



FOOD & FUN HOUR: OPEN FARMS

Meeting #7

October 9, 2025

4-5 pm

Group Expectations

- How to interact and discuss via Zoom
- OAM community: all types of affiliations are welcome!
- Code of Conduct
 - We are all coming from different backgrounds and perspectives. Please interact with mindfulness and respect!



INTRODUCTIONS

First name & pronouns



**What are your
experiences/interests/
feelings around
farming & gardening?**

Open Farms Background



Origin: Open Farms began in 2011 with the hiring of our Open Farms Manager Kelly Wilson. She is our longest-tenured staff member!



Locations: We currently have five farms throughout the Twin Cities and Afton (1.875 acres total).



Utility: In recent years, the Open Farms Program provides around 15,000 lbs of produce and herbs annually. We use this produce for special events, in client meals, and as CSA shares to support our programming.



Open Farms Manager at Afton farm!

<https://youtu.be/iksluiHR7Ck>

Open Farms Approach

By turning vacant lots into vibrant gardens, we are transforming underutilized urban spaces into healthy food to nourish the community.

Open Farms engages volunteers and the community in agricultural issues while providing the best nourishment possible to our clients living with life-threatening illnesses.

We use organic methods and permaculture principles in the gardens to work with nature, rather than against it. We also use a variety of different growing techniques to maximize efficiency and space as well as companion planting, crop rotations, cover cropping and green manure as ways to increase productivity, build healthy soil and reduce pest problems.



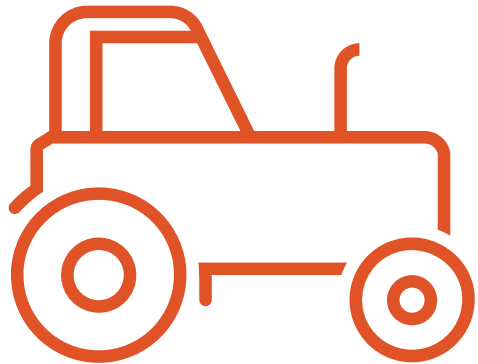
Open Farms and Menu Development

The partnership between Open Farms and the Open Arms kitchens actually begins in the dead of winter!



- In **early January**, I sit down with our farm manager, Kelly, and the kitchen managers to **brainstorm** what produce is most beneficial and feasible for the kitchens and what is most often used across our menus
 - Not just *types* of produce, but also *varieties*. For example, Roma vs. heirloom vs. cherry tomatoes; jalapeno vs. sweet bell vs. serrano vs. thai chili peppers.
- In **late January-early February**, Kelly uses the ideas from this meeting to **place orders for seeds**.
- In **late April/early May**, **seeds are started** indoors, under grow lamps and transplanted to the farms after the threat of frost has gone.
- In **mid- to late-June**, the **first harvest** occurs (usually lettuces/mixed greens, peas, scallions, fennel) and **ramps up** from there until **mid-November**!

Farm to Kitchen: Part 1



- During the harvest season, Kelly updates our Menu Specialist Dietitian, Lucy, of each week's anticipated harvest.
- They use a shared spreadsheet to track harvests, produce delivered to the kitchen(s), and harvest produce's usage in recipes.
- Lucy looks at each forecasted harvest and determines where on our menus we can utilize the produce to balance nutrition and maximize the flavor and quality of the produce.
 - Sometimes this is as easy as substituting our Open Farms produce in for the same type of produce we'd normally buy from a vendor and sometimes, we change the recipe to accommodate the Open Farms produce (ex. Subbing cherry tomatoes for carrots in a salad; subbing kale for spinach in a salad).
- Lucy then communicates with the kitchen managers on what to expect that week and where to use it and she has them confirm the plan is feasible.

Farm to Kitchen: Part 2



- Once the plan is confirmed, Lucy "places an order" on our shared spreadsheet, letting Kelly know how many pounds of each item should be delivered to which kitchen and on what day.
 - depending on the kitchen's production schedule, their current inventory and storage space, volunteer shifts, produce shelf life, etc.
- At the end of each week, Lucy confirms with the kitchens that the produce and amount expected was delivered.
- Produce gets processed (washed, sliced, trimmed etc.) by volunteers or staff and then added to whichever recipe we had agreed on.
- Once all produce usage is confirmed, Lucy (or a kitchen manager) updates the label for the meal to call out the Open Farms produce on the ingredient list.

Examples of Farm Produce in Meals



Zucchini and summer squash in Primavera Casserole, Zucchini Bread, and Roasted Veggie Sandwiches



Mixed string beans (green beans, purple beans, and wax beans) in Chopped Salads



Scallions in Hmong Fresh Lunch kits



Kale in Chef Salad



Mini fennel in Coleslaw



White onions and Walla Walla onions in Curried Chicken Salad Sandwiches and Curried Tofu Salad Sandwiches



Recent Farm Grants

- **City of Minneapolis (Climate Legacy Initiative):** Awarded \$22,536 in 2024 to expand irrigation, compost, and cultural meal production through Open Farms.
- **Ramsey and Washington County (Food Recovery):** Collaborative grant with both counties to support harvesting efforts on 1.25 acres of three urban farm locations from April of 2024 to September of 2025. This produce went directly into client's meals.
 - **Washington county locations: 4,612 pounds** of produce recovered
 - **Ramsey county locations: 1,807 pounds** of produce recovered
 - Average of 440 meals a quarter included locally grown, organic produce

Overall, Open
Farms produces
12,000 pounds of
produce annually,
growing over 40
different crops.

Collectively, these efforts advanced our mission to provide fresh, medically tailored, and culturally relevant food regardless of income, while fostering a deeper understanding of the systems that shape our food supply.



Discussion

- Did you know that OAM grows some of our ingredients?
- How does growing our own food change our relationship to it?
- What are some ways that local foods can be more available to you?



More content from the farms!

Check out this Open Farms spotlight video with Open Farms Manager Kelly from 2020!

[Lunch & Learn #1: Open Farms tour \(and gardening Q&A!\) with Kelly Wilson](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7RRtWlpxuY&t=10s)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7RRtWlpxuY&t=10s>



Future Discussion Topics

What would you like to talk about in future meetings?

Any guests would you like to see?

Do any of you have a food topic you'd like to present on?





Contact us!

Client Services: 612-767-7333

Mon – Thurs 8:30 am to 4 pm

Friday 8:30 am to 3 pm

Meals@openarmsmn.org

Nutrition Services: 612-540-7759

Nutrition@openarmsmn.org

If we cannot answer your call live, please leave us a detailed message with your name, date of birth, and what we can assist you with!

If we are having a hard time reaching each other, leave a timeframe that would be best for us to call you back.

THANK YOU FOR JOINING!