Food Education During a Pandemic
Dear Friend—

We want to thank you from the bottom of our hearts! Because of your steadfast support, Midwest Food Connection continues to deepen young peoples’ knowledge of and relationship with food. This year has called us to adapt to meet the changing environments that the pandemic caused for education. I hope you will enjoy reading about the many ways we adjusted our programming this past year to meet the needs of virtual education shifts.

Thankfully, our fiscal year ending 6/30/20 left us in a strong financial position to weather some revenue challenges that have since come our way. We have also secured some significant funding recently for new initiatives.

This year has been a challenging one for us all, but we can find resilience in food, land and one another. We know you will share our excitement at the opportunities that lie ahead! Midwest Food Connection is fortunate to have talent and commitment all around, from our staff, board and volunteers, our sponsoring co-ops and foundations, our donors large and small, and, especially this year, from our collaborating classroom teachers.

Be on the lookout for upcoming e-newsletters to see what Spring holds in store—and thanks again for your many personal contributions to our work.

Uli Koester  
Executive Director

Ashley Greywitt  
Board President
When schools closed in March 2020, a challenge awaited Midwest Food Connection’s teachers. Life was changing daily, it was hard to fathom what would come next. But we managed to channel the energy of spring and quickly moved our Urban Farming for Kids unit into a virtual format. Schools were waiting, and we knew children needed hands-on instruction and solid content.

Within weeks, we were teaching live lessons in the Google classrooms of our partnering schoolteachers. In addition, we produced videos for those classrooms that were not meeting virtually. Our four staff members’ homes became video production studios as we developed online instruction on planning a garden, planting, cooking—even raising chickens. In those few months, we created 39 videos, taught 59 live lessons, and worked with 16 schools.

At the same time, we were purchasing and repackaging seeds so that our students could indeed start plants and grow foods in their gardens. By leaving containers with small seed packets for safe pick-up on school grounds, we were able to turn learning into action. Several students proudly showed the results of the seed-starting when we taught them again in the fall.
A fter a summer of safely hosting drop-in times in three schoolyard gardens, we found that most of our partner schools were not welcoming students back to the building. Cooking, we decided, would be our way to engage students stuck at home. Our educators developed four scratch-cooking recipes inspired by Minnesota’s harvest. Students across the Twin Cities learned the fine art of fermentation by making sauerkraut, turned tomatoes and apples into savory and sweet sauces, and created their own wild rice bowls.

O nce again, we created videos to teach not only the cooking process, but how these foods grow. We highlighted community members as well, with a video featuring several growers at the Midtown Farmer’s Market.

Easily the highlight of the year, however, was cooking on the live classroom feed, with 20+ students peeling apples or mashing sauerkraut on the synchronous screen! We inspired teachers to continue cooking with their students after our lessons were done, and students and parents were effusive with their enthusiasm.
For the winter months, we developed one more unit. In order to increase access equitably, we wanted to cut down on the supplies students need at home. Our answer: “A Time for Tasting,” a four-lesson unit on the basic tastes, with only one small food item necessary each time. Any kind of carrot will do for the lesson on sweet, and soy sauce in a packet or bottle works well for our umami lesson. At the time of this writing, with winter drawing to a close, we are offering these lessons virtually to those students who have returned back to school as well.

That brings us again to spring. The pandemic continues, and guest teachers like us are largely not allowed into school buildings. But there is hope. We have ready the video materials, seed packaging techniques, and live-streaming lessons which we created in the pandemic’s first blows. A year later, perhaps an in person lesson or two in the garden will be possible too!
Thank you to these individuals who donated to MFC during the last fiscal year (plus through the end of 2020 in support of our pandemic programming).

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- Ann Beane
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### Up to $50
- Tim Abbs
- Martha Anderson
- Elizabeth Archerd and Richard Zajicek
- Anonymous (3)
- Raj Apat
- Kim Balkcum
- Ann Bateman
- Jean and William Baum
- Up To $25

“My students were very excited about making something in their kitchen, the skill is relevant to them, they had fun improvising and making something themselves.”

—Capitol Hill School, St. Paul
New Initiatives for 2021

• A Community-University partnership grant is allowing us to study new ways to reach parents and families with our work. The University of Minnesota’s Healthy Foods, Healthy Lives Institute is supporting this research.

• We are expanding the cultural relevance of our curriculum. We plan to discover and learn about healthy foods that are important in the communities we serve. This will be a collaborative effort, with the sharing of traditions at its core.

• At several of our schoolyard gardens, we will build and stock seed banks. In a similar method to little free libraries, neighbors will be able to exchange seeds for the next growing season.
We are grateful to these generous partners for their support!
(fiscal year ending June 30, 2020)

Round ups at the register on behalf of the work of Midwest Food Connection:

- Eastside Co-op
- Mississippi Market
- Valley Natural Foods
- Wedge Community Co-op & Linden Hills Co-op

"I just really appreciate that you all adapted along with us to offer a virtual option. Thank you."
— Seward Montessori, Minneapolis

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