

**Commentary...**

# Fresh Food Farmacy program changes lives

By **Audrey Tehan**  
Seed to Table Executive Director

The limitations to having extremely high blood pressure were crippling for local Sisters resident Brian (name changed for anonymity). Having to take six medications a day had become normal. Brian's blood pressure was often recorded at dangerous levels, which had led him to five emergency room visits in 2018.

The doctor was so concerned that Brian had a home monitoring system directly connected to the doctor's office, reporting readings on an hourly basis. Although doctors had recommended a diet richer in fresh fruits and vegetables, Brian and his wife simply did not know how to cook and use more fresh foods in their diet. In addition, the bills were already maxed out.

The six-year norm changed over the course of the past four months after their physician guided the couple to join Seed to Table's new Fresh Food Farmacy program. Brian now enjoys his morning, only having to take one of his previous six medications to control his blood pressure. And no, it was not one super pill that Brian had to switch to. In fact it was going back to basics of switching meals from processed freezer meals to Seed to Table's fresh fruits and vegetables, and Splitting Aces Ranch's lean, pasture raised meats.

About three years ago, Dr. Kevin Miller of High Lakes Health Care and myself were having an inspired conversation about the power of fresh vegetables. As a physician Dr. Miller emphasizes people's diets are a major foundation for maintaining and improving their health. Miller expressed how the growing

body of research supports the idea that when people eat well, they stay healthier and are more likely to control chronic diseases and perhaps even avoid them altogether. A healthy diet isn't as easy as popping a pill, it takes time, resources and dedication to switch habits. Thus, the idea sparked for Seed to Table to launch the Fresh Food Farmacy; where patients are "prescribed" by their doctor to join a Seed to Table Produce Share and receive 22 weeks of fresh veggies with guided recipes, cooking classes and support.

"When you prioritize food and teach people how to prepare healthy meals, lo and behold, it can end up being more impactful than medications themselves," says Dr. Jaewon Ryu, interim president and CEO of Geisinger Health Systems. "That's a big win."

Using food as medicine, the Fresh Food Farmacy (FFF) is designed to improve healthy eating habits and or help alleviate food insecurity for individuals. The FFF provides individuals with 22 weeks of farm fresh produce (either subsidized or at no cost), support and cooking/nutrition resources.

Seed to Table launched the

program this year, partnering with Bend Memorial Clinic and High Lakes Health Care to involve up to 15 patients in the program. Participants range in symptoms from type II diabetes, arthritis, weight, and simply a lack of access to fresh foods hindering their families' health. Physicians have seen that Seed to Table is a valuable starting place to connect the resource of nutritious foods, resources and community support.

Dr. May Fan of Bend Memorial Clinic stated, "I really appreciate being able to 'prescribe' healthy foods instead of prescribing medication. Seed to Table's Fresh Food Farmacy addresses the barrier of cost and connects our community to our local growers."

So what exactly does the Fresh Food Farmacy look like? Patients do not arrive to a waiting room, but a quaint produce stand set back against fields of deep green vegetables. Seed to Table's education coordinator, Aude Girin, greets each patient in the open air. Vegetables of the week are introduced, along with recipes and weekly nutrition tips. Weekly check-ins are informal conversations about challenges individuals face in regards to using an

entire bunch of kale in one week, or how to create larger flavors with fresh herbs rather than salt.

Participants receive around 600 pounds of fresh veggies over the course of six months.

The program incorporates monthly classes to learn practical skills to create healthy and sustainable lifestyle changes, weekly educational resources, and personalized check-in support. Learning valuable cooking skills, healthy-eating tips, practical recipes, and more are coupled with health monitoring from

their doctors throughout the program.

"Without Seed to Table's Fresh Food Farmacy, I would not be able to afford to eat fresh foods every week," said one participant. "The weekly vegetable pick-up has really helped me financially and has helped me with managing my diabetes."

The program has been a huge success, and we are thrilled to offer it. The stories are powerful. We hope to expand our impact, so individuals in similar positions to Brian and his family can get a piece of their life back.



Seed to Table intern Skyler Wilkins harvesting cauliflower for Fresh Food Farmacy.

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