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## Minnesota Food Charter Urges Investment in Equal Food Access; Aims to Save Lives and Dollars

**Shared agenda for statewide healthy food access launches October 29 at the Food Access Summit in Duluth, Minnesota**

**SAINT PAUL, Minn.—October, 2014—**To improve Minnesotans' access to affordable, safe and healthy food, a broad-based group of Minnesota organizations and a diverse group of stakeholders have created the Minnesota Food Charter, which will launch today at the Food Access Summit in Duluth.

The Food Charter is a roadmap designed to guide policymakers and community leaders in providing all 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 improve the state's economy.

"It's about saving lives and dollars. It's about ensuring our children and our children's children have reliable access to healthy, safe and affordable food to improve their lives, while at the same time strengthening our food and farm economy to improve Minnesota's bottom line," said Dr. Mindy Kurzer, Minnesota Food Charter Steering Committee chair and Director of the University of Minnesota Healthy Foods, Healthy Lives Institute. "The fact is, there's a real, substantial cost to society when healthy, safe food isn't available to everyone—and we owe it to future generations to start making changes now."

Minnesota has seen alarming rates of obesity and related diseases such as diabetes that have cost the state \$2.8 billion annually, according to the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH). In fact, two out of three Minnesotans are overweight or obese. At the other end of the spectrum is hunger, which according to Hunger-Free Minnesota, costs Minnesotans upwards of \$1.62 billion annually in preventable direct and indirect health and education costs.

The Food Charter represents the first time that such a broad group of Minnesotans has come together to address the ability of Minnesota's food and farm economy to promote health and economic prosperity. The effort included an unprecedented collaboration of Minnesota organizations and individuals across many sectors, working together to develop a shared agenda that promises to make significant change over time. Minnesota's leaders in hunger, health, agriculture, and economic development as well as thousands of Minnesota residents identified challenges to healthy food access and recommended policy and systems changes to resolve them.

The engagement process brought together organizations and residents with leadership from the Minnesota Department of Health's Statewide Health Improvement Program, through a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, funding from the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, and support from the University of Minnesota and additional state agencies.

"The Minnesota Food Charter represents the coming-together of thousands of Minnesotans—from policymakers and community leaders, to farmers and school foodservice staff—to help make a real difference for future generations in Minnesota," said Minnesota Department of Health Commissioner Dr. Ed Ehlinger. "The Minnesota Department of Health is pleased to be part of this exciting and unprecedented effort to improve access to healthy foods today and in the future."

Among the Food Charter's key findings:

- Healthy food needs to be more affordable, accessible and available to all Minnesotans regardless of where they live.
- Food skills among all Minnesotans need to be strengthened so they can grow, get and/or prepare healthy foods for themselves and their families.
- Minnesota's food infrastructure must improve the health of Minnesotans while growing a prosperous food and farm economy that provides healthy foods grown nearby for local consumers.

The Minnesota Food Charter will be officially unveiled at the Food Access Summit on October 29 at 10:15 a.m. at the Duluth Entertainment Convention Center, located at 350 Harbor Drive in Duluth, Minn. The Food Access Summit includes training, workshops and presentations healthy food access for all Minnesotans. The launch will include presentations by MDH Commissioner Dr. Ed Ehlinger and University of Minnesota Healthy Foods, Healthy Lives Institute Director Dr. Mindy Kurzer.

There will be media interview availability at the Food Access Summit on Wednesday, October 29 from 9:00 – 9:30 a.m. with Janelle Waldock from the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, and again from 11:00 – 11:30 a.m. with both Janelle Waldock and Commissioner Ehlinger.

To learn more about the Minnesota Food Charter, visit [www.mnfoodcharter.com](http://www.mnfoodcharter.com). For more information on the Food Access Summit, visit [www.foodaccesssummit.com](http://www.foodaccesssummit.com).

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