

Proposed Dakota County

2026-2027 Pilot Grant Program for Farmers Market Food Rescue Summary

PURPOSE:

In Minnesota, metropolitan counties are responsible for waste management policy and programs to achieve state goals for waste management and that support the State Waste Management Hierarchy, with waste prevention being the most preferred waste management method (Minn. Stat. § 115A.551) because it has the greatest environment benefit. By Resolution 25-456 (September 23, 2025), the County Board adopted the 2024–2044 Solid Waste Management Plan (Solid Waste Management Plan). The county’s plan incorporates the state-mandated enhanced focus on waste prevention, including food waste prevention.

The proposed 2026-2027 Pilot Grant Program for Farmers Market Food Rescue (Grant Program) supports implementation of the Solid Waste Management Plan strategy 11a to “Provide support to organizations to improve the safe storage and transportation of surplus edible food”. The Grant Program will support the recovery, collection, and transportation of produce that would go bad or spoil before it can be sold at the next farmers market and would otherwise be disposed. Rescued edible produce will be redistributed to Dakota County food shelves, as defined in Minnesota Statutes.

The Environmental Resources Department (Department) will develop the proposed pilot Grant Program as summarized:

ELIGIBLE RECIPIENTS:

Organizations that operate weekly farmers markets in municipalities in Dakota County.

GRANTEE OBLIGATIONS:

1. Apply for funding on a County-approved form that proposes food rescue activities at weekly farmers market locations with the greatest waste diversion potential.
2. Fulfill all responsibilities identified in the Grant Program Guidelines.
3. Report time, expense, and performance pursuant to Grant Program Guidelines using County report forms.

GUIDELINES AND APPLICATION:

The Department will develop Grant Program Guidelines, grant application form, and establish an annual grant cycle including an application deadline. Applicants can request \$10,000 –\$85,000 in 2026 and 2027. Applicants must submit proposed activities on the County prescribed Application form and must be submitted by the organization to the Department Liaison.

GRANTEE SELECTION:

A Department evaluation team will select the project(s) that best meets the funding criteria, including, but limited to, the greatest potential to divert food that would have otherwise been disposed and redistribute it to Dakota County food shelves. Selected projects will be administered through a contract between the County and the organization(s).

GRANT ACTIVITIES:

Grant Program funds will provide funding support to implement food waste prevention activities at farmers markets including to educate and train farmers market vendors on food waste prevention opportunities, collect edible produce that would have otherwise been landfilled or disposed, track and store collected food, provide vendor

compensation at a seconds-rate for produce that would have been disposed, and redistribute produce to Dakota County food shelves.

ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES:

Eligible expenses generally include: staff time to implement activities directly related to planning, implementing and promoting Grant Program activities conducted during farmers market season (July - October), including support for outreach and training to farmers market vendors on waste prevention and program participation opportunities; mileage to collect produce that would have otherwise been wasted and deliver it to Dakota County food shelves; temporary storage of produce as needed to ensure acceptance by the food shelf; development and documentation of partnerships with Dakota County food shelves that will receive collected produce and redistribute it to County residents; vendor stipends at a seconds-rate that is less than what a vendor could sell the produce at (i.e., no more than \$1 per pound for excess produce); collection of produce on predetermined pick-up dates from vendors that complete the verification form stating surplus produce would otherwise be disposed; tracking and reporting the amount of produce collected and donated; submitting invoices for reimbursement; other administrative activities relevant to the program.

INELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES:

Ineligible expenses generally include activities and staffing not related to the Grant Program such as: produce that is not certified as excess and could have been sold at an upcoming farmers market, activities that are non-waste abatement; grantee-generated waste.

FUND DISPERSAL:

Funds will be dispersed on a reimbursement basis for eligible food prevention and recovery activities during each farmers market season in accordance with Grant Program Guidelines. Documentation supporting all amounts to be reimbursed, including but not limited to invoices, proof of payments, proof of delivery to and acceptance from the food shelf must be submitted at least monthly to be eligible for reimbursement. Supporting documentation must show proof of expenses being incurred and paid for eligible activities Supporting documentation must not include ineligible expenses. Supporting documentation requesting reimbursement should be submitted to the Department Liaison via email.

REPORTING:

Each year, grantee(s) shall submit monthly reports and a final report to the Department Liaison that includes data related to recovered and distributed to local food shelves. Monthly reports include pounds of food collected, pounds of food redistributed by location, data on miles traveled and workers' labor hours, any applicable program costs. If donated produce cannot be delivered to a Dakota County food shelf, the grantee will detail the barriers and challenges to keeping food in the County in the interim and final reports. Final report data must total food collected and redistributed for the grant period and recommendations to address collection or donation improvements.

AVAILABLE FUNDING:

The Environmental Resources Department Operating Budget includes funds to provide the Grant Program, which is funded through dedicated organics programming State Select Committee on Recycling and the Environment (SCORE) grant funds. Environmental Legacy Funds are used to meet the required 25 percent county match for State SCORE grant funds. In 2026 and 2027, \$85,000 will be made available. A recommendation for funding after 2027 will be made based on demonstrated ability of projects to help achieve county food waste prevention objectives.