



Farm Notes

CSA Newsletter

Vol. 22 No. 10

October 17 — 21, 2021



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The Corners of Our Fields

In addition to our regular CSA customers and farmers market patrons and the folks who shop at our stands, we have many ways to get our vegetables into nearby communities that don't have access to fresh produce. We are glad there are so many volunteers out there, willing to pick up boxes of food every week, or willing to actually go into the fields and pick.

While we know that we are not actually fixing anything systemic when we contribute our surplus food to local food banks, we also know that this is an important part of the current solution to the problem of hunger and food insecurity. We want to make sure that someone eats everything that we grow – it is far too much trouble to grow all this food and then have it go to waste – and so we have nurtured relationships with a range of local groups that help to get the food where it needs to go.

In late September, a gleaning group from DC Central Kitchen came to pick beans. We often call AFAC (Arlington Food Assistance Center) when we have a big surplus that they can help to distribute – one memorable 10 degree day in late December they came to pick a van full of cabbage, loaded all the way to the ceiling. And this year we have been working with Grow A Row all summer long: they have sent



Helen of PVF (left) and Stacey of Grow A Row get vegetables into boxes to cram into the car.

volunteers every Tuesday to collect up all that came home from the farmers markets over the weekend. Last week they filled their car so full that the children who come to help load the vegetables had to hold boxes on their laps – they fit 400 pounds of eggplant and peppers and corn and beans into that one family vehicle.

And we asked our CSA customers for the second year if they would contribute toward CSA shares for those who don't have access to fresh, locally grown vegetables. Solidarity Shares were donated by more than 40 CSA customers who answered the appeal in the spring. They contributed enough to pay for 15 shares for 18 weeks, and in addition there have been numerous donations of individual shares while folks were away. We have packed and sent boxes of high quality vegetables for nearly three months now, and we will continue until Thanksgiving. It is very satisfying to be able to provide our best vegetables to hungry people, in addition to giving away our surplus. We grew some crops that were specifically requested by the community, as we really want to be sure to provide what is most appreciated. We are sure that we grew enough sweet potatoes for everyone this year.



Boy Scout Troop 962 with 75 pounds of specialty sweet potatoes.

For the Love of Gleaning

by Maggie Hirschberg

Gleaning is the act of harvesting excess produce from fields and distributing it to those in need through avenues such as food pantries or mutual aid groups. My gleaning experience started in elementary school with a trip my Girl Scout troop took to a nearby farm. We gleaned through the Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC), and though I don't remember what we harvested, that experience has stayed with me. During my final year of college last year, I took on a gleaning and food access internship with the Vermont Foodbank as part of my major's capstone requirement. No farmer wants to see their precious crops go to waste, but time and money pressures often prevent them from harvesting every last bean or tomato, and that's where gleaners come in.

Once or twice a week from July through October, I worked with a group of volunteers and other interns on farms throughout Vermont. We gleaned spinach, blueberries, kale, carrots, apples, and so many more

delicious and nutritious foods. My biggest takeaway from this experience was the focus on dignity - it's already a huge step for people to ask for help with accessing food, so it's crucial to make sure the gleaned and donated produce is something people are excited to eat. And they were: I tabled at a Boys'

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photo by hana newcomb

Gleaners from Patrick Henry College, collecting up sweet potatoes for the Tree of Life food pantry.

Crossroads Farmers Market

by Sophia Maravell

I have been going to Crossroads Farmer's Market for the past two years, representing our farm and providing continuity for the customers. I love going to this market for many reasons. It is one of the first farmers markets in the country to accept and double SNAP (supplemental nutrition assistance program) and WIC (women, infants and children) benefits when purchasing produce. There is always a stellar live band playing the market, and the wafting smell of Nancia's famous Guatemalan cooking while we set up our market display. It is a family market with babies wrapped to their mother's backs and grandmas all coming out together.

The market is located at Langley Crossroads in Takoma Park, MD which is a predominantly Latinx

neighborhood community. The default language at Crossroads is Spanish, and while I am not fluent, I am conversational to the point where I can haggle and joke with customers. Going to Crossroads increases my motivation to

continue learning Spanish and helps keep the language fresh and alive in my mind.

Spanish and English are not the only languages spoken at this market however. I catch a few words of Mum and K'iche which are two distinct Mayan languages, some customers are speaking Chinese, and I also love when I get to practice my Greek with one of our regular customers.

While it is our least busy market, we also deliver vegetables for 195 shares to go into the Crossroads CSA boxes and can price our veggies at a price point that is affordable and accessible for people paying with SNAP and WIC. It is different from the rest of our markets in many ways, and I'm proud to be able to represent Potomac Vegetable Farms at a market that has a core value of food access and building healthy community.



photo by karen brown

Lucille and Sophia at Crossroads Farmers Market.

Partnership with Food Justice DMV

... Ensuring That Immigrant Families on the Front Lines Get Produce



by Denise Woods

The Food Justice DMV partnership with PVF has been a produce-match made in heaven! Every week PVF donates beautiful produce on Fridays. Volunteers pick it up and move it down the road to support rent strike groups battling evictions from Alexandria, VA to NE, DC. This incredible contribution is a wonderful piece of the produce puzzle that ensures we can provide produce, food, diapers and more to a total of 500 immigrant families weekly.

One time the produce was even distributed by a couple during their 4 day Pakistani/Bangladeshi wedding ceremony! Parisa and Arsalan took the produce to Taniya, a rent strike community organizer in DC who greeted them with flowers and then they went to work! PVF's dedication ensures their produce is fresh

and fabulous and on the front lines of reducing food apartheid - one family at a time - and ameliorating health disparities running rampant in Black and Brown immigrant communities. We recently received a grant to purchase local produce and immediately thought of PVF!

Food Justice DMV began when the pandemic tsunami struck and thousands of Black and Brown immigrant families were thrown under the waves. We began in order to support the 200 families we had been accompanying to ICE check-ins; however, our food hot line phone was shared on Facebook, radio and given out in grocery stores and we now support an astonishing 5,533 families. In a year and a half we have delivered food justice to more than 190,000 immigrants. For more info or to donate or volunteer: www.foodjusticedmv.org.

These newlyweds delivered produce during their four-day Pakistani-Bangladeshi wedding ceremony.

Juan Delivers Solidarity Shares Every Tuesday

by Rae Basile

When Juan first met the Wingate Community in Southeast Washington, DC, in 2019, he was a guest speaker at an after-school program called So What Else for local teens. "These kids remind me of myself when I was their age."

Wingate is a 714 unit affordable housing community, where all of the families receive some kind of public assistance. Juan kept the relationship going, and for the last two years, vegetables from PVF's Solidarity Shares have been going straight to

the families in this community. What happens once the food arrives? Ms. Tawana, a community leader and elder who helps distribute the food shared, "People here LOVE these vegetables, they are so thankful. We give first priority to our seniors... sometimes we are breaking this down between 75 families!" She shared that potatoes are a community favorite, and sometimes she has a hard time spreading them among all of the families who need them. Thanks to these shares, people have received corn, okra, melons, onions, garlic, kale, chard, and more.



photo by hana newcomb

Juan loads up to go to Wingate.

Food Banks and Their Limits

by Michael Lipsky

I first encountered food banks years ago when I was doing research on the Reagan Administration's decision to give away blocks of cheese the government was storing as a result of an earlier policy to support dairy farmers. The cheese would be distributed through soup kitchens and food pantries supplied by food banks operating in every region of the country.

The Reagan planners liked this idea because they thought they could earn credit with the public at very low cost. The cheese was already there; all they had to do was give it to the food banks. But they hadn't thought it through. It takes warehouse space, trucks and refrigerators to store and distribute cheese. Riots at cheese distribution sites drew attention to the program, while food activists demanded compensation for their costs in implementing the government's cheese giveaway. In less than two years Congress passed legislation that reimbursed

the food banks and soup kitchens for their expenses, the very opposite of what the Reagan planners had intended.

In doing the study I learned how ingenious food banks are: taking food the supermarkets and manufacturers no longer want and finding a good use for it. Food banks also collect food from restaurants and other sources of food surplus, including unpicked crops from farmers. That's where Potomac Vegetable Farms becomes part of the story. This year the farm is donating surpluses to So Others Might Eat (SOME) and DC Central Kitchen in the District; the Arlington Food Assistance Center; and the Capital Area Food Bank and Food for Others (in Fairfax and Loudoun counties). Through these food banks the farm also hosts volunteer gleaners who are glad to pick beans and other crops in patches that still have good food but are no longer prime picking grounds.

At food banks I've appreciated a chance to witness the work of

communities organizing to help people with low incomes. At a Seattle food bank I volunteered with my young granddaughters and their mother to convert a huge bin of panko breadcrumbs into bags for distribution to families. At the Mescalero Apache reservation in southern New Mexico I helped disassemble pallets of packaged food, canned goods and produce just delivered by trailer for distribution to tribal members that day. Such small volunteer efforts are enacted every day in pantries, food banks, and feeding centers across the country.

However remarkable, I'm not fully comfortable applauding the commitment to filling the hunger gap through nonprofit centers, financial donations and volunteering. Hunger in America is a shame. The country has plenty of food, advanced understanding of how to grow it, and unmatched distribution systems, including our remarkable supermarkets that bring food to most of the nation at a very low cost.

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and Girls' Club once a week over the summer of 2020 as part of my internship, and the kids and families, many of whom were New Americans, who came by were especially excited for the blueberries, spinach, and cilantro.

I was lucky enough to have my first two (of hopefully many!) gleaning experiences at PVF this past week assisting with volunteer groups. On Friday, a group from Patrick Henry College, a local college in Purcellville, and the Tree of Life Ministries gleaned our massive sweet potato field in Loudoun. They found all the sweet potatoes we missed in our initial harvest, as well as ones that didn't quite meet our standards for markets and CSA (seconds produce), but still were perfectly good for eating - a total of 500 pounds from the field and a 51 pounds of seconds from our greenhouse! These were donated

to a local food pantry. Saturday saw four dedicated Scouts and one Scout Dad from a local Lovettsville Scouts BSA group out in Loudoun gleaning our smaller sweet potato patch and our penultimate bean patch! They harvested six ponies of tasty beans and three ponies of sweet potatoes.



Boy Scouts picking beans.