in person or virtual)
- Host a minimum of one (1) site visit with Department Liaison during a produce pick-up
- Submit monthly reports to the Department Liaison that includes data related to recovered and distributed to local food shelves. Monthly reports include pounds of food collected, pounds of food redistributed by location, data on miles traveled and workers' labor hours, any applicable program costs. If donated produce cannot be delivered to a Dakota County food shelf, the grantee will detail the barriers and challenges to keeping food in the County in the interim and final reports.
- Submit a final report to the Department Liaison that includes data related to recovered and distributed to local food shelves. Report should include total pounds of food collected, total pounds of food redistributed by location, data on miles traveled and workers' labor hours, any applicable program costs. If donated produce cannot be delivered to a Dakota County food shelf, the grantee will detail the barriers and challenges to keeping food in the County in the interim and final reports. Final report data must total food collected and redistributed for the grant period and recommendations to address collection or donation improvements.
- Maintain complete and accurate records with respect to the performance and costs incurred associated with the Grant Program for a period of at least six (6) years after the termination of the Farmers Market Food Rescue Grant Program Agreement.
- Pursuant to Minn. Stat. § 16C.05, Subd. 5, allow the County or other persons or agencies authorized by the County access to your books, records, documents, and accounting

procedures and practices relevant to the Grant Program at reasonable hours, for purposes of audit.

Fund Distribution

Documentation supporting all amounts to be reimbursed, including but not limited to invoices, proof of payments, proof of delivery to and acceptance from the food shelf must be submitted at least monthly to be eligible for reimbursement. Supporting documentation must show proof of expenses being incurred and paid for eligible activities. Supporting documentation must not include ineligible expenses. Supporting documentation requesting reimbursement should be submitted to the Department Liaison via email.