



PHOTO BY DANNY PETERSON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Village Gardens Prepared Foods Manager Charles Robertson was integral to the non-profit's establishment of a food market back in 2008 with his grant writing and organizing, and has been involved with the Janus Youth program in north Portland ever since.



PHOTO BY DANNY PETERSON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Ev Tapio, the farm manager for the non-profit Village Market, located at 4632 N. Trenton St., stocks fresh produce from the organization's community garden a block and a half away, which provides much needed nutritional food at affordable prices to diverse and low income customers.

Changing Eating Habits

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and Women Infants and Children (WIC) beneficiaries, Soebroto said. But a pattern emerged where customers would run out of benefit dollars to spend on fresh produce near the end each month, causing the store to stock less in those items.

To combat that problem, Village Gardens launched its Good Food program, which enables self-identifying SNAP and WIC eligible customers an additional 20 percent discount in all fresh, frozen, and dried produce. In

addition, those benefit-recipient customers' purchases earns them points toward future discounts—for every \$50 spent in SNAP or WIC benefits, they receive \$5 of free produce.

Now, Soebroto said, the store is stocking produce high throughout the month.

"That's a real game-changer. More than a game changer, that is a life-changer. Because we went from people just doing junk food...if you can imagine junk food throughout the month to actually having higher sales in produce throughout the month, that's a real

life changing event," Robertson said. "We've achieved what we hoped to achieve...just helping change people's eating habits."

Since 2016 the Good Food programs provided a total of \$72,243 in incentives and fresh produce to customers, Village Gardens' website stated.

The program's success is in part thanks to support from city, county, federal, and charitable donations. Village Market does not stay afloat through grocery sales alone, relying on the support they receive from community partners like the U.S. Department of Agriculture nutrition incentive program, The Portland Children's

Levy, Home Forward, CareOregon and the Siletz Charitable Foundation.

Also, as part of its pledge with supporters, the store has agreed to stock culturally relevant, affordable healthy food, and agreed to not sell alcohol or tobacco. In addition, about nine out of 10 of the store's staff is local residents.

Soebroto likes that the store benefits the neighborhood and invites them in for a direct-from-the-source experience like no other.

"Last year I think we were out of like mustard greens or something in the market and someone...took the customer down to the garden, harvested them, and

sold them. We get to sell green tomatoes, which you can't get in a grocery store, and folks are super excited, they're peeking over the garden and asking for green tomatoes. We get to just be immediately responsive."

In addition, an outdoor gazebo in the garden serves as a community gathering space. A potluck held amongst neighbors last month welcomed a visit from City Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty.

Village Gardens accepts volunteer work, provides leadership opportunities, and any local vendor interested in selling their product in the market can get in touch with them at 503-548-0374.



COURTESY VILLAGE GARDENS

In addition to being a hub for healthy food for diverse and low income communities in north Portland, Village Gardens also provides a gazebo in the garden for community gatherings, such as the potluck held during City Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty's visit to the non-profit last month.



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