

TEAM PROFILE

Healthy Food For All

Based in Ithaca, NY on unceded Gayogoho territory, on the land of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.



F2FA PROGRAM QUICK FACTS

► **F2FA PROGRAM REACH:**

The primary customer and farmer base is in Tompkins County (which includes the town of Ithaca and other rural towns in the county) in New York State, and they have begun extending their reach to Seneca County.

► **FUNDING SOURCES:**

- Private foundations
- State government funding
- Individual donations

Organization and F2FA program have been in operation since 2006.

► **WEBSITE:**

www.healthyfoodforall.org

ABOUT HEALTHY FOOD FOR ALL

Healthy Food for All (HFFA) was founded in 2006 by farmers who wanted to fight hunger and eliminate barriers to reliable, dignified access to nutritious, farm-fresh produce for people with low-incomes in Tompkins County. Farm to Food Assistance has been at the core of the organization's work from the beginning: for the past 18 years, HFFA has provided sustenance and stability for community members experiencing food insecurity while supporting local farmers to grow the diversity of fruits and vegetables that provide a cornerstone to good health. HFFA partners with 10 family-owned organic farms to provide 150,000+ pounds of quality produce to more than 1,500 food-insecure people annually.

What started as local farmers providing half-price Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares to families who couldn't afford the full price has evolved into a

suite of programs that increase nutritional food security and improve health outcomes, while supporting farmers to remain viable and productive on their land. The model is still based on a CSA as a way to build on-



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“The pantry partners are really the experts - if it doesn't work for them, it doesn't work. That's our approach: to make sure that the program is co-developed by community members who are experiencing food insecurity as well as the farmers growing the food. By investing in relationships with and among the farmers and the food-insecure families, expectations are set up for the program. They show up and tell their family members about the program - “they've got good greens” - and that's how the program spreads, through word of mouth.”

- LATICIA PERKINS, HFFA OUTREACH AND EQUITY MANAGER

going relationships among farmers and eaters but now includes CSA shares for local social service agencies, community organizations, and healthcare practitioners who then redistribute the food to individual families. HFFA centers the voices, dignity, and participation of historically marginalized and disenfranchised people in program design and delivery.

PIVOTING DURING COVID

During the pandemic, HFFA was compelled to think outside the box. The regional food bank ceased all perishable food distribution for a few months. Food access organizations that relied on the food bank to fill their shelves had to pause their services or try to adapt. Farmers were also losing income during the pandemic. When the wholesale market plummeted, most local farmers had already put seeds in the ground. HFFA decided to start offering CSA shares to pantries - in addition to the regular CSA model for individual households - and contracting with Black and Latino farmers, guaranteeing them a price to produce food for a specific pantry. During this pilot phase, HFFA heard the concerns from many households who experienced barriers to participating in a CSA, as well as complaints

throughout the emergency food system about the lack of high quality fresh food and the limited variety of produce typically available at pantries. During the second year of this pilot, before they even ordered seeds, the farmers met with their new pantry customers to get input on their crop list.

The pilot concluded in 2022 and HFFA officially launched its Farm-to-Pantry program to better reach populations for whom the subsidized household CSA model was not a good fit. This “Pantry CSA Share” program is implemented through a contract with food access organizations that spans the season, an upfront deposit paid to the farmer, and frequent payments throughout the season. Farmers and pantry organizers alike - and the hundreds of households relying on the pantries - have the certainty of a regular, fresh, high-quality supply of locally grown produce, and consistent payment throughout the growing season.

BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH FOOD

Dedicated u-pick gardens and on-farm events for CSA members and pantry clientele support HFFA's goal of community building through food. Director Liz Karabinakas says that HFFA's CSA programs represent “a labor of love, not a hand out.” Each distribution day itself is a community event. “It's not just line up, get your produce and leave,” says HFFA manager Laticia Perkins. “There's music, people gathering, and conversation. They get to experience community. Let's talk about our lives and get to know each other and admire the beautiful bounty that comes right from where we are. Gaining this appreciation [for good food] while you're on the land and seeing how things are growing and then



WHO'S AT THE F2FA TABLE?

Healthy Food for All has an advisory board with designated seats for organizational partners (food access organizations), CSA shareholders (low-income families), and farmers. Outside of this formal structure is where much of the important information is gathered that shapes the programs. Three staff members, themselves local community members, regularly interact and build relationships with stakeholders at distribution sites and during on-farm events. Listening to, witnessing and engaging in conversation with the community and the farmers is a critical source of information to shape strategy and adjust practices, as is the feedback that is solicited intentionally from these same stakeholders.

you get to pick your own flowers. Choice! You see folks working on the farm and get to ask them questions and learn how to grow your own. The appreciation for your farmer and to see the land – it's almost as important as the delicious food itself. It's therapeutic. Folks that are in reentry [post-incarceration] tell us how this food is changing the way they're eating and the choices they're making overall. Diet isn't a magic pill but knowing that you're important enough and valued enough to have access to this food and experience – that is. You can't always photograph the value of this work. But when we're on the ground experiencing these moments, it's pretty magical."

The CSA model – both farmer-to-household and farmer-to-pantry – creates a reliable and dignified way for community members to access local fruits and vegetables grown mere miles from their home, year-after-year. By fairly compensating farmers for growing

fruits and vegetables for neighbors in need, and creating a direct market channel for low-income households to purchase subsidized shares, HFFA invests over \$200,000 every year in local organic and regenerative agriculture, in-turn bolstering farm viability and resilience, and increasing the region's capacity to sustainably grow good, clean nutritious food for the whole community.

By focusing on building community through food as a core strategy, HFFA creates opportunities for all community members to be nourished by the region's local bounty.



IN THEIR WORDS



KEY SUCCESSES

Operating as a fiscally sponsored project of the Center for Transformative Action, which has provided autonomy and flexibility for HFFA's programs

1500-2000 low income people receive local produce annually

200 households enrolled for CSA shares

500 households are served through the farm-to-pantry shares

Consistently contracting with 6-10 farms per season, supporting small-scale family-owned farms



KEY CHALLENGES

Securing resources and maintaining relationships with larger funders who require more paperwork. Need for sustainable funding streams/business models for F2FA (social ventures, food trucks, etc).

Understanding and building what it really takes to create a safe, inclusive community space for communities that have been marginalized. Need for trauma-informed, seasonal, multilingual cooking/nutrition materials that honor the dignity of participants.

All of the stakeholders that are co-developing our program are all stretched too thin and all are experiencing some form of labor exploitation. Need for more robust relationships and collaborations among people who have been excluded and disinvested in the local food system to shape F2FA expansion.



VALUES IN ACTION

HFFA's distribution partners are an urban Black community center, a rural food pantry, and community-based organizations serving vulnerable youth, formerly homeless teens, and people in re-entry. Each is located in an economically disenfranchised neighborhood and run by community leaders who have deep, ongoing relationships with community members, their farmers, and HFFA staff. They elicit candid input from eaters about their preferred produce, informing farmer planning about what to plant.

All partners stay in communication throughout the growing season and raise awareness in their networks about the program—particularly among unhoused/housing-insecure people, immigrants and households affected by incarceration.



LESSONS LEARNED

Prioritize building trusting relationships and partnerships through authentic human connections and clear and timely communication to promote a mutual understanding about how the programs are run; to manage expectations; and to balance the needs of the farmers, pantries, and the food insecure neighbors.

The Farm to Food Assistance Learning Lab was made possible through a 2021 USDA Local Foods Promotion Program (LFPP) grant, with supplemental support from The Rockefeller Foundation. This profile features one of ten participating teams who served as co-investigators in the Wallace Center's research on the field of Farm to Food Assistance.