'Mini seed grants' help jump-start projects
Food and Farming Network awards $8,000

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TRaverse City — The Northwest Michigan Food and Farming Network awarded a total of $8,000 to eight innovative food and agriculture projects.

The funds were part of the organization’s first-ever round of “mini seed grants,” designed to jump-start projects that could enhance local food systems, said Carol Danly of the Food and Farming Network.

Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities funded half the sum through Networks Northwest, which was matched by NorthSky Nonprofit Networks. Grants awarded ranged from $250 to $2,000.

“We based it on how collaborative the projects were and how broad the application was to a large community,” Danly said.

Leelanau Conservancy received the largest grant, $2,000, for an online database that would link farmland buyers and sellers, farmland lessors and lessees and agribusiness employers and employees, according to a press release.

Other funded projects include: A collaboration to localize composting involving Crosshatch Center for Art and Ecology, Bay Area Recycling for Charities and Short’s Brewing Co.; food preparation demonstrations on a food truck at the Sara Hardy Downtown Farmers Market; graphic arts services for a health food guide; a YMC program that teaches campers about good nutrition and supporting local markets; a Northwest Michigan Health Services Inc. food and nutrition prescription initiative; Grow a Row and church garden produce sharing by Good Neighbors Food Pantry; and vegetable preparation demonstrations and tastings by Good Samaritan Family Services and Providence Farm at the Ellsworth food pantry.

Projects were required to fit into one of five focus areas: Local food sales, agribusiness generation, farm-to-institution, food access and farmland resources. The winners were chosen from 14 applicants.

“People that we weren’t necessarily connected with in the local food system before even reached out to apply,” Hardy said. “We became aware of a lot more projects.”

The Northwest Michigan Food and Farming Network was founded in 2009 to build agricultural innovation in northwest Michigan. For more information, visit www.foodandfarmingnetwork.org, email foodandfarmingnetwork@gmail.com or call 231-313-8744.