Together, we’re planting seeds for new growth while keeping neighbors fed year-round.

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Vermont Foodbank VTFOODBANK.ORG
It’s springtime again. Do we dare to hope that the promise of tomorrow will be realized? I certainly think so. **There is so much promise in our communities**, and many of us have spent the last few years just keeping the wheels on the bus — we’re ready to look to renewal and new growth.

At Vermont Foodbank we’ve already put our orders in with local farmers, like Janine Ndagijimana, who you can read about here. You’ll also read about community efforts to welcome Afghan families settling in Vermont as our new neighbors, growing our communities and bringing new perspectives and experiences.

Fulfilling the promise of a person, or a community, or a state is not always easy. But it is always worthwhile. **Together, we help fulfill the promise of a Vermont without hunger.** This is a moment to be audacious and join together in service of something bigger. Thank you for seeing that future and for helping to make it a reality.

**Thank you!**

John Sayles  
CEO
Working together to bring food choice to neighbors at home

Vermont Foodbank network partner, Feeding Chittenden, has launched a new order-ahead food system that is bringing more choice, safely, to individuals and families in Vermont.

“We realized there were many people not accessing our services that could have been,” shares Julia of Feeding Chittenden, about early learnings from the new program. Feeding Chittenden spearheaded the development of the new ordering and delivery program, Online Market, and is coordinating with the other Central Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO) Food Access Centers in Franklin and Addison counties. The Vermont Foodbank is one of more than a dozen organizations participating in the collaborative project.

“Vermont Foodbank staff were early thought partners as we looked to find a more loving and sustainable way to increase food access with more choice and less waste,” says Rob, director of Feeding Chittenden. The Foodbank also provided seed funding, through a community grant to develop technology for the online market that allows different charitable food locations to custom-tailor inventory available to participants. Your support is part of this collaborative effort that is expanding food access in Vermont.

An early example of the program’s success is a partnership with the University of Vermont Children’s Hospital. Using the system, medical staff can identify kids and families who would benefit from food resources and help them to enroll and set-up home delivery based on nutritional and personal needs and choice.

Capstone Community Action in Barre is the first partner to join CVOEO in using the new system to enroll participants. “When the pandemic hit, people were hesitant to come in person, but we knew they still needed food help, and we have a lot of transportation-insecure neighbors to serve as well,” says Liz of Capstone. “We are hoping that some of the folks who need delivery will be excited to use the new online order system so they can choose what they receive and reduce waste of foods they might not eat.”

Feeding Chittenden shared that it has been inspiring to see groups come together with open minds to solve hunger during the pandemic. “We all want to do better — it has become a community movement,” says Julia.
Moving to a new community is often challenging. Arriving without a job, not knowing where you’ll live, and speaking a different language make it even harder. A warm, familiar meal can mean so much. That’s why the Foodbank is making sure Afghan refugees have access to known and preferred foods upon arrival, with help from the community — and help from you.

“We’re doing what we always do, which is step up to help feed our neighbors,” says Zach. Zach does community engagement work at the Foodbank and has been helping coordinate welcome efforts, made possible with your support, for Afghan refugees arriving in Vermont.

With about 230 individuals slated to arrive by the end of 2022, the Foodbank has been working to help make sure that new Afghan neighbors are greeted with a familiar meal, a box of food, and/or a gift card to purchase groceries upon arrival. People will be eligible to apply for 3SquaresVT, a program that provides money each month to purchase groceries, but there’s some turnaround time for the signup process and it’s important that new community members have food during the time it takes to get settled.

Dignity is also important, and Zach and the Foodbank community engagement team have been collaborating with refugee resettlement organizations to curate the contents of the welcome food boxes so that people are receiving groceries relevant for creating and enjoying favorite meals. Boxes weigh about 40 pounds each and include staples like basmati rice and kidney beans, whole cardamom and coriander, oil, tea, and fresh produce and eggs. These boxes are distributed to families and individuals arriving at temporary housing locations in southern Vermont.
The Foodbank has also been partnering with restaurant pandemic program Everyone Eats in some regions to prepare meals, using Afghan recipes, that are then stored frozen until needed. When new neighbors first arrive at temporary housing (often without access to a kitchen), they are served a warm meal. “There are two different recipes,” explains Zach. “One eggplant recipe and one kidney bean recipe. And the hope is that when people first arrive that first night, or two nights, they have a meal that feels welcoming and familiar for them.”

In parts of the state with access to a diversity of stores and markets, and where newcomers are moving directly into an apartment or homestay, gift cards have been made available so people can purchase the food they need and want. “Even though it feels like a really big puzzle at the moment, the more I spend time on this the more I feel like I don’t think there’s any better fit to our mission than doing this work we’re doing right now,” shares Zach. “New community, different language, transportation barriers, food access barriers, not currently enrolled in 3Squares or anything … To me, that is the most vulnerable situation for anyone in our community at the moment. And so, supporting them however we can is important.”

The Vermont Foodbank can help you, or someone you know, apply for 3SquaresVT. To learn more, visit vtfoodbank.org/3svt or call 1-855-855-6181 to speak to our friendly team.

Afghan Kidney Bean Curry

Recipe from Eva Agha, thecuriouschickpea.com

Instructions

1. Melt 1 tablespoon of coconut oil in a pot over medium-low heat. Add coriander and cumin and cook until aromatic, about 1 minute. Keep a close eye so spices don’t burn.

2. Add dried mint and tomatoes with juices to the pot (watch for splattering!), and mash a little. Cook over medium-low heat, stirring occasionally, for about 7 minutes until tomatoes break down and are saucy. Transfer to a blender and blend until smooth, making sure to vent.

3. Heat the remaining 1 tablespoon of coconut oil to the pot and melt over medium-low heat. Add onion and cook for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until softened and starting to turn golden. Add minced garlic and continue cooking for an additional 5 minutes, stirring often so it doesn’t burn.

4. Once the onions are soft and golden, add the broth, spiced tomato sauce, kidney beans, pepper, and salt. Simmer uncovered on low heat for about 15 minutes. Adjust seasonings to taste.

5. Garnish with diced red onion and cilantro if desired. Serve with basmati rice.

Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons coconut oil, divided
- 1 tablespoon whole coriander seed
- 1 teaspoon whole cumin seed
- 1/2 teaspoon dried mint (optional)
- 1 15 oz can whole tomatoes
- 1 small red onion, diced (reserve some for garnish)
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 cup vegetable broth
- 3 cups cooked kidney beans (2 15 oz cans), rinsed and drained
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon salt

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Local farming offers variety, to share with the community

The Foodbank has been expanding the types of food offered at free distributions, to help make sure everyone has access to foods they want and need. Thanks to your support, 1,000 pounds of African eggplant were purchased from local Burundian farmer Janine, and distributed to community members to enjoy.

When Janine started growing African eggplant, she had five or six varieties. Now she just grows two, along with amaranth, “because of the Vermont weather.”

Janine farms on seven acres in Colchester, and lives in Burlington with her family. Janine speaks Kirundi, and explains through an interpreter that she was born to Burundian parents in a camp in Rwanda, and grew up there before moving to Tanzania in 1994 because of the Rwandan genocide. Janine got married in Tanzania, and had her first two children before moving to Vermont. She has lived in Vermont for fourteen years.

“It’s beautiful,” says Janine. “And then I found a garden. It’s my dream home. I’m not thinking about moving out.”

Janine is a self-taught farmer and started with a small garden plot at Ethan Allan’s New Farms for New Americans. She was growing eggplant to eat at home, and other people were interested — they wanted to buy some. Next, Janine moved to the Intervale Center, and then to the land in Colchester.

“Every year increase, increase,” explains Janine. “I’m still looking for land because each year I gain customers and what I have, it’s not enough.” Janine is hoping to expand to 20 acres in the upcoming season.

Typical customers know these types of eggplant and live all over the country, “Arizona, Utah, Idaho, Tennessee, Michigan, Ohio, Virginia, New York, Pennsylvania …” she breaks the list off, laughing.

You’re supporting Vermont farmers while providing local, meaningful food to neighbors experiencing hunger.
And Janine’s eggplant has been available to Vermont neighbors experiencing hunger, through food distributions that you help support. Having free, fresh African eggplant available means more community members are able to bring home familiar food to enjoy.

Janine says her partnership with the Foodbank also helps expose new people to African eggplant. Families who first found the eggplant through a free food distribution have sought her out later to buy more, an act that continues to support local business.

Janine describes the two varieties of eggplant she grows, known in English as garden eggs. “So the white, it is nice and sweet, almost like apples. And then the green one is a little more bitter.” Lilian, the interpreter, says the green ones are especially loved in Nepalese cooking.

The eggplants can be boiled, sautéed with spices, and served with tomatoes, fish, and other vegetables. Lilian joyfully shares what she likes her eggplant served with, “Amaranth, the African vegetable. It’s what I LOVE. Yes, and dry fish. And I eat it with fufu. Yes, oh my god, I best sit down. Wooo!”

“Eggplant,” states Janine, “it makes anything you want.”

Every season, Janine learns something new. And while she has been planning for future growth, she shares that her business has also been affected by COVID-19. Like when customers fall sick and can’t come pick up their orders. “This year has been a real challenge because of corona,” she says.

Thanks to you, the Foodbank is excited to continue purchasing and distributing eggplant from Janine. Working with the Foodbank has been helpful for her, and Janine speaks to the impact within the community. “It’s good. You help me, like you know, buy my things … Also, you do good because you offer people food. Food on the table to the people.”
The last day of school is right around the corner. For some families, summer break means long days at the lake, laughing with friends, fresh strawberries, and cold lemonade.

But for many families in Vermont, this summer will bring stress instead of relaxation. No school means parents and caregivers have to find a way to pay for childcare or summer camp. It means kids who rely on free breakfast and lunch five days a week suddenly … can’t.

And with the rising cost of food and other basic needs, people have already been forced to make tough decisions and tradeoffs. Family budgets just can’t stretch any further.

All through the summer, the Foodbank will continue to make nourishing food available in every Vermont county.

Because everyone should have access to the food they need when they need it. And every child should get to relax and play this summer, without worrying about having enough to eat.

You can help make this summer a little easier for neighbors facing hunger. A gift of $50 can help feed a family for a week.

If you or someone you know needs help with food this summer, please be in touch. You can reach us at vfoodbank.org or call (802) 476-3341.