

The Ithaca Voice

Healthy Food for All bringing fresh produce to rural parts Tompkins County

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COVID-19, HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES, LATEST NEWS, NEWS
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ITHACA, N.Y. — Healthy Food for All, a non-profit program of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County in partnership with local farms, will provide over 600 boxes of fresh locally grown produce throughout Tompkins County during the month of May to people in need.

Approximately a third of the boxes will also contain locally produced eggs, beans, grains and nuts for homebound, high-risk and food-insecure elders, individuals and families.

Since 2006 Healthy Food for All has been making fresh, quality produce accessible to low-income families through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares and educational resources, serving over 200 families in need annually. Liz Karabinakis, Director of Healthy Food for All, said this time of year is actually when the non-profit usually has a short break in-between winter and summer CSA seasons. However, as coronavirus hit, the need was apparent to Karabinakis and her team of farmers, and they stepped up and devised a plan to help.

Rural families throughout Tompkins County, like many throughout the region, are struggling with unexpected changes to their household income, making it difficult to afford food, especially the high cost of fruits and vegetables. In addition, people living in rural areas are also facing challenges around accessibility due in part to limited public transportation services during the pandemic, leaving many supermarkets, food pantries, and community agencies out of reach.

While there are sources of free shelf-stable food boxes available, including through Mutual Aid Tompkins miniature food pantries, procurement, preparation and perishability make it infeasible to include fresh fruits or vegetables.

The Food Bank of the Southern Tier, which is a major provider for food-insecure families, has also recently had to adjust their practices and disperse food into satellite locations in order to maintain operation while ensuring employees and volunteers stay safe — losing out on much of their cold storage for produce. "And so we have been inundated with community members desperate for fresh food," Karabinakis said.

Healthy Food for All in the past weeks has paired up with local farmers, PressBay Food Transfer Hub, Regional Access and Friendship Donations Network to make fresh food available. Home deliveries of "produce and pantry" boxes have been done with the help of volunteers, including drivers from B&B Flooring in Dryden, and volunteers through United Way.



One resident who recently received a box from Healthy Food For All reported, “I am currently unable to leave my home due to disability and I can't afford to order food delivery from the grocery store. My neighbor offered to go shopping for me, but she is a senior and I don't want to put her at risk. I haven't had any fresh food for weeks. This helped me so much.”

People who would like to request a box of fresh produce can sign-up [here](#).

The funds needed to deliver 605 boxes throughout the month of May were made possible by a \$12,057 grant from Community Foundation of Tompkins County and United Way of Tompkins County, and made possible thanks to donors to each organization's COVID-19 relief funds.

Karabinakis said she hopes to continue home delivery in the future, but is concerned about what happens next. “The reality is that we need more funding to continue. People need to eat more than once a month and we already have 200 households requesting boxes of fresh produce next week.” Karabinakis underscored the additional support that will be needed as more people request assistance. “I've seen firsthand the tremendous impact our deliveries of fresh produce are having in people's lives.”

Those who wish to support the project and help provide fresh produce for neighbors in need can make a donation directly on Healthy Food For All's website at www.HealthyFoodForAll.org. People can also make a donation by check, made payable to Healthy Food For All, and mail to Cooperative Extension – Attn: HFFA, 615 Willow Ave, Ithaca NY 14850.

100% of donations will go towards compensating local farmers for the food, so the project benefits both food-insecure community members by providing them with fresh food, and supports local farmers.

