

# Locally-grown foods, farmers markets growing



Janna Goerd, Tower Farmers Market manager, waters squash, lettuce, cabbage and herbs in the greenhouse at her Fat Chicken Farm in Pike Township.

ans Memorial. Along with accepting electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards, the market will offer matching dollars from a state program and Essentia Health.

market has grown in terms of both customers and vendors.”

Despite a short growing season, agriculture within the region is big business.

Including northeastern Minnesota and northwestern Wisconsin, agriculture in 2014 generated \$611 million in sales and \$245 million in earnings, according to a University of Minnesota Duluth study.

Hibbing Farmers Market, along Highway 37, is this summer doubling its days of operation to four days a week, including 3 p.m. to 8 p.m., Thursdays, beginning June 2, at Minnesota Discovery Center in Chisholm. The market is also open Tuesdays from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. and from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Fridays and Saturdays, across from McDonalds in Hibbing.

“I want to grow ours, and I’d like to include both Hibbing and Chisholm,” said Richard Johnson, market manager. “The partnership with Minnesota Discovery Center could really benefit us.”

Fresh vegetables, bakery, honey, homemade pies, plants, and crafts are customer favorites.

Beginning the afternoon and evening of June 9, a new Virginia Market Square Farmers Market opens in Virginia near the Iron Range Veter-

The market will be open every Thursday. Several downtown businesses are planning extended hours to coincide with the market.

“For people receiving food assistance, they can triple their dollars at our market,” said Marlise Riffel, an organizer of the market. “This is really part of the downtown revitalization effort to bring people to downtown.”

In Tower, the Friday 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. market is attracting increasing numbers of locals, tourists, and summer lake residents, said Janna Goerd, Tower Farmers Market manager.

Vegetables, pickles, flour, meat, baked goods, barbecue sauce, and pottery are top sellers.

Along with wholesome food, there’s always plenty of healthy socializing, said Goerd.

“It’s kind of a throwback to the old co-ops where you can stop and have a lemonade,” said Goerd. “Smaller farmers markets don’t fulfill everyone’s produce needs, but at larger markets people do go there to get their vegetables and other foods every week.”

For additional information on local farmers markets and home grown foods, visit [www.minnesotagrown.com](http://www.minnesotagrown.com)

## Larger farmers markets could be on the table

Scrumptious greens. Farm fresh eggs. Natural-fed meats. And mouth-watering baked goods.

Locally-grown foods are increasingly becoming a popular item on kitchen tables.

One of the many ideas planted at IRRRB’s recent “Cool & Creative Get Together” is to develop a regional Iron Range farmers market.

Across the Iron Range, from Grand Rapids to Tower, local farmers

markets are sprouting in size and popularity.

However, some say the concept of a larger, periodic Iron Range Farmers Market could take root.

“A regional farmers market would be good, and Saturdays would be a great day to do it,” said Jennifer Gordon Hughes, Ely Farmers Market president. “Maybe it could be done once a month and do it along with a festival or in conjunc-

tion with a fair.”

In some communities, farmers markets are already piggybacking with cultural activities, creating festival-type events.

“Ely has done a great job in having events surrounding our farmers market like ‘Tuesday Night Live’ music downtown and by having people with special talents in the (Whiteside) park during our farmers markets,” said Gordon Hughes. “Our

# KMDA tackles worldwide fishing market

## Bovey fishing lure manufacturer casts a wide sales net

BOVEY – Derek and Mike Vekich have their hooks into the domestic and global fishing market.

KMDA, Inc., a Bovey-based fishing products manufacturer owned by the Vekich brothers, is selling its extensive line of lures, swivels, and other fishing accessories, in 49 states and five foreign countries.

“We are probably one of the busiest little companies anywhere,” said Derek Vekich. “We are really just a couple of simple Iron Range kids who grew up here and learned on the fly.”

The company was founded in 2002 when the Greenway High School graduates returned to the Iron Range after leaving the area for a period of time.

“We grew up in Bovey, but always knew we’d come back here,” said Vekich. “Being raised here, we were always either hunting, fishing or involved in sports, so that’s all we knew about. We just decided to pick an industry to get into that we knew something about.”

Following the acquisition and sale of a canoe accessory business, the brothers landed a keeper when they launched KMDA.

KMDA started small, but has grown quickly.

Since 2002, KMDA has acquired the assets and brand names of nine fishing tackle companies, including several from Minnesota and as far as Kentucky and North Carolina.

“When we started, we wanted to build our own brand,” said Vekich. “But we knew that would take 30 years. So on the fly, we adjusted our thinking. Every company that

manufacturing facility, KMDA today manufactures about 400 different fishing products and some hunting gear.

Its five-person workforce produces approximately 400,000 pieces of fishing lures and accessories per year. KMDA products are sold in stores such as L&M Supply, Mills Fleet Farm, Cabela’s, Gander Mountain, and at bait shops.

Annual sales have skyrocketed from \$70,000 a year to \$3 million.

With IRRRB assistance, construction of a new 15,000 square-foot manufacturing facility is being planned this summer in Bovey.

“Without IRRRB, I don’t know how any of this would get done,” said Vekich. “This has been the easi-

est transition we’ve had.”

Plans are to add four new employees and increase production.

“It wasn’t long ago I said if we hit \$1 million in sales, I’d be happy,”

we accumulated brought us more customers for the fishing gear made by those companies and more customers from those geographic areas.”

Within its 7,000 square-foot

the formation of collaborative business, health care, and manufacturing groups is planned.

These are only a few of the many ideas that can help “Recharge the Range.”

On June 6, we’d like to hear from you.

Due to space limitations, registration is required. To register, go to [mn.gov/irrrrb](http://mn.gov/irrrrb)

Two earlier “Recharge the Range” forums brought together more than 250

community and business leaders. At a third forum, tourism, arts, and culture representatives voiced their ideas.

Some of the hundreds of suggestions brought forward at the forums are already being implemented.

A regional arts council is being formed. An expanded regional trails group and an attractions council are underway. And

the goal is to generate momentum around ideas on how to improve quality of life and diversify the economy of Iron Range communities.

Here’s your chance.

From 3:30 p.m. to 8 p.m., Monday, June 6,

the fourth “Recharge the Range,” forum is at Minnesota Discovery Center in Chisholm. The forum is open to the public.

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Mike Vekich makes a bucktail fishing lure at KMDA, Inc. in Bovey.

## What’s your idea to help “Recharge the Range”?

What are your ideas about how to improve quality of life and the Iron Range economy?

Are you willing to get involved in making your community a better place?

Or perhaps you’d simply like to connect with others to become more involved.

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Mark Phillips  
IRRRB commissioner