



# **Midwest Food Connection**

**Annual Report 2009–2010**

# Letter from the executive director

15 YEARS AGO, we founded the Midwest Food Connection to educate children about healthy food choices. We were excited to teach them about food grown in Minnesota, about methods of sustainable agriculture employed by our local farmers, and about good-tasting choices perhaps unfamiliar to them. The word “local,” however, was not on every tongue, as it is today. Programs to get kids into gardens were just beginning to appear on our horizon.

Fast-forward to 2010. For some children, access to local and healthy food has increased by leaps and bounds. School lunches are improving, local farmers are getting widespread recognition, and major corporations and health insurers sponsor campaigns for healthy eating. Farm-to-school is the order of the day.

At the Midwest Food Connection, we rejoice at these developments. We continue to believe that true changes in eating habits starts with reaching the hearts and minds of our students. When the hearts and minds are seven to ten years old, decades of healthful eating may follow.

In our 2010 annual report you will read about and see children holding vegetables, tending plants, trying new tastes, and—most importantly—thinking and considering. The stories and photos represent the 6,400 children we inspired in the past year, with 866 encounters between our teachers and small groups of children. Each lesson was filled with hands-on learning that drew in the children’s eyes, tastes, touch, and brains.

As we boldly go into our next 15 years of teaching, we are hiring a fourth teacher to go into schools, collaborating with like-minded local nonprofits to develop new educational enterprises, and expanding our funding base to include individuals such as you. Consider what part you have to play in not just changing our food system, but the hearts and minds of young eaters.

With many thanks to our sponsors this past year, and to all our active supporters, I gladly share these memories with you.



Uli Koester  
Executive Director



## Midwest Food Connection Revenue and Expenses

Revenue	2009	2010
Co-ops	110,971	119,256
Grants	10,000	25,000
Other	7,903	9,392
Total	128,874	153,648

Expenses	2009	2010
Salary, benefits, etc.	108,014	128,462
Administration	5,950	6,026
Staff Training	359	526
Teaching Exps	9,337	11,748
Outreach	1,705	2,942
Total	125,365	149,704



Haruko teaching a class at Clara Barton Open School

## Changing behaviors

“MFC IS SPARKING AN INTEREST in food with children — they are significantly more willing to try new foods and get in the kitchen and help prepare foods as a result of the lessons, as well as taking an interest in the foods their families are buying. Behavior change is very difficult to make, and the numbers show that MFC has been successful in changing something just about every parent wishes for!”

So wrote our consultant Courtney Blair after she completed a family survey in January 2010 at four schools where the Midwest Food Connection had taught. The survey had some strong results:

- 44% of students showed an increased interest in the family's food purchases as a result of our lessons.
- 60% were more willing to try new or different foods.
- 61% gained more interest in helping with food preparation.

Considering that we taught about 6,400 children last year, the 60% figure comes out to almost 4,000. Our consistent messages about grains, fruits, and vegetables, and respecting and enjoying foods, are coming home to the families of those students! Parents talk with us directly as well, and they are amazed how we have inspired their children to eat new foods. Sometimes we will hear back years later about recipes and cooking methods that have become family habits.

**“My daughter really enjoyed this activity. She’s a picky eater and it encouraged her to try new foods.”**



**“My child is excited to try some of the recipes you had in class—especially the pear salad and the pizza!”**



# Enriching lives

EATING WELL is more than healthy habits and proper nutrition, it is a journey into culture, agriculture, and science. At the Midwest Food Connection, we design our lessons to optimize unique experiences around food that children would otherwise never have. A few examples from the past year:



**Seven field trips to farms** in the metro area, where the children dug carrots, mulched beds, breathed the air, and observed beneficial insects. Each trip served 55 to 60 students.

Our fall **Food from Nearby unit** featured a salad-making class, where the students chose their own fresh produce and added a light dressing, as well as a study of garden herbs, which they spread on a vegetable pizza.

In our **Minnesota's Harvest unit**, the kids experienced a new cooked dish every week: a millet and rye skillet casserole, lake-grown wild rice, no-oil fried potatoes, and our popular winter vegetable stew.

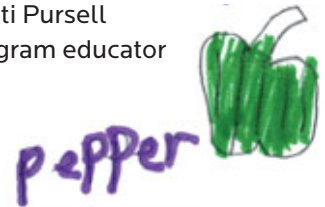
Students **started vegetable plants** while we taught them how to set up and tend a garden. We sent the plants home with the children so they could share fresh garden produce with their families during the summer.

## MFC teaching staff

Ginger Pearson  
program educator

Haruko Ruggiero  
curriculum specialist

Kristi Pursell  
program educator



## Districts served

Anoka/Hennepin Schools

Burnsville/Eagan, ISD 191

Lakeville Public Schools

Minneapolis Public Schools

Minnnetonka Public Schools

Rosemount/Apple Valley,  
ISD 196

Roseville Public Schools

St. Anthony/New Brighton,  
ISD 282

St. Paul Public Schools

## Schools Midwest Food Connection visited during 2009–10

Adams Spanish Emersion • Armatage • Bancroft • Barak and Michelle Obama Service Learning • Brimhall • Burroughs • Cherokee Heights • Christina Huddleston • Clara Barton Open • Deephaven • Dowling Urban Environmental • Echo Park • Emerson Spanish Immersion • Excelsior • Expo for Excellence • Galtier Science Magnet • Gideon Pond • Greenleaf • Groveland • Groveland Park • Hale • Hiawatha Community • Highland Catholic • Horace Mann • Jefferson • Jenny Lind • JJ Hill Montessori • Kenny • Kenwood Community/PAM Magnet • Lake Harriet • Linwood A+/Monroe • Marcy Open • Museum Magnet • New City Charter • Northrop Urban Environmental • Northrop Urban Environmental • Pillsbury • Seward Montessori • Sky Oaks • Southside Family • St. Hubert • Sullivan Communication Center • Thomas Lake • Transitions Charter School • Washington • Wenonah Community • Westview • Whittier Community School for the Arts • Wilshire Park • Windom Open School

# Becoming a model in education

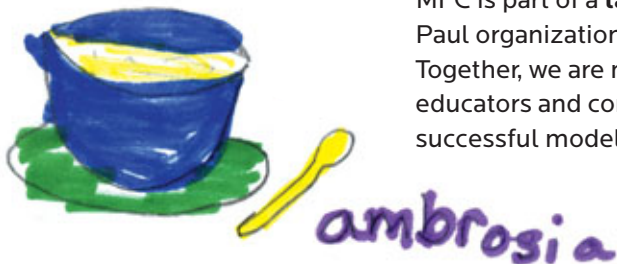
## Funders

Bremer Foundation  
Carolyn Foundation  
Lakewinds Natural Foods  
Linden Hills Co-op  
Mississippi Market  
Seward Co-op Grocery & Deli  
Wedge Co-op  
Valley Natural Foods

## Cooperating farms

Big River Foods,  
Marine-on-St. Croix  
Common Harvest Farm,  
Osceola, Wis.  
Cramer Organics Delano  
Gardens of Eagan, Farmington  
Peterson Produce, Delano  
Riverbend Farm, Delano  
Garden Farme, Ramsey

**“My son wanted to go to a co-op and talked about how close the farm was.”**



LAST YEAR, MFC WORKED with 52 partnering schools to bring our lessons directly to students. In 2010 we also took large strides to further spread our successful vision of food education for children.

MFC has also formed alliances with like-minded organizations that will allow us to share our best practices with other educators. With children's diets coming to the forefront of national discussions, others have begun to turn to us for help.



MFC provided the **nutrition component for LynxFit**, a program run by the Minnesota Lynx for Minneapolis' summer school. We trained the Lynx Fit interns who reached over 600 children with our lessons.

A group of 20 environmental education **teachers from Japan** spent a morning in May observing our classes. They were on a tour led by the Institute for International Education in Washington, DC.

MFC is participating in a **three-state proposal** with the University of Southern California to create and teach in school gardens at Minneapolis schools.

A team of teachers, financial, and food-service professionals is ready to roll out in 2011 a **new program called Food Adventures** under the auspices of MFC. In this initiative, we will train parents and community volunteers to present lessons on healthy eating in school classroom.

MFC is part of a **task force of leaders** of the key Minneapolis/St. Paul organizations that teach children about food and gardening. Together, we are making plans for a regional training center where educators and community members will learn best practices and successful models for working with young ones in the garden.





### Teaching by the numbers

	2008-09 school year	2009-10 school year
Lessons taught	754	866
Farm trips	6	7
Partnering schools	53	53
Students taught	6,300	6,400

### Mission statement

Midwest Food Connection envisions a society in which all people can improve their quality of life by consuming healthful foods and by supporting a local economy of sustainable food producers. Midwest Food Connection will contribute to this vision by empowering elementary school children to make healthy and responsible food choices.



**Midwest Food  
Connection**

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