

Introduction

- 12% of Maine households are food insecure, and over half are considered to have very low food security.
- In Hancock County, 6,740 people are food insecure, which is ~12.4% of the population.
- Maine ranks first in New England and 9th in the U.S. as the most food insecure state. 54,418.
- Fourth Fact??

Food insecurity (defined by the USDA as not having enough food for an active, healthy life) is often the result of social and political circumstances, which can be addressed through education and policy. Direct action must also be taken to ensure people have access (both physical and economic) to healthy food. That is why, in 2008, Share the Harvest was started through College of the Atlantic's Beech Hill Farm on Mount Desert Island.



Purpose

Working closely with island food pantries and other organizations dedicated to eradicating food insecurity, this program provides low-income community members with fresh, organic, and local produce at no-cost. Our goal is to fill critical gaps in food access on MDI and generate conversations and actions to address the root causes of food insecurity.

Methods

Share the Harvest serves as a liaison between low-income residents, migrant summer workers, and local food, ensuring access to the space, knowledge, and resources that it takes to sustain an equitable food system. There are three main ways we do this:

1. Farmstand Vouchers: Provides a voucher to purchase products at the Beech Hill Farm stand. They are valued depending on the size of the household and can be shared amongst family and friends.
2. Bar Harbor Farmers Market Voucher: Provides a voucher to purchase products at the Eden Farmers Market in Bar Harbor on Sundays. This voucher can be used to purchase food products and produce from many different market vendors.
3. Harvest Delivery: This option is specifically designed for community members who know they are unable to transport themselves to the farm stand. A delivery consists of a variety of freshly harvested produce packed in a reusable box. During the season participants will receive three box deliveries right to their door.

Results

In 2020, Share the Harvest served 132 households both on and off the island, 72 of which have someone in the household with a disability and 90 of which have someone in the household who is over 60. Each of our programs get great feedback in the end of season survey. 100% of survey takers saying they would recommend the program to others.

"You brought it right to my door, everything was very fresh and organic, much nicer than I could afford at the store"

"It gives me hope to know that there are programs like this, and younger people that care if others are hungry or not. There are a lot of hungry people."

"I love having the ability to have more fresh food in my diet."

"I have such gratitude for what you are doing, the beautiful veggies, and how you find alternative ways to get more people to them"

Discussion

Share the Harvest shows that addressing food insecurity can be small scale and community based. We support both food insecure households as well as local farms. While education and policy-based actions are crucial to creating a food secure world, we chose to focus on putting healthy, local food directly onto the plates of community members who otherwise would not be able to access it.



Implications

Having over 130 households participating in our program doesn't just mean that there are that we are helping that many households get access to fresh local foods. It means that there are 130 households that are unable to afford a consistent amount of fresh local foods without help. Share the Harvest simply addresses a lack of food access, which is a symptom of poverty and inequality. But in order to eliminate hunger, poverty and inequality must be critically addressed through strong policy and community development.

Literature Cited

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- Food Insecurity in Hancock County. (2018). Retrieved 2021, from <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2018/overall/maine/county/hancock>

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