

The Ithaca Voice



“Solidarity” CSA shares help meet local need for fresh produce

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ITHACA, N.Y. — As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to adversely impact the incomes of many Ithacans, several Tompkins County food security agencies have stepped up to work together and provide subsidized local produce to families in need.

Nearly 300 households with limited incomes are currently receiving subsidized CSA shares of fresh, locally grown produce every week through Healthy Food For All (HFFA), with over 10% of these households receiving “Solidarity CSA Shares” through HFFA’s partnership with Six Circles Farm, Press Bay Alley Food Hub and the Friendship Donations Network (FDN).

Solidarity CSA subscribers pay a self-determined sliding-scale fee based on what they can afford, and either pick up their weekly box of produce on Sundays at Press Bay Alley, or have their box delivered to their home for free thanks to volunteer drivers recruited through United Way of Tompkins County. These new “Solidarity CSA Shares” launched

in July and will run through the end of August, at which point HFFA hopes to offer the opportunity for people to continue, depending on funding.

"CSA shares on average cost around \$500 for the season, depending on different sizes, season duration and other factors," said Liz Karabinakis, Director of Healthy Food for All and member of the Tompkins Covid-19 Food Task Force. "HFFA typically subsidizes shares 50% for income eligible households, leaving the other half for low-income members to pay" she explained. "Although this arrangement is an exceptional value, this year affording half price is still beyond reach for many community members with little or no income...and that's at the heart of our special Solidarity Shares—to address additional needs and find a mutually beneficial arrangement during the pandemic for both community members and farmers."

While traditional CSA shares begin in June and go through November, the solidarity shares are running on a shortened timeline to give participants more flexibility in their subscription, which requires their commitment for six weeks at a time.

"While people want the reliability of the CSA, there's just so much up in the air right now with people's lives. They don't know if they will have a job or will have any government assistance for food or housing. They don't know if their kids are going to be going to school or not, and if they're staying in town. They don't know," Karabinakis said. "There's just so much that people are trying to figure out on a daily basis...as people are trying to navigate this uncertainty, both financially and otherwise, that informed our decision to offer this Solidarity CSA share."

The new solidarity shares are just the latest in a continuing effort by the coalition of food agencies to provide the community negatively impacted by the pandemic with fresh healthy food. Back in March, before the spring season of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) had begun and food pantries struggled to provide perishable foods in response to an upsurge in food insecurity as a result of COVID-19, HFFA and FDN partnered to distribute sliding scale weekly food boxes featuring local produce and pantry staples through home delivery across the county and at Press Bay Alley in Ithaca.

The Solidarity CSA shares this summer were made possible with a grant from the COVID-19 Response Fund of Community Foundation of Tompkins County and with support from Friendship Donations Network, PressBay Food Hub and other members of the Tompkins Covid-19 Food Task Force. HFFA is also supported by United Way of Tompkins County, and the local EFSP board.

HFFA and the other organizations involved hope to continue solidarity shares into the fall harvesting season— a pricey undertaking for which they are asking the public to help make a reality. For those interested in donating, more information is available on the HFFA website at www.HealthyFoodForAll.org

For info on joining the Solidarity CSA share, contact info@HealthyFoodForAll.org / (607) 272-2292 x242.

