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EXTENSION

NEWS & INFORMATION

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Empowered to become a community champion

St. Cloud, Minn. (04/22/2020)—According to World Health Organization, food security includes both physical and economic access to food. COVID19 has undeniably and significantly challenged the ability of low income Somali families to put basic Halal food on the table. During the current time of economic hardship and public health crisis, food pantries are in high demand. However, for many low income Somali families, free food pantries are not an option they can rely on; there are cultural and religious reasons for that. In fact, some food pantries have adapted to an ethnically diverse clientele, but still more work is needed to help food pantries across the state to become culturally responsive. Additionally, the risk of contracting disease has impacted Somali families without personal transportation by limiting their ability to share rides with other Somali families when going for grocery shopping.

Extension educator, Serdar Mamedov, with a Somali community partner, Abdiaziz Odiriye a Director of Community Grassroots Solutions, recognized the need to establish an emergency Halal food supply. Their idea was to partner with local Somali grocery stores who will agree to designate a small place in their store for free halal food items where store customers who cannot buy food in a sufficient amount can supplement their grocery purchases with additional food items. The seed money for this idea was provided by the University of Minnesota CRSDP. To ensure the sustainability of this initiative, many store owners committed to donate some of their food and store customers who can afford are also given an opportunity to donate some of their purchased foods to the Halal food supply corner.

The owners of Midnimo grocery store, Nur Yussuf, has taken the lead in this initiative and demonstrated a great community leadership. His store has assembled 30-35 packages of Halal foods that included flour, frozen Halal goat meat, pasta, rice, mung bean, two kinds of canned fish and juice. The total value of each Halal food package is about 40 dollars. Nur is strongly committed to serve the low income Somali community and others. He recognizes that despite the current challenges the Somali community members can help each other. Nur and other Somali community champions believe that community members of different races and cultures will come together to demonstrate unity in the face of current difficulties and they will come out of this pandemic much stronger than ever before.

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