

Intervale Food Hub - The Future of Local Food Marketing and Distribution

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Aggregation, marketing and distribution of local food products are some of the critical services offered by food hubs nationwide. By food hubs assisting numerous local farmers with collaborative marketing and distribution, it allows farmers to focus on growing and raising quality agricultural products while maintaining a sustainable business model. Intervale Food Hub is a growing enterprise of the Intervale Center, located in Burlington, that markets and distributes local food from over twenty Vermont family farms to hundreds of community members throughout the spring, summer and winter seasons. The Intervale Food Hub's goal is to provide the greater Burlington community access to high-quality foods while returning a fair price to farmers. Community members, public schools and a Burlington-area college, receive local food products directly at their workplace through this multi-farm CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) program.

According to the Intervale Food Hub's recent blog post about their CSA, here's how the multi-farm, a la carte share program works: "farmers deliver their products — be they sausages, yogurt, tomatoes, frozen fruit, or kohlrabi — to the Food Hub. Food Hub staffers sort and pack the products into customized CSA shares that are then delivered in handy orange shopping carts right to customers' workplaces, so they don't even need to stop at the grocery store on their way home!" The benefit to the customers participating in this multi-farm CSA program is one-stop access to local vegetables, fruits, meats, eggs, cheeses, and specialty products conveniently delivered and tailored to meet your personal preferences.



While the convenience factor of workplace delivery and personalized share packing are outstanding benefits to the customer, the Intervale Food Hub model is also addressing one of the more difficult challenges facing farmers and the resiliency of Vermont's food system — market access. A small percentage of our state's population — around 5% — is buying local food and supporting local farms. Reaching a larger segment of the population and introducing them to the ease, convenience, and value to local food supports local agriculture and creates new market outlets for farmers.

In 2008, the Intervale Food Hub reached 205 subscribers and delivered to 7 drop off locations; by 2011 their participation had grown to 820 members distributed at 30 sites. Each year at the Intervale Food Hub, greater than 50% of their CSA participants are new to the concept of CSA's and, ideally with a successful local food experience, they're more likely to feel comfortable choosing and buying local food at farmers' markets and retailers.

Eric Seitz and Rob Rock of Pitchfork Farm, a 6-acre heirloom and staple vegetable farm in Burlington, exclaim their support of the Intervale Food Hub's market outlet for their farm: "As our farm has grown, much of our success is due to the innovation and foresight of the Intervale Food Hub. Almost overnight, a whole new market became available to us. We would never have been able to achieve that without the Food Hub. To us, it really is the future model of local food distribution!"

While the number of farmers supplying local food products to the Intervale Food Hub has remained nearly the same (30 participating farms in 2008 and 24 in 2011), the total sales returned to farmers had risen from \$60,000 to \$285,000 over the same 4 years. Projected growth of this important food hub model shows \$1.1 million in annual gross sales by 2016, with \$700,000 returned to Vermont farmers.

Similar CSA programs offering multi-farm aggregation, marketing and distribution services are offered by many Food Hubs in Vermont. Check with your local community's food hub or individual farmers to see how you can best access local food through a CSA farmshare this season. As spring rapidly approaches, Intervale Food Hub participants - and CSA members across the state - are enjoying their spring shares and sign-ups for summer shares are just beginning. Don't miss out. If you would like more information about CSA farms or a food hub in your area, please contact Abbey Willard, 828-3829 or abbey.willard@state.vt.us.