

Focus on St. Johnsbury Local Area Food Alliance:

Providing needy Vermonters with access to healthy, locally grown food

By Abbey Willard, Local Foods Administrator, Vermont Agency of Agriculture

September was Hunger Action month and a wide variety of activities were scheduled to support food insecure families, provide food to hungry individuals, and honor the efforts of food access organizations. Many food hub groups in the state, such as St. Johnsbury Local Area food Alliance (St. J ALFA), in Caledonia County, build their organizational missions and primary objectives around supporting needy Vermonters through access to healthy, locally grown food.

St. J ALFA's mission is to strengthen the local food system and increase food sustainability and security, so that all community members have access to affordable, healthy and locally produced food. One of St. J ALFA's greatest successes is their engagement with the three-acre Community Farm. Located on Back Center Road, in St. Johnsbury, a principle goal of the farm is to increase local food security with a supply of locally grown, fresh vegetables. During the 2012 growing season, ALFA's third year of involvement with the farm, students and community volunteers grew tomatoes, potatoes, onions, carrots, beets, leeks, greens, peas, beans, squash and herbs. In addition to their farm work, students from Lyndon Town School and L.E.A.R.N (a small independent high school in Lyndonville) also participated in garden harvest and weekly produce deliveries to the St. Johnsbury food shelf, and local senior and community meal sites. St. J ALFA's mission is to connect students to the growing of local food.

Janet St. Onge, a teacher at L.E.A.R.N. and Community Farm volunteer, is deeply committed to connecting her students to the garden and food production. She exclaims "When young people are empowered to take action around food-related issues in the community, they begin to question personal food choices and cultivate a curiosity about food from seed to table." L.E.A.R.N. students engage in all aspects of food production at the Community Farm, from assisting with the garden bed preparation, to planting vegetables, to harvest and utilizing the locally grown produce in school lunch once a week. L.E.A.R.N. students cooked with local ingredients harvested from the Community Farm and shared chili, pasta sauce, squash soup, beans as a protein source, and roasted potatoes.

Committed students and community volunteers will end the growing season at the St. Johnsbury Community Farm by planting garlic and a fall cover crop and by hosting a Community Harvest Celebration event hosted at the Farm on October 19 from 4-6 pm.

To learn more about St. J ALFA's food access or school related projects, visit their website at <http://www.stjalfa.org> or contact Melissa Bridges at 802-748-9498.