

# Implementation of a Produce Prescription Program:

## Key Components and Lessons Learned

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### What is VeggieRx?

Produce prescription programs (e.g. VeggieRx) are a medical treatment or preventative service for patients with diet-related health conditions or risks. Programs such as VeggieRx can improve food security, lower chronic disease risks, and provide access to local, nutrient-dense produce to program participants. The model for this vegetable prescription program pilot was farm-direct, where produce was grown at the Farm at the Arb or procured from local farmers and given directly to patients at clinic pick-up sites.



### Partnerships for promoting health & food access

- **Carver County SHIP** and **Scott County SHIP** supplied essential funding, facilitated clinic partnerships, and contributed significant time for planning, distributions, and evaluation.
- In addition to program leadership, planning, and development, the **Farm at the Arb** grew, packed, and distributed bags of produce week for eight weeks.
- **MiCASA** served as an essential trusted community partner and lead Spanish communication resource for participants;
- **Health Matters Public Health Clinic** and **River Valley Health Services** screened, referred and provided key information to eligible patients for program participation
- **University of Minnesota Extension** helped with program planning and implementation, with a particular focus on nutrition education resource development and evaluation.

Together, these organizations piloted a VeggieRx program to low-income and under or uninsured patients in Carver and Scott counties (MN) during the 2022 growing season. Participants received produce bags filled with 5-12 pounds of various vegetables for eight weeks.

### Challenges

- 39% of participants indicated that access to reliable transportation was a barrier to pick up the boxes
- Data collection engagement was lower than expected; post (35%) & follow-up (59%) surveys

#### VeggieRx Pilot Overview

	343 bags of produce distributed to 74 participants totaling 2,600 cumulative lbs
	89% of participants indicated they were often or sometimes worried whether their food would run out before they got money to buy more (at enrollment)
	95% would recommend the program to a friend or family member*
	75% agreed that they improved their knowledge of fresh fruits and vegetables*

\*6 month follow-up - survey respondents\*

### Broader Impacts

In September 2022, the VeggieRx team received a Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP) grant from USDA NIFA, which provides the opportunity to expand and refine the program over the next three years.

The work of VeggieRx aligns with the second pillar of the National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health which prioritizes the role nutrition security plays in overall health, including disease prevention. Additionally, the program provides opportunities to:

- Address issues of nutrition insecurity in healthcare settings, such as increased referrals to food assistance programs & community-based nutrition education
- Understand the unique position of projects focused on the intersection of food access, community-based programs, and healthcare systems
- Develop best practices for produce prescription programs, including centering participant voice and choice in program model development

