



Minnesota Food Charter Media Q&A

Q1: What is the Minnesota Food Charter?

A1: The Minnesota Food Charter is a roadmap designed to guide policymakers and community leaders in providing Minnesotans with equal access to affordable, safe, and healthy food, regardless of where they live — access that not only improves the health and wellbeing of residents but that also has the potential to significantly improve the state’s economy.

Q2: Why was the Food Charter created?

A2: In recent decades, diet-related health issues—such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease—have surged, presenting costly, long-term challenges to Minnesota’s prosperity. Changes in the way Minnesotans eat—particularly high calorie, unhealthy foods and beverages—contribute to growing healthcare costs and lower worker productivity. This is not sustainable. As a state, we must work together to improve our health and support a vibrant economy. By putting health at the center of policies and systems, we can achieve the changes we envision.

There’s also a real cost to society when healthy, safe food isn’t accessible and affordable for everyone. According to the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), two-thirds of Minnesotans are now overweight or obese. A lack of access to safe, affordable, healthy food and too much access to inexpensive, unhealthy food contributes to growing rates of obesity and related diseases such as diabetes that cost Minnesotans \$2.8 billion annually. Hunger is also expensive; according to Hunger-Free Minnesota, food insecurity costs Minnesotans upwards of \$1.62 billion annually in preventable direct and indirect health and education costs.

Q3: How, specifically, will the Minnesota Food Charter help improve healthy food access and the state economy?

A3: First and foremost, the Food Charter identifies the challenges to reliable access to nutritious, affordable, safe food in the places Minnesotans work, learn, live, and play. Then, it offers proven policy and systems change strategies for overcoming those challenges. The Food Charter identifies the principles and priorities that the people of Minnesota believe will make a dramatic and positive difference in the lives of all Minnesotans—policymakers and community leaders need only follow these strategies to improve the health of our state’s residents and our economy.

Q4: What are the Food Charter's key findings and strategies?

A4: Among the key discoveries, the Food Charter found that healthy food needs to be more affordable, accessible and available to all Minnesotans regardless of where they live or how much money they have; food skills among all Minnesotans need to be strengthened so they can grow, get and/or prepare healthy foods for themselves and their families; and Minnesota's food infrastructure must improve the health of Minnesotans while growing a prosperous food and farm economy that can adequately grow and sell healthy foods. The Food Charter identifies a variety of strategies to address each of these challenges, from offering a greater variety of healthy options including culturally familiar foods, to implementing K-12 curricula around food skills education, to creating policies and incentives that reduce food waste.

Q5: Whose idea was it to develop a Food Charter for Minnesota?

A5: Minnesota is following the lead of four other states in developing a Food Charter, including Iowa, Michigan, Oregon, and West Virginia. The Minnesota Department of Health took the initiative to pursue development of the Minnesota Food Charter, and the work of developing the Food Charter was the combined effort of hundreds of organizations throughout the state, a number of state agencies, the University of Minnesota, Minnesota corporations and non-profits, and thousands of Minnesotans.

Q6: How was the Food Charter funded?

A6: The Minnesota Department of Health's Statewide Health Improvement Program secured a grant from the Centers for Disease and Prevention. The Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota also provided financial support. The University of Minnesota contributed substantial staff time and its Healthy Foods, Healthy Lives Institute served as the organizational home for the Food Charter Steering Committee.

Q7: Have you been working with policymakers as you've developed the Charter to ensure their buy-in and the Food Charter's success?

A7: Policymakers, including elected officials, as well as state and local agency decision-makers have been involved and informed about the Food Charter. Their participation has ranged from financial support to participating in Food Charter input sessions and serving in leadership roles on Food Charter committees. Many leaders and organizations that work with these decision-makers on a regular basis have also been deeply involved.

Q8: What are the biggest obstacles you face in getting the Food Charter implemented?

A8: The Centers for Disease Control lost the funding that supported the Food Charter, which has meant additional work to find financial support for the ongoing work of the Charter. We are pleased that the Food Charter represents unprecedented alignment between health, human

services, agriculture, and economic development, resulting in an exciting shared agenda for policy and systems changes that serve the interests and needs of all Minnesotans.

Q9: If the strategies in the Food Charter are followed, how quickly do you anticipate we'll see a reversal in the state's obesity numbers, food access numbers, related healthcare costs, and economic growth?

A9: By increasing access to safe, affordable, healthy food in the places we work, learn, live, and play, we anticipate cost savings and economic growth in a variety of ways. For example:

- By reducing BMI of Minnesotans by just 5% could save \$4 billion in healthcare costs in just ten years
(source: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/oshii/ship/docs/ROI2013.pdf>)
- By ensuring enrollment of all Minnesotans eligible for SNAP, \$210 million would be added to the state's economy. (source: <http://hungerfreemn.org/media-coverage/publications/snap-access-study-2010/>)
- By supporting policy and systems changes that increase access to healthy food, "Minnesota appears to have already lowered health care expenditures. In just the last two years, because of bending the curve on obesity, we estimate 47,000 fewer Minnesotans are obese today."(source: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/oshii/ship/docs/Bendingthecurve.pdf>)
- By investing in healthy food infrastructure, a state like Minnesota can add \$2.9 billion per year in gains to our food and farm economy.
(source: http://www.fairfoodnetwork.org/sites/default/files/Michigan20PercentShift_FullReport.pdf)

Q10: What can the average Minnesotan do with this information?

A10: All Minnesotans can participate in implementing policy and systems change strategies described in the Food Charter; it was designed that way on purpose. Minnesota residents can identify an issue or strategy they feel passionate about and work with their friends, community members, or other partners to implement the strategies.