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Lesmeister's internship leads to plans for new business after graduation

Summary: The senior has been working in collaboration with Morris Healthy Eating to bring together farm-fresh food and the Steven's County community at the Morris Area Farmer's Market.

(February 10, 2010)-We are what we eat, as the saying goes, and the [Morris Healthy Eating Initiative](#) is working hard to make sure that we are becoming healthier people. The University of Minnesota, Morris is working with community partners in a multi-year project to make fresh fruits, vegetables and other healthy foods more available on campus, in Morris and in Stevens County. Among their various projects is a partnership with the Morris Area Farmers Market. University student Audrey Lesmeister '11 is working with the Center for Small Towns, University of Minnesota West Central Partnership, and the Morris Healthy Eating Initiative to bring together farmers, their produce, and the Steven's County community.

Lesmeister has been working with the Morris Farmers Market since May 2010. The market started out small but has been gradually expanding, growing from seven to seventeen vendors. The Morris Healthy Eating Initiative also polled market goers this past season to find out what kinds of foods people are interested in. This information will be used next year to provide the consumers with the foods that they want. "Our goal is to unite the consumer with the food," Lesmeister says.

There's a growing demand for fresh food, according to Lesmeister, but people just don't know how to get a hold of it. "There's a real lack of availability of local foods," she says, but that's something they're working on changing. Next year, they're also going to pull in more UMM student customers by offering free shuttle service. The 2010 Farmers Market ran from June 17 through September 23 on Atlantic Avenue, with one final market held on campus in early November. The option of moving the market to East Side Park for 2011 is being considered, though planners are unsure if they're willing to give up their mainstreet locale. Lesmeister sees this project as long-term, possibly even endless because, as she puts it, "We're all going to need to eat."

Lesmeister, originally from Morris, never planned to stay in her hometown after her upcoming graduation, but something about this internship really peaked her interest. She says that it was a "fun, fun internship" and "a rewarding challenge." Now she is starting up her own business, Freshmeister Foods, and she hopes to provide local, sustainable, fresh food to the community.

Established in 2009, the Morris Healthy Eating initiative links leaders from the community's food, healthcare, and educational systems with partnering organizations, agencies, and businesses to make the healthy choice the easy choice.

The 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 UMM students for community identified

projects  .

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 of Minnesota. 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.

If you'd like more information on the topic of this article, please contact [Allyce Amidon](#).

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