

Aude Gire brings fresh food and education to Sisters Country

By T. Lee Brown
Correspondent

“I firmly believe that access to fresh foods and vegetables should be a basic human right,” said Aude Gire, education coordinator for Seed to Table farm. “It’s disappointing the way that our culture and society views food — and here in Sisters, the grocery stores are expensive.”

With Seed to Table, she hopes to increase access to fresh fruit and vegetables for people of all incomes.

“I really believe that food is deeply rooted in community, or it once was,” said Gire. “I want to bring that back: where people are sharing vegetables from their gardens and the farmers market is the heart of the community.”

Gire is originally from Pennsylvania, where she grew up gardening. She admits, “I didn’t like it as a kid — I think because my parents forced me to do it and I was rebelling.”

She came to love it, though, and volunteered with community gardens while doing AmeriCorps in California.

“I was really fascinated by the community aspect of it, people gardening right next to each other, sharing

their successes and failures together — enjoying each other’s company, reminiscing,” she explained.

This work led to another AmeriCorps program where Gire taught kids about gardening and cooking in Vermont.

“It clicked,” she said of the experience. “There is a big disconnect between kids and their food. With larger grocery stores and transportation abilities, kids just don’t know where their food comes from. It was fun and fascinating to see how interested and motivated the kids were — how much they loved getting their hands in the dirt, planting and digging.”

Gire moved to the Willamette Valley to work on a hunger-relief farm. She then moved on to a mix of farm-to-school education projects and working on small organic farms. The job listing for Seed to Table’s education coordinator caught her attention because it aligned so well with her values.

“It’s difficult to grow here,” she noted. “People here are deserving of fresh foods just as much as in the Valley where it just grows magically. It’s tough here, but it is possible if you are committed to growing organic, fresh produce.”

As education coordinator, she runs many field trips and activities for elementary school programming.

“We’re also working with the high school to do a high school greenhouse class every spring — an in-depth experience growing in our greenhouse and learning about agriculture in our modern society,” she said.

Sisters High School has a greenhouse on-site, and Seed to Table also partners with the Interdisciplinary Environmental Expedition

program. IEE brings about half of the school’s juniors into the great outdoors regularly for education across multiple subject areas.

“We have several high school students who come and do projects at the farm every spring through IEE,” said Gire.

Gire expressed excitement about working with the Warm Springs School District as well. She hopes that incorporating Seed to Table’s knowledge into the classroom and into the science curriculum will help the reservation’s residents in the long-term. “Students come out to the farm four times of the year,” she said, “and we also do in-class learning.”

Many in the Sisters area struggle financially to bring healthy food to their tables. Every Thursday, Gire brings donations of Seed to Table’s fresh produce to local food banks. “It’s amazing to see how grateful people are to see the abundance of the produce we can grow here,” she said. “Witnessing such genuine appreciation for what we do — they’re able to get these local fresh fruits and veggies for free or a really cheap price. It’s really nice to see that — instantly, they’re smiling, and they’re happy.”

In partnership with High Desert Food and Farm Alliance, Seed to Table provides harvest meal kits: “HDEFFA provides a recipe, the food bank provides a nonperishable item like rice, and we provide the veggies. All the ingredients are there.”

Gire has learned from the feedback people offer.

“It’s been interesting to hear what people have to say,” she said. “Because I get how much people think they hate kale — until they try one of those recipes. A lot of families pick up the harvest kits. Then they’re like, ‘Hey



PHOTO BY TL BROWN

Seed to Table Education Coordinator Aude Gire led children in a variety of educational crafts and taste-testing activities throughout the season at Sisters Farmers Market.

this is pretty good!’”

The addition of the education coordinator has been a huge boost for the organization, according to Executive Director Audrey Tehan. Seed to Table reports that it educates nearly 1,500 students throughout Central Oregon each year. The educator coordinator role is dependent on Seed to Table’s fundraising efforts.

An anonymous donor has challenged the Sisters community to raise \$20,000 in order to receive a matching donation of the same amount. Seed to Table has until November 1 to raise the matching funds. Donations can be mailed to Seed to Table Oregon, P.O. Box 1812, Sisters, OR 97759. For additional information, see www.seedtotableoregon.org.

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