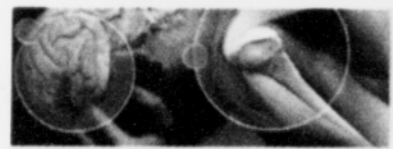


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What's on your list today?.

LOCAL NEWS



PHOTO BY MINDY COOPER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Michi Caldwell (from left) Tracy Arney and Stephanie Brown ready produce for the Farm Fresh Buying Club at Holy Redeemer Church in north Portland where residents from throughout the community are invited to find affordable and healthy foods for the table each Wednesday.

From the Farm to the Congregation

Faith community hosts Farm Fresh Buying Club

BY MINDY COOPER THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

In an effort to bring more affordable and healthy food to the tables of families in north and northeast Portland, the faith community has partnered to provide creative opportunities to pool resources and access high quality produce at bulk prices.

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon's Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership and Holy Redeemer Parish have developed several farm produce to-congregation buying opportunities, including a number of farmers tables located at different worship sites, and a Farm Fresh Buying Club, which is open to all members of the community.

"The whole goal is to give access to fresh organic produce at a reasonable price," said Michi Caldwell, the coordinator of the effort at Holy Redeemer. "And it is open to anybody who would like to participate."

Stephanie Brown, a volunteer and member of the club since it first began last year, said the program allows her family the opportunity to be more connected to where their food comes from.

Brown said the program enables members to choose the produce they want from a weekly list of available produce, which comes directly from Deep Roots Farm in Albany.

"You get an e-mail on Friday from the farm announcing what will be available in the upcoming week based on weather conditions and season," she said. "Then you can place your order by Monday morning, in order to receive produce the following Wednesday."

Holy Redeemer Church, located on North Rosa Parks Way stands as the dropoff site for the buying club on Wednesdays, which will continue throughout October.

Although the program began small in 2010 and was only open to certain members within the community, it opened enrollment to anyone after receiving a grant to bring farm fresh produce to faith communities throughout Portland.

"It's incredible how well people have responded to the buy-in," said Caldwell "We have a pool of members, so we are able to pull our orders together and buy in bulk directly from the farm," she said.

Currently, there are almost 30 members of the Buy-in Club that began for the season last month. Caldwell expects more people will become involved as summer season progresses and a larger variety of food becomes available.

Although there is a membership fee, she said the amount is based on a sliding scale of income levels. "If people can't pay, we also have scholarships available," she said. "We just want people to be a part of it."

Members of the Farm Fresh Buying Club are also given the opportunity to increase their purchasing power by purchasing products at wholesale prices. In addition, a grant from Kaiser Permanente employee enables club members to use their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Benefits (SNAP) to buy \$8 in of produce to receive \$8 in free produce.

Although Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon's (EMO) Interfaith Network for Earth Concerns is a state-wide association of Christian denominations, the program connects residents a variety of religious affiliations.

Caldwell said the group has about four members from the Muslim community.

"We also have the farmer's tables, which is where farmers come to different churches on days of services to sell their products," she said. "And any congregation or faith community that would like to have a farmer's table can."

Currently, she said, there are around seven tables located

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