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Joe Einertson '14, Brooklyn Park, helps with the implementation of a local foods co-op in downtown Willmar

Summary: The project's goals are to increase the availability of local foods, to bring business investments to the heart of the city, and to provide an alternative grocery experience.

(May 24, 2011)-Every summer the city of Willmar hosts an outdoor market, known as the Becker Market, in downtown Willmar. With the help of University of Minnesota, Morris student Joe Einertson '14, Brooklyn Park, a task force from the Willmar Design Center is working hard to convert the market into a year around, local food, community-owned grocery store.

Einerston says the project has three main goals: to increase the availability of local foods to Willmar and the surrounding communities, to bring business investments to the downtown area, the heart of the city, and to provide an alternative grocery purchasing opportunity.

Currently, there are no co-ops in the area surrounding Willmar, with the closest being the Morris Food Co-op. The proposed Willmar Community-Owned Grocery would be able to provide for residents of not just Willmar but the surrounding towns as well. The project is still in the planning stages, but just recently the community-owned grocery became an official legal entity, and plans are in motion to sign the papers for a building soon. If everything goes according to plan, the store and deli should open in spring 2012.

You can join [Becker Market on Facebook](#) to keep up to date with the market and community-owned grocery.

The [Center for Small Towns](#) is a community outreach program housed at the University of Minnesota, Morris and serves as a point-of-entry to the resources of the University. Small towns, local units of government, K-12 schools, nonprofit organizations, and other University units are able to utilize the Center's resources as they work on rural issues or make contributions to rural society. Their mission is to focus the University's attention and marshal its resources toward assisting Minnesota's small towns with locally identified issues by creating applied learning opportunities for faculty and students.

The University of Minnesota West Central Partnership is a legislatively funded initiative led by citizen leaders committed to leverage University resources to sustain Minnesota's natural resource based economy and empower citizen participation and leadership. West Central Partnership has partnered with the Center for Small Towns sponsoring "Connecting Students and Communities" program that provides financial support to hire Morris students for community identified projects.

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