

## SHIP in action

### Taking a closer look at two local initiatives in Sibley County

#### Sibley East School Garden High Tunnel Initiative

The Sibley East (SE) Agriculture Program has created a very successful school garden program. Summer of 2010 was the first year of the garden, with the produce harvested going to the school lunch program. For 2011, SE has plans to expand the garden. As a part of this expansion, SHIP awarded grant funds to the SE Agriculture Program to purchase a high tunnel. This is a pipe structure 30 ft x 48 ft with rafters that will get the “green house effect.” Having the high tunnel will extend the growing season by one month on each end. It will also be opened up for elementary science in the spring and fall to plant “quick” crops that the children can grow, and then will be used for fresh snacks for the children in school. The rest of the summer, it will be used to plant vegetable crops that will be used at school for the lunch program.

In addition to the high tunnel, the Sibley East Agriculture Program’s school garden also includes a one-acre garden close to the school in which 100% of the fruits and vegetables will go to the school lunch program, and another 1 ½ to 2 acres halfway between Arlington and Gaylord in which ½ of the produce will go to the school lunch program and the other ½ will be used as a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) partnership. This is in addition to a corn test plot that they are expanding from 7 acres last year to approximately 10 acres this year.

To better support the food service staff in incorporating this fresh produce into the school food program, it was also important to include a training component for them. Through the SHIP grant, we were able to offer a hands-on training for the food service staff from both Sibley East and GFW schools through the University of MN Extension office called *Keeping Kids from Falling Short: A New Look at Fruits and Vegetables in the School Cafeteria*. The SE school garden has become a model throughout the state.

Sample pictures of a “high tunnel”



## Farm-to-School Forager Initiative

Through the SHIP initiative, Meeker-McLeod-Sibley Community Health Services has contracted with a forager to provide direct services to local schools participating in Farm-to-School. In Sibley County, this includes both Sibley East and GFW Schools. Both school districts have begun small Farm-to-School programs and have expressed an interest in expanding them further. The goal of having a forager available to the schools right now is to help the schools create a sustainable Farm-to-School program that they can continue themselves in the future. Farm-to-School connects schools with local farmers to get fresh, locally grown foods into the school food program. In addition to getting more fresh foods into the school cafeteria, Farm-to-School programs are good for the economy. It keeps money circulating in our local economy and supports small, medium and sustainable farmers in our region. Farm-to-School also links kids to farmers, educating them about where and how their food is grown.

The forager is working with the schools to build relationships with local farmers. She is working with the schools to create a sustainable process that the schools can replicate in the future to continue procuring food from local farmers. The forager initially is assisting the schools with tasks such as:

- finding farmers that grow the foods the school needs,
- help the schools identify the quantities of fresh food they need to meet the number of servings they prepare,
- arrange the details of the transaction to meet the needs of both the school and the farmer such as delivery of the product, accountability/quality of the food, billing arrangements, etc.

For more information on these initiatives or the SHIP work taking place in Sibley County, please contact Mary Bachman, Sibley County SHIP Coordinator, at (507) 237-4048 or [maryb@co.sibley.mn.us](mailto:maryb@co.sibley.mn.us).

