



The Spud Run: Expanding Access to Fresh Local Produce in Northeast Wisconsin

Challenge

As a UW-Madison Extension staff member working to strengthen food security in Door, Kewaunee, and Manitowoc Counties, Laura Apfelbeck is helping pantries connect with local food producers through the USDA-funded WI Local Food Purchase Assistance Program. When that program lost funding in January 2025, many rural pantries were left without a reliable source of local foods.

Rural pantries are often overlooked in food distribution systems. Few have loading docks, even fewer have refrigerated trucks, and many are open only one or two days a week. Staffing is limited, often relying on one or two part-time employees who may not be able to manage heavy deliveries. Yet the benefits of local procurement are significant. Growers earn needed income, and pantries receive fresh, local produce that families want.

The Project

In many communities across these three counties, fresh potatoes are a household staple. Yet most food pantries do not have a consistent supply. With a few targeted phone calls, Apfelbeck identified a Wisconsin-based grower with the capacity to deliver potatoes at an affordable price. Through a partnership with Alsum Farms & Produce in Friesland, participants could purchase a 50-pound bag of russet potatoes for nine dollars, including delivery to Manitowoc with a minimum order of 30 bags. With a supplier secured at a sustainable price point, The Spud Run was launched.

Connections built through The Big Apple Project also supported expansion. After learning about the effort, Larry Peterson of Resurrection Church Food Pantry in Green Bay reached out to Alsum for pricing information. Peterson shared this message: “Thanks for the info! I called Dave at Alsum this afternoon and he is going to send me a price list of lots of different products. This is the info I have been hoping to get to the Coalition all year but didn't know where to find the opportunities. You have been just the resource I have been praying for.”

The December Spud Run will include the original partners plus the Manitowoc Boys & Girls Club, United Ministries (serving pantries in St. Nazianz and Two Rivers), and the Kewaunee County Food Pantry in Algoma. The January Spud Run will expand to include seven pantries in Door County.



Dan Balch and Eric Weidner loading potatoes destined for Lakeshore Community Pantry



Tracy Bruce-Minehan and a Peters Pantry volunteer with potatoes from Alsum Farms

Continuing Impact

Community partners are enthusiastic. By collaborating, pantries can increase buying power and reduce transportation costs. Still, most rural pantry managers do not have the capacity to design and pilot new multi-county distribution systems while meeting the immediate needs of the households waiting at their doors. Extension plays a key role as connector and facilitator, helping create a sustainable model for long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships. Once established, these systems can continue to strengthen local food access well into the future.

By the Numbers

2,300 pounds of potatoes delivered in the pilot

46 bags distributed

6 organizations received potatoes in the first run



Mark Janiak at Kewaunee Co Food Pantry stocking potatoes from Alsum



Alsum Farms & Produce is known for their eco-friendly practices

On November 4, the pilot delivered 46 bags of potatoes (2,300 pounds) to four food pantries and two community meal sites in Manitowoc and Kewaunee Counties. The Big Apple Project offered a helpful model for logistics and partnerships. Because Alsum does not deliver directly to Kewaunee or Door Counties, the Manitowoc nonprofit Grow It Forward provided transport from Manitowoc, similar to their role in distributing apples.

“ You have been just the resource I have been praying for.
—Larry Peterson, Co-Chair, Brown County Hunger Coalition