



The Good Food Access Program

A Report to the Minnesota Legislature

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Executive Summary

The Good Food Access Program (GFAP) was established at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) through legislation passed by the 2016 Legislature (MINN. STAT. 17.1017). The same year, the Legislature also established the Good Food Access Program Advisory Committee (MINN. STAT. 17.1018).

The purpose of the GFAP is to increase the availability of and access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food for underserved communities in low- and moderate-income areas. To accomplish this goal, the GFAP provides two grant opportunities: Technical Assistance Grant (designed for organizations providing technical assistance to eligible grocery stores and small food retailers) and Equipment and Physical Improvement Grant (to assist grocery store and small food retailers in purchasing equipment and making physical improvements).

The Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 GFAP Equipment and Physical Improvement Grant Request for Proposals (RFP) was released in November 2024 and closed in January 2025. The MDA awarded \$935,000.11 in Equipment and Physical Improvement Grants to 21 projects. Projects ranged from \$7,000 to \$75,000.

The GFAP Advisory Committee recommended not opening an RFP for GFAP Technical Assistance Grants to focus on reaching more retailers with equipment and physical improvement needs, therefore the MDA did not award funds for technical assistance.

During the 2025 Regular Legislative Session, the MDA proposed changes to MINN. STAT. 17.1017, which included changing the program name to the Food Retail Improvement and Development Program.

Introduction

This report is required by the Minnesota Legislature (MINN. STAT. 17.1017, subdivision 9):

Legislative report. The commissioner, in cooperation with any economic or community development financial institution and any other entity with which it contracts, shall submit an annual report on the Good Food Access Program by January 15 of each year to the chairs and ranking minority members of the House of Representatives and Senate committees and divisions with jurisdiction over agriculture policy and finance. The annual report shall include, but not be limited to, a summary of the following metrics:

- (1) the number and types of projects financed;
- (2) the amount of dollars leveraged or matched per project;
- (3) the geographic distribution of financed projects;
- (4) the number and types of technical assistance recipients;
- (5) the demographics of the areas served;
- (6) the costs of the program;
- (7) the number of SNAP dollars spent;
- (8) any increase in retail square footage;
- (9) the number of loans or grants to businesses owned by women and Black, Indigenous, or Persons of Color; and
- (10) measurable economic and health outcomes, including, but not limited to, increases in sales and consumption of locally sourced and other fresh fruits and vegetables, the number of construction and retail jobs retained or created, and any health initiatives associated with the program.

This report will focus on grants awarded in FY25 and the impacts of previous rounds of grantmaking in FY23 and FY24 grants.

Background

The Good Food Access Program (GFAP) was established at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) through legislation passed by the 2016 Legislature (MINN. STAT. 17.1017). The same year, the Legislature also established the Good Food Access Program Advisory Committee (MINN. STAT. 17.1018).

The purpose of the GFAP is to increase the availability of and access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food for underserved communities in low- and moderate-income areas. To accomplish this goal, the GFAP provides financial support and technical assistance to open, renovate, or expand the operations of grocery stores and small food retailers in underserved communities in low- and moderate-income areas.

This legislation also created the Good Food Access Account in the Agricultural Fund. The account consists of money appropriated by the Legislature and may also accept funds donated, allotted, or transferred to the account from public or private entities. The statute encourages the MDA to leverage other forms of public and private financing or financial assistance for the projects.

Good Food Access Account funds may be used for loans, grants, technical assistance, and other types of financial assistance. The MDA may contract with one or more qualified economic or community development financial institutions to manage the financing component of the program, and with one or more qualified organizations or public agencies with financial or other program-related expertise to manage the provision of technical assistance to project grantees.

In FY17, the GFAP received a one-time appropriation of \$250,000 to the Good Food Access Account. Of this amount, \$7,400 remains available for funding grants and administrative expenses.

Beginning in FY18, annual appropriations for the program have come from the Agricultural Growth, Research, and Innovation (AGRI) Program. The annual appropriation gradually grew from \$250,000 in FY18 to \$450,000 in FY23 and increased to \$1 million per year in FY24 and FY25.

During the 2025 Regular Legislative Session, the MDA proposed changes to MINN. STAT. 17.1017. The three main changes included:

- changing the program name to the Food Retail Improvement and Development Grant (FRIDG) Program;
- removing food desserts as defined by census tracts as the primary location eligibility requirement; and
- updating department name changes to reflect the current state agencies represented on the Advisory Committee.

These changes were made in response to community, grant review panel, retailer, and advisory committee feedback to better serve the intended program beneficiaries and to more closely align with the original legislative intent. Along with changing the name of the program, the names of each of the grants also changed.

In addition to the changes made by statute, we also renamed the individual grant programs. The former Equipment and Physical Improvement Grant is now known as the Equipment and Infrastructure Grant, and the former Technical Assistance Grant is now known as the Technical Assistance Provider Support Grant.

The program names were effective beginning in FY26, or July 1, 2025. Most of this report will refer to the program as the previous name, except for the portion of the report discussing FY26, where the program will be referred to by its new name.

Program Activities Completed

The following activities have taken place since submitting the last report in January 2025:

- January-February 2025: GFAP Equipment and Physical Improvement Grant proposals were reviewed by the evaluation committee. The MDA awarded a total of \$935,000 to 21 equipment and physical improvement projects.
- January-May: The 2025 Regular Legislative Session took place where changes were made to the GFAP statute including changing the program name to FRIDG. These changes took effect July 1, 2025.
- June 12, 2025: The GFAP Advisory Committee met for its 18th meeting.
- October 27, 2025: The FRIDG Advisory Committee met for its 19th meeting.
- October 2025: New webpage was developed for FRIDG.
- January 16, 2026: FY26 FRIDG Equipment and Infrastructure Grant RFP was released.

Fiscal Year 2025 GFAP Equipment and Physical Improvement Grants

In November 2024, the MDA released the RFP for the ninth round of GFAP Equipment and Physical Improvement Grants. The department anticipated awarding up to \$935,000 to assist grocery store and small food retailers in purchasing equipment and making physical improvements. Applicants could request a minimum of \$5,000 and a maximum of \$75,000, and no match was required.

Projects were expected to increase access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate foods, and applicants needed to be in or serve a food desert (as defined by the USDA Economic Research Service) or serve populations with limited access (such as the aging population or those living with a disability) in a low- or moderate-income area. The evaluation criteria focused on long-term project sustainability, community engagement, community economic and health impacts, as well as sales of Minnesota agriculture products. In response to the RFP, the MDA received 90 applications requesting approximately \$4.75 million.

Grants were awarded competitively, and applicants were ranked by a panel of MDA and community-based reviewers. Preference was given to projects that:

- Demonstrated community support and impact of the project.
- Required a public investment to move forward, build capacity, create community impact, or be competitive.
- Had positive economic and health impacts on underserved communities, such as through creation and retention of jobs for individuals who reflect the demographics of the community.
- Demonstrated a commitment to increasing sales from Minnesota agricultural producers.

A total of \$935,000 was awarded to 21 projects. Projects ranged from \$7,000 to \$75,000. Estimated private investments totaled \$3.95 million, although there were no formal matching requirements.

Table 1: FY 2025 GFAP Equipment and Physical Improvement Awards

* Estimated Total Project Cost is based on the grantee's original budget submitted as a part of their grant proposal. Some grantees may have reduced the scope of their projects based on their actual grant awards.

District	Organization Name	Location	County	Award Amount	Estimated Total Project Cost*
08A	American Indian Community Housing Organization	Duluth	St. Louis	\$75,000	\$2,995,775
21A	Bolt's Grocery Store	Lake Benton	Lincoln	\$70,120	\$70,120
21B	Butterfield Hardware LLC	Butterfield	Watonwan	\$40,000	\$42,929
11A	Cloquet Natural Foods	Cloquet	Carlton	\$13,104	\$13,104
09B	Ditterich Mercantile	Vergas	Otter Tail	\$16,329	\$16,329
09A	Dutchmen's	Fergus Falls	Otter Tail	\$68,926	\$204,645
08A	Ecolibrium3	Duluth	St. Louis	\$75,000	\$94,218
21A	Ivanhoe Supermarket	Ivanhoe	Lincoln	\$75,000	\$84,775
09B	Larry's Supermarket of Battle Lake, Inc.	Battle Lake	Otter Tail	\$56,100	\$56,100
63A	Longfellow Family Foods	Minneapolis	Hennepin	\$24,601	\$25,851
04B	Manna Food Cooperative	Detroit Lakes	Becker	\$46,434	\$678,896
03A	Mitska's Market	Ely	St. Louis	\$24,936	\$78,000
16A	Natural Food Co-op	Litchfield	Meeker	\$27,020	\$27,020
16B	New London Food Co-operative	New London	Kandiyohi	\$9,195	\$10,195
02A	Northern Bait & Convenience	Gonvick	Clearwater	\$40,820	\$44,000
05A	Northwoods Grocery	Nevis	Hubbard	\$75,000	\$153,982
12A	Pomme de Terre Foods	Morris	Stevens	\$7,212	\$7,213
16B	Real Food Inc. dba Becker Market	Willmar	Kandiyohi	\$16,102	\$16,102
14B	Rivers Station LLC	St. Cloud	Stearns	\$55,798	\$75,000
07B	Simek's Farm LLC	Kelsey	St. Louis	\$43,300	\$43,300
46A	Weinberg Brothers Investment Corporation, LLC	St. Louis Park	Hennepin	\$75,000	\$144,145
Total	--	--	--	\$935,000	\$4,881,700

As in previous years, most projects focused on upgrading and expanding existing infrastructure rather than building new retail locations. For example, Ditterich Mercantile, located in Vergas, purchased a 3-door freezer dedicated to locally sourced meats and a cooler to offer locally grown fresh produce.

This year, we also have four grantees starting their retail space or expanding into a new space. Simek's Farm, located in Kelsey, is opening a retail space on their farm where they will offer dairy, eggs, meats, fruits, and vegetables. They will be using their funding not only to purchase coolers for this retail space, but they will also be pouring a slab of concrete for their outdoor market to make it accessible for all. Ecolibrium3, a non-profit operating in the Lincoln Park neighborhood of Duluth, is utilizing their grant award to renovate a building for a grocery start-up, Lincoln Park Grocery, to provide fruit, vegetables, dairy, and meat to their community.



Photo 1 and 2. Ecolibrium3, located in the Lincoln Park neighborhood of Duluth, is renovating a building to become Lincoln Park Grocery, to provide fresh, whole foods to their community.

Retailers receiving funds under this grant are required to participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Currently, all but five of the FY25 recipients are SNAP authorized retailers and had combined SNAP sales of \$566,699 during the first year of their projects. The remaining grantees will become authorized SNAP retailers before the completion of their project and being reimbursed for their expenses.

Recipients of GFAP grants represent multiple business and ownership models. Of the 21 FY25 grantees, 16 are for-profit businesses, two are nonprofit organizations (Pomme de Terre Foods, Inc. and Ecolibrium3), and three are cooperatives (Manna Food Cooperative, Natural Foods Co-op, and New London Food Cooperative). Of the 21 projects, 14 are grocery stores, one is a food hub with a retail component (Becker Market), two are convenience stores (Northern Bait & Convenience, Rivers Station) and three are other small food retailers like a natural/health foods store (Cloquet Natural Foods, Dutchmen's), a corner store (Longfellow Family Foods) or direct farm-to-consumer market (Simek's Farm).

Projects serve a variety of diverse communities across the state. Of the 21 funded proposals, 11 are serving urban areas (city with a population of more than 5,000) and 10 are serving primarily rural areas (city with a population of less than 5,000). Thirteen projects are located in food deserts, six are serving other low- or moderate-income areas, and two are filling critical gaps such as access to health and local foods and access to culturally appropriate foods. Grantees noted that they specifically serve people in their communities who are

aging, low-income, Black, Indigenous, and people of color, including those who are Hispanic, Latino, Asian, Native American, African American, or Somali.

Descriptions of funded projects and a map of their locations can be found in the [Appendix](#).

Fiscal Year 2023 and 2024 GFAP Equipment and Physical Improvement Grants

During 2025, we followed up with FY23 and FY24 GFAP Equipment and Physical Improvement grantees. Nineteen of 37 grantees have completed their project and most plan to complete by the end of 2026. Summaries of these grantees are available in prior years' legislative reports.

Of the 37 FY23 and FY24 retailers who benefited from GFAP grants, all but two grantees participated in SNAP during FY25 and had total SNAP redemptions of \$3,553,344. Since receiving their awards, these retailers have redeemed a combined total of \$8,162,625. The remaining grantees will become authorized SNAP retailers before the completion of their project.

All FY23 and FY24 recipients reported that MDA grant funds helped make their projects possible and that the projects were unlikely to occur without the grant funding.

"We are so grateful for the FRIDG Program. We would not have been able to grow and keep our doors open without it. We are forever grateful for the opportunity to serve our community!"

-Jessica W., New Ulm Community Market and Cooperative

"We are deeply grateful for the support provided by the FRIDG: Retailer Equipment and Infrastructure Grant Program. This project has allowed Mogadishu Meat and Grocery to better serve our community by expanding access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate foods. The grant has not only improved our infrastructure but also strengthened our role as a trusted community hub. We look forward to continuing our work and building on the positive impact this program has made possible."

-Tohow S., Mogadishu Meat and Grocery

Likewise, award recipients expect that their project will positively impact the long-term sustainability of their business. Mills Country Market, a store featured in last year's report, is a family-owned grocery store in New York Mills, population of 1,294. Tim Muehler, the store owner, and his son Tyler, who works at the store, worked together on this project and received \$74,376 in grant funding. In addition to offering more healthy food options and seeing a rise in customers visiting the store, they were hoping to see their energy costs go down with their new equipment, which replaced equipment from the 1970's. Tim is happy to report that since installing the new equipment, their energy costs have decreased between \$800-\$1000 per month! "We thank you folks for all you do to help us succeed and stay in business. Without help like this we would not be able to upgrade and be more energy efficient," said Muehler.



Photo 3 and 4. West Bank Grocery, located in Minneapolis, purchased and installed new equipment for product, fresh meats, and frozen vegetables.

West Bank Grocery, located in Minneapolis, received an award of \$59,392 in FY24. With their funding, they replaced and added two 6-door freezers, two fresh deli/meat coolers, vertical meat merchandiser, and shelving to increase retail space and healthy options for the community they serve. Owner Osman Diini says “We are located in the heart of a low-income and moderate-income area. We attract and give opportunities to locals that are in need of a job.” Since they completed their project, they have been able to add two full time positions to their staff. Of the FY23-25 grantees who have completed their projects, approximately five full-time-equivalent positions have been added as a result of their projects. In addition to increasing their staff, West Bank Grocery’s project has also led to an increase in sales of produce, meat, and dairy products.

The FRIDG Program focuses on expanding access to healthy grocery options but also prioritizes adding Minnesota-grown or -raised products. 83% of FY23-25 grantees report that they have been able to add local products as a result of their project. 56% of grantees added local fruits, 67% added local vegetables, 67% added local meat, fish, and poultry, 44% added local dairy products, and 33% added other local products like eggs, legumes, grains, maple syrup, and honey (see Figure 1).

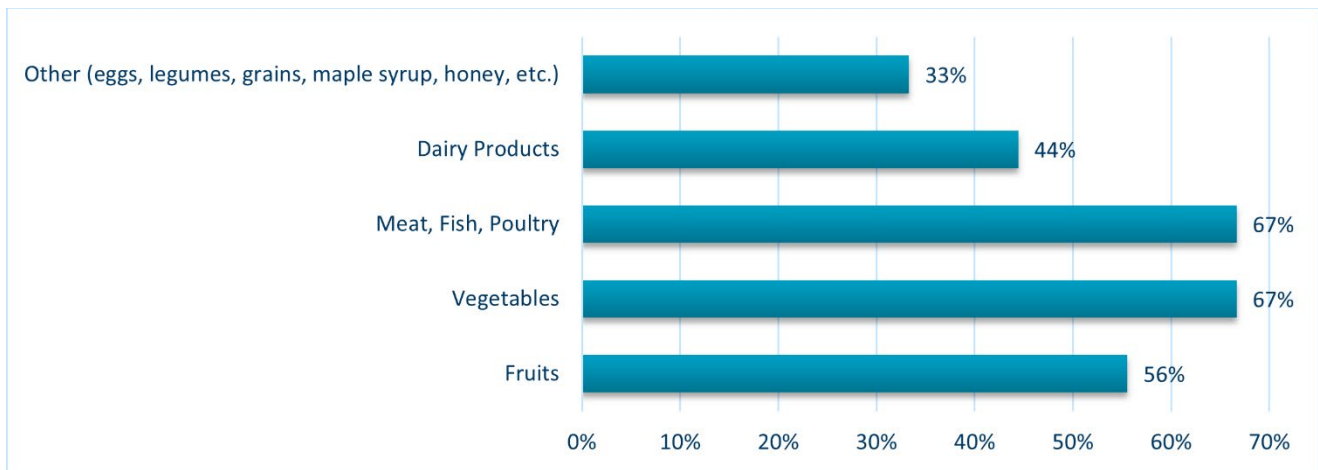


Figure 1. Percent of projects adding Minnesota-grown or -raised products because of their project.

Next Steps

After considering input from the FRIDG Advisory Committee, the RFPs for FY26 FRIDG Equipment and Infrastructure Grant, as well as Technical Assistance Provider Support Grants, were released in January 2026. The application period will run through March 10, 2026, and funding decisions will be announced in late spring 2026. Through a competitive review process, we expect to award approximately \$725,000 for Equipment and Infrastructure Grants and up to \$200,000 in Technical Assistance Provider Support Grants.

Appendix

Table 2: Summaries of FY25 GFAP Equipment and Physical Improvement Grantees

Organization	Location	Project Summary
American Indian Community Housing Organization	Duluth	Niiwin Indigenous Food Market will expand retail space with one four-door cooler, one four-door freezer and deli case to offer their community access to nutritious and culturally appropriate food that predominately highlights Indigenous foods and vendors. They will offer grocery items like milk, eggs, and bread as well as wild rice, maple syrup and sugar, traditional teas, regional fish, hominy/flint corn, and value-added products.
Bolt's Grocery Store	Lake Benton	Bolt's Grocery Store will replace two coolers and condensing units to be more energy efficient and to offer a wider array of fresh meat and dairy options.
Butterfield Hardware LLC	Butterfield	Butterfield Hardware will purchase five freezers and shelving units to carry a wider range of perishable healthy foods.
Cloquet Natural Foods	Cloquet	Cloquet Natural Foods will replace an inefficient and failing cooler and freezer with one three-door freezer and one three-door cooler to increase energy efficiency and reduce waste. The new equipment will also support them in being a CSA drop-off location, helping farmers get their products to consumers.
Ditterich Mercantile	Vergas	Ditterich Mercantile will purchase a three-door freezer dedicated to locally sourced meats and a cooler to offer locally grown fresh produce.
Dutchmen's	Fergus Falls	Dutchmen's will purchase shelving, gravity bins, dispensers, scale, and a nut grinder to establish their bulk food distribution infrastructure. They will also purchase a freezer and refrigerator to expand retail space for fresh produce.
Ecolibrium3	Duluth	A non-profit grocery store start-up located in the Lincoln Park neighborhood, will utilize funding for construction costs to open their retail location, Lincoln Park Grocery which will focus on the sales of fruit, vegetables, dairy, and meat.
Ivanhoe Supermarket	Ivanhoe	Ivanhoe Supermarket will purchase and install three new cooler display cases that will increase capacity for selling fresh produce, meat, and dairy products.
Larry's Supermarket of Battle Lake, Inc.	Battle Lake	Larry's Supermarket will replace old, inefficient equipment with reconditioned freezer equipment creating more energy efficiency while expanding their square footage of retail space allowing them to expand their offerings.
Longfellow Family Foods	Minneapolis	Longfellow Family Foods will purchase two coolers and one freezer to replace malfunctioning units which will provide high-quality fresh and healthy foods, as well as expanding to offer more organic dairy, cheese, and egg options.
Manna Food Cooperative	Detroit Lakes	Manna Food Cooperative will be updating their compressors and electrical work necessary for relocating into a larger retail space, allowing them to broaden the foods they will be able to sell in both fresh and frozen options, including a significant expansion of Minnesota-raised frozen meats.

Organization	Location	Project Summary
Mitska's Market	Ely	Mitska's Market will update their physical space and purchase equipment to improve and increase retail space to provide a larger variety of pantry staples and whole food products.
Natural Food Co-op	Litchfield	Natural Food Co-op will purchase and install a new reach-in freezer to expand their offerings of frozen meat, fruit, and vegetables.
New London Food Co-operative	New London	New London Food Co-op will purchase a refrigerator to increase their supply and variety of local and organic vegetables, as well as a freezer to purchase whole animals for sale.
Northern Bait & Convenience	Gonvick	Northern Bait and Convenience will purchase and install a walk-in cooler allowing them to offer fruits, vegetables, more dairy, meats, and other healthier food options.
Northwoods Grocery	Nevis	Northwoods Grocery will purchase one walk-in freezer, one walk-in cooler, and two compressors to replace those destroyed in a fire so they are able to continue to offer access to food in their rural community.
Pomme de Terre Foods	Morris	Pomme de Terre Foods will replace a failing, inefficient freezer with a new freezer to continue to offer a wide variety of locally grown/raised produce, meat, cheese, meat alternatives and frozen international foods.
Real Food Inc. dba Becker Market	Willmar	Becker Market will purchase a refrigerated trailer to store and make food deliveries from their store as well as pick up food from local farmers to deliver to customers.
Rivers Station LLC	St. Cloud	Rivers Station is a convenience store trading their tobacco retail space for grocery retail focusing on produce, meats, and dairy products. Their award will cover necessary electrical upgrades, a freezer and cooler with new condensing units and grocery carts.
Simek's Farm LLC	Kelsey	Simek's Farm will utilize funding to expand their retail space and purchase coolers to provide space for local dairy, eggs, meats, fruits, and vegetables. They will also enhance their outdoor market by pouring a concrete slab to make it more accessible.
Weinberg Brothers Investment Corporation, LLC	St. Louis Park	The Kosher Spot will expand their retail space with 12 refrigeration units and eight freezer units which will increase their capacity for selling more locally sourced kosher meat, poultry and dairy products.

Map: FY25 GFAP grantees

This map of Minnesota shows the locations of FY25 GFAP Equipment and Physical Improvement grantees. These grantees are listed in [Table 2](#).

