

The Northern New England UU District is gathering information about churches helping pantries provide fresh farm produce for their clients in collaboration with other churches. The following is our report.

I am writing from Allen Avenue UU Church in Portland, Maine, as the volunteer manager of a food pantry, called Project FEED (www.projectfeed.me), housed in Woodfords Congregational church. Our church has supported this pantry for many years. My husband is Chair of the Board and many of our members volunteer at the pantry restocking and serving clients. Each week our church members bring non-perishable food to church to contribute and once a year the whole church makes a huge collection of food around "Earth Day." We netted 96 full bags of cans and boxes of non-perishable foods in reusable bags this past year.

Last summer the chair of our Ethical Eating committee and her children worked cooperatively with the food rescue, Wayside, to collect leftover produce from the farmers' market in Portland to be distributed later to various local pantries. After showing the movie *Fresh* and inviting two local farmers to exhibit the 20 different Maine foods available from farms year-round, we wondered how to provide local produce to our pantry's clients.

Woodfords Congregational church (where the pantry is housed) invited me to be on a panel to discuss food needs in the community. I told them of our desire to provide local produce at the pantry and their Social Justice committee offered three CSA's! In addition we participate with the *Maine Hunger Initiative*. They received a grant and WE netted \$500 more dollars worth of fresh produce from

another local farm during the summer. We also learned that we could share a truck (another grant) and driver with the Seventh Day Adventist church, White Memorial, to pick up our additional produce. One of our member volunteers agreed to coordinate the produce as it was received at the pantry.

Another need presented itself. How were we going to store all of this fresh produce? The Board learned of another grant for \$1000 through that same Maine Hunger Initiative. Woodfords church, the Wayside Soup Kitchen, also operating out of Woodfords' kitchen, and our pantry are cooperatively purchasing an energy efficient refrigerator to be shared, half by us and half by Wayside and stored in Woodfords kitchen, just down the hall from the pantry.

The farms are providing recipes for unusual items like Swiss chard and kale and we have many delighted pantry clients. As web-master for the pantry and a helper for our own church's website, I will be working to get photos and comments from our pantry clients to share. Will we find a way to continue this effort into the winter? Stay tuned! That Ethical Eating chair, I mentioned before? She now has a full time job at an organic farm as the Community Programs and Volunteer Coordinator helping to educate schools, children and their parents about fresh produce. The farm contributes to another pantry in the Portland area.

This has been a wonderfully cooperative endeavor and we are very pleased with the results.

Volunteer Pantry Manager,
Delene Perley