



Aitkin County Public Health

PartnerSHIP News!

February 2025

[Aitkin County
SHIP Website](#)

[Resources](#)

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**Aitkin, Itasca, Koochiching, Carlton, Cook, Lake, and St. Louis counties
make up Northeast SHIP**

Stay updated with the latest news and events from the northland, the Northeast Minnesota Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP). Read about our health initiatives, community success stories, and upcoming events promoting healthy living in the region.

<https://www.northeastship.org/news>

Check out the Northeast SHIP Website!

(formally called Healthy Northland)

<https://www.northeastship.org/>



FIND FOOD Aitkin County

Featured Recipe of the Month!



2 - INGREDIENT CHOCOLATE FUDGE CAKES

2 - Ingredient Chocolate Fudge Cakes

These 2-Ingredient Chocolate Fudge Cakes are super simple and delicious! Just mix pumpkin puree with chocolate chips, microwave or bake, and enjoy a moist, fudgy treat with a hint of pumpkin flavor.

Ingredients

- 2½ cups chocolate chips, melted
- 1 cup pumpkin puree*

Directions

1. Prepare a standard muffin tin: add paper liners to 10 (of the 12 muffin) compartments (I like to double up on the paper liners for extra sturdiness. No need to mist with oil spray). Set aside.
2. Melt the chocolate chips using a double boiler or using the microwave method
3. Mix in the pumpkin puree and stir until the mixture is smooth and creamy without any streaks of pumpkin.
4. Divide the batter among the 10 paper liners, smooth the tops using the back of a spoon and give the muffin tin a few taps on the counter to flatten out the cakes.
5. Place in fridge to firm for 2 hours or more. Serve with optional berries and dark chocolate shavings.



Notes

- Melt the chocolate chips in the microwave, stirring every 20 seconds until smooth and creamy (about 2 minutes total). **GAME-CHANGING TIP** Lightly spray your microwave-safe bowl with oil before adding the chocolate chips—this makes cleanup a breeze! You can also use a double boiler if you prefer.

Bauer, Joy. "2-Ingredient Chocolate Fudge Cakes." JoyBauer.com, 2025, Source: Joy Bauer.

www.findfoodaitkincounty.org

<https://findfoodaitkincounty.org/recipes/>

SUCCESS STORY

Success Story: Aitkin County Public Health Secures Minnesota SARE Mini Grant for Farmers Market Hub ROI Analysis

*Author: Hannah Colby, RD, LD, CLS
Community Health Specialist with Aitkin County Public Health*

Aitkin County Public Health has secured a Minnesota Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) mini grant to conduct a return on investment (ROI) analysis of the Aitkin Farmers Market Hub. This initiative is a strategic step toward understanding and showcasing the hub's long-term economic, social, and health impacts. By quantifying these benefits, the goal is to reinforce the hub's role as a vital asset in strengthening local food access, economic sustainability, and public health initiatives.

With this analysis, Aitkin County's Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) coordinator and community partners aim to provide data-driven evidence that will inform future investment and policy decisions. Insights from Ryan Pesch of the University of Minnesota Extension will help frame the findings in a way that resonates with key stakeholders, including county agencies, schools, and nonprofits. By clearly communicating the return on investment, the project seeks to secure sustained support and funding for local food initiatives.

The ROI study, led by Ryan Pesch, will examine sales data from the Aitkin Farmers Market Hub, analyzing both producer and product sales. In addition, interviews with producers will shed light on the profitability of hub sales compared to other market avenues. This evaluation will also consider marketing costs and overall operational profitability to assess both immediate and long-term financial impacts. The ultimate goal is to determine whether the hub fosters business development and economic resilience among local producers.

Beyond the numbers, this ROI analysis aspires to be a catalyst for future growth. By demonstrating the hub's tangible benefits, Aitkin County Public Health and its partners hope to attract increased investment, strengthen community partnerships, and expand access to fresh, local foods. This data-driven approach ensures that decisions supporting the hub's sustainability are backed by concrete evidence, positioning it as a cornerstone of a thriving local food system that enhances both economic vitality and public health.

Unveiling Public Health Insights

The Power of Partnership: How Public Health Is Combatting Food Insecurity in Aitkin County

*Author: Hannah Colby, RD, LD, CLS
Community Health Specialist with Aitkin County Public Health*

In Aitkin County, Minnesota, food insecurity is a pressing issue affecting many

individuals and families. Public health professionals understand that food insecurity occurs when people lack consistent access to healthy and affordable food. This lack of access often leads to poor nutrition, which can cause people to make lower-quality dietary choices or, in some cases, skip meals entirely. The consequences of food insecurity go far beyond hunger—poor nutrition is linked to long-term health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, weight management issues, and even mental health disorders.

In Aitkin County, the situation is concerning. Approximately 34% of residents live at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, making it a constant struggle to meet the cost of essential needs like food. For many in the community, purchasing enough nutritious food is a daily challenge. In fact, 64% of residents report facing a barrier to acquiring adequate food due to the high cost of food. The burden of food insecurity on public health is significant. Research indicates that the annual healthcare costs associated with food insecurity in Aitkin County amount to \$2,079.01 per person (Berkowitz et al., 2019). This underscores the financial impact not only on families but also on the healthcare system, which bears the strain of treating preventable health conditions linked to poor nutrition. Aitkin County's food insecurity rate is 9.6%, higher than the state's average of 6.8% (University of Minnesota Food Insecurity Dashboard, 2021-2023). Even more troubling is the rate of food insecurity among children. Aitkin County has the third-highest rate of food insecure children in Minnesota, with 17.9%—or 470 children—going without the food they need to grow, learn, and thrive (Feeding America, 2021). This has long-term implications for their physical and cognitive development.

Adding to the challenge, Aitkin County is considered a food desert, meaning that many residents live in areas where access to fresh and healthy food is limited. These areas lack grocery stores, farmer's markets, and other sources of nutritious food. As a result, people often have to rely on convenience stores or fast food, which tend to offer lower-quality, less nutritious options.

Public health in Aitkin County has taken significant steps to address food insecurity by fostering partnerships and implementing programs that provide residents with access to nutritious food. One of the key efforts in the community is the Food Rx program, which connects individuals and families facing food insecurity with fresh, healthy food. This program empowers participants by providing them with prescriptions in which they receive a CSA share from the Aitkin Farmers Market Hub and Riverwood Connects Market Bucks to spend at the Aitkin Farmers Market, helping to improve their health outcomes. In addition, Riverwood Healthcare Center has also introduced Farm Fresh boxes (short-term), available on a monthly basis during the winter months. These boxes offer locally grown, fresh produce to residents who may otherwise struggle to access such nutritious options during the colder months when fresh produce can be scarce. Riverwood Healthcare Center also offers emergency pantry packs for patients who are being seen and are in need of food. This initiative provides immediate support to those facing food insecurity, ensuring that individuals do not go without the basics while receiving care.

The Super Shelf transformation at Aitkin First Lutheran Church is another example of innovation in addressing food insecurity. This project has redefined the food shelf experience, making it more accessible and welcoming for community members while ensuring they have access to a variety of nutritious options (2023 Community Food Shelf at Aitkin First Lutheran Church Evaluation).

Aitkin's Farmers Market has become an essential resource for families facing food insecurity, as it now accepts WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Incentive Coupons, Market Bucks, and Produce Bucks. These programs make it easier for families to stretch their food dollars while supporting local farmers. Additionally, Riverwood Connects Market Bucks and PoP (Power of Produce) Coupons for both kids and seniors further encourage healthy eating and make fresh produce more accessible to all members of the community.

The Hill City Community Garden is another vital initiative helping to combat food insecurity in Aitkin County. This community-driven project provides residents with the space, tools, and knowledge needed to grow their own fruits and vegetables. By fostering local food production, the garden not only increases access to fresh produce but also strengthens community ties and promotes self-sufficiency. Residents can take advantage of educational opportunities in gardening while benefiting from a sustainable source of nutritious food. Additionally, the community garden offers mental health benefits by providing a space to engage with nature, reduce stress, and improve overall well-being through outdoor activities.

Additionally, both the Aitkin and Hill City School Districts have embraced the Farm to School program, enhancing local food access by incorporating fresh, locally grown produce into school meals. This initiative not only supports healthy eating habits among students but also connects them with local farmers, fostering a sense of community and environmental responsibility. By engaging students in the importance of local agriculture, these programs contribute to a healthier future for both the students and the broader community.

To ensure that all these resources are easily accessible, a new [Find Food Aitkin County](#) website has been launched. This platform is designed to connect residents with local food resources, making it easier for them to find available food programs and services in their area.

These partnerships and programs reflect a multi-faceted approach to addressing food insecurity in Aitkin County. By combining healthcare, local food access, and community-based efforts, public health has taken significant steps to combat food insecurity, improve health outcomes, and create a more supportive and resilient community.

Sources:

- 2020 Aitkin County Bridge to Health Survey
- Aitkin County using data from Feeding America. Food insecurity statistics are as of 2021
- University of Minnesota Food Insecurity Dashboard as of 2021 - 2023
- 2023 Community Food Shelf at Aitkin First Lutheran Church Evaluation
- Find Food Aitkin County Website Analytics (Insights)
- Berkowitz, S. A., Basu, S., Gundersen, C., & Seligman, H. K. (2019). State-Level and County-Level Estimates of Health Care Costs Associated with Food Insecurity. Preventing Chronic Disease, 16. <https://doi.org/10.5888/pcd16.180549>

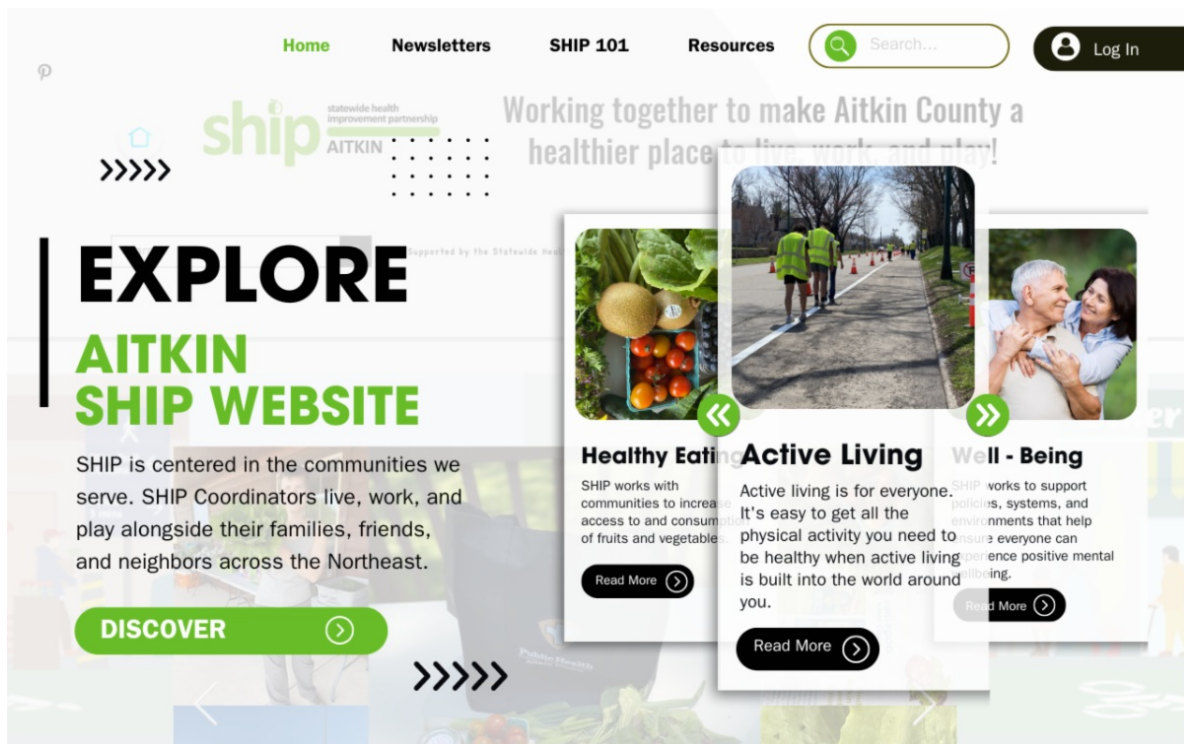


SHIP STORY MAP

The Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) creates wellness across Minnesota's communities through community-driven, evidence-based, and equity-focused programs that tackle the root causes of chronic diseases.

The image above and the link below will take you to the storymap to explore work across Minnesota.

[We are SHIP](https://www.health.mn.gov/ship)



<https://www.aitkincountyship.org/>

Have An Event Coming Up?

Don't forget Aitkin County Public Health has a Mother and Infant Rest Area Canopy that is available for everyone to check out. This pop-up canopy provides a private space for mothers to nurse their little one/s. You can check out the canopy and supplies via the [Aitkin County SHIP website](https://www.aitkincountyship.org/).



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Message

Upcoming Event

Northland Food Forum

Please join us for a day of regional sharing on diverse food access initiatives across the Northeast Region. Collaborate on partnerships, resource sharing, and joint advocacy efforts to strengthen the regional food system.

March 14, 2025

9:30 am - 4:00 pm

Peace United Church of Christ

111 North 11 Ave E, Duluth, MN

Free Food Provided (potluck style)

For questions contact: blakemant@communityhealthboard.org

Registration/RSVP:

[Northland Food Forum Registration](#)

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www.aitkincountyship.org



204 First Street NW, Aitkin, MN, 56431



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.
Aitkin County

MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY

from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm



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