



Connecting local farmers with neighbors in need.

Food, Social Justice, and the Power of Collaboration

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Some of us at Rolling Harvest Food Rescue are huge food and hunger policy wonks, some just want to share great food with people who can't afford it or don't have access to it, some want to focus on our nutrition and culinary education and outreach, and some of us just want to focus on volunteering to get our hands in the beautiful soil while harvesting food for donation at our partner farms. But we all have come to realize that we are a small part of a much bigger movement to address the hunger, food inequality, and waste we see all around us, in the midst of so much abundance.

Fifteen percent of our local families continue to struggle to put healthy food on the table and make difficult budgetary choices every day between food and rent, medical care, transportation, heat, education, and

more. As long as this challenge exists, we will continue to partner with local farmers and food producers to share their excess with local food pantries, family shelters, community meals providers, low-income seniors, and more. In the process, we have an opportunity to create more awareness of what any person can do to make a difference in his or her own community.

Since 2010, Rolling Harvest has grown and expanded, providing more than 1,712,000 pounds of fresh, locally grown food from 32 farm partners so far--that's more than 6 million healthy servings of fruit, vegetables, eggs, and organic meats on the plates of our neighbors in need. We now deliver free of charge to more than 50 food pantries and other hunger-relief sites that lack access to fresh produce. We harvest excess from the farmers' fields, picking up and distributing to a growing network of those in need.

We find ourselves at the intersection these days of addressing food

waste, hunger relief, and good environmental stewardship. With so many going hungry and not having access to proper nutrition, there should be no acceptable tolerance level for wasted food—food that is still healthy and appealing and that can easily and safely be donated, with no fear of liability, and kept out of our methane-producing landfills.

We have seen so much progress being made, especially here in Bucks County. There is now serious momentum building with collaborative partners to create more programs that specifically address the challenge of access to nutritious produce and healthy proteins like organic meats, dairy, and eggs. These are the foods that our neighbors living with poverty and food insecurity need most. Paradoxically, until recently, these were also the foods that were least often donated, with food pantries relying mostly on less-expensive packaged and processed foods that can actually contribute to preventable diet-

related illnesses such as diabetes and high blood pressure. When nonprofit organizations work together, so much more can be accomplished—which just makes good business sense.

Nurturing public-private collaboration also helps everyone move forward to fulfill their missions. With that in mind, we met with the Bucks County Commissioners last year to bring them up to date on all that was happening to help hungry residents. What came out of that meeting was no less than a total game changer: the offer to use their large warehouse facility for cold food storage. (In Bucks County, there is no official Food Bank, which is the usual organizer and provider in most counties for donated food along with what state and federal food programs provide.)

From this extraordinary gift came the way forward for Fresh Connect Bucks County, launched in April of 2017. Fresh Connect is a new collaboration

of Bucks County Opportunity Council, Philabundance, Rolling Harvest Food Rescue, and St. Mary Medical Center, with generous funding from United Way of Bucks County. It is a free farmers market bringing fresh, healthy food directly to hungry residents in the underserved communities of Bristol and Ottsville. We operate year-round, providing reliable and needed food to the 57,000 Bucks County residents facing hunger, 32% of whom are children and 14% of whom are seniors.

Feedback so far is that a majority of the recipients attending each week are feeling better from eating these healthy foods that were previously unavailable to them. And, to ensure better outcomes, there is a nutrition education team at both sites, offering tasting samples and tips from recipes created using that week's available produce. Now that we have learned together what can be accomplished, there are plans to expand Fresh Connect to more

at-risk communities. The Bristol location serves Lower Bucks, and Ottsville serves Upper Bucks; the hope is to open this year in Warminster Heights to serve Central Bucks County.

As with any movement that hopes to enact real change, help and support from the community are essential. The need to help our struggling neighbors with adequate nutrition may be getting even more dire. There are many proposed cuts in the upcoming federal budget that may greatly reduce benefits like SNAP (food stamps), Meals on Wheels, and subsidized school breakfasts and lunches—programs with proven success rates helping to lift people out of poverty while bringing significant economic benefits to communities.

Please check out www.RollingHarvest.org for more info about the work we are doing and how you can help. If you would like to be a recipient or volunteer for Fresh Connect, please check out www.bccoc.org