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## SHARE food buying service helps cut costs

*By Meredith Thorn  
Journal staff*

With grocery prices rising and the economy falling, a nonprofit that helps cut grocery bills by as much as half has seen a local growth of nearly threefold.

Self Help and Resource Exchange, a monthly food buying service that operates as a food buying club, can help people save 30 percent to 50 percent on groceries, said Paulette Flynn, the executive director of SHARE. The organization is fueled by volunteers and is not funded by tax money or donations.

The program has no membership fees or eligibility requirements. Orders have a minimum cost of \$15 but otherwise have no limit, and items can be bought separately or in packages. Orders are placed and picked up once a month.

"It helps out with the grocery bills," said Terry Miller, of Stevens Point. "I think it's wonderful."

Miller is both a SHARE volunteer and a participant. She moved around a room at the Portage County Health and Human Services on Saturday, where a line of volunteers waited to put meats, vegetables and pies into baskets or boxes.

The distribution sites are all run by volunteers, keeping costs down. Labor costs only pay for employees at SHARE's main warehouse in Butler.

Food is bought from vendors across the country, Flynn said. Food options change every month, but the available products always emphasize fresh fruits and vegetables, meat and dry goods, she said.

"It's a really neat system. Because of the volunteers, we can keep the overhead very, very low, and that's how we're able to save people money on their groceries," she said.

The nonprofit is different from a food pantry. Food pantries are meant to help people in an emergency and rely on donations, Flynn said, but SHARE helps those on an ongoing basis who might need to stretch dollars, but aren't necessarily in an emergency.

Marilyn Weisbrod, the local SHARE volunteer coordinator, said participation has more than tripled from a year ago. She was working Saturday at the busiest distribution they've had yet, she said.

Projected food sales for 2009 range from \$4 million to \$5 million, Flynn said.

"It's just a really good way for people to stretch their food dollars," she said.

## Additional Facts

On the Web

Shop online at [www.sharewi.org](http://www.sharewi.org).