THE FOOD BANK FARM

The Food Bank Farm CSA is a 60-acre, diversified, vegetable farm that donates half of its production to those in need. Each year the Farm donates over 275,000 pounds of organic produce, and it does so without any operating subsidy or grant funds. The farm relies on a variety of highly efficient production and distribution systems that enable the donation of surplus production.

*All Produce is grown without the use of pesticides, chemical fertilizers or herbicides. The farm is not certified, but complies with all USDA standards for organic production.
Where is it located?

The food bank farm is located at 121 Day Road in Hadley. Volunteers are always welcome.

What is it?

Community Supported Agriculture - amounts. Please deposit on the same day before the pickup and before each pick-up.

Organic and Affordable!

What are the benefits?

- Organic and Non-GMO
- Supporter-Friendly
- Shared Risks and Rewards
- Fresh Produce

Become Part of The Farm

- Organic and Non-GMO produce
- Supporter-Friendly
- Shared Risks and Rewards
- Fresh Produce

Quality & Freshness

We provide fresh, seasonal, and organic produce that is picked and washed for you. Our farmers and volunteers are always welcoming.

There is no work required. Produce will be brought to you at the time and place you choose.

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Here’s what our members say about the Food Bank Farm...

Every week from May to October I head to the Food Bank Farm to pick up fresh, organically grown food. Little ones are chasing chickens, people are picking their own flowers...there are friendly faces in the share room....you can't get that at the grocery store. Cindy Hamel, Belchertown

...Vegetables are gorgeously fresh, varied, ample and inexpensive. It feels great to know that what benefits me also benefits others. A perfect deal. Marianne Simon, Whately

The farm offers me one of life’s few sources of unambiguously good feelings....I think of it as a moral and culinary bargain. Marietta Pritchard, Amherst

...A tremendous sense of satisfaction knowing I am giving my family the best. Dr. Claudia Attardi, S. Hadley

Good, chemical free food, an opportunity to help feed the hungry...We’ve been “Farm Folks” from Westfield since the farm began...Rev. Jim Potter and Family

Joining the farm was one of the best decisions we ever made. We get the finest quality food and our very own 60 acre organic farm with none of the work! John and Linda Miller, Granby

As a member of the Food Bank Farm, I don’t just buy food, I buy justice and a right relationship with the land. It is one of the best places in this great valley. Rev. Donna E. Schaper, Amherst

It’s well worth the drive from Longmeadow to give our children and ourselves a connection to the earth... Leslie and Dr. James Frank, Longmeadow

We get the freshest organic produce in the valley and a sense of community. Lynne Goldberg and Bob Wool, Springfield

Our family eats healthily, bountifully and creatively from the Food Bank Farm. Not only that, it’s less expensive than buying comparable produce at the store. We’ve been members since 1993 and plan to continue until we get kicked out for picking too much cilantro! Karen Axelrod, Northampton

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Stop, Shop—And Share

Michael Doctor (in hat), who runs the Food Bank Farm, with shareholders, Ed and Deborah Chrzanski and their sons, Josh 14, (with glasses) and Justin, 10. "We make our share last all year by freezing and canning," says Deborah.

“"Our shareholders get a good deal, and we can use the money to give away food to people who need it," says Michael Doctor, the director of the Food Bank Farm.

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How the Food Bank Farm can afford to feed the hungry
AND still be a good deal for its customers.

Nestled on 60 acres of land in Hadley, Mass., is a farm that is unlike most others. Besides providing its "shareholders" with fresh, organically grown vegetables and fruits—everything from peas to rutabaga to watermelon—at or below supermarket prices, the farm annually gives away half of its harvest, about 100,000 pounds, to emergency food pantries, shelters and programs for the elderly.

Michael Doctor, 34, is the director of the nonprofit Food Bank Farm, which thrives without any help from the government. "All we want is for people to use their food dollars here," said Doctor, "and not in the supermarket."

How can such a farm work? How can it afford to help feed the hungry and still be a good deal for shoppers? The farm, set up by the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts—a food distribution network—stays in business by selling "shares" to residents. Shareholders are found by word-of-mouth or by brochures distributed throughout the area. The shares cost between $350 to $450 each and can be exchanged for a fixed amount of produce each year. One share is good for up to 30 pounds of vegetables every week from May to November and, at the peak of the growing season, shareholders can choose from more than 30 different kinds of vegetables.

Today, more than 400 shareholders support the farm, which is called a Community-Supported Agriculture project. "We serve nearly 600 families and the share size is so large that two or three households often buy together," said Doctor.

Though there are more than 200 such farms throughout North America, the Food Bank Farm is the first and only one committed to giving away half of its harvest. When I visited, shareholders were picking up vegetables for the week. Inside the main barn, families toting paper bags gathered around wooden tables laden with stalks of brussel sprouts and beets. They dug into harvest buckets and boxes filled with squash and pumpkins.

Ed Chrzanski and his wife, Deborah, of nearby Chicopee, Mass., have been shareholders for four years. Coming to the farm, says Deborah, has changed the way her family eats. "I never ate collards before," Deborah said, laughing. "Now I can’t stop telling everyone how wonderful they are. We make our share last all year by freezing and canning."

The farm’s family atmosphere offers added appeal. Children pick as much as they wish of tomatoes, peas—and even flowers. And they can help out in other ways too. Today, the Chrzanski family helped prepare the food for distribution. Ed says it’s a good experience for his sons, Josh, 14, and Justin, 10. "When they help out, I think they know the importance of what we’re doing," he told me. "It’s about being thankful for what we have."

Families, though, pitch in only if they want to. "This is a consumer deal and that’s the way we like it," says Doctor. "Our shareholders get a good deal, and we can use the money to give away food to people who need it." Three times a week, Jim Levey—the food procurement director for the Northampton Survival Center, an emergency food pantry—drives to the farm to collect free vegetables, which he then takes back to the center. The needy come to the center and take their pick.

How did the farm get started? "We wanted to take an entrepreneurial approach to getting produce into the stream of goods distributed to food pantries," said David Sharken, the executive director of the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts. "To do that, we knew we needed control over our own land."

After searching for a year, Michael Doctor found his 60 acres. With the help of a state law designed to protect rural areas from urban development, the Food Bank took out a mortgage from the Vermont National Bank’s Socially Responsible Banking Fund and bought the land for well below market value. Then, Ralph Taylor, a philanthropist, stepped in to guarantee the farm’s loan. He had met Doctor through a friend several years ago. "I was ready to invest whatever was necessary," he said.

In 1992, Doctor moved onto the property with his wife and son, and as word spread about the project, students and residents from the area got involved. Several farmers taught Doctor how to repair machinery, how to cultivate land and how to raise crops.

Doctor and Linda Hildebrand, the harvest manager, are the farm’s only full-time employees. Volunteers, mostly students from nearby colleges and farmhands, work as needed.

Last year, the farm threw a party to celebrate paying off its mortgage seven years ahead of schedule. All of the shareholders were invited. Carol Rodheby, the administrative director of the Northampton Survival Center, told me about one woman who started giving staff members the recipe for a soup she couldn’t afford to make for years. "It’s a huge psychological boost for people to be able to choose food for themselves," said Rodheby.

For advice on how to start a community-supported farm, write: The Food Bank Farm of Western Massachusetts, 115 Bay Road, Dept. P, Hadley, Mass., 01035.
Food bank farm grows on people

By DIANE LEDERMAN

HADLEY — It's 92 degrees and Molly K. Whalen has got her hands full of flowers she just picked with her pink-cheeked children at the Hadley Food Bank Farm.

Neck on the agenda is a visit to the produce barn to pick up the family's share of eggplant, corn, and other assorted vegetables. Then it's back out to feed two black goats that already have a pile of fresh vegetables in their pen.

This is the Ambler's clan's weekly visit to the Hadley Food Bank Farm. Whalen said it's more of an event than a shopping trip.

The food bank farm is one of many community-supported farms in the area where people can buy shares entitling them to produce during the growing season. The money provides the farm with income to operate.

At the Hadley Food Bank Farm, member shares also allow the farm to grow enough food to provide half of what's grown to the Western Massachusetts Food Bank, said Michael Doctor, farm manager.

Last year, they raised about 400,000 pounds of food, half of which went to the Food Bank to be distributed to its member agencies. They expect a similar bounty this year, Doctor said. All the food is organic.

Standing with her children inside the produce barn, Whalen said, "We just love it. We love the food of course." But she said it's more than that. "The people we see here, the sense of community.

Just after 1 p.m., on a recent Wednesday, there were dozens crowded around her picking up their shares as well. Youngsters were outside petting the penned in goats, others were playing on the swing set. Whalen's son, Tristan, couldn't wait to go see the chickens.

Whalen said they love the pick-your-own side of the farm too. "It's nice for the children, to see how food is grown. When they pick beans, they see how the beans grow.

Each week from late May until October, then twice in the winter, shareholders at the food bank farm are entitled to a portion of whatever is in season at that time — last week for example that included eggplant, corn, green peppers, cucumbers, tomatoes, among other vegetables and watermelon. The pick-your-own component offered flowers, beans, cherry tomatoes, cilantro and other herbs. Members can pick as much as they want.

The farm started about 14 years ago, Doctor said. It became a community member farm 11 years ago, starting with 50 members, said Kathleen M. Crivelli, harvest manager. Now there's about 100 members and a waiting list for people who want to join next year.

Doctor said about 80 percent of the members who join stay on. They might come because they want to support the food bank, but they stay because of the food, he said. Most of what members pick up has been picked fresh that day. And those farming know when to pick, he said, slicing a melon to show its lush salmon color and ripeness.

Susan M. Fliner of Granby became a member this year after picking up some vegetables for a friend last year and falling in love with what she saw.

"I love it so much," she said. And her Mount Holyoke College colleague Deborah J. Novak were taking their lunch hour at the food bank recently. They came to pick flowers for their office.

Fliner said she gave up her own vegetable garden because she could get everything she wanted at the farm.

"Novak, who's not a member, said she would consider joining next year. "I can see coming here and spending hours."

Fliner turned to her and said, "I do.

With so much to choose from, Fliner said, "I've actually broadened my knowledge of greens."

The farm offers all kinds of greens from arugula to collard, to kale. Besides selling what they grow, the farm sells products made by local people, including hand-made soaps, organic blueberries, breads from the Black Sheep in Amherst, turkey pot pies from Dimeand in Wendell, Vermont cheddar cheese, among other products.

"We try to support small businesses," Doctor said. They also want to offer their shareholders one-stop shopping, Crivelli said.

Doctor writes a member newsletter and staff provide recipes and tips for how to prepare the produce that's offered. There are even bags of everything one needs to make organic chili for $4.50.

The farm also provides the landscape to learning.

Diane Lederman can be reached at dlederman@union-news.com.
Food Bank Farm: A Feast for Eyes, Table