



# Board of County Commissioners Agenda Request

**4A**  
Agenda Item #

**Requested Meeting Date:** April 8, 2025

**Title of Item:** Award Business Development & Recreation Grants

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> REGULAR AGENDA  <input type="checkbox"/> CONSENT AGENDA	<b>Action Requested:</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Approve/Deny Motion <input type="checkbox"/> Adopt Resolution (attach draft) <input type="checkbox"/> Hold Public Hearing <i>*provide copy of hearing notice that was published</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Direction Requested <input type="checkbox"/> Discussion Item <input type="checkbox"/> Information Only						
<b>Submitted by:</b> Mark Jeffers		<b>Department:</b> Economic Development						
<b>Presenter (Name and Title):</b> Mark Jeffers, Economic Development Coordinator		<b>Estimated Time Needed:</b> 5 min						
<b>Summary of Issue:</b> <p>The Aitkin County Economic Development Committee has received and reviewed grant funding requests for the Business Development &amp; Recreation Grant Program. Grant applications and grant award summary are included.</p> <p>The Committee was unanimous on the recommendation. The Committee recommends and requests approval to award the following grants at this time:</p> <table style="width: 100%;"><tr><td>Aitkin Farm Trail</td><td style="text-align: right;">\$2,000</td></tr><tr><td>Nature Rocks</td><td style="text-align: right;">\$2,000</td></tr><tr><td>Food As Medicine Festival</td><td style="text-align: right;">\$500</td></tr></table> <p>The purpose of this grant fund is to leverage county funds, private funds, and volunteer efforts to enhance small business development activities in Aitkin County, with a focus on increasing sustained tourism and recreational events. Organizations may apply individually or submit a joint application. To demonstrate their commitment to the grant request, organizations must provide a 1:1 match of funds in good faith. The Aitkin County Board of Commissioners has approved this funding to be used directly for the benefit of the Aitkin County community through the Aitkin County Business Development &amp; Recreation Grant.</p>			Aitkin Farm Trail	\$2,000	Nature Rocks	\$2,000	Food As Medicine Festival	\$500
Aitkin Farm Trail	\$2,000							
Nature Rocks	\$2,000							
Food As Medicine Festival	\$500							
<b>Alternatives, Options, Effects on Others/Comments:</b>								
<b>Recommended Action/Motion:</b> Economic Development requests approval of a motion to award the recommended grants.								
<b>Financial Impact:</b> <p><i>Is there a cost associated with this request?</i> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p><i>What is the total cost, with tax and shipping? \$</i></p> <p><i>Is this budgeted?</i> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <span style="float: right;"><i>Please Explain:</i></span></p>								

### Business Development and Recreation Grant

#	Facility Name	Project Name	Contact Name	Email	City	Phone	\$ requested	\$ Awarded
1	Growth Innovations	multi-tenant signage	Tami Jacobs	tjacobs@growthiv.org	Aitkin	218.927.2172	\$ 1,025	\$ -
2	Clear Lake Gardens	Aitkin Farm Trail	Kelley Rajala	clearlakegardens@gmail.com	Aitkin	707.331.6850	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000
3	Long Lake Foundation	Nature Rocks	Bob Marcum, Dave McMillan	rmarcum@llcfoundation.org	Aitkin	218.768.4653	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000
4	Food as Medicine Festival	Riverwood/Clear Lake Gardens	Kelley Rajala	clearlakegardens@gmail.com	Aitkin	707.331.6850	\$ 500	\$ 500
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26								
							\$ 5,525	\$ 4,500



1

## Application for Aitkin County Business Development & Recreation Grant Program

January 1, 2025 - December 31, 2025

1. Grant requests should be submitted by EMAIL to:  
mark.jeffers@co.aitkin.mn.us, subject line: BD&R2025 or  
by mail to:  
Mark Jeffers  
Aitkin County Government Center  
307 2<sup>nd</sup> Street NW, Room 316  
Aitkin, MN 56431
2. Funding recommendations will be considered at the regularly scheduled monthly meeting of the Aitkin County Economic Development Committee. Application deadline is **May 31, 2025**.
3. Committee recommendations will be submitted to the Aitkin County Board of Commissioners for final approval.
4. The purpose of this grant fund is to leverage county funds, private funds, and volunteer efforts to enhance small business development activities in Aitkin County, with a focus on increasing sustained tourism and recreational events. Organizations may apply individually or submit a joint application. To demonstrate their commitment to the grant request, organizations must provide a 1:1 match of funds in good faith. The Aitkin County Board of Commissioners has approved this funding to be used directly for the benefit of the Aitkin County community through the Aitkin County Business Development & Recreation Grant.

### APPLICANT INFORMATION

#### PROGRAM INFORMATION

Project/Event Name: Multi-tenant sign

Date(s) of Project/Event: 1/6/2025

Location of Project/Event: 316 1st Ave NW, Aitkin

Organization/Community Name: Growth Innovations

Person in Charge of Project: Tami Jacobs + Stan Gustafson

Organization Mailing Address (Street Name or P.O. Box or Route and Box # and City and Zip Code):

316 1st Ave NW, Aitkin, MN 56431

Contact Person's Phone #: 218.927.2172

Contact Person's Email: tjacobs@growthiv.org

Description/focus/purpose of your organization:

Improving quality of life through job creation, economic diversification + area development

**FUNDING:**

Amount requested from Aitkin County

\$ 1025.00

(Minimum \$100.00, maximum request is 2,000.00). The Economic Development Committee may recommend to the Board of Commissioners to increase or decrease the amount awarded at their discretion. The Aitkin County Board of Commissioners grants the final approval for funding.

Amount of your organization's match

\$ 1025.00

Total projected budget

\$ 2050.00

**PROJECT/EVENT DESCRIPTION:** Be concise and complete; attach supporting information if needed.

Install a multi-tenant 8x8 PolyMetal sign on the south side of our incubator building - listing each tenants if they so choose. We feel this is a great way to advertise the businesses located in our building. Each tenant will be able to create their desired design on their sign insert & their cost is \$160.00. These will be able to be changed out as tenants move in & out. Our hope is to drive more foot traffic to our businesses located in our building. We feel this is an affordable way to advertise the small businesses in our building.

**Explain how your project will bring visitors to or provide a positive and sustainable economic impact on Aitkin County.**

This will give locals & those visiting Aitkin an idea of what is located in our building.

**List target audience:**

Residents & visitors to Aitkin County

**How many people usually attend this project/event?****If awarded, how many incremental visitors do you hope to attract?**

100+





4. **PROJECT BUDGET:** in the space below, provide a budget for the entire event.

Category	Grant Funds	Applicant Funds	Total
Sign-8x8 3MM Polymetal Bx K+M Signs	700	700	1400
Install K+M Signs	175	175	350
Permit	150	150	300
TOTALS	1025	1025	2050

Contact Signature:

Name Loni Fink Date: 1/7/2025



RE: Sign - 8x8 Idea...

From Kerrie Erikstrup <kerrie@upnorthsigns.com>

Date Mon 11/25/2024 11:57 AM

To Tami Jacobs <tjacobs@growthiv.org>

**CAUTION:** This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

On the 3mm PolyMetal  
8'x8' signs \$1,400 w/ the acrylic UV clear coat  
The 43" x 22" rider signs \$160/ea.

Install \$350  
I would have you get the Sign Permit.

*Thank You,  
Kerrie Erikstrup*

E-mail: [Kerrie@upnorthsigns.com](mailto:Kerrie@upnorthsigns.com)



218-546-8417  
[www.UPNORTHSIGNS.com](http://www.UPNORTHSIGNS.com)

802 4TH STREET  
IRONTON INDUSTRIAL PARK  
IRONTON, MN 56455 USA

**From:** Tami Jacobs <tjacobs@growthiv.org>  
**Sent:** Monday, November 25, 2024 11:47 AM  
**To:** Kerrie Erikstrup <kerrie@upnorthsigns.com>  
**Subject:** Re: Sign - 8x8 Idea...

Kerrie,

What would the cost for this size and type of sign? Also how much would the individual little signs cost?

Tami Jacobs

Office Manager

Growth Innovations

Application for Aitkin County Business Development & Recreation Grant Program: **AITKIN FARM TRAIL 2.0**  
January 1, 2025 - December 31, 2025 1.



#### PROGRAM INFORMATION

**Project/Event Name:** Aitkin Farm Trail 2.0  
**Date(s) of Project/Event:** 2025 Ongoing  
**Location of Project/Event:** Aitkin County (County-wide)  
**Organization/Community Name:** Clear Lake Gardens  
**Person in Charge of Project:** Kelley Rajala  
**Organization Mailing Address:** 31213 292nd St. Aitkin, MN 56431  
**Contact Person's Phone #:** 707-331-6850  
**Contact Person's Email:** [clearlakegardens@gmail.com](mailto:clearlakegardens@gmail.com)

#### Description/focus/purpose of your organization:

Clear Lake Gardens (CLG) is a small business in the Glen Township of Aitkin County. We operate a 2-person, 2-acre sustainable farm that grows vegetables, fruit, herbs and flowers. We sell our goods directly to the public at the Aitkin Farmer's Market and onsite Farmstand, as well as selling wholesale to local restaurants, institutions and retailers via the Aitkin Food Hub.

In 2023, a small marketing project of mine that started with our neighboring three farms, blossomed into highlighting 11 farms across Aitkin County. This was the spark of the **Aitkin Farm Trail**, similar to other cooperative marketing efforts that promote local food and agriculture, such as the Clover Valley Farm Trail north of Duluth. CLG printed 2,000 rack cards with the geographic map of the farm locations on one side, and a Farm Directory on the back side. These were distributed by CLG, the featured farms, the Aitkin Farmers Market, Aitkin Food Hub, Riverwood Hospital and Aitkin Public Health. Additionally, we considered it a huge marketing win to get Explore MN, Minnesota Grown and the MN Sustainable Farming Association's endorsement of the project and printed their logos on the bottom of the rack card.

#### FUNDING: Amount requested from Aitkin County \$2,000

Amount of your organization's match \$ 2,000

Total projected budget \$4,000

#### Project Description:

We would appreciate consideration for seed funding to produce Aitkin Farm Trail 2.0 – the next iteration of a project we initiated in 2023. Please see [clearlakegardens.org/farm-trail](http://clearlakegardens.org/farm-trail) for version 1.0.

I envision that version 2.0 this will include:

- 1) an updated map/directory including more farms, eateries and food producers throughout the county, and
- 2) a mobile-friendly website to match – or include on the Chamber or County's websites.

#### What do you hope to accomplish, how it will be done and specifically how the grant funds will be used.

I have a passion for local economics. My goal with this project is to help build a strong, resilient local economy in Aitkin County and the region. I believe there is an opportunity for Aitkin to place 'sustainable agriculture' as a pillar of future local economic growth and a component of the County's 'Naturally Better' program. Aitkin County is rich with sustainable agricultural social and physical resources and opportunities. By drawing on these resources, Aitkin County can become a State leader and a hub for sustainable agriculture, local food systems, and an economy based on natural elements and stewardship – all the while building community resilience.

We will accomplish this goal over time through projects and partnerships. We already test-piloted the Farm Trail 1.0 rack card. Now we'd like to expand the number of farms and restaurants and print a new directory – for residents and visitors. We'd also like a digital directory where people can find the businesses along the Aitkin Farm Trail.

Funding would be used for designing and printing the marketing materials, designing a website and/or app. and additional marketing expenses.

**Explain how your project will bring visitors to or provide a positive and sustainable economic impact on Aitkin County**

Broadly, I hope to further pin Aitkin County's position "on the map" as a great place to visit. People can visit farmstands, eat at farm-to-table restaurants, attend farm tours, learn at educational classes on regenerative agriculture, homesteading and eco-heath. These diverse topics appeal to a broad swath of the public. I believe the market potential is substantial and it could provide a solid direction to aim collective energy for the future of Aitkin's economy. Agrotourism is a growing trend in the State and the Aitkin Farm Trail can tap into these new opportunities and flourish.

Projecting forward, with initiatives such as this, I believe Aitkin can become a draw for new residents to the area who are interested in sustainable food, health and agriculture. It creates a welcoming and supportive ecosystem for entrepreneurs and small business owners to move here for the quality of life and "set up shop" with new related businesses.

**List target audience:**

People considering a life change, people interested in living closer to nature, people looking for new skills, people concerned about their health and environment, homesteaders, DIYers, parents, teachers, new retirees.

**How many people usually attend this project/event?**

This would be an ongoing marketing project, not a one-time event.  
I would consider printing 2,000 maps again and reprint when needed.

**If awarded, how many incremental visitors do you hope to attract?**

600 in 2025

PROJECT BUDGET:

Category	Grant Funds	Applicant Funds	Total
Research/Data Collection		1,000	1,000
Map Design	500		500
Printing	500		500
Web Design	500		500
Other marketing	500	500	1,000
Partnership Coordination		500	500
TOTAL	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$4,000

Contact Signature:

Name: Kelley Rajala, co-owner Clear Lake Gardens

Date: 2/1/25



#3

## Application for Aitkin County Business Development & Recreation Grant Program January 1, 2025 - December 31, 2025

1. Grant requests should be submitted by EMAIL to:  
[mark.jeffers@co.aitkin.mn.us](mailto:mark.jeffers@co.aitkin.mn.us), subject line: BD&R2025 or  
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2. Funding recommendations will be considered at the regularly scheduled monthly meeting of the Aitkin County Economic Development Committee. Application deadline is **May 31, 2025**.
3. Committee recommendations will be submitted to the Aitkin County Board of Commissioners for final approval.

### APPLICANT INFORMATION

#### PROGRAM INFORMATION

**Project Name:** Nature Rocks! A Fundraiser for Conservation

**Date(s) of Program:** Saturday, June 21, 2025

**Location of Program:** Downtown Aitkin

**Organization/Community Name:** Long Lake Foundation benefiting the Long Lake Conservation Center

**Person in Charge of Project:** Bob Marcum, President Dave McMillan, Manager LLCC

**Organization Mailing Address (Street Name or P.O. Box or Route and Box # and City and Zip Code):**

28952 438<sup>th</sup> Ln Palisade, MN 56469

**Contact Person's Phone #:** 218-768-4653

**Contact Person's Email:** [rmarcum@llcfoundation.org](mailto:rmarcum@llcfoundation.org); [dave@longlakecc.org](mailto:dave@longlakecc.org)

**Description/focus/purpose of your organization:**

The Long Lake Conservation Foundation is 100% volunteer-operated. We see value in providing people, especially youth, with resources to learn about nature and understand the importance of conservation. The foundation's purpose is to raise, receive, and appropriate funds with a goal to enhance environmental education at Long Lake Conservation Center.

The center is focused on living connected to the natural world. They inspire a deep appreciation of nature through hands-on, discovery based learning. Those that experience Long Lake Conservation Center develop skills and an appreciation for the natural world around them in the hopes of building a lifelong stewardship of the environment.

#### FUNDING:

Amount requested from Aitkin County \$ 2,000

(Minimum \$100.00, maximum request is 2,000.00). The Economic Development Committee may recommend to the Board of Commissioners to increase or decrease the amount awarded at their discretion. The Aitkin County Board of Commissioners grants the final approval for funding.

Amount of your organization's match \$2,000

Total projected budget \$16,000





**PROJECT/EVENT DESCRIPTION: Be concise and complete; attach supporting information if needed.**

Nature Rocks! A Concert for Conservation is a scholarship fundraising event headlined by the GB Leighton and The Jorgensens. This is the major summer fundraising event for the Long Lake Conservation Foundation. All profits from this event will go to support Long Lake Conservation Center so that youth to attend Outdoor School and summer camp. This is the concert's fourth year. We will continue to support our local community through utilizing area contractors and vendors. You can learn more about Nature Rocks at [www.naturerocksconcert.com](http://www.naturerocksconcert.com).

**What do you hope to accomplish, how it will be done and specifically how the grant funds will be used?**

There are a number of goals for this event. The primary goal is to raise money in support of Long Lake Conservation Center's environmental education mission. We are selling tickets to this event, seeking sponsors, grants, building local partnerships, and selling t-shirts and concessions. The budgeted projection is to raise \$16,000. This will be distributed to up to 3,500 youth during the 2025-26 school year. Other goals include building awareness for Long Lake Conservation Center's environmental education mission, and being an active part of life in Aitkin County, supporting its burgeoning entertainment-based brand. The grant funds will be used to execute the concert, including paying for band, stage, facilities, port-a-potties, media and incidentals. The event will be marketed on local radio, press releases, paid newspaper advertisement, social media posts and paid digital media.

**Explain how your project will bring visitors to or provide a positive and sustainable economic impact on Aitkin County.**

This is the fourth year of Nature Rocks. Our first year, the concert was held in downtown Aitkin. The past two years, we tried to grow the concert with national acts, utilizing the Aitkin County Fairgrounds. This year, we are returning to our roots and returning to downtown Aitkin. We believe that the venue and vibe of downtown is more conducive to the scope and brand of Nature Rocks. Area businesses, including bars, restaurants and hotels directly benefit from the concert. The event will also directly pay numerous Aitkin County businesses, including Timber Septic and Antoine Electric. Other businesses, including Block North, the Ripple Center, Rosalina's Pizza and Smokey Jake's BBQ will directly profit from providing services at the concert. We estimate that approximately 250 people from outside of the County will attend the concert. In past concerts we heard numerous comments about how "cool" Aitkin is. We anticipate that this year's event will similarly benefit Aitkin County.

**List target audience:**


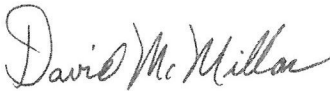
The primary target markets are Aitkin, Brainerd, Grand Rapids, Duluth, St. Cloud and, to a lesser degree, the Twin Cities metro area.



4. **PROJECT BUDGET:** in the space below, provide a budget for the entire event.

Category	Grant Funds	Applicant Funds	Total
Bands	\$500	\$9,000	\$9,000
Sound, lights and stage	\$1,000	\$2,000	\$3,000
Advertising	\$0	\$1,500	\$1,500
Port-a-Potties	\$500	\$700	\$1,200
Culligan Water Station	\$0	\$100	\$100
Insurance	\$0	\$500	\$500
Miscellaneous/incidentals	\$0	\$500	\$500
Volunteer T-shirts	\$0	\$200	\$200
TOTALS	\$2,000	\$14,000	\$16,000

Contact Signature:

Name   Date: 2-21-25



## **PROGRAM INFORMATION**

Project/Event Name: **Food as Medicine Festival**

Date(s) of Project/Event: **Saturday, 5/31/25**

Location of Project/Event: **Aitkin Farmers Market - Tractor Supply parking lot**

Organization/Community Name: **Clear Lake Gardens** in Collaboration with Riverwood and Public Health

Person in Charge of Project: **Kelley Rajala**

Organization Mailing Address: **31213 292nd St. Aitkin, MN 56431**

Contact Person's Phone #: **707-331-6850**

Contact Person's Email: [clearlakegardens@gmail.com](mailto:clearlakegardens@gmail.com)

### **Description/focus/purpose of your organization:**

Clear Lake Gardens (CLG) is a small business in the Glen Township of Aitkin County. We operate a 2-person, 2-acre sustainable farm that grows vegetables, fruit, herbs and flowers. We sell our goods directly to the public at the Aitkin Farmers Market and at our onsite farmstand, and sell products wholesale to local restaurants, institutions and retailers via the Aitkin Food Hub.

### **FUNDING:**

Amount requested from Aitkin County \$500

Amount of your organization's match \$1,750

Total projected budget \$2,250

### **PROJECT/EVENT DESCRIPTION:**

We will be producing a free public educational event on the importance of fresh, local, seasonal food as it relates to personal health and wellbeing. We plan to hold two panel discussions and two cooking demonstrations with professionals from Riverwood Hospital and Public Health. The content will cover the topics of "food as medicine", food access, preparation, preservation and seasonal, local food sourcing. We will hold this event

adjacent to the Aitkin Farmers Market at the beginning of the growing season to promote our local farms and food producers. The event is planned from 10am-1pm on Saturday, May 31, 2025.

**What do you hope to accomplish, how it will be done and specifically how the grant funds will be used.**

Our goals are to:

- 
- 
- Raise public awareness about the impact of food choices on participants' health and wellbeing.
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- 
- Draw people to the farmers market to promote those farms and businesses.
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- 
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- Direct people to the resources of the Find Food Aitkin County program and Riverwood Hospital.
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We want to help people learn about:

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- 
- The direct connection between what they eat and the quality of their health.

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- Taking more control over their physical and mental wellbeing.
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- 
- The benefits of local, healthy, seasonal foods.
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- 
- Local farms, food businesses and food resources.
- 

County funds would help purchase supplies for the food demos, rent equipment, and public marketing for the festival.

**Explain how your project will bring visitors to or provide a positive and sustainable economic impact on Aitkin County**

We believe this festival fits well into Aitkin's "Naturally Better" program. It will help position Aitkin County as a regional leader in sustainable agriculture and healthy living. The event will also create exposure and direct sales to local farm, food and health businesses.

Many people are interested in better health and wellness. We believe this festival will be a draw to a wide variety of people throughout the region. We expect that seasonal residents will attend and leave the event with a greater interest in sourcing their food locally, rather

We expect approximately 250 people to attend.

**If awarded, how many incremental visitors do you hope to attract?**

We expect about 25% of the attendees to be from outside the Aitkin area.

**PROJECT BUDGET:**

Category	Grant Funds	Applicant Funds	Total
Equipment rental	50	1,350	1,400
Food Demo Supplies	250	300	550
Marketing	200	100	300
TOTAL			2,250

Contact Signature:

Name:

Date:

Kelley Rajala

3/25/25



than bringing all their food up from the cities. This would have a long term economic benefit for our local businesses.

**List target audience:**

- 
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- Area residents who are wanting and/or needing to improve their physical and mental health
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- Seasonal residents who currently don't shop locally
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- People interested in homesteading, gardening and food preservation
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- 
- 
- People who enjoy cooking and eating
- 
- 
- 
- Sustainability enthusiasts
- 

**How many people usually attend this project/event?**

## **PROGRAM INFORMATION**

Project/Event Name: **Food as Medicine Festival**

Date(s) of Project/Event: **Saturday, 5/31/25**

Location of Project/Event: **Aitkin Farmers Market - Tractor Supply parking lot**

Organization/Community Name: **Clear Lake Gardens** in Collaboration with Riverwood and Public Health

Person in Charge of Project: **Kelley Rajala**

Organization Mailing Address: **31213 292nd St. Aitkin, MN 56431**

Contact Person's Phone #: **707-331-6850**

Contact Person's Email: [clearlakegardens@gmail.com](mailto:clearlakegardens@gmail.com)

### **Description/focus/purpose of your organization:**

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### **FUNDING:**

Amount requested from Aitkin County \$500

Amount of your organization's match \$1,750

Total projected budget \$2,250

### **PROJECT/EVENT DESCRIPTION:**

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- Taking more control over their physical and mental wellbeing.
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- 
- 
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- 
- 
- 
- Local farms, food businesses and food resources.
- 

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Contact Signature:

Name:

Date:

Kelley Rajala

3/25/25