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AGRICULTURE**Southeast Minnesota program will rescue the food from farms otherwise left behind**

The Southeast Minnesota Food Rescue and Redistribution Program is a new initiative that's working with farmers to reduce food waste and food insecurity in southeast Minnesota.

Written By: [Noah Fish](#) | 5:30 am, May 18, 2021



Food waste. GgWink/iStockphoto.com

A rescue effort is underway in Southeast Minnesota to take the leftover food from farms and turn it into a product local communities can be nourished from.

The [Southeast Minnesota Food Rescue and Redistribution Program](#) is a project that was started in response to the [COVID-19 pandemic](#) and the dire food position it put many families and communities in.

The goal of the program is to reduce local fresh food waste by rescuing items left over on farms and then redistributing those items to the community. On its website, the Southeast Minnesota Food Rescue and Redistribution Program describes its pursuit to solve the enduring issue of every farmer having more product than they can ultimately sell.

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Lisa Schutz, director of the Southeast Minnesota Food Rescue and Redistribution Program. (Noah Fish / Agweek)

Lisa Schutz is the director of the Southeast Minnesota Food Rescue and Redistribution Program. She said the overall mission of the program started this year is to reduce [food insecurity](#) in southeast Minnesota by using products grown in the region.

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"In 2020, we became aware that there was a sharp increase in food waste for farmers, due to points of distribution that were not open, such as restaurants," she said. "And we also knew that food insecurity was on the rise."

She said the rescued food will first go to communities in the greatest need of food, such as low-income families, homeless people and seniors who do not feel safe venturing outside their homes. Food from the program will be delivered to those people, said Schutz.

"Last year we rescued apples, raspberries and tomatoes — and we were able to turn those into products and sell them here at the market or distribute them to food insecure households," she said.

One of the founding members of the program is Doug Bibus, who owns and operates a small apple orchard in southern Minnesota. The orchard produces about 2,000 bushels of apples per year, which equals about 70,000 pounds.

"A lot of Doug's fruit wouldn't be perfect for retail, just because of size, color or whatever, but still be great to make syrups, jellies or dehydrate to make snack mixes," Schutz said. "So we rescue that food."

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Product line of rescued foods

The Southeast Minnesota Food Rescue and Redistribution Program has already formed a partnership with INFUZN Foods, which will release a line of products within the next few months, all made from the foods rescued in the program.

"And so we'll be doing this on a much larger scale," Schutz said.

The product line will have affordable price points, she said, and will be delivered to food insecure households before it's sold elsewhere.

"We have found that part of food insecurity involves mobility of food as well as mobility of people. So if they cannot get to a food shelf or a pantry, then we'll take the fresh food to them," Schutz said.

Schutz is a Native American from the Cherokee tribe — from the "Paint Clan," she said.

"The reason we're called the Paint Clan is because we're medicine women, and we paint remedies on," said Schutz, who sells natural medicine products as a vendor at local farmers markets.

She sees the food rescue program as part of her own personal calling, which has been in the works for centuries.

"Handed down from my great-grandmother to me, and I have a granddaughter right now working in my booth," she said. "Learning natural medicine."

Schutz invited Patrice Bailey, an assistant commissioner with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, to the Rochester Farmers Market on May 1 to learn more about the food rescue program and how it can work in Southeast Minnesota.

"Local foods are really the backbone of the fabric of Minnesota," Bailey said. "It's not the food big-boxes, it's the local community groups that have been able to come together to help each other like this one."

Bailey said that food banks and pantries help reach communities in need, but more needs to be done to reach the people who might be slipping through the cracks.

"I feel like the food pantry industry, whatever it's turned into, is probably not always getting to the local families," Bailey said.

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Lisa Schutz, director of the Southeast Minnesota Food Rescue and Redistribution Program. (Noah Fish / Agweek)

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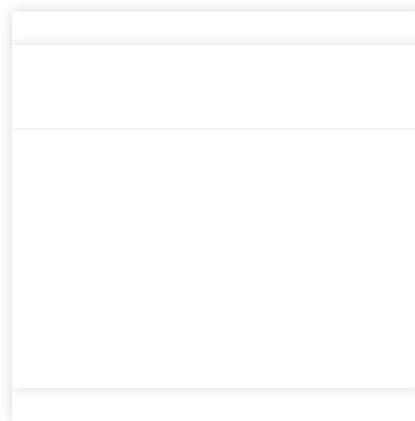
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