



Aitkin County SHIP Program PartnerSHIP News!



AUGUST 2023

[Aitkin County SHIP Website](#)

[Resources](#)

[Healthy Northland Website](#)



Aitkin, Itasca, Koochiching, Carlton, Cook, Lake, and St. Louis counties make up Healthy Northland.

Supported by the Minnesota Department of Health's Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP), Healthy Northland strives to make the healthy choice the easy choice for everyone in Northeastern Minnesota through collaborative and community-based policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change efforts.

[Visit Healthy Northlands' Webpage!](#)



In August's newsletter read about: Land Use and Zoning in International Falls; and how the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) partners with the Public Health Law Center to reduce and eliminate commercial tobacco, promote healthy food, support physical activity and address other cause of chronic disease.

[Read the August Newsletter!](#)

*For the next few months, the Aitkin PartnerSHIP newsletter will be focusing on **MN EATS** as there is so much to share about all the fantastic work that is happening in our communities to increase access and consumption of*

nutritionally dense foods!

Featured Success Story



Riverwood's Food Rx Program

Riverwood Healthcare Center is one of two rural healthcare systems selected by the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) for a three-year U.S Department of Agriculture (USDA) grant to implement a pilot program to improve dietary health, reduce food insecurity, healthcare use and costs for populations within their communities.

Under this USDA grant, Riverwood has partnered with Aitkin County

Public Health's Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) program and the Aitkin Farmers Market Hub to design a pilot produce program tailored to specific community needs and resources. The goal of the program is to demonstrate the impact of food prescriptions through increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables.

The **Food Rx Program** identifies patients in need of better nutrition and health education, establishes an ongoing care plan, and connects them to food resources. Healthcare workers identify participants for the Food Rx program by looking at their medical and social histories. They keep an eye out primarily for food insecurity, as well as nutritional conditions that could potentially improve with a healthier diet. If a patient agrees to participate, they are enrolled in the program for the growing season and receive six market share boxes and coupons to spend at the farmers market.

A steady stream of participants arrives every Wednesday, not for a doctor's visit, but for a box of produce aggregated from the Aitkin Farmers Market Hub. The fresh fruit and vegetables, grown by local farmers, are part of their Food Rx program, which gives patients who are experiencing food insecurity access to free food deliveries and recipes. More than a couple dozen patients are participating in the program thanks to local partnerships.

Food Rx also provides an important partnership to support local farms. Riverwood is mindful of supporting the local farming economy through working with Aitkin Farmers Market Hub which provides local farmers with steady income.



SHIP Spotlight!

Rachel Johnson

with intern Emma Arnold (left to right)

Rachel Johnson is the Population Health Program Manager at Riverwood Healthcare Center. She has worked in the areas of behavioral health, ambulatory care, community outreach, and administration.



Population Health Program Manager at Riverwood Healthcare Center

Since starting her position just this last spring, Rachel has hit the ground running with Riverwood's [Food Rx Program](#). This program fits under the nutrition, physical activity and weight focus area of their *Riverwood Connects*. Rachel collaborates with Riverwood's Dietitians (educational trainings around nutrition through the growing season), the Aitkin Farmers Market Hub, Aitkin County Public Health, University of Minnesota Extension and volunteers to be able to assemble Local Food Market Boxes for participants to receive for six weeks (staggered in cohorts from July to October). Additionally will receive "Riverwood Connects Bucks" participants can either spend at the Aitkin Farmers Market or turn back in for another Market Box.

Rachel's vision is to offer winter produce/access to shelf stable foods over the winter months and holiday boxes to families during longer holiday breaks.

Other areas Rachel is working on with *Riverwood Connects* includes mental health (suicide prevention); substance abuse, tobacco cessation and Find Help (online platform to connect patients to local resources).

Rachel is a member on the Aitkin County Statewide Health Improvement Partnerships' Community Leadership Team. Additionally represents Aitkin County on Healthy Northland's Regional Community Leadership Team.

WHAT IS MN EATS?



Vital partnership with communities

“ SHIP provides much-needed leadership, connections, time and funds for local food initiatives. Farm to School, SuperShelf, Food Rx and the Farmers’ Market would not be as successful in Aitkin County without the efforts of our SHIP coordinator. Growing these connections with farmers and buyers keeps local dollars local, and that benefits everyone.”

—Allison Rian, Aitkin Farmers’ Market Hub Manager

“ SHIP has done so much to help local farmers get connected with local eaters. Aitkin County is a leader in farm to school in rural Minnesota, and that’s because of the sustained effort in SHIP.”

—Jane Jewett, Owner of WillowSedge Farm



The MN EATS context area is dedicated to creating healthier food environments by increasing access to affordable, appealing, healthy, and culturally relevant food and beverage options. The vision for this work is that all people in Minnesota experience an equitable, just, nourishing and resilient food system that is responsive to change.

Statewide Health Improvement Partnership EATS Activities

Statewide Activity: Food Rx

The goal of the Food Rx Statewide Activity is to connect a clinic or health system with a food retailer to deliver a "Food Rx" to clients or patients via a standardized screening and referral process.

Statewide Activity: SuperShelf

SuperShelf is a PSE approach that transforms food shelves using a values-based approach to create a welcoming environment in which to access healthy foods. The SuperShelf approach is rooted in evidence-based practices and relies on collaborative partnerships between food shelves, SHIP, University of Minnesota

Extension, and hunger relief organizations.

Flexible: Farm to School, ECE, and/or Institution

Farm to school is being expanded to include additional settings of Early Childhood Education providers (ECE) and Institutions that have cafeteria-like food services. The core components of Farm to School are traditionally referred to classroom, curriculum, and community, but can be applied to the additional settings more broadly as:

- **Procurement:** Local foods are purchased, promoted, and served in the cafeteria or as a snack or taste - test.
- **On-site gardens:** Students or other participants engage in hands-on learning through gardening.
- **Education:** Students or other participants engage in education activities related to agriculture, food, health or nutrition.

Other Flexible SHIP Activities:

- Community Food Assessments & Planning
- Food Guidelines
- Breastfeeding (i.e. supportive spaces & places)
- Community Based Agriculture (i.e. community garden)
- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)
- Food Nutrition & Security
- Farmers Markets
- Healthy Food Retail
- CACFP Guidelines
- Baby Cafe
- Supporting Students with Chronic Conditions
- Comprehensive framework for addressing school nutrition environment and services.
- Workplace gardens
- Policy, System, and Environment work supporting healthy food vending, cafeterias, and snack stations.
- Healthy Beverage Access

Interested in a MN EATS strategy mentioned above? Contact your local [SHIP Coordinator Hannah Colby](#) to learn more on how to get started!

Photos of **MN EATS** work with collaborative partners in
Aitkin County (Part 2)

(Food Rx Program at Riverwood Healthcare Center with collaborating partners and volunteers)







Recipe

(Riverwood Healthcare Center Dietitians, Megan Perpich & Melissa Te Slaa)



Salsa Verde Chicken Tacos

- 1.5 lbs. chicken breasts or thighs
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper
- 2 cups low-sodium chicken stock
- 1 cup store bought or homemade roasted tomatillo salsa Verde
- 1 large yellow or white onion
- 2 poblano peppers
- Small handful of torn cilantro leaves
- 8 small soft corn tortillas

Instructions:

Pat the chicken breasts/thighs dry with a paper towel and season on both sides with salt and pepper. Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Sear the chicken breasts/thighs (in batches, if necessary) for 4 to 5 minutes, or until golden brown. Flip the chicken and carefully pour the chicken broth and salsa into the pan. Bring the liquid to a low simmer and braise the chicken for 35 to 40 minutes or until fork tender. Using tongs, remove the chicken to a large plate or bowl. Bring the liquid in the pan to a low boil. Add the sliced onion and poblano pepper to the pan and cook, stirring every few minutes, for about 8 to 10 minutes, or until the vegetables have softened and the liquid has reduced by half. Using forks, shred the chicken into small pieces. Reduce the heat to low and add the shredded chicken back into the pan with the vegetables, stirring the mixture together until just combined. Season to taste with salt and pepper, and add the torn cilantro leaves. Spoon the chicken mixture into the tortillas. Finish with optional toppings: crumbled feta cheese, baby radishes, avocado chunks, fresh cilantro leaves, or hot sauce.

Recipe

(Aitkin County Public Health Dietitian & SHIP Coordinator, Hannah Colby)

Tomatillo Salsa Verde

- 10 tomatillos
- 1 jalapeno, stemmed, seeded and ribs removed (keep ribs and seeds if you want it hotter)
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 bunch cilantro
- Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions:

Remove the husks from the tomatillos and rinse. Place the tomatillos and the jalapeno in a pan and cover with water. Place over medium-high heat and boil until the tomatillos are fully cooked and are dull olive green color, about 10 minutes. Strain the mixture, then place the tomatillos and jalapenos in a food processor. Add the garlic and cilantro and process until smooth. Season to taste with salt and pepper.



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.

To see SHIP work across the state of Minnesota, click on the image above or the link below. From the We Are SHIP page, scroll down to the map. At the far right, you will see a box that includes the state total (2,172 in dark blue print), and below that the Search the Map selection tool. You can now choose Topic Areas, Settings, or County.

[We are SHIP](#)

Upcoming Events



Mental Health Implications of Cannabis

September 7th from 10:00 am - 11 am

[Register Here](#)



QPR Suicide Prevention Training for Agricultural Communities

September 18th
October 17th
November 21st

[Register Here](#)



Understanding 21st Century Cannabis

November 20th
1 Hour
Virtual Online

[Register Here](#)

The Dangerous Truth About Today's Marijuana: Johnny Stack's Life and Death Story

December 15th
1 Hour
Virtual Online

[Register Here](#)

AITKIN CITY PARK MASTER PLAN

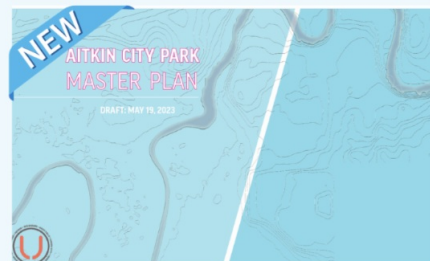
C E L E B R A T I O N !

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

SEPTEMBER 5, 2023
AITKIN PUBLIC LIBRARY
3:30 - 5:00 PM

Come and see the Aitkin City Park Master Plan & Concept you helped create!

- ✓ Final Concept
- ✓ Key Features
- ✓ Priorities Plan
- ✓ More





Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.
Aitkin County

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