



Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

## Faith and Food: Action Strategies for Healthy Eating

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**Faith and Food:** *Action Strategies for Healthy Eating*

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The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy works locally and globally at the intersection of policy and practice to ensure fair and sustainable food, farm and trade systems.

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## Introduction

We live in an era when food is being discussed as never before. Where was my food grown and how was it grown? How can we ensure that all people have access to healthy food? Are our daily eating practices reflective of our spiritual beliefs? How can food be a vehicle for putting those beliefs into practice?

Across the country, faith communities are putting their beliefs about food and healthy eating into action. Some are offering healthier food at church events. Others host a farmers market, connect their members with local sources of halal or kosher foods, or grow food at a church garden that they contribute to a neighborhood food shelf.

In the following pages, you will find examples of how faith organizations are building community—and healthier lives—through food. We hope these stories will inspire you to build new bridges between your faith and your food. You will find a resource list at the end to connect you with additional ideas and information.

Of course, this report is just a snapshot of what is happening in the faith community to improve access to healthy food. We invite you to share with others what your faith community is doing to improve access for all to healthy food. Visit [www.iatp.org/faith](http://www.iatp.org/faith) and tell us your story. We hope to continue to add new, inspiring stories to the list of case studies highlighted in this report.

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## Preserving the Season's Bounty "Cannables" Food Preservation Project St. Alban's Episcopal Church Bolivar, Missouri

About a half hour north of Springfield, Missouri, rests Bolivar, a community with a population of around 10,000. Nestled on the west end of town is St. Alban's Episcopal Church, a young church with a small but growing congregation. The size of this congregation's heart, however, greatly outweighs its numbers.

### History

St. Alban's kicked off its "Cannables" Food Preservation Project in 2008. It all started at a Bishop's Committee (parish council) meeting early in the spring, when church member Romain Morgan (see photo) presented her idea for an on-site garden where the produce would be donated to local residents. Going a step further, she added food preservation as an important parallel project. The committee told her, "Great idea...do it!" The idea may have come from one person, but as a testament to the congregation at St. Alban's, this has not been a one-person project. More than half of the congregation has been either directly involved or supportive in some way. The Episcopal Diocese of western Missouri heard about their efforts and awarded a grant of \$1,000. St. Alban's used the grant to pay for the purchase of food preservation equipment, including jars, pressure cookers and food dehydrators.

### The motivation

"We intend to return in some way to the local food production more common to our ancestors (and still common to our Amish neighbors) partly in order to remind each other that we can grow food...to revive the art of canning, drying and freezing produce so that anyone with a garden can provide food for themselves and others for winter...and to remind each other that we really do have a responsibility to care for each other," says Reverend Cathy Cox.

### The project

St. Alban's decided to plant the garden directly outside the church along the full-length windows "so it is visible during worship," says Reverend Cox. Local members donated compost, mulch, fill soil, seeds, plants, use of equipment and lots of time. Others even donated their gardens and orchards to the effort. St. Alban's presently has three



gardens and three orchards from which to harvest. The main goal of the gardens and orchards is to provide both fresh and preserved fruits and vegetables for anyone who wants them. Reverend Cox makes clear that "there will be NO income guidelines for receiving food. Everyone who helps in any way, as well as any of your friends or neighbors who need it, will be invited to come and take the results of this work, take home recipes and attend further canning classes."

In June 2008, a county extension agent was asked to teach church members and others about canning fruits and vegetables. Although there was no advertising for this free class, more than 30 people attended. Further canning classes are scheduled, in addition to freezing and food dehydrating classes. Bob Wagon, an enterprising member of St. Alban's, "obtained three 6-foot long incubators with fans, temperature control and rotating shelves, and remodeled them to use for drying fruit and tomatoes," says Reverend Cox.

As summer moves along, fruits and vegetables become ripe for the picking. Once certain fruits or vegetables are harvested, they are brought to the church for food preservation parties, where anybody can come and help with the canning process. Those who attend do not necessarily have to know how to can, as an experienced canner is present at each preservation party. Everyone present helps prepare the produce, including cleaning and cutting the fruits and vegetables. Others can their produce at home and deliver it to the church.

Due to the volume expected from the gardens and orchards, a large number of people will benefit from this project. More than 300 tomato vines were planted. But to be successful, a large number of canning jars are needed. Individuals have donated numerous jars from their own supplies while others have purchased new cases and dropped them off at church anonymously.

Once the canning, freezing or drying is completed, the finished products will be distributed to anyone wanting to enjoy a healthy addition to their diet. Preserved food that is not immediately distributed will be stored at the church and at a farm a few miles down the road. Both will serve as a food bank of preserved fruits and vegetables for the taking. Reverend Cox encourages people to return their used jars so they can be refilled later in the season or next summer.

St. Alban's has also invited mothers from House of Hope and members of the Barceda Families teen parenting class in Bolivar to participate in the canning process and take home the healthy finished products. Nick Utecht, 28, sees the value of younger people learning food preservation techniques. "There are so many good things going on. The older generation is teaching the younger one something they can learn together and be proud of in the end. And anything that can get people to eat healthier will make their lives that much better," says Nick.

### Lessons learned

Much has been learned in the few months since Cannables was started. What surprised Romain Morgan the most was how everyone was on board with this project. "We all know that if we belong to any group, there is always a naysayer, but there has not been one complainer or one person who says we should not do this. Many other faith communities in Bolivar and surrounding towns have looked to St. Alban's as a wonderful example of a small church doing big things."

Romain says that people are becoming more aware that they need to help others and eat healthy. She hopes that the project continues and catches on elsewhere. At the same time, members of St. Alban's hope that anybody and everybody will take advantage of this program—and improve their diets along the way. Says Reverend Cox, "We want to destroy the idea that there are the needy and then the rest of us who 'help.' We hope we might begin to create a community of givers across those lines because all of us need to learn how to live in a recession (and afterward!) in a more humane way, and this is one good way to begin."

### Web resource

St. Alban's Episcopal Church: [www.stalbansozarks.org/index.html](http://www.stalbansozarks.org/index.html)



[Church member Romain Morgan]

## Letting Your Garden Grow

### *Guardian Angels Catholic Church Oakdale, Minnesota*

A number of faith communities across the country are lucky to own the land occupied by their parishes or worship centers. Guardian Angels Catholic Church in Oakdale, Minnesota, has taken full advantage of its unused land by converting nearly a half-acre of open space into a fully functioning garden.

### History

At a church retreat 14 years ago, members were asked to draw a vision of the church's future. Two of those members, Barb Prokop and Maggie Lindberg, drew gardens. Putting their heads together, they came up with the idea for the church garden on unused church land. They approached church leaders with their plan, pitched as an outreach/justice pursuit project because all produce would be donated to area food shelves. This idea was accepted by the parish and what was once a large grassy space was converted to a large garden. Fourteen years later, these women continue to make this vision a reality.

### The motivation

The Guardian Angels Community Garden provides an abundance of fruit and vegetables for local food shelves. But to make this project successful requires an abundance of volunteers who can care for and manage the garden. Volunteer Theresa Watschke likes that they can provide something for people who do not have easy access to fresh and healthy food. "A lot of people in this world need help, and with the garden we can do this," says Theresa. Two high school freshmen also help with the garden. Victor Lugg likes that "it helps the parish community get involved with the church while also feeding the less fortunate." Classmate Joe Warner agrees, and feels that it is "really incredible to do something like this." Volunteer Mary Mahoney puts it simply: "It's an opportunity to play in the dirt and give back!"

### The project

The Guardian Angels Community Garden is not just any garden. It is meticulously planned and cared for, thanks to the expertise of Barb and Maggie, along with countless volunteers. The garden is split into twelve 3-foot-by-4-foot plots with enough space to move a wheelbarrow or

even a small tractor in between. The fruit and vegetables are rotated each year to a different plot, adding to soil health and keeping insects and microbes guessing. Three of the 12 plots are kept out of production and are instead planted with buckwheat. The buckwheat is then tilled into the soil and used as green manure, enhancing soil fertility. A wooden frame that can be unassembled, moved and reconstructed from year to year surrounds the compost pile. The garden is managed with organic values in mind. Barb and Maggie strongly believe organic growing is the best management for the land and healthiest for the food produced.



At the start of this project, local food shelves were interviewed to determine if they could handle the distribution of fresh food. Three food shelves immediately complied; another food shelf was added a few years later. The garden was then planted to accommodate the number of food shelf clients and the food shelf's storage capacity. Spring, summer and fall crops are planted, including everything from beans and broccoli to potatoes and peppers. In all, 28 different fruits and vegetables have been grown.

As with any project of this scale, volunteers make it happen. They harvest produce on Tuesday and Saturday mornings and on Thursday evenings. Volunteers then deliver the fresh fruit and vegetables to the food shelves after harvest on Tuesdays and Saturdays, and on Friday mornings. In all, about 70 volunteers have signed on to help. Ten of those are drivers making the deliveries. Barb hopes to have 24 volunteers a week to ensure maximum efficiency.

During the planting season, nearly 100 preschool students, 10 at a time, help plant potatoes. The preschool children also help with the potato harvest. Barb and Maggie keep meticulous records of every crop and yearly harvest totals by weight. On average, about 10,000 pounds of produce are collected each season. In 2007, nearly 4,000 pounds of watermelon and squash were harvested. According to the volunteers, a watermelon is considered a prize at the food shelves!

### Lessons learned

All church members are invited to work in the garden. “In an effort to be Christ to one another, the Guardian Angels Garden Committee invites you to join us in growing fresh produce for those who are hungry.” According to Barb, “We knew food shelves didn’t have nutritious options so we planned this to fill that void for part of a year. We wanted to place very nutritious food in the hands of those who needed it the most, including the elderly, children, folks stressed by low or no income, or people struggling to meet their basic needs.” The volunteers have learned a lot about themselves and the spirit of the church, thanks to this project.

Many of the volunteers have some connection to farming by either growing up on a farm or having farmers in their family. This garden gives them the opportunity to work with the land again and help those less fortunate in the process. Theresa Watschke sees the vast benefits. “It gives me a chance to garden—and for a good cause. The food shelf clients really appreciate it, because if you don’t have much money, you probably don’t buy very much healthy food.”

“This garden is grown to share the bounty with those in need,” says Barb. What started as two similar visions, drawn on paper 14 years ago, has developed into a wonderful project that should be around for a long time to come.

### Web resource

Guardian Angels Catholic Church:  
[www.guardian-angels.org/fia/outreach/](http://www.guardian-angels.org/fia/outreach/)





## Connecting Halal and Locally Grown Taqwa Eco-Food Chicago, Illinois

As the local food movement continues to grow rapidly, people from all faith backgrounds are joining in and creating new avenues to purchase food raised in accordance with the principles of their faith.

Taqwa Eco-Food, a Chicago-based food cooperative, is working to meet the needs of those wanting to purchase local meats raised and processed aligned with the principles of Islam.

### History

Taqwa Eco-Food originated in 2001. It was created through a Chicago-based organization called Faith in Place, whose dedication to organizing people of all faith backgrounds to care for the earth has yielded great success. Part of Faith in Place’s mission statement reads: “Faith in Place gives religious people the tools to become good stewards of the earth. We partner with religious congregations to promote clean energy and sustainable farming. Our mission is to help people of faith understand that issues of ecology and economy—of care for Creation—are at the forefront of social justice.”

With this foundation, Taqwa Eco-Food was created to connect farmers to both Muslim and non-Muslim consumers. The word *Taqwa* means “God-consciousness,” or being aware that doing good things pleases God (while doing bad things displeases God). The same holds true for how the earth and its inhabitants are treated, including people, plants and animals.

There are three Islamic beliefs that are followed when raising and slaughtering meat. In addition to *halal*, there is *tayyib* (wholesome food produced in a wholesome way) and *dhabihah* (the Islamic procedure for slaughter).

### The motivation

Zainab Khan currently serves as President of Taqwa Eco-Food’s board. Through working at Faith in Place, she says that “the more and more we learned about the importance of locally grown food, the more we realized that we should connect consumers with farmers.” There was also a growing demand for halal meat, or food produced in accordance with Islamic beliefs.



Taqwa Eco-Food has a three-pronged approach to their work, starting with farmers—local, family-owned and operated farms where sustainable farming practices are used. The group believes that one cannot harm the land without harming the people on the land. Therefore, if these farm families can stay physically, mentally and financially healthy, then the rewards are passed on to the land, the animals and the consumers. “The second you set out making things better for farmers and people, you immediately make things better for animals and the land,” explains Zainab. To put it simply: Be kind to people raising food, and in return, they will be kind to consumers.

### The project

Membership in Taqwa Eco-Food is open to anyone, and members pay a yearly membership fee of \$25. Presently, cuts of beef, lamb and chicken are available for order. And although prices are a little higher than in the grocery store, members know that they are supporting a local family farm that in turn helps keep rural communities strong and viable. These farmers are also farming in ways that will leave the land better than when they started. Products are available for home delivery in Chicago or can be picked up at the Faith in Place office.

Customers are also made aware that the meat they are eating is better for them than the meat typically available at area grocery stores. All livestock is pasture-raised and the poultry is free-range. Some farmers finish their livestock with some grain, and all grain and pastures are free of added chemicals. No antibiotics or hormones are used. Meat raised in this fashion has been found to be healthier for consumers, as livestock fed minimal amounts of grain contains a higher amount of healthy omega-3 unsaturated fats. According to Taqwa, “For all these reasons and more, [the farmers’] products are healthy, wholesome and natural in every sense of the word. The meat is leaner with less cholesterol and calories and more protein.”

In order to bridge the gap between consumers and farmers, Taqwa Eco-Food organizes trips to participating farms. The consumers learn where their food comes from and how it is raised. Farmers receive feedback and learn about consumers’ preferences.

Taqwa Eco-Food also helps people get creative about where they shop by encouraging members and many others to become members of a CSA (community-supported agriculture) farm or to shop at local farmers markets. “We try to be an available source for people trying to eat healthy,” says Zainab. An event called “Taste of Taqwa” is held to educate people about food issues. Another unique aspect of Taqwa Eco-Food is their dedication to feeding those less fortunate. *Sadaga*, the Islamic term for giving or donating money, is used to purchase healthy meats that are delivered “to low-income families throughout the inner city.”

### Lessons learned

Still in its early years, Taqwa Eco-Food faces a number of challenges. First, like any newer food cooperative, cash flow fluctuations can present headaches. But Taqwa continues to grow and will eventually become a free-standing organization.

Another challenge relates to the availability of meat products. Presently, there is more demand for local meat than there is supply. For some farmers, raising livestock in line with the principles of Islam means having to adopt new farming practices, which is not always an easy task. Significant challenges include a shortage of pasture land and high grain prices. Distance from the farms is another challenge that Taqwa Eco-Food faces. However, as more farmers join in, there may be a possibility for collectively transporting meat from the farms to the city.

As more people recognize the importance of local food and local family farms, the demand for food grown on these farms will continue to grow. As one of Taqwa Eco-Food’s goals states: “This outlook is shared by many faiths. Therefore, ‘interfaith’ is the nature of our business and co-op. While our animals are slaughtered solely by qualified Muslims, the people who support our business come from all different faiths and walks of life.”

With this worldview and sustained dedication, Taqwa Eco-Food will continue to grow and help consumers and farmers, while also caring for animals and the land.

### Web resources

Taqwa Eco-Food: [www.taqwaecofood.org](http://www.taqwaecofood.org)

Faith in Place: [www.faithinplace.org](http://www.faithinplace.org)

## Teaching Healthy Cooking to Food Service Staff

### “Dash of Faith” Program

*Central Baptist Church and Bethlehem Baptist Church  
Columbia, South Carolina*

Two Columbia, South Carolina, churches have taken an innovative approach to healthy eating education, and getting used to the change of menu was only a matter of time!

### History

In 2006, the University of South Carolina (USC) Office of Research and Health Sciences, in conjunction with the South Carolina Cancer Disparities Community Network and the USC Cancer Prevention and Control Program, sponsored the “Dash of Faith” program. The program was designed to educate cooks from two area churches about healthier food preparation. The cooks—paid employees of the churches—prepare meals for church celebrations, funerals and everything in between. Central Baptist Church and Bethlehem Baptist Church volunteered to participate. Brook Harmon, a dietician with the Cancer Prevention and Control Program, led the project.



### The motivation

Before “Dash of Faith,” a dinner at the two churches would typically include fried foods and large amounts of salt. According to Johnnie Mae Rich, Director of the Catering Ministry at Central Baptist Church, “Many people in our church have high blood pressure, high cholesterol or diabetes, and that’s partly because of what they’ve been eating.” Church menus and ingredients only added to the health woes of many of the parishioners. It was time for a change. “Before this program, we didn’t think much about healthy foods,” says Johnnie Mae. “We wanted to become more aware of how we cooked our food and how that affects our health.”

### The project

To assess the project’s ultimate impact, Central Baptist Church served as the “experimental” group and Bethlehem Baptist Church as the “control” group. Once the participants at Central Baptist had finished the program, Bethlehem Baptist would then take its turn. About 12 church cooks at Central Baptist were identified and asked to participate. Brook Harmon met with the cooks to identify their cooking backgrounds and skills. Cooking classes began, and so did the fun!

Nutritionists from nearby South Carolina State University taught the majority of the classes. A hands-on approach made for exciting and engaging classes that occurred two to three times a month for five months. Participants were eager to learn and rarely missed a class. Each week, they learned about healthy alternatives and menu preparation. The students prepared different recipes and sampled their creations. Lessons included what to avoid and what to substitute for high fat ingredients. Olive oil, a mono-saturated fat, became a substitute for cooking with butter. Recipes that included more fruits and vegetables were introduced. Fried food recipes were replaced with baked recipes, including alternative chicken recipes. The students learned how to switch from excessive use of salt to more herbs and alternative spices.

Changing the foods they had grown to love over years of church dinners was difficult for some of the students. According to Central Baptist member Isabel Law, “The food didn’t taste good at first.” The cooking students were apprehensive about adapting to these new flavors. Because of this, the seasoning portion of the class was shifted to the beginning of the program. Over time, alternative herbs and spices won over the taste buds that had been so accustomed to salt.

### Lessons learned

Mary Gilmore is the Repast Committee chair at Bethlehem Baptist Church, and her responsibilities include planning and preparing funeral dinners. As part of the “Dash of Faith” program, she learned many different ways to serve healthier meals at her church.

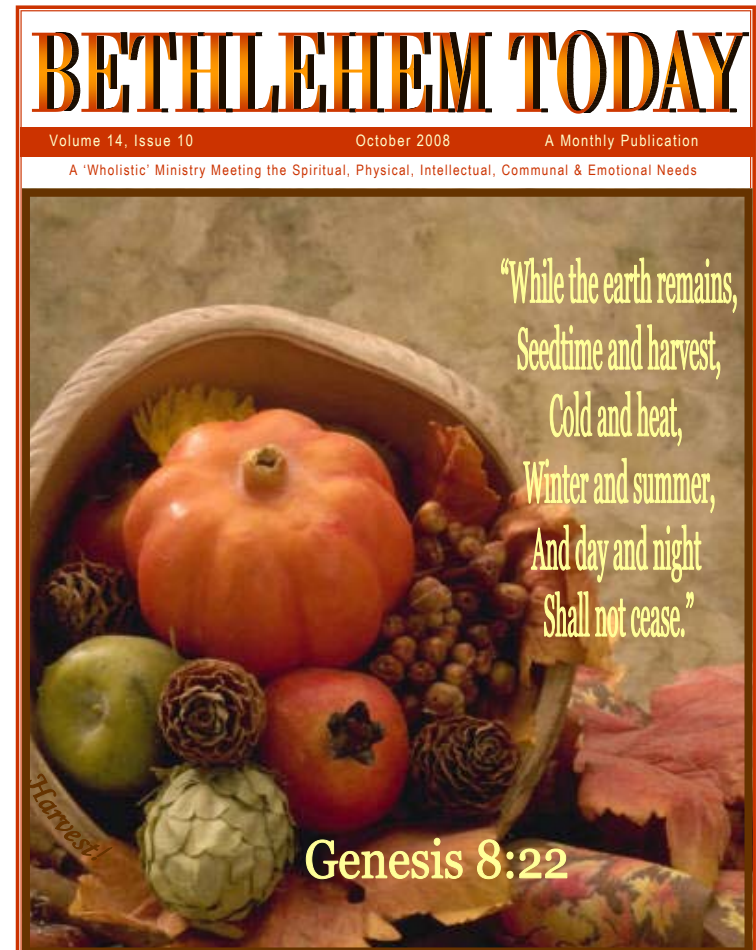
Not only did she learn to cook differently, but her shopping habits also changed. She significantly cut back on the amount of store-canned fruits and vegetables she had been using for the dinners, and instead purchased more fresh foods. “The class was so wonderful, and now everybody seems to like the food,” Mary says. “Dash of Faith” participants had fun watching their congregations’ reactions to the new meals and wondered if anyone noticed the decreased use of salt. Johnnie Mae, Mary and Isabel continue to use what they learned within their respective churches.

The women are convinced that using fresh fruits and vegetables makes their food taste better. Not frying as much and using less salt has led to healthier diets for congregation members. Johnnie Mae claims that “this program showed me that we have a responsibility to cook healthy meals at our church, especially if church members have medical problems. Healthy eating can always help.” Isabel feels good that their dinner choices can have a positive impact on people’s health. “Changing the way you eat affects all of that,” she says. All three women say they are also eating healthier at home. “I’ve learned to appreciate food so much more,” says Mary. “I wish the classes didn’t have to stop!” Taking healthy menus to the next level, Mary even brings cake with no icing to funeral dinners.

Isabel hopes that they have raised awareness for those with unhealthy eating habits. She feels that as a church, they should be taking care of their members in every way possible, including serving a healthy meal at church events. Participants would like to continue the classes, with the cooks teaching the congregation members new methods. Mary gives one final piece of advice: “Stay away from salt!”

### Web resources

Central Baptist Church: [www.centralbaptistcolumbia.org/index.html](http://www.centralbaptistcolumbia.org/index.html)  
 Bethlehem Baptist Church: [www.bbc1867.org/index.php](http://www.bbc1867.org/index.php)  
 School of Public Health, University of South Carolina:  
[www.sph.sc.edu/news/dashoffaith.htm](http://www.sph.sc.edu/news/dashoffaith.htm)



## Engaging Farmers Through Community-Supported Agriculture

### "That's My Farmer" Event 16 Interfaith Communities Eugene, Oregon

There is a movement in Eugene, Oregon, to connect city dwellers with local farmers. The creative vision of John Pitney, Associate Pastor at First United Methodist Church, brought to life an all-inclusive faith-based event that launched this movement in 1999.

#### History

Community-supported agriculture (CSA) is typically defined as local support for local farms. People purchase "shares" from the CSA farm for the growing season and receive weekly deliveries of fruits and vegetables. Some CSA farms also distribute such things as meat, cheese and honey. For the past nine years, faith communities across Eugene have come together to connect their members with local CSA farms. An annual event held in April is fittingly titled "That's My Farmer," and gives farmers an opportunity to showcase their farms and sign up new members.

From the start, Pastor Pitney began speaking at different churches and worship centers throughout Eugene, educating people about the benefits of joining a CSA farm. He also recruited different faith communities to become partners in the "That's My Farmer" event. Pastor Pitney never goes anywhere without a sign-up sheet for people interested in becoming a part of "That's My Farmer" or joining a CSA. The first event in 1999 started with eight farms and six churches. Since then, the event has grown to 16 co-sponsoring interfaith communities and 12 CSA farms. Attendance for the event has also increased each year—more than 400 people attended "That's My Farmer" in 2008.

#### The motivation

Pastor Pitney's goal is to find more sustainable ways for faith communities to have a positive impact on both the local community and the environment. Supporting local family farms fit the bill perfectly. "That's My Farmer" has clearly been a success, but there is much more to the event than farmers showing their produce and signing up members. Connections and friendships are made between the farmers and the community members. According to Pastor Pitney, "'That's My Farmer' helps us discover new ways to be the church. Hope is emerging, and it's cool when churches can take a lead."

#### The project

The "That's My Farmer" event may take place just once a year, but it takes months of preparation. A coordinating council composed of one or two representatives from each faith community meets at different times during the year—a fall meeting starts the planning process, and meetings continue monthly from January to April. "Each of the faith communities must figure out what's best for them," says Pastor Pitney. The faith communities advertise the event along with educating and encouraging their members to join a CSA. Some faith communities have special Sunday worship services that center on the interconnectedness of CSA benefits: the local economy gains; the physical health of community members is strengthened; and the social aspects of connecting farm-to-table are enhanced.



The 2008 event was organized to showcase the farmers and thank them for their hard work. Before the event began, the farmers arrived and set up their tables or booths. At 6:30 p.m., community members mingled with farmers. An "action guide" with information on all of the CSAs was given to everyone in attendance. Cash donations were encouraged to allow the churches to purchase CSA shares for low-income families. The program ran from 7:30 to 8:30, and was kicked off with Pastor Pitney's song "That's My Farmer." Everyone sang along. Farmers were introduced and each given an ovation from the crowd. A brief blessing of the farmers was offered.

Before the event, farmers send suggested discussion questions and Pastor Pitney selects the most thought-provoking of them to explore during the program. Topics include anything from “What gets you up in the morning?” to questions about global warming, local foods and soil fertility. The Mayor of Eugene attends the event and is invited to speak as well. “The goal is to keep it simple and focused on the farmers,” says Pastor Pitney. Another highlight of the evening is when CSA boxes are donated to a domestic violence center from the donations collected that evening. The night is capped off with homemade ice cream for everyone. For Pastor Pitney, it feels good to say thanks to the farmers.

A new twist was added three years ago when “That’s My Farmer Bucks” were introduced. These coupons provide an alternative for those interested in supporting local farmers and eating fresh and healthy foods. The coupons can only be used at farmers markets through farmers who participate in “That’s My Farmer.” Farmers then redeem their coupons for cash through the program throughout the season. These coupons are sold at the “That’s My Farmer” event as well in the participating faith communities. Coupons are worth \$5 and are sold in \$20 bundles. This past year, more than \$11,000 worth of coupons were purchased! Money from any unused coupons goes toward the purchase of CSA shares for low-income families in Eugene. And with a 70 percent coupon redemption rate, that extra money helps even more families find access to healthy foods.

### Lessons learned

The excitement around this program continues to grow in leaps and bounds each year. “I’ve never worked around a community project where the enthusiasm was higher,” says Pastor Pitney. His advice for others interested in starting a similar project is this: “Try to get a team of people in your congregation to work together on this instead of attempting a new project alone. Have patience, and help people discover what talents they possess to make it a success.” Pastor Pitney believes that once people understand the benefits of having a project like this in both their faith community and community as a whole, it is easy for them to work hard to make it a success. As the fall and winter months roll in, “Folks are hot to go for spring,” says Pastor Pitney.

“That’s My Farmer” has had a large impact on the nutrition of those taking advantage of the local CSA farms. “More people are concerned and educated now about buying local, healthy foods,” says Pastor Pitney.

He thinks that people in his community want to feel they are making a real difference. Linda Davies, CSA manager at Winter Green Farm, agrees that they are. Over the last five years, 56 families have signed up for Winter Green’s CSA at the “That’s My Farmer” event. Countless others have purchased shares from other CSAs. The event was “a real eye-opener for me,” says Linda, as she was “blown away by the involvement, dedication and enthusiasm of the faith communities involved.” She enjoys how the farmer-consumer relationships have grown during her time at the farm. “It’s one thing for the customers to know the farmers are out there, but it’s another to get a chance to look them in the eyes.” She also enjoys being able to connect and reconnect with the other farmers at the event.

In 2009 “That’s My Farmer” will celebrate its tenth anniversary. Pastor Pitney is really seeing the fruits (and vegetables!) of his labor. He acknowledges that the help and coordination of volunteers has made “That’s My Farmer” what it is today: a very successful event that connects healthy food and local farmers to consumers in faith communities and the community of Eugene in general. “The story of faith goes along with the story of farms,” says Pastor Pitney.

Excerpt of “That’s My Farmer” song:

*Oh, that’s my farmer!  
Don’t I have good taste?  
We’re taking back our food system!  
It needs a human face.  
I just can’t wait till Tuesday  
To see what’s in our box.  
Community Supported Agriculture really rocks!  
Harvest bad? Harvest brisk?  
We share the bounty, share the risk.  
Cheap food gone berserk,  
We pay directly, to those who do the work.*

### Web resources

Oregon Ecology blog entry about “That’s My Farmer”:  
[www.oregonecology.com/2008/04/thats-my-farmer-farmers-gather-for.html](http://www.oregonecology.com/2008/04/thats-my-farmer-farmers-gather-for.html)  
Simply in Season Blog about “That’s my Farmer” coupons:  
[www.simplyinseason.blogspot.com/2006/05/thats-my-farmer-market-coupons.html](http://www.simplyinseason.blogspot.com/2006/05/thats-my-farmer-market-coupons.html)

## Becoming a Community-Supported Agriculture Drop Site

*St. Paul Jewish Community Center*

*St. Paul, Minnesota*

The St. Paul Jewish Community Center (JCC) is located in the southwest corner of St. Paul, Minnesota. The Center’s mission is to “strengthen the greater St. Paul community by nurturing physical, intellectual, social and spiritual growth in an inclusive environment defined by Jewish values and culture.” In light of this mission, it is fitting that the only self-identified Jewish community-supported agriculture (CSA) farm in Minnesota collaborates with the JCC to improve the diets of people in the community.

### History

In early 2006, JCC Program Director Penny Schumacher decided to launch an experiment. At the time, Penny was a member of a local CSA farm called Easy Bean Farm, located west of the Twin Cities. The farm is unique because farmer Mike Jacobs and his family base their farming practices on two Jewish beliefs: *Tuv Ha’Aretz*, meaning good for the land and best of the land, and *Tikkun olam*, meaning repairing the world. Mike also practices *Peah*, or leaving the corners of the field for the poor.

### The motivation

These values resonated with Penny, who felt that members of the JCC should have the opportunity to learn about CSAs and take advantage of acquiring healthy food while also directly supporting a family farm. Penny enjoys reminding people that their food was not grown in a grocery store!

### The project

Beginning in February 2006, Penny began promoting the idea of purchasing shares of the Easy Bean Farm CSA to members of the JCC. The concept of a CSA farm was unfamiliar to many people, so she invited Mike Jacobs to speak to interested members. Penny also spread the word through their JCC newsletter. “Whether they joined or not, they learned something new,” says Penny. By the time that Easy Bean Farm was ready to begin making deliveries, 30 families had signed up. A room at the JCC was designated as a drop-off/pick-up location and Mike made deliveries every Friday during the growing season. CSA members appreciate the Friday delivery, as the Jewish Sabbath begins Friday evening.

Included in every basket is a newsletter from Easy Bean Farm detailing which fruits and vegetables are included, and what to expect in future deliveries. Everyone’s share basket contains the same produce, but some folks like certain fruits and vegetables more than others. This led to the “leave a veggie/take a veggie” box, where members could leave veggies they did not like in exchange for something they did.



In 2007, Penny applied for a grant from Hazon, a national Jewish organization whose vision is “to create a healthier and more sustainable Jewish community—as a step toward a healthier and more sustainable world for all,” and became a member of Hazon’s national *Tuv Ha’Aretz* community. Penny further promoted the CSA by writing a story about Easy Bean Farm that was published in the local Jewish newspaper, as well as in the National JCC newsletter. As word spread, the number of CSA shares purchased more than doubled. However, a severe drought lasting through much of the growing season made for a shortage of available produce. Penny sees this as the most difficult time since the project’s inception, and some families decided not to purchase shares for the following year. Everyone discovered that when you purchase a CSA share, you are taking a risk alongside the farmer.

Following the drought of 2007, Penny was compelled to fill the empty spots and in 2008 signed up 73 families, an increase over the previous two years!

### Lessons learned

There has been tremendous positive feedback from CSA members. Not every CSA member is a member of the JCC and others are not Jewish, but all are learning important Jewish values that Penny sees as “international values.”

Also important is the notion of “eating with the seasons.” Eating food while it is in season is not only fresher and healthier, but also easier on the environment and beneficial for local farmers. A fresh, locally grown strawberry in July tastes much better than a store-bought strawberry in December! Penny also loves the idea that CSA members have the opportunity to taste new vegetables. According to Penny, CSA members can trust that their food is safe. “I am proud that we support a farmer in their livelihood and I know our CSA members feel the same,” says Penny. “I’ve learned that we can help repair the world, and eating fresh and healthy food from a local family farm is a great start.”

### Web resources

St. Paul Jewish Community Center CSA page:

[www.stpauljcc.org/jewish/green\\_csa.lasso](http://www.stpauljcc.org/jewish/green_csa.lasso)

Easy Bean Farm: [www.easybeanfarm.com](http://www.easybeanfarm.com)





## Hosting a Farmers Market

### Stevens Square Farmers Market

*Plymouth Congregational Church and Stevens Square Community Organization  
Minneapolis, Minnesota*

Empty land and parking lots are precious commodities in some urban areas. This “wasted space” can be gold for innovative thinkers who find ways to improve their neighborhood and community at-large.

Plymouth Congregational Church (PCC) and the Stevens Square Community Organization (SSCO) in Minneapolis, Minnesota, have accomplished this and more.

### History

Plymouth Congregational Church is located south of downtown Minneapolis in the Stevens Square neighborhood. Great things are happening both inside and outside the church. The Groveland Food Shelf is operated in the church, the Stevens Square Farmers Market takes place in the church parking lot and a community gardening program is located a short distance away. All have links to one another.

### Motivation

The idea for a community garden was put forth 11 years ago by a group of neighborhood association members. Two nearby lots had become hosts to trouble. One lot housed a run-down building that had turned into a place to buy drugs, while the other lot had become overgrown with weeds. The city demolished the house and the weeds were cleared away, allowing neighborhood residents to take advantage of these spaces for community gardening.

### The project

Robert Skaft of the SSCO has been involved with the gardens since the beginning, and currently serves as both the community garden and farmers market manager. Since the gardens’ inception, Robert has hosted various groups who have added to the viability and appearance of the gardens. Members of the Women’s Correctional Facility in Shakopee, Minnesota, built a tool shed for use in the gardens. In 1999, graduating architecture students from the University of Minnesota built an aqueduct to serve as a watering system connected to the hydrant, allowing gardeners to retrieve water from a central station on site. The two garden locations currently support 35 gardeners who tend to



their plots throughout the growing season, raising fruits, vegetables and flowers for their own use. Costs are \$25 for a 4-foot-by-8-foot plot and \$50 for a 10-foot-by-20-foot plot annually. Robert organizes workdays that include watering and weeding.

At the end of each season, Robert sends a letter to the participating gardeners to determine if they will return next year. A turnover rate of about 15 plots is generally expected and there is a waiting list for the following season. The Drop-in Center, a program

at PCC for people with both physical and mental disabilities, helps maintain two plots as well. For two seasons, the Groveland Food for Youth program, also associated with PCC, helped maintain the gardens through weeding and watering. Homeless youth were paid \$10 an hour to do this work. Robert hopes to renew this connection in the future.

“I have a good group of people who keep the gardens clean,” says Robert. “People tell me that they really enjoy that the gardens are here and that they cleaned up the neighborhood.” One of Robert’s biggest complaints from gardeners is the occasional theft of produce, but they understand that it is hard to avoid.

One of Robert’s goals included tying the gardens to the food shelf at PCC. Produce from two plots at the gardens was donated to the food shelf weekly. The produce added fresh and healthy options to the Groveland Food Shelf. Now, this donated produce also comes from the farmers market.

The Groveland Food Shelf is located in the basement of Plymouth Congregational Church and distributes food for those in need. Around 25,000 pounds of food are shared with nearly 1,000 people on a

monthly basis. Five churches are involved with this monumental effort. The food shelf advertises that it is “continuously addressing the need for an ongoing supply of fresh vegetables and fruits.”

The idea for a neighborhood farmers market came about in 2007 from both Robert and the former Executive Director of SSCO, Julie Filapek. “There is no grocery store in our neighborhood where you can buy fresh fruits and vegetables,” says Robert. “We felt this would be a great niche for the community.” Robert and Julie attended a small farmers market in a nearby neighborhood and then launched their own market the following year.

Robert came up with an idea to connect the church with the market. Katie Dailey, who serves on both the SSCO board and the PCC Outreach and Events Committee, encouraged him to pursue the idea. That spring, Robert approached the Plymouth Congregational Church and asked about hosting a small farmers market in their parking lot, which was in a prime location due to a busy four-way intersection and nearby bus stops. The market was the first to be awarded a Local Produce Market permit, the result of a new City of Minneapolis policy championed by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy to reduce barriers to starting small farmers markets. According to Katie, “The congregation at Plymouth was very excited about the prospect of having a farmers market in the parking lot.”



The spring of 2008 marked the beginning of the Stevens Square Farmers Market. Two or three farmers sell their own locally grown fruits and vegetables every week. One farmer accepts Farmers Market Nutrition Program vouchers, allowing customers who participate in the federal Women, Infants and Children nutrition program to purchase healthy food. Sales are robust and the number of shoppers has been steady. The market takes place on Wednesdays from 3-7 p.m., when many parishioners also visit the church.

What makes this market unique is the connection with the church. At the end of the market, the vendors fill a few boxes with their unsold produce. Robert takes this produce to the church to be distributed through the food shelf. The fee that is normally charged to vendors who sell at farmers markets is waived if they give fresh produce to the food shelf. “The vendors are cool with the idea,” says Robert.

As market manager, Robert is present for the entirety of each and every market. He provides information on local foods and healthy eating to interested shoppers, along with recipes featuring produce sold at the market. Robert is truly devoted to all three projects and feels good about the connections made between the three. “The whole idea is to bring fresh produce to the people, whether it’s through the community gardens, the food shelf or the farmers market,” says Robert.

### Lessons learned

“Being exposed to locally grown food is good and helps people learn new things about food—and probably about the neighborhood,” says Robert. “Even if they’re just passing by on foot, bike, car or bus, they see the market and notice that it really brings life to this little corner of the world.” Katie agrees that taking advantage of an under-utilized space for a small farmers market benefits the church and the community. “Now that we are well into the season and the farmers market is in full swing, people are really enjoying the chance to purchase fresh produce. We hope that the market will continue next year.”

### Web resources

Plymouth Congregational Church: [www.plymouth.org](http://www.plymouth.org)  
 Stevens Square Community Organization: [www.sscoweb.org](http://www.sscoweb.org)  
 Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy Mini Market Project: [www.iatp.org/localFoods/project\\_miniMarkets.cfm](http://www.iatp.org/localFoods/project_miniMarkets.cfm)

## Offering Healthier Food Options

### Wednesday Community Lunch Program

#### Central Presbyterian Church

#### St. Paul, Minnesota

The sound of conversation rising from dozens of round tables gives the appearance of a crowded restaurant on a Saturday night. But actually, it is a Wednesday afternoon in the basement of Central Presbyterian Church in downtown St. Paul, Minnesota.

### History

Central Presbyterian Church's lunch program dates back nearly 30 years, and has ebbed and flowed with changes in the surrounding neighborhood. However, the lunch program really took off a few years ago after a staff member at the church brought cookies and homemade bread to the construction crew working next door on a building addition to the church's neighbor, Minnesota Public Radio.

### The motivation

According to Reverend David Colby, "Meals have been very important in churches from the beginning. People gather around food." He makes it clear that these meals have "no strings attached" and that all are welcome from any—or no—faith background. "We wanted to create a community," says Reverend Colby. This community includes office workers, construction workers, local residents and homeless people. But people are not only embracing the community building aspect; they are also taking advantage of healthy and balanced meals. "Your body is your temple, and we must be good stewards of the body that God has given us," says Reverend Colby. He adds that America's frenetic lifestyle does not encourage healthy eating. "Even just sitting down and making time for a meal would encourage a healthier diet," he says.

### The project

Chef Barb Westman has served as Food Service Manager at Central Presbyterian Church for 18 years. Self-taught, Barb brings years of experience to the lunch menus she creates, spending each Tuesday arranging a menu for Wednesday. The seasons help decide what will be featured. Vegetables come from a local, organic farm from spring to fall, and the fruits come from Barb's brother and sister-in-law's orchard. Barb enjoys cooking with the freshest ingredients possible. In the off-season, Barb relies on local stores. On any given Wednesday, the menu could include: vegetarian paella soup, couscous salad with pineapple, a whole-grain



salad with rice and barley, and tomato basil soup or southwest pumpkin soup. In the colder months, hot dishes are prepared, including a red pepper creamy pasta, and pork and sauerkraut soup. The favorite bread is apple-cranberry-walnut.

A line forms around noon at the basement door of the church and people check out the menu on a large display board and pay for their lunch. A modest price of \$6 is asked of everyone, and of course, added donations are welcomed. If someone cannot afford the cost, they are invited to eat as a guest of the church. It is not the intention to make money, but costs must be covered to continue. Financial backing is needed from the church at various times to keep things balanced.

Lunch is served buffet style and attendees are asked to take only what they need so that everyone can eat. People are also encouraged to take seconds. In 2008, an average of 140 diners participated in each lunch, with one lunch recording 170. "I don't know if we can feed many more than that," Barb says. "140 is a good average for the space we have and the food we can provide."

### Lessons learned

The success of the lunch program has followed the success and new life of downtown St. Paul. Workers in nearby office buildings, construction workers, and others now have a healthy and very reasonably priced Wednesday lunch option. "People are surprised that this is a church basement, but we don't have church basement food," says Barb. Fried food is nowhere to be found. There is a sense of excitement among those waiting in line, trying to catch a glimpse of what is on the buffet line.

Barb acknowledges that none of this would be possible without the help she receives from volunteers. “Volunteers are a wonderful support group, and what an interesting way for people to give back.” Eight to 10 volunteers help Barb prepare the food every week. Everything except the bread is made in the church kitchen on Wednesday mornings. Volunteer Mary Price believes that for some, “It is their major meal of the day.”

Barb thinks that besides her main menu of freshly prepared soups, salads and other dishes, her homemade desserts are what keep people coming back. “It’s good to have something unique, some kind of specialty to get people talking.” Regular customers would argue that everything on the buffet line is a specialty in itself, especially in this era of fast food and unhealthy diets.

Maureen Smith, the church’s Pastoral Associate and a lunch volunteer, says the community building that occurs around this lunch program is special. There are only round tables, encouraging lively conversation and new connections. No reservations are taken and some groups have their business lunches there. Maureen explains, “Those who come to lunch feel at home eating well-prepared healthy meals. But the meals are not only healthy, they’re good to eat!”

### Web resource

Central Presbyterian Church: [www.cpcstpaul.org/index.html](http://www.cpcstpaul.org/index.html)



## Gardening in Partnership with Others

### *Upper Sand Mountain Parish*

### *Sylvania, Alabama*

If you are looking for an example of an extraordinary organization doing everything they can to take care of those less fortunate, look no further than the Upper Sand Mountain Parish (USMP). The USMP, a joint effort of eight United Methodist churches in northeastern Alabama, has become an indispensable and innovative ministerial group with a long history of devotion to people in need.

### History

Thirty-nine years ago, nearly 20 Methodist churches in northeast Alabama came together to form the Upper Sand Mountain Parish. In this case, the word “parish” is used to encompass churches throughout northeast Alabama that are connected and that support the USMP. Because there was a strong need for outreach in the region, many felt that networking and forming one group parish would be most effective. The parish is centered in Sylvania, Alabama, in the southern Appalachian Mountains, but serves people over nearly 1,000 square miles. The USMP includes a food pantry, community and church gardens, a large cannery, healthy eating education, housing help, clothing and much more.

### The motivation

Tayna Rains is the Ministry Center Coordinator and currently the only full-time employee at the parish. “We live in an area where people do not want to ask for help,” says Tayna. People have worked hard for generations and have a great deal of pride, which makes asking for assistance out of the question for many. According to Tayna, many people who qualify for food stamps but do not use them come to the parish for support. Because of this, the parish does its best to maintain the dignity of those in need.

At the moment, Tayna sees more support and enthusiasm than ever from local communities. “While we are church-based, the community is very receptive and has a positive attitude,” she says. She feels that a region that is poor to begin with is hit even harder when the economy worsens. Social services become scarce, money gets tight, and cheap and unhealthy processed food—rather than fruits and vegetables—finds its way to kitchen tables.



### The project

A food pantry is based at the parish in Sylvania. Ten years ago, the parish discovered that it was not practical to give boxes of pre-selected food to those in need. A new system of food distribution was needed for a number of reasons. For instance, if a person was allergic to peanuts, a jar of peanut butter in that person’s weekly or monthly box would go to waste. A person’s pride, potentially damaged by walking out with a pre-selected box of food, was another factor.

In response, a new approach was launched. The new system has the appearance of a grocery store, giving the clients an opportunity to “shop.” Using a point system, based on family size, families can take food up to the total points allowed. “This gives them some of their dignity back and allows them to make their own food choices,” Tayna explains.

The food pantry is also supplied with fresh fruits and vegetables from nearby gardens through the “Gardens of Plenty” program. For 30 years, individuals and local businesses have donated seeds and fertilizer to local gardens for people to help support themselves. Currently, 400 families are served through this program. People are encouraged to plant gardens even if they have a small living space. The USMP purchases seeds in bulk and nearly 100 children ages 3-14 sort seeds and put them in plastic bags to be distributed.

“The children are a great part of the ministry,” says Tayna. Everyone with a garden is then encouraged to donate extra produce to the food pantry. About two acres of garden produce is donated. “Some people view fruits and vegetables as a luxury,” says Tayna. “Fresh apples and green beans should not be seen as a luxury.” Having these fresh foods available in season improves the diet of families throughout the region. Not only are the gardens helping those tending over them, but also families who receive help from the food pantry. More than 3,900 families (roughly 12,000 people) are served through the food pantry.

Also on the parish grounds sits a large-scale cannery. This cannery is fully licensed with a health permit. More than 2,000 quarts of vegetable soup and 3,000 pounds of sauerkraut are canned for future use through the food pantry. All ingredients come from the church and other local gardens. About 400 volunteers come to the cannery throughout the summer, and many help with both the cannery and food pantry. At least five people volunteer each day.

To raise funds, the parish launched their “Green Tomato Products” line. Green tomatoes are put in jars with strawberries at a 2 to 1 ratio, resulting in tomatoes with the taste and color of strawberries! “The kids love them so they must be good,” says Tayna. Jars are sold at local retailers and the money raised is used for parish ministries. A farmers market was recently started on the parish grounds, giving local people a chance to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables. Without this market, those who do not use the food pantry, or have their own garden, would have to drive on average 20-30 minutes to find fresh produce. The USMP is also teaming up with an organic garden for the first time.

Finally, the USMP is starting a health education program. “We are planning to have a registered dietician who will use our kitchen facilities to teach a 10-week healthy cooking class. We will offer scholarships to people from the community to learn more about making healthy lifestyle choices and how to put those into place,” says Tayna. “If people knew better, they would do better.” These classes began in fall 2008.

### Lessons learned

Tayna encourages faith communities who want to give food away to become connected with a food bank or similar organizations. She also says it is much more effective for parishioners to donate money to a food pantry than buy food at a grocery store and then donate it. Tayna ex-

plains that food banks can often make their money go further through discounted prices. Working together across churches also helps. Tayna sees it like this: There are eight member churches. It is easy to break one stick at a time, but eight sticks are hard to break at once. “When we pool our resources, we are able to meet the needs of the community,” she says.

As for the success of the food pantry, Tayna explains that “you can’t expect people to live off canned vegetables and peanut butter sandwiches all the time. They need fresh fruits and vegetables.” Rather than eating macaroni and cheese every meal, clients can take advantage of fresh food in season and canned produce through the fall and winter months. What has been pleasantly surprising to Tayna is how many people come back and offer their time and services to help out. “What warms my heart is that many volunteers are people who struggled at one time and were helped,” says Tayna. “So many people might be down on their luck for awhile, but many of them want to come back to help.” Everyone who has been helped is encouraged to come back and volunteer. “The economy makes it difficult to be successful, and fewer and fewer people can afford to make donations, but whatever the cost or creativity, we will continue.”

### Web resource

Upper Sand Mountain Parish: [www.uppersandmountainparish.org](http://www.uppersandmountainparish.org)



## Promoting Healthy Eating

### Body & Soul Program

#### Multiple Locations

Many people believe that the body and soul are connected: A healthy body can directly affect the health of the soul, and the other way around. The Body & Soul program promotes this belief and helps African-American congregations improve both their physical and spiritual health.

### History

Body & Soul was launched through a collaboration among the American Cancer Society, the National Cancer Institute, the University of North Carolina and the University of Michigan. “The idea was that churches and communities would pick up the program and run it on their own,” says Marci Campbell, Ph.D., professor of nutrition in the University of North Carolina’s School of Public Health at Chapel Hill. Materials were developed, including an instructional DVD and a Web site. A pilot proved successful and was picked up by the National Cancer Institute. The program has been underway for 10 years and hundreds of churches across the United States have taken part.

### The motivation

As Body & Soul organizers point out, African-Americans are at higher risk than the general population for developing heart disease, cancer and diabetes. Obesity and inactivity have a direct link to these killers. However, healthy eating and exercise can help. Body & Soul is rooted in the idea of confronting underlying causes and addressing health risks as a church community. People were already gathered at churches to find spiritual health; tying in physical health seemed a natural fit. “I was thrilled to see this program take off,” says Marci. “It was a tremendous opportunity to do some good for more people.”

### The project

Body & Soul has four program pillars that congregations are asked to follow. Below is an excerpt from Body & Soul’s Web site:

#### **First Pillar:**

*A pastor who is committed and involved*

Be sure to get the pastor’s support up front. As the leader of the church, the pastor’s support sends a clear message to the congregation. It shows that the program is in keeping with the mission of the church. And it helps church members see the link between physical health and spiritual well-being.

#### **Second Pillar:**

*Church activities that promote healthy eating*

Activities that encourage church members to eat more fruits and vegetables are the heart of Body & Soul. These can include workshops, cooking demonstrations, taste tests and many others.

#### **Third Pillar:**

*A church environment that promotes healthy eating*

Body & Soul is most effective when the church sets a good example. The congregation needs to hear the pastor speak about health. They also need to get information about healthy eating. But sermons, hand-outs, and even classes are not enough. Church members also need to eat plenty of fruits and vegetables at church events. Serving more fruits, vegetables and other healthy foods at church shows that the church “practices what it preaches.” The church is committed to the health of the congregation and healthy eating becomes a part of church life.

#### **Fourth Pillar:**

*Peer counseling that motivates church members to eat a healthy diet*

Peer counseling helps motivate church members to eat more fruits and vegetables. Interested church members sign up to talk with a trained peer volunteer. Church members talk about how healthier eating relates to their life goals and personal values. Peer counselors tailor the talk to the person’s readiness to change. Together, the church member and peer counselor create an action plan for eating more fruits and vegetables. This approach empowers people to take more control over their health.

## Lessons learned

According to Marci, the Body & Soul program seems to be most successful when participating churches collaborate with local schools, health departments and state chapters of the American Cancer Society. Having the effort backed by a strong ministerial alliance that connects the various groups is also essential. “A congregation must be motivated,” says Marci. “A strong team or ministerial alliance must be organized with outside support and everyone needs to have the confidence to complete the program and make necessary changes to the diets and habits of church members.”

Marci has been surprised by the weight loss and other health benefits experienced by church members. “Diets have changed and more people are exercising as a result of this program,” says Marci. Church members take this program seriously, including the counseling portion that is designed to provide a positive support system for participants. “People really feel it has been beneficial,” says Marci. “Many are able to discontinue hypertension medication, are losing weight, and are setting a good example for the children.”

## Web resource

Body & Soul program: [www.bodyandsoul.nih.gov](http://www.bodyandsoul.nih.gov)



[graphic used with permission from the Body & Soul Web site]



## Serving Healthy Meals in the Hindu Tradition

*The Hindu Temple of Minnesota  
Maple Grove, Minnesota*

Faith and food have brought people together for thousands of years. The Hindu Temple of Minnesota has successfully blended the two by serving healthy meals in the Hindu tradition to both members and non-members of the Hindu community.

### History

Surrounded by the quiet farm fields of Maple Grove, Minnesota, the Hindu Temple of Minnesota sits only an hour away from the hustle and bustle of Minneapolis. Its weekend lunch program began when the Temple was constructed in 2006. Sarojini Tallapragada serves as the Food Service Chair, organizing meals and volunteers to prepare food on Saturday and Sunday mornings.

### The motivation

Many faith communities enjoy coming together after worship to enjoy a meal, and nowhere is this more evident than at the Hindu Temple. The Temple's mission is to conduct and sponsor religious, spiritual, charitable, educational, social and cultural activities for the Hindu community, and to preserve and embellish Hindu traditions and cultural heritage. Food is considered a gift from God, so it is treated seriously. According to members, the weekend meals provide an opportunity to show respect to God for giving them good, healthy food. The motivation for Sarojini is simple: "If you can feed people, you feel happiness," she says.

### The project

Meals are served at the Temple on Saturdays and Sundays at noon, and three to four hundred individuals are served at each meal. After services, the cooks serve food in a buffet style. Diners are charged only \$4 per meal, with the proceeds going directly to the Temple. Because many who follow the Hindu faith are vegetarian, no meat is served.

The Temple follows the belief that there are two kinds of food that can be eaten: *Saathvic* and *Taamasic*. *Saathvic* encompasses all foods that promote good things in humans, including kindness, mercy and happiness. These foods include any vegetable such as rice, lentils, potatoes, okra and cabbage. *Taamasic* foods are non-vegetarian foods. These foods are believed to induce qualities that are more aggressive, especially if one eats a lot of meat. However, it is not necessary for Hindus to follow a vegetarian diet.



Five or six families, typically younger couples, volunteer each week to prepare the food, which is all made at the Temple. *Anna dhanam* is the Hindu term for "gift of food." According to Sarojini, "We cook for mental satisfaction. If you feed people, you give them life. Giving food is the greatest charitable thing the human race can do."

Suben Kanagaratnam, a member of the Temple, attends the meals regularly and enjoys the sense of community he feels after worship. "We get all caught up in our work lives all week, so it's nice to come and enjoy a great meal with my faith community." Everything from rice pudding and soup to homemade yogurt and spicy potatoes are served, with each meal featuring at least six items.

### Lessons learned

According to Sarojini, the food preparation can be very time consuming, but it is definitely worth the effort. "Indians really appreciate a home-cooked meal, so if they find that they cannot cook as much as they'd like, they can enjoy a good home cooked meal at the Temple." Volunteers must be coordinated to ensure there are enough people available to make the large quantities of food needed. Volunteers are expected to cover the cost of all the necessary groceries, though the Temple will also contribute provisions if something specific is needed at the last minute. Once the rush begins on a busy day, the room fills up fast. There are also tours of the Temple that coincide with the weekend meals.

All people are welcome at the Temple for lunch, regardless of their faith background. Sarojini says proudly, "In the Temple, food comes with the blessings of God!"

### Web resource

Hindu Temple of Minnesota: [www.hindumandirmn.org](http://www.hindumandirmn.org)

## Additional Resources

### **Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA)**

Food Security Learning Center — CSA: [worldhungeryear.org/fslc/faqs/ria\\_041.asp?section=2&click=1](http://worldhungeryear.org/fslc/faqs/ria_041.asp?section=2&click=1)  
 Land Stewardship Project CSA Farm Directory (Minnesota and Wisconsin): [landstewardshipproject.org/csa.html](http://landstewardshipproject.org/csa.html)  
 Robyn Van En Center for CSA Resources: [csacenter.org](http://csacenter.org)  
 USDA Alternative Farming Systems Information Center: [nal.usda.gov/afsic/csa](http://nal.usda.gov/afsic/csa)

### **Farmers Markets**

Food Security Learning Center — Farmers Markets: [worldhungeryear.org/fslc/faqs/ria\\_047a.asp?section=4&click=1](http://worldhungeryear.org/fslc/faqs/ria_047a.asp?section=4&click=1)  
 Minnesota Department of Agriculture (list of farmers markets in Minnesota): [www.mda.state.mn.us/food/minnesotagrown/farmersmarkets.htm](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/food/minnesotagrown/farmersmarkets.htm)

### **Food Preservation**

National Center for Home Food Preservation: [uga.edu/nchfp/index.html](http://uga.edu/nchfp/index.html)  
 University of Minnesota Extension — Food Preservation: [extension.umn.edu/foodsafety/components/foodpreservation.htm](http://extension.umn.edu/foodsafety/components/foodpreservation.htm)

### **Gardening**

American Community Gardening Association: [communitygarden.org](http://communitygarden.org)  
 Gardening Matters (Minnesota): [gardenworksmn.org](http://gardenworksmn.org)  
 University of Minnesota Extension — Gardening Information: [extension.umn.edu/gardeninfo](http://extension.umn.edu/gardeninfo)

### **Nutrition Education**

Holy Healthy UMC: Steps to Faith-Based Health and Wellness: [holyhealthyumc.com/healthyeating.htm](http://holyhealthyumc.com/healthyeating.htm)  
 University of Minnesota Extension — Nutrition, Food, and Health: [extension.umn.edu/nutrition](http://extension.umn.edu/nutrition)

### **Other National Food-Related Organizations and Healthy Eating Resources**

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota — Prevention Minnesota : [preventionmn.org](http://preventionmn.org)  
 Community Food Security Coalition: [foodsecurity.org](http://foodsecurity.org)  
 Eat Well Guide: [eatwellguide.org](http://eatwellguide.org)  
 Food Routes: [foodroutes.org](http://foodroutes.org)  
 Food Share: [foodshare.net](http://foodshare.net)  
 Growing Power: [growingpower.org](http://growingpower.org)  
 Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy: [iatp.org](http://iatp.org) | [iatp.org/faith](http://iatp.org/faith) | [agobservatory.org/issue\\_localFoods.cfm](http://agobservatory.org/issue_localFoods.cfm)  
 Local Harvest: [LocalHarvest.org](http://LocalHarvest.org)  
 Slow Food USA: [slowfoodusa.org](http://slowfoodusa.org)  
 Sustainable Communities Network — Agriculture and Food Systems: [sustainable.org/economy/agriculture.html](http://sustainable.org/economy/agriculture.html)  
 The Food Project: [thefoodproject.org](http://thefoodproject.org)  
 The Food Trust: [thefoodtrust.org](http://thefoodtrust.org)  
 World Hunger Year: [worldhungeryear.org](http://worldhungeryear.org)





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