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UMM Receives Blue Cross Support to Promote Healthy Eating

Project part of Blue Cross initiative to improve access to, affordability of, healthy foods, especially fruits, vegetables

The University of Minnesota, Morris (UMM) will receive funding from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota's (Blue Cross) tobacco settlement proceeds to promote healthier eating and thereby help to improve the health of Minnesotans.

UMM was chosen to receive the funding to expand access to, and availability of fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods on campus, within greater Morris, and in Stevens County.

Led by UMM's Office of Student Affairs, the project will create a Morris Healthy Eating college health coalition. Partners in the coalition include: Sodexo Campus Services – managers of campus dining services, the Pride of the Prairie Local Foods Initiative led by the University of Minnesota West Central Partnership, Stevens Community Medical Center – providers of student health services, and the Pomme de Terre Food Co-op.

“We learned last fall that only 15 percent of college students at Morris and in Minnesota eat the five servings of fruits and vegetables recommended daily. And one of every three college students is overweight, obese, or very obese,” said Sandy Olson-Loy, UMM's vice chancellor for student affairs. “We're very concerned—for our students and for the state—given the links between unhealthy eating, obesity, and the risk of heart disease, cancer and other chronic diseases. We want to make healthy eating a regular part of campus and community life.” College health statistics come from the 2007 College Student Health Survey of 14 Minnesota universities conducted by the University of Minnesota.

The University of Minnesota, Morris is one of eight local organizations receiving funding from Blue Cross through its Prevention Minnesota Community Funding initiative, *Healthy Eating Minnesota*. The contracts are one element of a comprehensive effort to more than double the number of Minnesotans who eat five or more daily servings of fruits and vegetables. Funded groups will work to improve access to and affordability of healthy foods, especially fruits and vegetables.

Research shows eating more fruits and vegetables can help protect against heart disease and some cancers, help manage diabetes and weight, lower cholesterol and blood pressure, and reduce the likelihood of heart attack or stroke. The valuable health benefits result in reduced illness and health care costs related to a poor diet.

“Unhealthy eating and physical inactivity combined are the second leading cause of preventable death and disease in our state, and today 80 percent of Minnesotans put their health at risk because they aren’t eating a healthy diet,” said Marc Manley, M.D., vice president and medical director of population health at Blue Cross. “That’s a big problem that requires enlisting help from many groups around the state to remove barriers and change systems, so that eating healthy foods can be the easy choice. We look forward to working with local organizations such as the University of Minnesota, Morris and together, I’m confident we can make real progress.”

Contingent upon successful negotiation of its contract, the University of Minnesota, Morris, along with their community partners, will begin their work in early 2009. Their experiences and successes will be shared with other communities across the state.

Blue Cross expects to invest approximately \$650,000 from its tobacco settlement proceeds to fund these eight groups’ healthy eating work next year. For more information about *Healthy Eating Minnesota*, and a complete list of selected groups, visit www.bluecrossmn.com/preventionminnesota.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, with headquarters in the St. Paul suburb of Eagan, was chartered in 1933 as Minnesota’s first health plan and continues to carry out its charter mission today: to promote a wider, more economical and timely availability of health services for the people of Minnesota. A nonprofit, taxable organization, Blue Cross is the largest health plan based in Minnesota, covering 2.9 million members in Minnesota and nationally through its health plans or plans administered by its affiliated companies. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, headquartered in Chicago. Go to www.bluecrossmn.com to learn more about Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota.

The University of Minnesota, Morris is a founding partner in the Pride of the Prairie Local Foods Initiative, a collaborative effort along with the partners named above, as well as the West Central Research and Outreach Center and University of Minnesota Extension, Land Stewardship Project, Sustainable Farming Association, Prairie Renaissance Cultural Alliance, area farmers and the Upper Minnesota River Valley community. UMM’s annual Pride of the Prairie Fall Feast and Spring Local Foods Meals and Farmers’ Markets feature delicious locally grown seasonal foods. The campus’ Turtle Mountain Café and Dining Services regularly include local and regional foods on their menus. Students engaged in UMM’s Service Learning Sustainable Living Initiative implement local foods projects and conduct action research to create sustainable communities.

The University of Minnesota, Morris: A renewable, sustainable education.