FEED Kearsarge Nourishes Our Community

Jennifer White

Many local organizations have worked diligently to alleviate temporary food insecurity and improve the long-term resilience of our food system by offering emergency assistance, fostering beneficial relationships, providing local products and creating educational opportunities. The unprecedented social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have intensified many of those existing regional challenges and revealed the fragile nature of our dependence on a global food system and supply chain.

Our New Hampshire community needed a rapid, collective response to strengthen the capacity of our existing support networks to ensure the availability of necessary resources for all — specifically, access to healthful food. FEED (Food Expansion, Education, Distribution) Kearsarge is a collaborative network of organizations committed to nourishing our community by feeding and empowering ourselves and our neighbors.

The growing list of partners includes Colby-Sawyer College, Spring Ledge Farm, Kearsarge Neighborhood Partners, Kearsarge Lake Sunapee Community Food Pantry and New London Hospital. FEED Kearsarge's initiatives are designed to improve the immediate health of residents in crisis, while also promoting the perennial wellbeing of the regional food system and the local economy.

Spring Ledge Farm and Colby-Sawyer's own Main Street Garden will oversee the cultivation of crops most in demand by food pantries, schools and New London Hospital's Food Rx program. These additional garden rows, totaling more than an acre of land, will provide at least 1,000 pounds of produce and will feature primarily root crops, which would be available to recipients long after the growing season is over. Kearsarge Neighborhood Partners (KNP) will help raise funds for materials and identify volunteers and paid assistants who will help tend the designated land and then process and deliver the produce. Kearsarge Food Hub will help coordinate the aggregation and distribution of food to local pantries and the hospital program.

Through a program called "Tray it Forward," participants of Spring Ledge Farm's annual seed sowing workshop have donated 250 trays of easy-to-plant seedlings to essential medical workers and families with stretched finances. Spring Ledge split the cost of the trays with donors, and Vermont Compost Company and Pleasant View Gardens contributed planting materials.

Kearsarge Food Hub workers and Colby-Sawyer College students will offer educational materials and technical training to promote more at-home food production and preservation. Inspired by historic victory garden programs, they will also provide sample garden-planning designs to help families be more successful and self-sufficient. The Food Hub and the college will also run a pilot program in which they will establish three model victory gardens at the Kearsarge Regional Elementary School at Bradford, the Bradford Community Food Pantry, and the Brown Memorial Library.

Interested donors and volunteers for FEED Kearsarge should contact Kearsarge Neighborhood Partners at knph.org.

Jennifer White is the director of sustainability and innovation at Colby-Sawyer College where she collaborates with stakeholders to implement policies, initiatives, and curricula that promote sustainability and resilience on campus and within the greater community.