

REGENERATIVE AG IN THE HEARTLAND:

Paving the Path to a Regional Farm-to-Military Value Chain



BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Across the nation, initiatives are bolstering local and regional food value chains, benefiting direct-to-consumer markets, restaurants, grocery stores, and larger institutions like hospitals, dining centers, and schools. A new initiative, led by Basil's Harvest in partnership with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Food Systems Team and the Minnesota National Guard, assesses the potential for Midwest National Guard units to procure local and regional foods. This project aims to enhance the health and economic impact of the National Guard's food value chain while fostering a more sustainable and resilient food system that benefits servicemembers and the broader community.

Understanding and establishing defenses against threats – such as climate change, food insecurity, food contamination and adulteration, disease, and war – requires ensuring good nutrition, health, and wellbeing for our people and communities. The Regenerative Ag in the Heartland: Paving the Path to a Regional Farm-to-Military Value Chain initiative aims to transform military nutrition by embedding sustainability and health into national defense logistics.

PRIMARY GOALS

-  **STRENGTHEN REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS**
Foster community collaboration to expand mid-tier value chains serving National Guard units.
-  **ESTABLISH BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS**
Develop strategies to connect local and regional food producers, processors, intermediaries, and military dining facilities.
-  **IMPLEMENT REGIONAL FOOD SOURCING FOR GO FOR GREEN® INITIATIVE**
Create a road map for military dining facilities to increase local and regional food purchases, in line with the Department of Defense's Go For Green® initiative.
-  **CONNECT UPPER MIDWEST FOODSHED INSTITUTIONAL MARKETS**
Link the Upper Midwest regional foodshed with institutional markets to cultivate connections and grow the local and regional food economy.
-  **INCREASE UPPER MIDWEST FOOD SYSTEM CAPACITY**
Enhance mid-tier value chain coordination to streamline the procurement of local foodstuffs for institutions.
-  **DEVELOP SUSTAINABLE MARKET OPPORTUNITIES**
Establish resilient institutional market opportunities that align with Go For Green® initiative and National Guard priorities
-  **ASSESS NATIONAL GUARD MENUS AND PROCUREMENT OPTIONS**
Determine processes for evaluating and enhancing National Guard menus and purchasing options to incorporate local and regional foodstuffs.



IMPORTANT FOR THE MILITARY

Currently, units receive food deliveries from food service management companies but there are opportunities to also source produce, dairy, grains, and meat from local and regional suppliers. To explore these opportunities, the National Guard Food Service Logistics and Holistic Health and Fitness teams are supporting our team in the review of food budgets, menu development, purchasing options, and access to local and regional food products.

OUTCOMES

SERVICEMEMBER READINESS

- Encourages more nutrient-dense foods to be served at military bases, ensuring servicemembers have access to the nutrients they need.
- Improves overall servicemember diet, cognitive functions, and energy levels, therefore directly impacting readiness and performance.

RESILIENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY

- Builds sustainable relationships with regional producers to ensure food value resilience.
- Reduces the reliance on few and distant food suppliers by diversifying food sources, better preparing the National Guard for emergencies or disruptions in national food distribution networks.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE SYSTEM

- Identifies where the resources are to build a pathway for mobilizing food, health, and resilience across the Midwest in response to national threats such as disease, war, climate change, and disaster relief.



IMPORTANT FOR COMMUNITIES

As a community pillar, the National Guard can leverage its influence to promote awareness, facilitate partnerships, and support the logistics of farm-to-institution initiatives, thereby aligning with its commitment to the economic success and wellbeing of the communities it serves.

OUTCOMES

➔ HUMAN HEALTH BENEFITS

- Increases access to fresh, nutritious food, potentially improving community-wide health outcomes
- Promotes regenerative and/or organic methods of food production, reducing the amount of chemical inputs ingested by humans.

➔ VIBRANT LOCAL ECONOMIES

- Supports regional farmers by providing a new market pathway
- Creates jobs in regional food and agriculture industries

➔ ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

- Reduces carbon footprint due to shorter transportation distances
- Encourages regenerative and/or organic farming practices, creating ecosystems that are more climate-resilient

➔ COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

- Strengthens regional food systems to increase access to nutrient-dense food for all
- Engages the community, providing education around connections between food and human health.
- Equips our servicemembers and communities with emergency response resources and adaptability in the face of climate change, disease, and war

PROJECT SCOPE

Our team has made progress on the project scope since its inception in 2023. Thus far, we have completed the evaluation of existing National Guard menus and options for procurement from existing contract potentials to identify products that can be sourced locally and regionally. From this, we used this information to aggregate Census of Agriculture and other secondary data sources for relevant products that meet the needs of these menus. We then selected ten products for analysis of value chain logistics across each region to determine the most appropriate and feasible options for initial sourcing.

At this stage in the scope, we are in the process of mapping farm and food businesses capable of aggregating and distributing to National Guard units and assessing potential land access across these units for on-property growing. Based on the regional distribution of National Guard units and local and regional farms, the team will identify small and large units in both Minnesota and Illinois for further discussion and analysis of value chain logistics. Additionally, we'll engage with producers and food service staff via focus groups to assess the feasibility of using local and regional products in National Guard kitchens.

We also recognize the critical need for developing an emergency response system that maps out available resources, farms, and food hubs within the local foodshed region surrounding National Guard units. This system will facilitate a bidirectional pathway to community-supported food, health, and resilience, ensuring rapid mobilization in the face of national threats such as disease, war, climate change, and disaster relief. By creating a comprehensive network of local food sources and logistical support, we aim to strengthen the National Guard's capacity to respond to emergencies while promoting sustainable and resilient food systems.

We anticipate spanning beyond 2025 to increase the number of programs and states we are working with in the endeavor to increase local and regional procurement to National Guard units.

ONGOING EFFORTS



BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

Establish new partnerships for sustainability and growth.



APPLYING FOR GRANT FUNDING

Seek funding to support research and implementation.

MEET THE TEAM

Basil's Harvest (BH) convenes leaders across food systems, farms, institutions, and healthcare to foster strategic and collaborative ecosystems that create impactful regenerative value chains. The organization curates experiential learning opportunities to increase awareness of the connections between soil health, crop nutrient density, and health outcomes. By linking soil health research to human health, Basil's Harvest supports regenerative supply chains that benefit both environmental and human wellbeing. Their initiatives include farm-to-institution programs, culinary medicine training, and reach, education, outreach aimed at mitigating the climate impacts on environmental and human health.

<https://basilsharvest.org/>

The **National Guard (NG)** actively serves throughout the 54 states, territories, the District of Columbia and across the globe. As the primary combat reserve of the Army and Air Force, the Guard applies the personnel, training and equipment for wartime missions and state responses in the homeland. As an initiative of the Department of Defense, the Minnesota National Guard (MNNG) introduced the Go for Green 2.0 initiative to prompt better food and beverage selections to optimize performance, readiness, and health.

<https://www.nationalguard.mil/>

Iowa State University Extension & Outreach (ISUEO) Food Systems Team supports the development of a thriving food system through partnerships with community collaborators. Our team is skilled in food systems planning, coalition building, data collection, and research assessments for food systems development across the country. Ongoing initiatives include farm-to-school and early care, research and facilitation, and offering food systems certifications for planning, creating, and being involved in food systems development.

<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/ffed/food-systems>

Knecht Research Consulting & Design specializes in research design, project development, and comprehensive evaluation services. Positioned at the intersection of research and practical application, our services leverage data, systems engineering, and comprehensive analysis to generate adaptive solutions and projects. Our services include program and project implementation and evaluation using specific metrics tailored to context and operation, informed by input from end users, stakeholders, and community research. We offer design and analysis of operations through contextual systems and human factors engineering. With expertise spanning agriculture, medicine, neuroscience, nutrition, and systems engineering, we support innovative and impactful projects through grant and proposal development. Our interdisciplinary approach blends diverse fields to create holistic, effective solutions.

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QUESTIONS? If you have any questions about this initiative, please send them to e.meyer@basilsharvest.org. Thanks!



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