Let’s Squash Hunger!

A Hubbard squash can weigh as much as 40 pounds! The thick skin is bluish and warty and difficult to cut. What to do with two tons of Hubbard squash? Thanks to our Fresh Produce Conversion Program (FPCP), created to increase the availability of fresh, ready-to-cook produce to low-income residents, Food Gatherers has transformed the ungainly Hubbards into family size packages of ready to cook squash unlocking its tasty sweet potato, pumpkin-like flavor for folks to enjoy.

Our volunteers wash, peel, cut, weigh, and bag fresh vegetables in our dedicated food safe area, so that at-home meal preparation is easy. Pallets of beets and squash are cut into cubes, and misshapen carrots are sliced.

Two-pound portions are bagged and labeled with basic cooking instructions making meal preparation easy for busy seniors and families.

The FPCP builds upon Food Gatherers’ Food Security Plan, created in 2009, which prioritizes distribution of fresh fruits and vegetables throughout Washtenaw County. Today, Food Gatherers distributes 6.4 million pounds of food each year to a network of 150 partner agencies. More than sixty percent of the food we distribute is fresh produce, and proteins.

Food Gatherers is grateful to the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan’s Healthy Food Connect Initiative for a grant to fund the FPCP for the first year. “With the program up and running, initial feedback from partner food pantries is very positive,” says Markell Miller, Food Gatherers Director of Community Food Programs. Our partner agencies report that the prepared vegetables are some of the first foods that people choose when they visit a pantry.

At Food Gatherers’ warehouse, Produce Production Pioneer Scott Strzempek oversees a cadre of volunteers who prepare the produce for distribution. “We are currently focused on processing vegetables that can be challenging for people to prepare at home, that have high nutritional value, and that are abundant in our inventory” explains Scott. “To date, we have completed one hundred volunteer shifts, taking 7.5 tons of produce and making it easy to prepare in home.”
The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the largest and most effective food assistance program in the country. The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities finds that in fiscal year 2016, 1 in 7 people in the United States utilized SNAP, 68% of which are in families with children (cite).

In Michigan, 14.9% of households are food insecure or struggle to regularly afford nutritious meals (cite). To improve the diets of individuals and families, SNAP’s funding currently supports education through cooking demonstrations and tips for grocery shopping on a budget. These activities have been shown to increase fruit and vegetable consumption in low-income children and seniors (cite).

While SNAP helps people meet their immediate food needs, its impacts are also long lasting. Research shows low-income children receiving SNAP have better health than low-income children not receiving SNAP, and their families are less likely to have to choose between paying for health care and other basic needs such as housing and food (cite).

Not only does SNAP play a key role in improving food accessibility and health of low-income individuals and families, but it also improves the economy. For every $1 distributed in SNAP benefits, $1.70 is generated in economic activity. In fact, Michigan’s economy gained about $2.2 billion in 2016 through SNAP dollars spent at participating grocers, markets and other retailers (cite).

For more information on how you can make sure SNAP continues to make positive impacts in our community, visit:

www.foodgatherers.org/advocate

Article by Laura Burton (MSW Intern)

Upcoming Summer Events

What? Jazz in the parking lot
When? Friday, July 28th from 7-9pm
Where? Shadford Field Parking Lot (YCS Football Field on Cross St. in Ypsilanti)
About: Featuring John E. Lawrence and the Power Band

Sickle Cell Disease Association of America-Michigan Chapter will be on site to do free Sickle Cell testing. Sickle Cell Disease is the most common blood disorder in the U.S. with every 1 in 500 African Americans and 1 in 1,000 Hispanic Americans suffering from it.

This is an important initiative to YCS Superintendent, Dr. Edmondson, because he has the Sickle Cell Anemia trait and wants our community to be tested and informed about this disease.

What? Wolverine State Brewing Company Summer Party
When? Saturday, July 29 from 12:00pm 11:00pm
Where? 2019 W Stadium Blvd, Ann Arbor, MI 48103
About: Come celebrate summer at the tap room! All spring and summer, Wolverine State Brewing staff have been brewing beers on our pilot system to debut at the Summer Party!

Vote for your favorite with tokens (available for purchase at $1 apiece). ALL proceeds benefit Food Gatherers and their mission to help make sure kids don’t go hungry this summer!

Admission is free, and kids are welcome! Don’t miss this summer celebration!
What is Double Up Food Bucks?
*Fair Food Network’s* Double Up Food Bucks program doubles the value of federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP or food stamps) benefits spent at participating farmers markets and grocery stores, helping people bring home more fruits and vegetables, while also supporting local farmers.

How does Double Up work?
Double Up provides SNAP recipients with a one-to-one match to buy healthy, Michigan grown fruits and vegetables when they use their Bridge Card at participating locations.

Who qualifies for Double Up?
It's easy! Anyone receiving SNAP benefits is automatically eligible: if you have a SNAP Bridge Card, you can use this program.

How do people sign up?
At farmers markets: Before shopping, SNAP customers should go to the market office or information booth, where market staff can help you get started.

- Spread the Word -

Double Up's success is grounded in a network of partners who help spread the word.

The *Fair Food Network* has downloadable program flyers and posters available in English, Russian, and Arabic available online (pictured on right).

Check the flyers out in Resources or complete this form to request hard copies at no cost.

Have Questions?
Call: 866-585-2796
Website: www.doubleupfoodbucks.org
Free flyers: http://www.doubleupfoodbucks.org/get-involved/

Harvest Hints

Fruit-Flavored Water

Now that the summer is heating up:

- Try to drink (at least) eight cups of water every day!
- Bring a bottle of water with you when you’re on the go to stay hydrated.
- Add a flavorful (and healthy) splash to your summer drink. Don’t forget to eat the fruit for extra nutrition! Below are some great recipes to try!

Cucumber, Orange and Mint: Add 5-10 slices of cucumber and a 2-3 slices of orange to a large pitcher of cold water. Make sure you wash the cucumber and orange before slicing. Add fresh mint if you have it available. Enjoy!

Strawberry Pineapple: Add a small handful of washed and sliced strawberries (fresh or frozen) and 2-3 pineapple rings (fresh or canned) to a large pitcher of cold water. Yum! Try other fruit combinations in your water, such as frozen blueberries and fresh lemon. The possibilities are endless.

*Article by Lauren Odenkirk (UM Dietetic Intern)*
Made with love by the Community Food Programs Department

Erin Freeman, Community Food Programs Coordinator, erin@foodgatherers.org
LeRonica Roberts, Community Food Programs Coordinator, leronica@foodgatherers.org
Shaira Daya, Nutrition Projects Manager, shaira@foodgatherers.org
Paula Dana, Community Kitchen Coordinator, paula@foodgatherers.org
Scott Roubeck, Community Kitchen Training Coordinator, scott@foodgatherers.org
Markell Miller, Director of Community Food Programs Department, markell@foodgatherers.org

CFP Interns

Laura Burton, MSW Intern, laura@foodgatherers.org
Hadlee Garrison, SPH Intern, summerfood@foodgatherers.org
Katherine McManus, SPH Intern, summerfood@foodgatherers.org