

Healthy Roots Collaborative Advisory Committee Meeting

January 28, 2021 – 1pm to 3pm

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82615690056?pwd=ZkRYV0lOTXovVE52d3hjc2tJY3gxZz09>

Attendance: Emily Alger, Nina Hansen, Rachel Huff, Robert Ostermeyer, Tim Smith, Brad Docheff, Bethany Remmers, Koi Boynton, Peter Jenkins, Christine Porcaro
Not in attendance: Denise Smith

Goals:

- Review end of year gleaning & food access report
- Discussion on ongoing role in mass feeding
- Report out on Farm & Food Biz Focus Group

Times	Agenda	Action
1:00 to 1:30	Org updates	
Notes:		
1:30 to 2:00	Gleaning & Food Access Presentation	
Notes:		
2:00 to 2:30	Discussion on HRC role in mass feeding – including EE & FFFB updates	
Notes:		
2:30 to 3:00	Report out on Focus Group	-Continue to work with food hubs (Intervale and Mad River Food Hub) -Organize a meat focus group -Charitable organization focus group (February) -Bring Sam Smith back into the fold -Farm survey and Buyers survey

Notes:

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FCIDC- Through the ReStart Vermont Program it became very evident that small business did not have a handle/strong understanding of their finances. FCDIC and RPCs are applying for funding to help small businesses and farms manage their numbers better. A lot of the current resources are not available to smaller businesses and farms.

Bethany: NRPC project review committee has been closely following the Perego expansion (infant formula). They are starting a major expansion overhaul. They will continue to follow that project for the all the implications that that project will have.

NRPC was the head of the effort to see about helping business take advantage of visitors along the Mississquoi Valley Rail Trail (not necessarily ag businesses...but it could be). Bethany will ask Greta, who was project lead, to provide the committee with an update at a later meeting.

Robert: NorthWest Family Foods has been making efforts to get people inside to shop. They have created a system where the parking lot becomes the waiting room and staff can manage who comes in and out from inside the building. This setup becomes easier for the staff and for the customers.

Brad- Has had the opportunity to attend VT Rural Development workshops. Has found them to be really helpful, with inspiring words and many community insights.

Nina: They are still in the thick of Farmers to Families. They were able to squeeze in some local farms. They worked with Jim Markle to get potatoes. They

worked with an orchard in Peru. Milk from Franklin County in the Cabot Yogurt that was included. Wondering if Healthy Roots knows what is going on with the USDA boxes.

Koi: The Abbey Group donated money for the Healthy Roots Collaborative Farm to School efforts. VT Food Bank had a meeting with MacKenzie Scott and soon after they got the donation (\$9 million). They contributed some money to Willing Hands to put in a walk in cooler.

Robert: Food is not the issue for the Food Bank. It is the transportation. There needs to be a system set up to get food to people that can't get to it. If we had a way to use existing systems to get food to people where they already are (daycares/schools) that would be great. We have the nodes just no way to get the food to those nodes. Transportation and distribution is the real issue.

Gleaning & Food Access Presentation

PIVOT to COVID 19 response

- COVID 19 safety protocols (March)
- ShiftMeals (April-June)
- Farmers to Families Food Boxes (June-Sept)
- Everyone Eats meals (September-December)

By the numbers:

Farmers to Families

- 1,650 produce boxes
- 1,585 dairy boxes
- 1,000 gallons of milk
- 17,800 frozen meals
- 29,000 lbs of produce gleaned
- 3,000 lbs of other food moved

25 Recipient Sites Served

- 15 Charitable Food Sites
- 10 Non-Traditional food Recipient Sites: Some of the non-traditional sites might not necessarily receive gleaned produce but they did receive the Farmers to Families Food Boxes and Everyone Eats Meals.

-This year there was an increased need in Richford. With the regular unloading of Farmers to Families Food boxes, it became a really truck to trunk operation and people knew it was going to happen so they always show up ready to take food.

CIDER Meals saw an increase from 250 to 650 (mainly seniors). Neighbor meals are produced at South Hero Congregational church for CIDER. Over the past 18 months it has really grown.

Other Grand Isle sites did not see an increase.

People are generally happy with the quantity and quality of gleaned produce. There was one comment about the produce being too ripe which can sometimes be true.

Gleaned Produce

Received produce from 13 farms and food from 9 non-farm partners.
45% had significant engagement (weekly glean of 800+ lbs)

Farms that donated over 800 pounds of food

- River Berry Farm
- JK Markle Potatoes
- Tuberville
- Pomykala Farm
- West Farm
- West Shore Farm
- Borderview Research Farm
- Salvation Farms
- Hall's Orchard
- Jericho Settlers Farm

Plus Smaller amounts from 12 additional farms and partners

- Wally's Place
- Beef Liver from Health Hero
- Tomato plant from Blue Heron Farm
- Concord grapes from a S. Hero Resident
- Eggs from Savage Gardens
- Veggies from BFA Fairfax school garden
- Produce swapped with other gleaning organizations

32 Volunteers

-45% increase in individuals from 2019

Who are our Volunteers?

- All individuals (no school groups this year)
- 53% volunteered more than once
- 22% volunteered 5 or more times

-66% were new this year

What did volunteers do?

-They field gleaned a total of 92 hours

-They drove 919 miles for deliveries

-They processed vegetable (topping beets and carrots for a total of 18 hours).

Program Financials

There has been an increase in expenses and that coincides with an increase in hours of Peter's position. The good updated is that Forward Philanthropy is ecstatic about what we are doing!

NOTE: Plumrose (HRC Corporate Gleaning sponsor) has changed their name to Swift Prepared Food.

Looking Forward

A year-round program

Infrastructure is key. We need a centralized place for food. Not having to rely on space in a bunch of different location. Peter would like to see HRC stockpile more storage crops throughout the year. This would help to build our volunteer capacity. People can meet in one centralized location.

Tim: What does that storage space look like?

Peter: It depends on how big we want to dream and how quickly...essentially a building with a small cooler and some other storage space with some washing space. Willing Hands has a bunch of coolers at different temperatures depending on the product. One of our partner farms has been able to provide us storage space (West Farm). Health Hero also has some space that we use.

Koi: Just for our gleaning program and being able to respond to what has been moved in the past few years, a 4 pallet cooler would be great, a chest freezer, a loading dock, wash pack place and dry storage for Healthy Roots supplies (in addition to gleaning program).

Peter: Other infrastructure...potentially another pickup truck. It is pretty critical to getting into farm fields. That is lower priority right now, but it could be one in the future.

Peter: What is our role in mass feeding programs in the future? Do we want to double down on just gleaning? Are we wanting to expand who we serve, including non-traditional sites? Are there locations that are further out that we can serve?

Feedback and Questions

Rachel: Echoes Robert's idea of using HRC to reach those existing nodes. Rachel and Peter were on a call yesterday where a woman was talking about going to a school parking lot to hand out food to people

Peter: There is not a HUGE surplus in just gleaned produce. What he is getting, is what food shelves need. If we could start creating food boxes ourselves (like the Intervale Center...that could be of interest). Our biggest farms (River Berry and Pomykala) are not necessarily increasing the amount of gleaned produce drastically but Healthy Roots currently does not have the capacity/outlets to take on much more.

Koi: It is interesting to see different farm practices and what kind of food and how much food we get. Ben Pomykala said he could give more if we had more volunteers.

Asking VT FoodBank about HRC being a more integral partner of Vermonters Feeding Vermonters. Is there a way for us to meet more non-traditional sites?

Farmers to Families

Koi- We took part in a meeting with the Food Bank about how regional partners can move food regionally. The Abby Group was not awarded Farmers to Families the bid this round. Global Trading out of NJ won. They are a big corporation that works in prepared foods. Committee discussed whether or not HRC should engage in "last mile" distribution of the food boxes for Global Trading.

Emily- If we are not the middle man are we nervous about our existing relationships to charitable food sites?

Peter: He told food shelves that is was unlikely that HRC was going to be distributing the boxes and they were disappointed but they understood the circumstances.

Tim: If HRC does get picked, where would they drop off?

Koi: Healthy Roots would have people on site to unload boxes directly from to Global Trading into cars to then be distributed.

Tim: Some of this would need to be refrigerated?

Peter: Yes, because they are mixed boxes with meat and dairy...sites would need to separate that when they receive the boxes and refrigerate the meat and dairy...quite an inefficient system.

Nina: Do you think the state will step in and pay for the last mile?

Koi: I haven't gotten a sense that that is the case.

Emily: We are stretched in capacity already and probably not going to get the bid. It may be better to leave it to that Global Trading to do their best.

Tim: I think this will eat up all excess time that we have. I think it would be tough program to manage for sure especially if we don't have a place to work out of. From truck to trunk...that would be a logistical nightmare.

Peter: It would also be difficult with Everyone Eats meals happening at the same time too

Emily: Everyone Eats also has more of the ability to affect to our local businesses and farmers.

Koi: No other VT organizations think that GT will reach out to them and they are not looking to form a relationship with them.

Tim: Nina, do you have an aggregation point?

Nina: it has been different with each round: Global Foundries has been a silent partner...we are using their loading dock and kitchen facility... Other scenarios we met at a common point and unloaded. Global Foundries has been amazing (*NOTE- Global Foundries does NOT want this information publicized*).

Robert: Everyone loved the Farmers to Families boxes...the switchover of the distribution points to the food shelves made a lot of sense. In the spring, NW Family foods saw a 40% drop of households using the food shelf: People weren't traveling anymore, we had to put together prepackaged groceries (that took away choice and created less satisfaction). There was also an increase in SNAP benefits, there was the initial distribution of stimulus checks so that people who are normally served had more economic stability than ever before.

It shows quite simply how efficiently these program can eliminate economic stress. They did not experience any food shortages...the Farmers to Families boxes were really great!

Alburgh and Sheldon did see an increase in spring, summer and fall!

Emily: We should continue to keep gleaning program in mind as these infrastructure talks move forward. Who we are serving and what are we supplying them with...what do sites need in order to distribute? This could help us decide what kind of infrastructure that we need!

Peter: Are there goals for the gleaning program that we should be focusing on? When I think about what I am envisioning it is focused on nailing down volunteer capacity. Are there other things gleaning program should be pursuing?

Robert: Thank you Peter for the flexibility and work you are doing. You were able to distribute more types of food that had been available before. It was really remarkable and the flexibility that everyone has been able to show has been really great!

Rachel: Add a goal: We aren't going to get school groups in the field but we should continue to hold onto the educational aspect of gleaning with a focus on the charitable food system. Weave it into the Farm to School work!

Business Focus Group

3 buyers

Nina Hansen, The Abbey Group
Sam, Pumpkin Village North
Ashley Clear, Rail City Market

5 producers

Phelan O'Connor, Pigasus Meats
Angus Baldwin, West Farm
Ben Pomykala, Pomykala Farm
Christine Kubacz, Foggy Bottom Farm
Kevin Melman, Funj Shrooming

They started to build a picture of what the needs might be. They started drawing a picture of cold and dry storage with a potential of a commercial kitchen space. They would like storage for frozen meats as well as being able to do short term storage for whole animals. People were also looking for access to dry storage for packaging where they might not have room on their farm.

The services people were interested in were a regionally aggregated CSA (similar to what the Intervale does). They were also interested in an increase in brokering of sales....how to formalize and institutionalize that.

Commercial Kitchen- people were interested in renting the space to make their product but also hiring a co-packer (a company/person who creates products for producers based on the producers' recipes, like sausages). The small volume that meat producers need is a problem for making co-packing cost effective.

Emily: Regional CSA has an interesting intersection with gleaning...as we have seen with the Intervale.

How businesses think it would affect them:

- increase sale and purchasing efficiency
- increase profitability
- increase local purchasing

We were very happy with people's engagement and willingness to talk about it.

Next steps

- Continue to work with food hubs (Intervale and Mad River Food Hub)
- Organize a meat focus group
- Charitable organization focus group (February)
- Bring Sam Smith back into the fold
- Farm survey and Buyers survey

Tim- The investment in co-packing is HUGE and are limited in the type of food that you can make. That could limit customers.

Peter: Is there concern about meat and produce being processed in the same facility?

Koi: Yes, we would have to make sure that that was set up in a way that would work.

CAE would tell us this...however big you think you need...make it bigger

Emily: Some important questions would be: What is the base level of service for people to use the infrastructure that we would build. Who are the cornerstone businesses and who are the smaller businesses that we are supporting?