

**Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund  
2010 Request for Proposals (RFP)**

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**LCCMR ID: 213-F**

**Project Title:**

Northfield Community Farm Acquisition

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**LCCMR 2010 Funding Priority:**

F. Environmental Education

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**Total Project Budget: \$** \$360,000

**Proposed Project Time Period for the Funding Requested:** 2 years, 2010 - 2012

**Other Non-State Funds: \$** \$0

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**Summary:**

Northfield Community Farm is a demonstration cooperative designed to preserve endangered farmland, enhance local food systems, and support sustainable agriculture and the farmers who practice it.

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**Location:**

**Region:** Central

**County Name:** Rice

**City / Township:** Northfield

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_____ Knowledge Base	_____ Broad App.	_____ Innovation
_____ Leverage	_____ Outcomes	
_____ Partnerships	_____ Urgency	_____ TOTAL

## MAIN PROPOSAL

### PROJECT TITLE: Northfield Community Farm

#### I. PROJECT STATEMENT

Concerned citizens of Northfield have watched local policy decisions jeopardize large tracts of productive farmland and have developed a novel plan to preserve it: join together to buy it. Using the cooperative model employed so successfully to get a new natural foods coop in town (Just Food, opened in December 2004, now with nearly 1900 members), the Northfield Community Farm Project will create a 40-acre working organic demonstration farm for beginning farmers who will supply subscribers with a share of their produce. The success of this project may have far-reaching impacts around the state as other communities find inspiration to relocalize their own sustainable food economies, thereby conserving undeveloped land as well as vital resources such as water and air.

This project addresses several critical sustainability issues. Productive farmland is a natural resource vital to our survival, yet the current economics of farming and land development have led to the loss of enormous amounts of critical farmland with tragic consequences for our lakes and rivers. America loses over one million acres of farmland each year, and communities like ours need tools to slow this process in order to both ensure food security and protect the ecosystems on which we all depend.

At present, the burden of maintaining this critical resource has largely fallen to the farmers themselves. With a farm owned by the community, financial stresses associated with the vicissitudes of farming will be shared by a large number of people rather than being the sole responsibility of farmers, as is now the case in privately-owned ventures. Further, the average American farmer is 55, and opportunities are far too rare for young farmers to gain the knowledge and capital required to ensure that we may farm sustainably in the future. Our vision is to create a way for beginning farmers to ease into the daunting process of starting their own farms; partnering with programs in the state geared toward new farmers, we hope to launch many new organic growers by providing them with the equipment they need and a ready-made customer base.

Our long-range plan is to buy and thereby preserve more area farms as well as run programming for the community, particularly schoolchildren, to enhance understanding of the importance of local foodsheds and sustainable agriculture as part of sound environmental policy. We hope to create a working model that other communities can copy, and once our test farm is stable we would hope to send out emissaries to teach leaders in other communities how they might likewise begin community-owned farms.

Sustainable models of agriculture will play a vital role in protecting our nation's diverse ecosystems. By limiting emissions from food distribution, controlling runoff, and working with natural systems to protect wildlife and water quality, sustainably-managed farms protect the health of these systems. The Northfield Community Farm offers a new way to address these pressing environmental concerns.

#### II. DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT RESULTS

**Result 1:** Preserve 40 acres of farmland and create working community farm **Budget:** \$ 360,000

<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>
1. Preserve 40 acres of productive farmland (purchase of farm, \$200,000 + legal fees)	9/15/2010
2. Create cooperatively-owned farming operation (\$100,000 for equipment, farm buildings; 60,000 for 2 year .5FTE Farm manager)	6/1/2011
3. Develop community education programs (cost relatively insignificant and absorbed by cooperative)	5/1/2012

**Result 2:** Become a working model for other communities and assist in their efforts to copy this model

**Deliverable**

1. Share findings and resources with other Minnesota communities
2. Assist other communities planning and organization of similar farms

**Completion Date**

6/15/2012  
6/1/2011

**III. PROJECT STRATEGY**

**A. Project Team/Partners**

Project Team members come from a number of local groups:

- Northfield Local Food Action Network: a consortium of local activists committed to building our local food system.
- Center for Sustainable Living: A 501 (c) 3 nonprofit supporting local sustainability initiatives
- Transition Northfield: A citizen group working to make Northfield self-sufficient.

Members drawn from all three groups have formed a Board charged with working out the purchase of the farm and recruiting members. The Board will hire a farm manager to oversee the development of the working farm and arrange for farmers to come work on it. The farm manager will work with the Board to design the CSA system the farm will use. Board members will coordinate volunteer efforts to create educational outreach programs.

**B. Timeline Requirements**

We plan to begin work on this project as soon as funds are available, spending the first six months on acquisition and planning. We aim to have farmers on the land by the beginning of the first growing season, April 2011. Our first season will be the pilot program; we will then spend the winter months evaluating and planning further refinements. In the second season, we would demonstrate the viability of the project and begin inviting leaders from other communities to see the possibilities of cooperatively-owned farms.

**C. Long-Term Strategy**

This project seeks to create a self-sustaining farm in perpetuity by drawing on funds contributed by its membership through purchases of farm produce. Like other cooperative ventures, later investments (such as upgrading equipment or further land purchases) will be decided by an elected board and paid for through private investments by the membership. We hope our success inspires other communities to try this model as well, so this project may also be seen as the starting point for a movement of community-owned farm projects.

Careful stewardship of arable land is crucial to addressing the numerous environmental problems we now face. Sustainable agricultural practices protect streams and provide wildlife habitat; safeguarding productive farmland from development and relocalizing food systems will be all the more necessary as we tackle the intersecting problems of population growth, dwindling energy supplies, and climate change. This demonstration project aims to heighten awareness of the central role of food production in wise planning of our ecosystem's future and offers a model for communities around our state to address these complex and difficult challenges.

## Project Budget

### IV. TOTAL PROJECT REQUEST BUDGET ([Insert # of years for project] years)

<b>BUDGET ITEM</b> (See list of Eligible & Non-Eligible Costs, p. 13)	<b>AMOUNT</b>
<b>Personnel:</b>	\$ -
Farm Development Manager [.5 FTE for 2 years]	\$ 60,000
	\$ -
<b>Contracts:</b>	\$ -
<b>Farm Building improvements</b> (greenhouse, storage sheds, chicken coops, etc); contractors to be determined	\$ 50,000
<b>Equipment/Tools/Supplies:</b> tractors (purchased second-hand), row covers, irrigation tape, etc	\$ 50,000
<b>Acquisition (Fee Title or Permanent Easements):</b> 40 acres, to be held by Northfield Community Farm Cooperative	\$ 200,000
<b>TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET REQUEST TO LCCMR</b>	<b>\$ 360,000</b>

### V. OTHER FUNDS

<b>SOURCE OF FUNDS</b>	<b>AMOUNT</b>	<b>Status</b>
<b>Other Non-State \$ Being Applied to Project During Project Period:</b> Membership fee by community members	\$ 100,000	to be raised
<b>Other State \$ Being Applied to Project During Project Period:</b> planning to apply for MPCA grant in fall	\$ -	
<b>In-kind Services During Project Period:</b> As with the development of our food coop, thousands of volunteer hours will be put in over the course of this project	30,000?	pending

## **Project Manager Qualifications and Organization Description**

The Board of the Northfield Community Farm comprises ten activists who have overseen numerous environmental and local food initiatives, including the creation of Just Food Coop and its support of local farms and educational outreach. The group includes farmers, educators, and scientists from the community. The Board would hire a farm manager to oversee the development of the farm buildings and the installation of new farmers and would themselves be involved in major decision making and oversight of the project.

