Friendship Centers ‘Farm-to-Senior’ program a success

Friendship Centers of Emmet County (FCEC), Council on Aging, delivered 43,170 meals to 306 individuals throughout Emmet County and served 23,564 meals to hundreds of diners at the senior centers in 2014.

A ‘farm-to-senior’ pilot program to increase locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables in these meal programs has been deemed a success, according to registered nurse, Chris Scott, the project’s coordinator.

“The seniors who participate in the Meals on Wheels program or eat at our congregate meal sites in Petoskey, Brutus and Pellston have expressed much enthusiasm and support for the addition of locally grown produce to the menu. In addition, we are very pleased to support our local economy,” Scott said.

In January of 2014, FCEC hired a consultant with a grant from the Petoskey Harbor Springs Area Community Foundation to determine the feasibility of utilizing locally sourced produce in the Meals on Wheels and Congregate Meals programs.

A detailed Request for Information (RFI) was distributed through several organizations and contacts to local farmers to elicit interest in providing produce.

As a result, locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables were incorporated into the menus at the Friendship Centers last year. Numerous positive comments were made by those who have enjoyed the addition of locally grown produce to the menu. Survey results indicate that 95 percent of meal participants believe it is important or very important for FCEC to include food from local farms in their meals.

“The salad bar is wonderful. It’s great that local farmers help support the senior center,” said Lauren and Carolyn Keller.

Based on these positive results, FCEC is increasing its purchases of locally grown produce this year with the continued support of the Community Foundation as well as a donor advised fund at the Community Foundation.

“Farming is a valuable part of our culture and economy in this community,” said David Jones, executive director of the Community Foundation.

“We are so pleased to work with the Friendship Centers, a trusted, long-time partner, to learn what our community can do to provide seniors with fresh, local produce, while at the same time creating a new market for area growers and identifying practices that others could follow to replicate or expand these programs within our region.”
Council on Aging utilizes locally grown produce for meal programs

Don McPhee and daughter Sandy Steffel — "We love the salad bar, especially since some of the local farmers having been providing some of the vegetables. It helps keep us healthy."

Council on Aging of Emmet County, Council on Aging of Charlevoix County, Council on Aging of Cheboygan County and Council on Aging of Presque Isle County all formed a consultant with a grant from the Petoskey-Harbor Springs Area Community Foundation to determine feasibility of providing locally sourced produce in the Meals on Wheels and Congregate Meals programs. A detailed report was used through several focus groups to elicit interest in providing produce. As a result, locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables were incorporated into the menus at the Friendship Centers last year.

Numerous positive comments were made by those who have enjoyed the addition of locally grown produce into the diets of seniors.

"Promising is a valuable part of our culture and economy. In this community," said David Jones, executive director of the Community Foundation. "We are so pleased to work with the Friendship Centers to support a trusted, long-time partner, to learn what our seniors can do to provide seniors with more fresh, healthy food."

The initiative is part of an overall effort to promote local agriculture and to provide seniors with fresh, healthy food options. In January 2014, the agency officially announced its efforts to increase the availability of fresh, local products in their meal programs.