Reader-Supported News for Philipstown and Beacon

The HIGHLANDS Current

November 26, 2021

A New Orchestra
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An image from a video taken on Jan. 6 at the Capitol shows a man identified as Gregory R. Purdy Jr. pushing on a barricade erected by police.

Two Kent Men Arrested in Capitol Riot

Former Carmel school board candidate among accused

By Chip Rowe

Two residents of Kent, including one who was a candidate last year for the Carmel school board, were arrested on Nov. 10 and charged with federal crimes related to the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol.

Gregory R. Purdy Jr., 23, and Matthew Purdy, apparently brothers, surrendered to the FBI in New Windsor. A third man, Robert Turner, whom Purdy Jr. identified in an Instagram video as his uncle, was also charged. The criminal complaint was unsealed by a federal judge in Washington, D.C., on Nov. 12.

According to a LinkedIn profile, Purdy Jr. in 2016 managed a campaign by his father, Gregory Purdy-Schwartz, a Republican who hoped to unseat longtime state Assembly Member Sandy Galef, a Democrat whose district includes Philipstown and Kent. Galef won reelection that year with 65 percent of the vote.

Purdy-Schwartz, 50, who also resides in Kent, was recorded at the Capitol confronting police officers with his son, according to the FBI complaint, but has not been charged.

A 2016 Carmel High School graduate,

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HVSF Gets $2 Million State Grant

Also applies for 'special-events' permit for next two seasons

By Leonard Sparks

The Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival has been awarded a $2 million state grant for its planned new home at The Garrison in Philipstown after being named a "priority" project by the Mid-Hudson Regional Economic Development Council. The announcement was made Monday (Nov. 22).

At the same time, the festival has applied for a "special events" permit to stage its 2022 and 2023 seasons under a temporary tent at the former golf course. If the Town of Philipstown approves, HVSF plans to erect the tent used at its former home, Boscobel, on what used to be a tennis court and is now a gravel lot.

The grant for HVSF was part of $81 million awarded to 97 "shovel-ready" projects around the state through the annual Regional Economic Development Council initiative. The money is distributed by the Empire State Development Corp., which provides grants, loans and tax credits based on recommendations from 10 regional councils. There is still $150 million available.

The HVSF funds will come in the form of reimbursements for its project costs if it is approved by the town. Using an impact calculator created by the advocacy group Americans for the Arts, the festival projects it could double its annual local economic impact to $7.6 million by 2024. It said that would include adding nearly 50 new seasonal hires and five year-round administrative jobs.

"Support for the arts like this contributes to a more interconnected and resilient Hudson Valley, a community we're very proud to be a part of and to serve," said Davis McCallum, HVSF's artistic director, in a statement.

The Mid-Hudson Regional Economic Development Council represents Putnam, Dutchess and five other counties. HVSF was the only recipient in Putnam County; there were three in Dutchess, including one in Beacon (see Page 5).

HVSF said it hopes for construction of permanent structures to begin in Janu-

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HUNGER in the Highlands

First in a series

By Brian PJ Cronin

It's 8:15 a.m. on the Saturday before Thanksgiving, 15 minutes before the Philipstown Food Pantry at the First Presbyterian Church in Cold Spring opens, and the line at the front door is already more than a dozen people long, their breath sending up tiny clouds in the November chill.

During the week, the large room on the other side of the door serves as a nursery school. But every Friday at noon, volunteers begin to transform the space into what resembles an indoor market — only one in which no money will be exchanged.

Tables are set up, and non-perishable goods such as canned food and boxes of cereal are stacked. The next morning, refrigerated goods are pulled out of cold storage: milk, butter, eggs, but also, because it's Thanksgiving week, frozen turkeys and chickens. One table is laden with pies, courtesy of the Girl Scouts. Bread from Trader Joe's that's too close to its expiration date to sell is spread out on another table. And by the door is an assortment of fruits and vegetables that came from the Glynwood Center for Regional Food and Farming.

The early morning sunlight pours in from the expansive windows, casting a glow on the food that is minutes away from being distributed, giving the scene the air of a sacred ritual. Which, in a sense, it is.

"I do this because it's my Christian mission," says Amy Richter, a retired music teacher who has been volunteering here for four years. "Even though this isn't my church." There's a more secular reason as well for why she comes here every week. "I hate to see people go hungry," she says.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, which oversees federal food programs, has reported that more than 38 million Americans — 12 million of whom are children — are "food insecure," a term that refers to a lack of consistent access to food.

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How Much Do You Spend?

The United Way calculated in 2020 that a family of four, including two children in school, must earn $89,784 in Putnam County and $71,760 in Dutchess to survive with a bare minimum budget. To the right is the monthly food portion of that budget.

MONTHLY FOOD SURVIVAL BUDGETS

	SINGLE ADULT	SINGLE SENIOR	COUPLE	SENIOR COUPLE	COUPLE +2 CHILDREN
Putnam	$363	$309	$754	$643	$1,259
Dutchess	$305	$260	$634	$540	$1,058

Source: ALICE Household Survival Budget for New York, based on 2018 figures

Hunger *(from Page 1)*

Another term that comes up when speaking with people who address hunger is ALICE, an acronym that the United Way has popularized that stands for "Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed." About 1 in 3 residents of the Hudson Highlands falls into this category. These are working Americans living paycheck-to-paycheck, one hardship or disaster away from no longer being able to cover basic necessities such as food, perhaps just in the short-term, perhaps longer. Then came the worldwide disaster of COVID-19, and millions of Americans found themselves in line for free groceries or a meal at a soup kitchen.

At 8:30 a.m. on Saturday, the doors open at the Philipstown Food Pantry and three clients at a time are let in. They bring wheeled carts and reusable bags. Volunteers stand by to assist them with carrying their groceries. Another volunteer by the door asks if they would like a ham or turkey for Christmas, so the pantry can prepare. The people who come in are young and old, families with children, the disabled, the working poor.

The mood is anything but somber. Volunteers and clients greet each other, sometimes with hugs. They trade recipes, discuss the holidays, make plans for caroling together on Christmas Eve. One volunteer, standing behind the Glynwood table, explains what to do with some of the more unfamiliar ingredients.

"This is a carnival squash," she says, holding up a striped and spotted gourd. "You cook it just like you would an acorn squash." The clients need little convincing; every one of them loads up on the fruits and vegetables. As the stacks of non-perishable goods start to dwindle, volunteers rush to restock them with more food, so that every client who comes in is greeted with abundance.

An hour later, the clients are gone. More than 50 families have been fed, including homebound clients who received deliveries courtesy of the Lions Club. That's about twice as many people as the pantry was feeding before the pandemic began but down from its peak during the first few months in 2020 when more than 70 families were utilizing the service.

"We've just been pedaling, pedaling, pedaling, trying to keep up," says Carolyn Rapalje, another regular volunteer. "So far we've been OK."

She notes that in the past, donations and volunteers peaked around the holidays and tapered off the other 11 months. Since COVID-19, donations of time and money have been ample and consistent throughout the year. For now, the increase in demand has been met by an increase in aid, in everything from the federal level to funds raised by the Town of Philipstown to home gardeners dropping off their backyard bounty.

When I ask Richter and Rapalje what it would take to solve the problem of food insecurity on a larger scale, they look at each other and laugh. It's clear they've discussed this themselves many times.

Richter's belief is that programs like the Philipstown Food Pantry exist because of holes in the social safety net. Volunteers and nonprofits are stepping up to do work that, in her opinion, the government should be doing. She's seen the institutional failings that push people into food insecurity and the arms of the food pantry: Lack of health care, especially mental health care. Lack of paid maternity leave and child care.

"A minimum basic income, like they tried in Finland," would help, she said, referring to a recently completed two-year pilot program in which that country randomly selected 2,000 unemployed individuals and gave them a monthly payment of about $630 for the length of the program, payments that continued even after they found work.

Other European countries are now considering their own pilot programs and even Pope Francis suggested last year during his Easter address that "this may be the time to consider a universal basic wage."

Rapalje's solution is simpler. "For those who have to give to those who don't," she says. "It's the only way I can think of."

'An eye-opener'

In September, the USDA reported that the overall rate of food insecurity in 2020 remained the same as it was in 2019 because many Americans who needed emergency meal services in the wake of the pandemic were able to get help. That increased aid has not been equitable, however: Among single parents and Black Americans, food insecurity increased last year. (Locally, numbers on food insecurity are harder to quantify, outside of measures such as food pantry or soup kitchen activity, or the percentage of people estimated to be living on bare-minimum budgets.)

Part of the reason that the overall rate didn't grow more is that local groups stepped up their efforts and new initiatives formed in a flash. The lockdown of March 2020 was barely 24 hours old when Beacon Mutual Aid was created, and the group was soon handing out massive food donations in conjunction with the Beacon school district, Common Ground Farm in Wappingers Falls and Fareground in Beacon. In Philipstown, Supervisor Richard Shea was able to quickly raise $170,000 from two anonymous donors to fund emergency food efforts.

Those gifts "opened the spigots," he recalls, allowing the town to raise more than $600,000. Some of those funds went to support groups such as Second Chance Foods in Putnam County and the food insecurity initiatives of Lodger in Newburgh.

Another reason is that some of the many barriers that usually prevent or complicate those seeking aid from getting help were no longer an issue. There were no piles of paperwork, offices to navigate or a system that, as Karen George from Fareground says, "makes people feel ashamed." Instead, those who said they needed help were simply given food and money, instead of being made to prove they needed it.

"We wanted to make sure that there were no barriers and no source of potential for humiliation," said Shea. "This was about: If you're telling us you need help, then obviously you do need help and we're going to make sure you get it. And the best way to do that was to get gift cards so people can get what they want."

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A volunteer harvests tomatoes at the Second Chance Foods pantry garden.

Volunteers wash greens from the garden. *Photos by Lyna Skenkman*

Sorting groceries at Second Chance: Peak-condition items such as eggs, milk, steak and salmon are passed on whole, while items near their sell-by dates are made into meals. *Photo by Martha Elder*

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The majority of the money the town raised was used to purchase gift cards to Foodtown in Cold Spring and Key Food in Beacon in $100 denominations that were given out week-to-week. The grocery stores also donated cards.

"We had some people say, 'Well, you shouldn't be giving those out, people are going to just buy beer and cigarettes,' " Shea said. "And I said, 'Look, I'm going to trust people. You have to give people the benefit of the doubt.' I believe if you give people the opportunities, they'll take it and they'll lift themselves up. But you can't beat people down and put them at a disadvantage and then say: 'Why can't you do something about it yourself?' "

In the last 21 months, the Town of Philipstown has received hundreds of thank-you letters, cards and posters from gift-card recipients. Shea, who has been the supervisor for 14 years but did not run for reelection, called the work that the town is doing to address food insecurity during the pandemic the most gratifying he's done. "It's been an eye-opener," he said.

'We just choose not to'

Maggie Dickinson, a Beacon resident who is a professor at the City University of New York, says we may be living in a rare period of U.S. history in which we can make long overdue expansions to the social safety net.

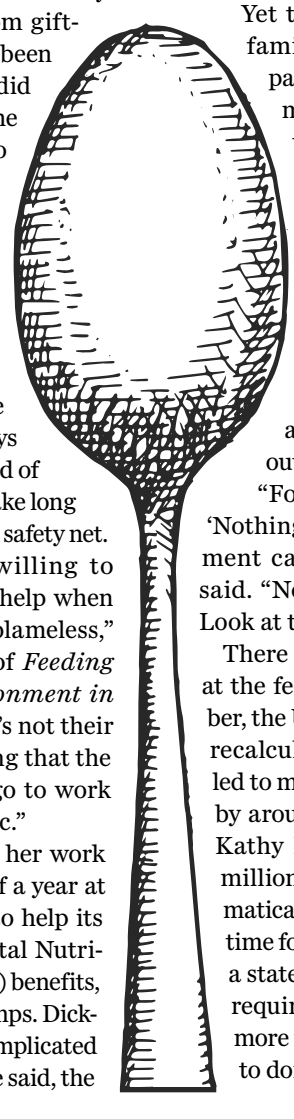
"People are often more willing to agree that other people need help when they can see other people as blameless," said Dickinson, the author of *Feeding the Crisis: Care and Abandonment in America's Food Safety Net*. "It's not their fault. There's an understanding that the reason that people couldn't go to work was because it was a pandemic."

Her 2019 book came out of her work volunteering over the course of a year at a food bank and attempting to help its clients get federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, colloquially known as food stamps. Dickinson learned firsthand how complicated the process can be, and how, she said, the system seemed to work against Black and Hispanic people and single parents.

"Why do we make it so hard?" she asked. "Why have we been discouraging, for 40 or 50 years, people from getting the benefits they need? There's lots of room for improvement [in the system], but it's also a political question."

By one estimate, around 40 percent of the food produced in America is wasted, thrown away or left to rot in the fields because it could not be harvested — all before it reaches a dinner table. Preventing just a fraction of that waste would be enough to feed every person in America who is food insecure, advocates say.

"It's not a matter of can we do this or can't we do this," says Dickinson. "We just choose not to."



Yet the emergency assistance that families have received during the pandemic, and the ease with which many were able to receive it, has the potential of changing the narrative. Dickinson pointed to the monthly Child Tax Credit payments that started showing up in most parents' bank accounts over the summer with little fanfare or fuss but that, according to researchers at Columbia University, have already lifted millions of children out of poverty.

"For so long, people have said, 'Nothing will ever change, the government can't do anything,'" Dickinson said. "Now we're like, 'Huh, they can! Look at that!' "

There have been other developments at the federal and state levels. In October, the U.S. government overhauled and recalculated the SNAP system, which led to many people's benefits increasing by around 21 percent. Last week, Gov. Kathy Hochul announced that $230 million in SNAP benefits would automatically be added to many accounts in time for Thanksgiving. And in January, a state law will go into effect that will require any institution that produces more than 2 tons of food waste a week to donate the excess if the food is still edible or send it to organic recycling facilities to be turned into compost. (Methane produced by food rotting in landfills is a leading contributor to climate change.)

Boxes of donated food are delivered to food pantries each week.

Advocates say the Highlands is in a unique position to address hunger because, while there is income inequality, it also has pockets of deep wealth and generosity. There's an enviable excess of volunteers and a high concentration of people who have been working in the food insecurity space for decades who, as the pandemic showed, know how to respond in times of crisis. When that infrastructure is not in place, it's evident: Kara Marie Dean-Assael of Beacon's Fareground says the organization found itself working in Wappingers Falls when the pandemic struck simply because no one there happened to be addressing hunger on a private or institutional level.

The Highlands is also well-positioned to fight hunger because it has long been part of a region that produces a vast agricultural bounty — local farmers are able to quickly provide food without getting bogged down by supply chain issues. Last week, Hochul announced that Nourish New York, a program introduced during the pandemic to purchase food from local farms for emergency feeding programs, would be made permanent.

Over the next few weeks, *The Current* will be taking a closer look at the people and the programs who are combating food insecurity and the once-in-a-generation opportunities that may lie ahead.

NEXT WEEK:

A second chance (in more ways than one)

HOW MANY ARE HUNGRY?

While statistics are hard to come by locally on who is suffering from food insecurity, estimates by the United Way give an idea of how many people are struggling.

Beacon (12508)

7,123 households

1,994 live paycheck-to-paycheck

784 live in poverty

39 percent below survival budget

Cold Spring/Philipstown (10516)

2,200 households

677 live paycheck-to-paycheck

79 live in poverty

35 percent below survival budget

Garrison (10524)

1,422 households

331 live paycheck-to-paycheck

41 live in poverty

26 percent below survival budget

A volunteer at Second Chance Foods portions out soup made of squash from Glynwood Farms. *Photo by John Kaprielian*

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A Shift in Thinking

Beacon schools embrace plan for 'culturally responsive education'

By Jeff Simms

One of the stories Jevon Hunter talks about in his workshops is the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

Signed into law by President Chester A. Arthur, the measure banned Chinese immigration after decades of animosity toward the newcomers, who had been arriving in the U.S. since the 1840s, particularly on the West Coast, providing low-cost manual labor.

The law wasn't repealed — and even then, a national quota of 105 Chinese immigrants per year remained — until 1943, when the U.S. and China became allies in World War II.

When teaching students about that period in history, Hunter, the chair for urban education at SUNY-Buffalo State, tells the public school officials who attend his workshops that it's critical to bring more than one perspective into the narrative. What stories that we tell reflect privilege, he asks? Which voices are left out?

Hunter

In an interview this week, Hunter said he encourages teachers to connect that time with current events by asking: Where do we see these kinds of acts still being created in society? When considering recent U.S. efforts to limit immigration, he noted, "we're really not too far from still doing it."

Culturally responsive education

Hunter, who has advised more than 25 districts and county Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) in the last six years, was in Beacon last month for two days of workshops as the city school district has begun Phase 1 of New York State's three-year plan to implement "culturally

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Last Meeting Before Cold Spring Change

Planning Board appointment causes a squabble

By Michael Turton

The appointment of Yaslyn Daniels to the Planning Board created some friction at the Tuesday (Nov. 30) meeting of the Cold Spring Village Board, which was the last for Mayor Dave Merandy and Trustees Marie Early and Fran Murphy before a new administration takes over next week.

The appointment was approved by a 4-0 vote, with Trustee Tweeps Phillips Woods, who defeated Daniels in the Nov. 2 election, abstaining. Woods had been appointed to the Village Board by Mayor Dave Merandy in May to fill a seat vacated by Heidi Bender. She defeated Daniels by a wide margin to be able to serve the second year of the 2-year term.

When Merandy asked Woods to explain her abstention, she replied, "I don't think it looks very good to do this in your last meeting."

Merandy, Early and Murphy will leave office on Monday (Dec. 6), when Kathleen Foley becomes mayor and Cathryn Fadde and Eliza Starbuck join the five-member board as trustees. Foley has said she will appoint Joe Curto to fill the trustee seat she vacates to become mayor. A ceremonial swearing-in will be held on Tuesday.

Daniels

Merandy and Early dropped out of the race in June after Foley became a candidate for mayor; Murphy did not seek re-election. Although he had appointed Woods, Merandy endorsed Daniels for the 1-year trustee position.

Woods asked Merandy facetiously if he recalled the recent election campaign. "It's just a little dicey for me," she said of the proposal to appoint Daniels, adding that, depending on how she voted, "it looks like pity." She wished Daniels luck with her appointment.

Merandy responded that "this is what I figured would happen" and said Daniels' appointment reminded him of the outrage over President Barack Obama being blocked from appointing Merrick Garland to the U.S. Supreme Court.

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HUNGER in the Highlands

Second in a series

By Brian PJ Cronin

It's Friday at Second Chance Foods, which operates out of the Community of the Holy Spirit in Brewster. Friday means cooking. A dozen volunteers are breaking down winter squash and chopping alliums. A fleet of Instant Pots bubble away, and every once in a while a volunteer lets off steam from a massive pressure cooker.

Half of the gymnasium next to the kitchen is filled with boxes, being packed with meals that have been cooked in the kitchen, as well as fresh produce from local farms and food donated by grocery stores.

It's not busy, though. You don't know busy.

"You should have been here Tuesday," says Rich Winters, treasurer of the board at Second Chance Foods and chief dishwasher. "On Tuesdays, all of us leave here and we can't move. It's nonstop."

Second Chance Foods isn't exactly a food pantry. It's not quite a soup kitchen, either.

"We call ourselves a food rescue," says Martha Elder, its executive director.

The organization was founded in 2015 after Alison Jolicoeur, who lives in Beacon, learned that 40 percent of the food grown or produced in the U.S. ends up in the garbage. Diverting just a fraction of that food could end food insecurity in the country, but as Jolicoeur and friends who helped her found the nonprofit soon realized, there were pragmatic challenges to distributing food — such as getting excess tomatoes into the hands of the hungry before the vegetables rot.

"We realized that if we could cook some of this food, we could greatly extend the shelf life," says Elder, who is the only full-time employee. There is also a part-time employee, but Second Chance is powered by about 50 volunteers who cook, garden, pick up grocery store stock that is close to its sales expiration date, harvest excess produce and pack meal kits.

The organization started out

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Hunger *(from Page 1)*

cooking 10 months of the year (closing in the depths of winter), but new sources of donations kept being discovered, so it switched to cooking once a week year-round. Then the pandemic hit and it moved to twice a week (Tuesdays and Fridays), cooking and freezing meals to be delivered to soup kitchens and food pantries.

Elder says she usually doesn't know what donations are going to come in until the day before, if that. "I can't make a plan a week in advance, because somebody might tell me 'I've got a couple of hundred pounds of cheese pumpkins,' " she explains, standing by a table laden with a couple of hundred pounds of cheese pumpkins. "So we're going to make a lasagna that has a layer of that, we're going to make a curry that uses that, we're making a soup that's got that, and it's all going to a soup kitchen in Newburgh."

There's a recipe on the wall from The Food Network for roasted butternut squash lasagna that feeds eight. "We're cooking for 180 people today," says Elder, so all the quantities have been multiplied: 30 sliced onions, 15 quarts of squash or pumpkin, a whole cup of freshly chopped sage.

Most of the recipes come from *Cook's Illustrated* or *The New York Times* because Elder knows those recipes have been tested, will work, and, most importantly, will taste good.

"The only nourishing food is the food you actually eat," she says.

Volunteers in the kitchen at Second Chance Foods *Photos by B. Cronin*

Second Chance Foods is a "food rescue" but also considers itself a health care organization. "Poor diet is the No. 1 killer of Americans," says Elder, citing the combined effects of heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure. "We could save so much money and so many lives just by helping people to eat better."

Numerous studies have shown the amplifying effects of a nutritious diet, including improved concentration, emotional health and — especially important during a global pandemic — a strong immune system. Unlike members of the middle and upper classes, Americans who have food and income insecurities are pushed to their physical and emotional limits every day, trying to survive, advocates say. And fresh produce or healthy meals is typically not what they find at a food bank.

"You know when you go to the grocery store, and there's a bag there, and the sign says, 'Give us $10 and we'll give this bag to someone?'" says Winters. "It's junk in that bag."

Elder and Winter believe that giving someone a healthy meal provides them with two things that many emergency feeding systems don't: Nutrition, and dignity.

Rich Winters with Second Chance Foods' new refrigerated trailer

'It was a relief'

"There's an ignorance that those who have toward those who have not," says Cate Maher, who lives in Garrison and once relied on Second Chance Food. She says she too often hears the accusation that someone has food insecurities because they're "not working hard enough."

Maher was once a stay-at-home mom, married with two young children. When her marriage suddenly ended, she became a single unemployed mom with two young children. She needed work, but her kids needed her.

"For their emotional stability, they needed to have their mom close by," she says. Maher was able to find a job with flexible hours and an employer who understood the schedule that a single working mom sometimes needs.

"What comes along with that is not a high salary," she says. "I needed to do what I needed to do." She signed up for Medicaid and started picking up food from a pantry in Brewster. That was where she discovered Second Chance.

She says that "we felt like we won the lottery: To look through the bag and see that this week we got stuff from Second Chance, to know that it was prepared with love and with care and with consideration for the families that they're feeding. It felt like a holiday meal."

Maher credits Second Chance Foods with helping her put healthy, restorative food on the table and survive a difficult time of her life, while working toward financial independence. She no longer needs to pick up food from pantries, but still fondly recalls the meals that Second Chance gave her: The white chicken chili, the chowder, the quarts of marinara sauce that she used to turn into several meals.

"They took a lot of the pressure off me on those days when I didn't know what I was going to do and what I was going to pull together that my kids would eat and enjoy," she says. "It was a relief."

Maher's job keeps her too busy to volunteer with Second Chance Foods, but she did find a way to give back. A few weeks ago, she donated a pressure cooker and an Instant Pot. She delivered them personally to Community of the Holy Spirit so she could meet Elder and the volunteers for the first time and thank them in person.

It also showed Maher what Elder and Winter will tell anyone who will listen: They could do so much more.

"They are willing and they have the desire and the drive," says Maher. "But they've outgrown that space."

A refrigerated trailer donated by the Rotary Club of Southeast has helped, but there's not enough space to accept all the donations that are offered, and not enough room for all of the volunteers who want to help. Elder says they often have to leave food in the fields because they don't have capacity.

"There seems to be no limit to people's generosity when it comes to the produce and the food and the chickens and the groceries," says Winter, standing in front of a closet with an air conditioner that runs 24/7 to create an ad hoc fridge. They've run

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more power lines and outlets to the kitchen and redesigned whatever that can for maximum efficiency.

"I don't want to sound corny, but this is God's work," says Winter. "You feed people. No ifs, ands or buts."

Take what you need

Advocates say that the main reason that food insecurity has, as a whole, remained steady despite more people being in need during the pandemic is that many of the usual barriers that prevent people from accessing food have fallen away. Instead of the usual paperwork and scrutiny, people are simply being fed. No ifs, ands or buts.

That's in sharp contrast to the way things usually run. Karen George and Kara Marie Dean-Assael, the founders of Fareground in Beacon, say they have found it easier to acquire food to distribute in Beacon, Wappingers Falls and Newburgh over the past 18 months. But in order to continue to receive food post-pandemic from some of the regional food banks, they first have to prove that the people receiving their donations qualify to get them.

"Isn't people showing up enough?" asks Dean-Assael. "Do you know how many people cry when they get food from us, saying, 'Thank you so much, you have no idea?' "

George and Dean-Assael have heard from the people they help about the difficulty of navigating the system to get benefits, a system they say is unnecessarily punishing.

"They don't know how to do it, they don't understand how to do it, and so they don't do it," says George. "They feel like they're being made to stay where they are instead of being able to get up and get out."

Fareground's focus has evolved over its seven years of existence. It has been giving food away during the pandemic but also working on the larger issue of destigmatizing hunger, of finding ways to help people who have been made ashamed to ask for help. "We have run into young moms who have kids who will not go to a food pantry because they feel like they're being judged, or they're embarrassed," says George.

Hence, the Tiny Food Pantries.

There are four of them across Beacon that Fareground operates: one in front of Binnacle Books, one inside the Howland Library, one in front of the Recreation Center and one in Tompkins Terrace. There are also two community fridges, one behind Binnacle Books and one at the Recreation Center.

The premise is simple: Take what you need, leave what you can. Fareground stocks the pantries with food, but anyone who wishes to donate, even if it's just a can of soup, can deposit it in the pantry or fridge. The pantries remove barriers for those who need food, but also for those who want to help. Soup kitchens and food pantries are only open at certain times, which might conflict with a job.

"If there's a stigma attached to you needing help, you can sort of do it on the down low," says George.

Adds Dean-Assael: "People don't know if I'm going to pick up food or drop off food. There's a little anonymity and it doesn't matter."

Kara Dean-Assael and Karen George of Fareground *Photo by Dylan Assael*

Donated fruits and vegetables at Fareground *Fareground*

When the group was first setting up the pantries, a criticism they heard was that one person could empty it out. The Fareground response is that if someone is taking all of the food, that's fine because it means they need it. They have, however, added signs with contact information for people who need more food than what's there, so Fareground can help.

The only time George ran into this problem — a woman at the Recreation Center was taking the food as she was stocking it — George found she was delivering to homebound seniors at Tompkins Terrace. "I told her that's fabulous," said George. "You're helping us help them." She now arranges larger drop-offs.

Fareground's original mission was to create a "community kitchen": A pay-what-you-can-if-you-can feeding space within Beacon that would feed the food-insecure, the time-crunched or anyone who wants a meal with their community. That would also remove a lot of the barriers and stigmas attached to food insecurity, says Maggie Dickinson, a Beacon resident and author of *Feeding the Crisis: Care and Abandonment in America's Food Safety Net*.

Fareground installed a Tiny Food Pantry outside the Beacon Recreation Center in 2017. *File photo by B. Cronin*

Finding steady funding for such programs is difficult, but Dickinson says that this is where local communities can make a difference. She points out that we feed kids in school and seniors at senior centers for free or at low cost but don't do this for the general population.

"There are lots of things that cities and towns could do that they don't see as their role but which would make a huge impact," she says. "Who's thinking about food at the local level? There's nobody in city government whose job it is, whose portfolio that is. We leave it all to 'the market.' Food is fundamental to how we all live and there's an awful lot more we could do if we were paying attention at the local level. But we typically don't."

NEXT WEEK: ***Counties step up***

For Part 1, see highlandscurrent.org/hunger.

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Familiar Faces
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Sean Barton and Josh Maddocks operate Cockburn Farm in Garrison, where customers cut their own trees. *Photo by J. Asher*

What? No Christmas Trees?

Fires, drought and snafus tighten supply

By Joey Asher

The pandemic, drought, forest fires and a supply chain mix-up have thrown the Christmas tree business into turmoil this year in the Highlands. Prices are up. In some cases, supply is down.

For the first time in 50 years, the Beacon Engine Co. No. 1 at 57 E. Main St. had no trees to sell for its annual fundraiser, said Frank Merritt, the president of the company. The cause was a supply-chain mishap with the supplier in Vermont. "He didn't have enough trucks to make deliveries," Merritt said.

At Vera's Marketplace and Garden Center on Route 9 in Philipstown, co-owner Dominic Giordano said on Thursday (Dec. 9) that he received only 270 trees this year,

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GIVING SEASON — Man's best friend gets in position for a nibble at the Cold Spring waterfront on Dec. 4 while waiting with a crowd of revelers for Santa to arrive on a Cold Spring Fire Co. truck. Hudson House provided the treats. For more photos, see Page 21. *Photo by Michael Turton*

HUNGER in the Highlands

Third in a series

By Brian PJ Cronin

One of the most significant recent achievements to address food insecurity in the Hudson Valley is something that, on its surface, has nothing to do with food.

Last month, Poughkeepsie became the fourth New York municipality to pass a "good-cause eviction" law, which limits the amount that landlords can increase rent and stipulates that they must have a good cause for evicting tenants. Beacon is weighing whether to pass similar legislation.

What does that have to do with hunger? Everything, says Sarah Salem, who was elected on Nov. 2 to a third term on the Poughkeepsie Common Council and works for Dutchess Outreach, an organization that has been fighting food insecurity for nearly 50 years.

"This was something that our constituents told us they needed," Salem said the day after the legislation was passed. "And we were able to give it to them. Those constituents are our clients at Dutchess Outreach. They said last night how great our food pantry was, and how it helps them achieve a sense of financial stability, but they need to be protected in their homes."

It is hard to discuss food insecurity without examining what's driving people to food banks and soup kitchens in the first place.

The reasons are vast: Growing economic inequality, stagnant wages, gentrification, rising health care and housing costs are the most obvious. Maggie Dickinson, who lives in Beacon and is the author of *Feeding the Crisis: Care and Abandonment in America's Food Safety Net,* argues that welfare, the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (food stamps) and other government programs have been modified to be less about ending hunger and more about subsidizing low-wage workers.

"During welfare reform in the 1990s, there was this line that everybody used which was 'A job was your path out of

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Hunger *(from Page 1)*

poverty,' " she says. "The policy goal was to get women off welfare and into a job so that they would no longer be poor. What happened was that millions of women got pushed off the welfare rolls and they were still poor.

"Food stamps were seen as one of these ways to subsidize low wages without actually doing anything to challenge employers' bottom lines," she says. "Walmart could still pay you next to nothing, but you could get food stamps and the Earned Income Tax Credit to make ends meet. Wages have stagnated so much over the past 40 years. If the minimum wage was the same as it was in 1968, and inflation-adjusted, it would be around $24 an hour. We're still trying to get $15 an hour passed."

There's space for food-insecurity programs to get involved in addressing long-term economic problems, such as Dutchess Outreach advocating good-cause eviction laws or, in Texas, the San Antonio Food Bank building an affordable, transitional housing unit with child care next to one of its distribution centers.

But for the immediate problem — making sure no one goes to bed hungry — the COVID-19 pandemic is providing the funding and momentum to change how the issue is addressed.

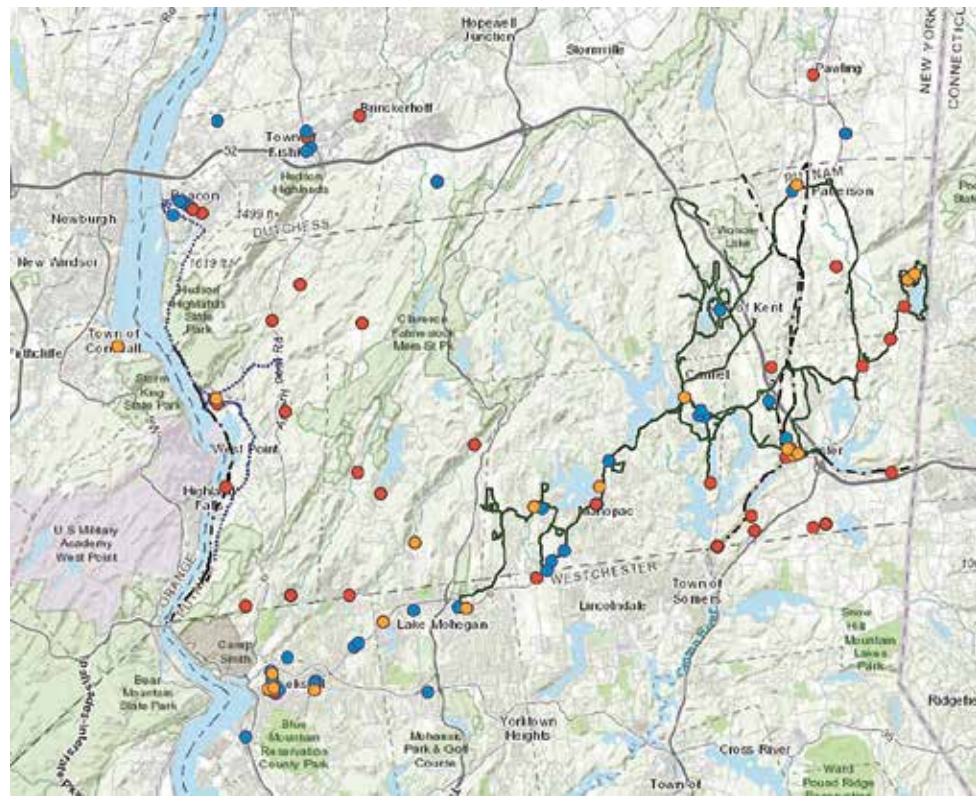
One of the allowable uses for funds from the $1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act passed by Congress earlier this year is addressing food insecurity. And nonprofits are questioning the necessity of barriers that in the past have prevented people from getting help, such as paperwork and income verification.

Over the past 18 months, volunteers and private funding have stepped up in the Highlands in such ventures as the formation of Beacon Mutual Aid and the $600,000 that the Town of Philipstown raised to buy grocery gift cards and fund emergency feeding programs.

With that in mind, in October the Philipstown Town Board considered what level of food insecurity would be acceptable.

"In a town like Philipstown, with our resources, we should have a goal of zero percent food insecurity," says Jason Angell, a Garrison farmer who joined the board this year. "That's doable."

Jason Angell, a farmer who serves on the Philipstown Town Board, says zero hunger locally is "doable." *Photo provided*



This food access map, created by the Putnam County Food Systems Coalition, shows the challenge that lack of transportation can create when obtaining food. The blue dots represent stores that accept food stamps; the orange dots are pantries and other emergency providers. The green and dotted blue lines are county bus or trolley routes.

Mapping inequality

It takes more than a bag of groceries or a box of produce to address food insecurity. It also takes data. If you're setting a goal of zero hunger, you have to first figure out how many people are hungry.

Much of Angell's work with Long Haul Farm, which he owns with his wife, Jocelyn Apicello, has involved addressing food insecurity in what are traditionally thought of as the areas that suffer from it: Poor, urban neighborhoods in Newburgh, Peekskill and Poughkeepsie.

But when the number of families that the Philipstown Food Pantry was serving tripled in the pandemic's early months, he says his field of vision expanded. "Did that reveal a spike in food insecurity due to COVID-19, or did it show chronic food insecurity in some way that had not been revealed?" he asked.

Those questions led him to the newly formed Putnam County Food Systems Coalition, who was crunching numbers and interviewing residents in a search for answers. The coalition — whose members include the county Department of Health, Second Chance Foods, the Glynwood Center for Regional Food and Farming and Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) of Putnam County — recently published a food systems map based on its research (see bit.ly/putnam-map).

As Jen Lerner of CCE Putnam explained, 5 percent of residents in Putnam County live at or below the poverty line, compared to 13 percent nationwide. "That would say to you, 'Oh, it's not a problem here,' " she says. "But then you start looking at the comparison of the cost of living."

According to the data, Putnam has the highest cost of living of any county in the state and the second-highest average cost per meal, behind Manhattan.

That leads to another stat known as ALICE. Developed by the United Way, it's an acronym for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. These are the working poor, who make too much to qualify for food stamps or other government assistance but have trouble making basic ends meet. Nearly 30 percent of Putnam households meet that criteria, or about 1,000 households in Philipstown.

"They're making decisions between paying bills and buying food," Lerner says.

But are they food insecure? Angell says it's best to think of ALICE households as intermittently food insecure as opposed to chronically hungry, because they may be able to afford enough groceries one month but not the next.

Working off the calculation that a third of ALICE households are food insecure at any given time — "That's just an assumption because our data has limits," allows Angell — and that 120 households in Philipstown are at or below the poverty line, leads to the rough estimate of 450 food-insecure households.

Based on the number of households being served by the Philipstown Food Pantry and the county senior center, about 25 percent of the food-insecure households in Philipstown are being fed. So what would it take to feed the other 75 percent?

Lerner says that while insufficient income is the leading cause of food insecurity in Putnam, lack of transportation is the second.

"Having reliable transportation is a great cost, between insurance, upkeep, car payments," she says. "So people are dependent on public transportation, but there's a lot of anxiety."

If it takes an hour to get back home from the grocery store by bus, people will think twice about buying fresh produce, dairy or anything else that needs to be refrigerated for fear that it will spoil on the journey.

Another piece of the puzzle is that farmers in Putnam have the capacity to donate more

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food to Philipstown than they already do, but there's nowhere to store it. Vendors at the Cold Spring Farmers Market have expressed an eagerness to give food leftover at the end of the Saturday market to the Philipstown Food Pantry, but the pantry is closed for the week by the time the market closes, and doesn't have enough refrigeration to accept it anyway.

The answer appears to be a refrigerated truck or van that can pick up produce, dairy and meat donations, store them safely and deliver them to families with transportation problems. The necessity of Second Chance Foods, which transforms excess produce into freezable meals, becomes clearer when considering the food map.

"Much as I like to think, as a farmer, that just giving people bunches of kale and collard greens is going to solve their issues, a lot of people need food that they can consume right away," says Angell. "They may be homebound elders who can't turn a bunch of kohlrabi into an immediately nutritious meal. So we source the surplus food, have a place to store it until it can either be distributed or turned into easily consumable foods like Second Chance Foods does, and then bring it to places that we've identified as having food insecurity needs."

As a model, Angell points to the Westchester Food Bank's mobile food pantry, which lays its wares out like a farmers market but gives away the food to anyone who comes by. "They don't ask for income data," says Angell. "They're trying to not stigmatize the fact that people need food, especially when there's a growing number of people in economic crisis."

"What it keeps coming down to is: storage and distribution," says Lerner. "You talk to everybody who works in food insecurity and the question is: How can we store it in a way that we can distribute when it's needed, when it all comes in at once?"

Angell and Lerner are working on a proposal to present to the Philipstown Town Board on how to use some of $700,000 it expects to receive through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to address local hunger.

Part of the proposal will probably involve a mobile refrigerated unit, as well as more refrigerated sites to handle excess produce donations and allow food pantries to have more stock on hand. But part will include human infrastructure: someone to oversee it all.

Most food insecurity groups start out as volunteer networks and quickly run out of capacity because no one has time to expand the organization. Second Chance Foods hired an executive director a few years ago, and Fareground in Beacon recently did the same after operating on volunteer power for six years.

Angell hopes that a part-time coordinator, paid in part or entirely with ARPA money, could oversee senior care and food insecurity while also identifying other sources of funding for the position, as happened with the nonprofit Philipstown Behavioral Health Hub, which provides mental health services. As he sees it, nonprofits, religious groups and local governments have to team up to tackle hunger, or no one else will.

"Who has the incentive to take the food from that waste stream and refrigerate it and turn it into usable food items that can be consumed easily by the general American public and distribute it?" he asks. "I don't see how the capitalist market moves into that space and finds a way to profit by giving food away."

Dutchess Outreach board members serve lunch. *Photos by Sean Hemmerle*

Dutchess Outreach

A lot has changed in the 47 years that Dutchess Outreach, based in Poughkeepsie, has been fighting hunger. Initially, as with most food pantries, it handed out food based on a model provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture: bags with protein such as beans, a dairy item, a fat, canned vegetables and canned fruits.

"That's not according to dietary guidelines, and it wasn't according to cultural preferences," says Sarah Salem. The stereotypical view of "beggars can't be choosers" sometimes persists when it comes to routing donations to food banks, resulting in donations that don't take into account the health of the person receiving the food, or even what they will eat.

Dickinson, the author of *Feeding the Crisis*, spent the early months of the pandemic assisting a group that was handing out donated food in Manhattan's Chinatown. One of the donated foods the volunteers kept receiving was cheese.

The members of the largely immigrant population who needed food told the volunteers that "this is not something we ever consume." Says Dickinson: "Honestly, they're kind of grossed out by it. It's really culturally inappropriate."

For Salem, the proof that the old model wasn't working was in the streets. After handing out food, volunteers would find discarded cans on the ground outside. "We were contributing to waste," Salem says. "We've switched to the 'choice' model."

Sarah Salem of Dutchess Outreach

Today, clients at Dutchess Outreach grab a shopping cart and take what they want from food that has been laid out. Salem says that since the model was adopted, the organization is giving away less food because people are only taking what they know they're going to eat. The model is also in use at the Philipstown Food Pantry — volunteer Amy Richter refers to it as "shopping."

As in Cold Spring and elsewhere, Dutchess Outreach asks for little information from clients, who expressed fear of visiting after the Trump Administration in 2019 revealed a proposal to deny green cards and citizenship to immigrants who legally availed themselves of public services such as food stamps.

"We do need to collect some data for grants and reporting purposes, but we don't need that much, and we definitely don't need to stop someone and get an entire analysis of their financial history or their background," Salem says. "We want to make it as easy and shameless as possible."

Salem also helped found the Hudson Valley Food Systems Coalition, a working group of farmers, food producers, legislators, health officials and culinary professionals hoping to figure out how to address local hunger.

Dickinson says that's a good instinct, citing Nourish New York, a recently passed law in which the state pays farmers and food producers to supply food to food pantries and other emergency food providers.

That type of program "strengthens the connection between people who need food, and people who are growing food but are doing it with a lot of risk and a lot of economic challenge," she explains. "Rebuilding food systems may not seem like an obvious solution, but it's an important piece."

Not every service that Dutchess Outreach offers is free. It also runs a farmers market where the produce and other items are about half the typical cost.

"It gives people the opportunity to test at the level they're able to purchase food and build a more sustainable food system for themselves but also — and this is key — feel like they're participating in the local food movement," says Salem. "They feel like they have a seat at the table."

NEXT WEEK: ***Feeding the hungry is an agricultural act***

For Parts 1 and 2, see highlandscurrent.org/hunger.

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The Highlands Current

Comic Inspiration Page 13

December 17, 2021

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Diane Lapis, the president of the Beacon Historical Society, shows off a recently donated 19th-century painting of Fishkill Creek by Ella Ferris Pell. *Photo by Ross Corsair*

Beacon History Makes Move

Society relocates from one former rectory to another

By Alison Rooney

Just like the city it documents, the Beacon Historical Society is on the move.

The latter began its life during America's bicentennial in 1976 at the Howland Public Library, before spending 20 years packed into a 225-square-foot room at the Howland Cultural Center. It has always needed more space to house an extensive collection, ranging from maps, documents and postcards to school desks, artworks and products produced during the city's industrial heyday.

In 2017, after a search which took years, the BHS found some breathing room on South Avenue, moving into the 2,000-square-foot former rectory of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church.

Moving again was not in the society's immediate plans but, out of the blue, the nonprofit's board was approached by the Franciscan brothers, who were leaving their rectory next to St. Joachim's Church at 61 Leonard St., off the east end of Main Street near The Roundhouse.

"The church invited us to consider moving here with a great offer" for a 10-year lease, says Diane Lapis, the society's president. "Now we have 12 rooms: seven

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Dutchess, Putnam Will Not Enforce Mask Mandate

Serino also criticizes state order as COVID-19 cases rise

By Leonard Sparks

The executives for Dutchess and Putnam say they will not enforce the state's new indoor mask mandate for businesses as both counties face a surge in COVID-19 infections and deaths that has been worsening since August.

Putnam County Executive MaryEllen Odell, a Republican, issued a statement on Monday (Dec. 13), the first day businesses and venues had to require masks indoors for staff and patrons unless they verify that everyone entering is fully vaccinated. The state is directing local health departments to enforce the order, which includes fines of up to $1,000 for each violation a business incurs.

Odell said businesses cannot be expected "to implement this unrealistic order" and that Putnam's Health Department is "working overtime" to vaccinate residents while preparing to open a six-day-a-week testing center at the county's office complex in

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HUNGER in the Highlands

Last in a series

By Brian PJ Cronin

It started as a lark.

Peter Davoren liked antique tractors, but once he got his hands on one, he realized that he might as well use it. Soon he was cutting hay around Philipstown, restoring friends' fields, feeding their livestock. "It was just for fun," says Stacey Farley, his wife. They transitioned from feeding animals to feeding people, and Davoren Farm was born.

Davoren and Farley farmed around Philipstown, growing vegetables, putting their children — and then their children's friends — to work. Members of the Philipstown Garden Club volunteered. The couple leased 10 acres in Garrison across Route 9D from Boscobel and built a barn. They began selling to restaurants and set up a pop-up stand that attracted loyal customers. Davoren continued to work full-time in construction, and Farley in the art world. They still do. "We all have other jobs," says Farley, who also serves on an advisory board for this newspaper.

Then came March 2020, and it wasn't a lark anymore.

"The whole world changed," says Farley. "So we shifted."

Although Davoren Farm does not operate as a nonprofit (Farley jokes that it's a "not for-profit"), when the pandemic shutdown began, its co-owners decided they would give away their harvest.

Nearly two years later, that continues. Most of the food is donated to Fareground in Beacon and Fred's Pantry in Peekskill, two organizations fighting food insecurity. The remainder is sold at the farm stand, with the proceeds given to the Philipstown Food Pantry and the town's food assistance program. The food they sold to restaurants is now donated to restaurants. "They're hurting just as much, just in a different way," says Farley.

"We see it as a form of mutual aid," explains Lukas Lahey, the farm's one full-time employee, who was hired shortly before the pandemic shut-

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down.

It is difficult to think of something that has killed 800,000 Americans and counting as having a silver lining. But in the early months of the pandemic, Americans were united in their desire to help those who were suffering.

"We've seen with COVID a lot of the underlying [societal] problems bubbling to the surface," says Lahey. "Now we're facing them and needing to do something about them."

As the lines at food banks swelled, the way that the U.S. addresses hunger, or "food insecurity," was reconsidered. What if it wasn't so hard to get help? What if people were given fresh and healthy food instead of junk that contributes to chronic health issues?

For those already working in food insecurity, it was a validation of what they've been saying for years. But for those who were new to it, it was an eye-opener. What could survive the pandemic is a new approach to feeding the hungry.

"The need isn't going away," Farley says as we walk through the farm fields on a warm December day. "It's been hiding in plain sight. But we are committed to this for the foreseeable future."

Lukas Lahey and Stacey Farley of Davoren Farm *Photo by B. Cronin*

Feeding the hungry is an agricultural act

From Route 9D, the fields appear to be bare. But up close, you can see the stubby cover crops that were planted in the fall, after the harvest.

These crops will help aerate the soil and restore nutrients until the winter fells them, Lahey explains. In the spring, they'll be tilled into the ground to regenerate the soil. Instead of planting one cover crop, the farm is experimenting with mingling several of them. "There's things that the plants are doing together that you might not take into account," he explains. "But the sum is greater than the parts."

In the panic of the pandemic's early days, Maggie Cheney of Rock Steady Farm in Millerton saw other farmers attempting to fundraise, get food to those in their communities who were being impacted, and continue to farm, all at the same time. Behind the goodwill, "there was a lot of chaos and confusion," she recalls.

Founded in 2015, Rock Steady is a for-profit farm with a 500-member Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. But by partnering with the nonprofit Watershed Center, it also can fundraise to address food insecurity and social justice issues. With the Glynwood Center for Regional Food and Farming in Philipstown and other local farmers, Cheney helped create what became the Food Sovereignty Fund.

The idea was to allow farmers to support their communities without having to become a nonprofit or spend more time fundraising than farming. The fund pays farmers to grow produce that is donated to food pantries and organizations that distribute it to those in need. In a similar initiative, Common Ground Farm in Wappingers receives a grant each year from Community Foundations of the Hudson Valley that allows it to donate half of its harvest. And last month, Gov. Kathy Hochul enacted a law to cement into place Nourish New York, which had been created during the pandemic to pay farmers to grow food that is donated.

However, Common Ground Farm is a nonprofit, and Nourish New York is mostly designed for larger farms. The hope is the Food Sovereignty Fund will fill in the gaps to include smaller, for-profit farms.

The fund recruits farmers who identify with communities that have historically been discouraged from farming or disproportionately affected by hunger, such as those who are minorities, gay or female.

Select farmers are matched with a project in their community that addresses food insecurity and paid to grow food across the seasons. The farms also receive support and technical assistance from Glynwood.

"The long-term goal is that we'll have regional hubs that can overlap and work together to move food effectively around when there are changes in the year or changes in production, instead of the centralized system that failed us during the pandemic," explains Megan Larmer, who coordinates the program for Glynwood. "We want to get people to see this as a thing that farmers ought to be paid for, and eaters have a right to the food that they're able to produce.

"If the people of Putnam and Dutchess counties got to choose who got to eat the beautiful food that our farmers grow, it wouldn't only be the wealthiest among us."

The fund also hopes to improve the nutritional value of the food that is distributed so it will "keep them well enough to participate in life fully," Larmer says. "You look at the chronic-disease charts for the people who have to rely on emergency feeding systems over years, and for children, and they're devastating."

Much of the food supplied to emergency feeding programs across the country is donated by grocery manufacturers as tax write-offs, Larmer says. Creating that excess processed food is a waste, including of the petroleum it takes to deliver it. "If we can end the reliance on that donation chain, then it's no longer good business [for corporations], and we give the advantage to the types of food that we actually want to see in the world," she says.

Cheney says the pandemic brought the problem of food insecurity to light to the public. "People seeing lines at food pantries had a huge impact in terms of their generosity," Cheney says. "People start to connect the dots, especially in polarized communities such as the Hudson Valley and New York City where there's incredible wealth gaps and people don't actually realize how food insecure many people are, including people living right next door."

'There's a lot we can do now'

The cover crop has already started to die back at Common Ground Farm, but the red Russian kale is hanging on thanks to an unusually warm December.

Katie Speicher, who just finished her first season as farm manager, points out which fields in the crop rotation are slated to lay fallow next year in order to give the soil a chance to recover.

"We've got great soil for farming," she says, "It's all a sandy loam so it's got excellent drainage, which is what you want, especially in a year like this." Even with the torrential rains that slammed the Hudson Valley this past year, and being farmed productively for 20 years, the soil continues to provide.

When Common Ground started in 2001, it was a trailblazer. Along with the Poughkeepsie Farm Project and the Phillies Bridge Farm Project in Gardiner, it introduced the Hudson Valley to the idea of the CSA, which had originated in the early 1980s when Booker Whatley, a professor of agriculture at Tuskegee University, thought it could keep Black farmers from losing their livelihoods.

Whatley argued that small farms could be made more profitable if they offered memberships: People ("city folks, mostly," he said at the time) would pay a fee at the beginning of a growing season in exchange for a share of the bounty.

Twenty years after Common Ground began, there are more than 110 CSAs in the Hudson Valley. But for Common Ground, it was a lot of work — work that took away from other areas of focus. The farm's mission had been "to preserve the heritage of farming in the Hudson Valley," explains Sember Weinman, its executive director. But over its first 10 years, Common Ground came to realize that what was becoming known as the "food movement" — a push for more local, sustainable agriculture — was not worth much if only the wealthy could afford it.

"There are two food systems," says Larmer at Glynwood. "The one you can afford to pay for, and the one you just have to take if you're facing any kind of challenges in your life. There needs to be just one food system."

When Hurricane Irene hit in 2011, Common Ground was able to raise funds to recover. For-profit farms had it harder. That prompted Common Ground to reconsider its CSA, concluding it was "competing with the people we want to help: other farms."

It began blazing a new trail. The CSA was sent to Obercreek Farm, a new, for-profit operation 4 miles down the road. "The CSA was taking up all of our resources," said Weinman. "Pulling that out, we were like, 'Wow, there's a lot we can do now.'"

Thanks to the grant that allows them to donate half of their produce, the farm contributes to eight feeding programs. Working with Karen Pagano of the Beacon City School District, they've gotten their food into the cafeterias and run a "backpack program" in which students take bags full of food home on the weekends (see Page 11). "We have a lot of farm-to-school educational programming, but it's meaningless unless kids actually have access to that food," says Weinman.

The farm also helps run the Beacon Farmers Market and helped start the Newburgh Farmers Market, both of which accept food stamps. In fact, customers are allowed to double the value of their federal benefits when purchasing produce to make it affordable and change the perception, says Weinman, that "farmers markets are for wealthy white people."

Nothing goes to waste. Common Ground secured another grant that allows it to purchase unsold produce from vendors at both markets each week to donate to emergency feeding programs.

Who benefits?

Whatever happens in the fight against food insecurity in the years ahead, it will

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be tied to the fate of smaller local farms. At Common Ground Farm, Speicher believes that, one way or another, because of climate change and an increasingly unstable world, change is going to come.

"Whether we choose to do it now or it's forced upon us, we are going to face drastic food systems change within the next 10 to 20 years," she says during a 55-degree day in mid-December. "From a federal standpoint, a smart way to go about it would be to redirect all the farm subsidies for corn and soy and invest in nutritious food that stays domestic, and invest in people who want to farm."

At Davoren Farm, Lahey points out that the average age of the American farmer is 57.5 years and getting older. Many farmers do not have heirs willing to take over, or a succession plan.

"It's going to be the largest non-wartime transfer of land in human history," he predicts. Work will need to be done to make sure farms remain farms, preferably small and under local control. He'd also like to see municipalities give more material and educational support so that people can take food production into their own hands.

"If people are able to have two chickens and a small backyard garden plot, you can feed any scrap food to the chickens, you get fresh eggs regularly. And if you have a community doing that you can create some serious resilience against any screw-ups in supply lines," he says. "I know people who keep two chickens in their apartment. It's a little kooky, but it can be done."

At Rock Steady Farm, Cheney points out that both food insecurity and small-farm insecurity are problems with the same roots. Affordable housing is an often-overlooked factor when it comes to discussing farms, but both Rock Steady and Common Ground have had problems attracting staff who can afford to live in the Hudson Valley.

Lack of medical care is another problem across the board. "It's such a hard thing for small farms who run on tiny margins to afford good health care for their employees," Cheney says. "It's something we're striving for but we're 6 years old and we still haven't gotten there." It can be especially challenging in rural areas that lack clinics.

Anyone seeking to address hunger will inevitably run into the fact that food insecurity exists, and continues to exist, because of policy failures, not personal failures. Cheney urges people not to fault others for their food choices or circumstances, but instead look at the bigger picture. Who benefits from healthy food being scarce and inaccessible? If healthy food remains out of the reach of many, then who gets to live long and healthy lives and who doesn't?

"There needs to be less focus on individual responsibility and more on the system," Cheney says. "That's the most important piece to understanding this."

See highlandscurrent.org for Parts 1, 2 and 3 of this series.

Eating at School

For many lower-income students in the Highlands who face food insecurity, school breakfast and lunch are vital.

About 37 percent public school students in grades K-12 in Dutchess and 25 percent of those in Putnam receive free or reduced-price school meals. To qualify, a family of four must earn less than $34,450 annually for free meals and $49,025 annually for reduced prices. To prevent shaming, state law does not allow districts to identify which students receive subsidized meals.

The federal program that pays for these meals is the second-largest nutrition assistance program, behind food stamps. During the pandemic, the federal government has been paying for every school meal in an effort to reach more of the estimated 12 million students who are chronically hungry.

Karen Pagano is the food services director for the Beacon City School District. She spoke recently about her experiences with Zach Rodgers for his podcast *Beaconites*; her responses have been edited here for brevity.

Do you see food insecurity issues with students?

There are subtle signs: children who are always first in line at breakfast; children taking as much as they are permitted each meal; children stuffing their backpacks with non-perishables; students showing up at the nurse's office hungry at the start of the day. Common Ground Farm has worked on weekend distribution to some fragile families to help with non-school days. That is where the insecurities become more observable. We were thrilled that the USDA [U.S. Department of Agriculture] funded all school meals this year because it removed the stigma of receiving free meals. Participation has increased dramatically this year as a result.

How is this year different from last year?

Last year because of the shutdown we were distributing meals to homes, people were picking up meals and we were serving in the cafeterias [when students returned late in the year]. Our concern this year is the supply chain. When you're serving 2,000 meals a day, you have to have the product in house significantly earlier than when you're preparing it, and for our vendors to cancel orders at the last minute throws a curve.

How have you compensated for shortages?

In September we made a connection with a New York producer of beef and, because I had my beef order slashed from the government, I committed to buy thousands of pounds. We did a farm-to-school program in the second week in October featuring all New York products. Thinking outside the box has put us in a better position to support the local economy.

There are growers in the region that are learning to provide opportunities

for us, as well, so I'm starting to plug into that. That's the direction I have to go because our typical sources are just not there.

How have you deployed farm-to-school?

Common Ground provides produce and we partner with Land to Learn, which was previously Hudson Valley Seed. Those organizations approached me, knowing that a school district that serves 2,000 meals a day has a lot more purchasing power than a restaurant that serves 96. The idea was to engage the students and the kitchens and food service operations in sustaining Hudson Valley producers.

We had some students who had never seen anything grow in the ground. They had to first engage the students to be accepting of local products, and then we had to engage the staff to prepare local products and families to buy lunches. This has all been developing over the last five to six years. We're hoping to continue with the thought in mind that our students have already been exposed to all this. They have seen the gardens. They are familiar with local products and therefore accepting of the menu changes [to freshly made meals].

Making food from scratch must take more labor.

It had to be done in baby steps. I couldn't just change every menu every day and expect my staff to be able to manufacture that in the 45 minutes we serve students. So we put a cook at every school; a lot of schools will just have food service workers opening an oven. It's been hard this year with the numbers of students who are participating, but we're finding that the items we're making from scratch are what they are enjoying.

How long do you think the supply crunch will last?

Food has a cycle. Poultry takes 12 weeks from the hatching to harvesting, followed by the process that takes the chicken to the table. When that supply chain is severed, it has a long-lasting impact, because agriculture grows in long stretches of time. Now we've missed a growing season, so we have to find something that can be either grown more rapidly or another location. You also rely on drivers; truckers are few and far between. Even if my vendors have a product, they might not get it to me for two weeks. If I see something that has availability in high quantities, we stuff our freezers.

Do you coordinate with other schools?

I work with a coalition of about 20 schools in the Hudson Valley. I'm the president. We try to get ahead of problems. We're working on a platform to consolidate purchasing to make it more sustainable for vendors, suppliers and us. It's a struggle, but it's important because I don't see this ending in the short term.

HOW CAN I GIVE (OR GET) HELP?

BEACON COMMUNITY SOUP KITCHEN

Operated by In Care Of Multi-Services at the Tabernacle of Christ Church, 483 Main St., the kitchen is open weekdays from 10:30 a.m. to noon for takeout. Call 845-728-8196. To donate, email incareof.beacon@gmail.com.

- facebook.com/BeaconSoupKitchen

BEACON SENIOR CENTER

This Dutchess County program at 1 Forrestal Heights provides weekday lunch at noon; the suggested contribution is $3. For delivery, call 845-486-2555.

COMMON GROUND FARM

Located in Wappingers Falls, the farm delivers more than 14,000 pounds of produce annually to 11 pantries, meal programs and free markets. It also doubles the value of SNAP benefits at the farmers markets in Beacon and Newburgh through its Greens-4Greens program.

- bit.ly/greensforgreens
- P.O. Box 148, Beacon, NY 12508

COMMUNITY ACTION PARTNERSHIP FOR DUTCHESS COUNTY

Its Beacon pantry, at 10 Eliza St., is open by appointment on Fridays to pick up a three-day supply of groceries. Call 845-452-5104.

- dutchesscap.org
- 77 Cannon St., Poughkeepsie, NY 12601

CORNELL COOPERATIVE EXTENSION OF PUTNAM COUNTY

The CCE is launching a Seed to Supper program to teach residents on limited budgets how to grow their own produce.

- putnam.cce.cornell.edu/donate
- 1 Geneva Road, Brewster, NY 10509

DUTCHESS OUTREACH

This group has operated emergency food services in the county for nearly 50 years.

- dutchessoutreach.org
- 29 N. Hamilton St., Suite 220, Poughkeepsie, NY 12601

FAREGROUND

Fareground provides weekly distributions and free markets in Beacon, as well as deliveries or pick-ups. It also stocks Tiny Food Pantries at the Beacon Recreation Center (23 W. Center St.); Binnacle Books (321 Main St.; the refrigerator is around back); Christ Church (60 Union St.); and the Howland Public Library (313 Main St.). Donations can be added to the pantries, but no expired food or opened packages.

- fareground.org
- P.O. Box 615, Beacon, NY 12508

FOOD BANK OF THE HUDSON VALLEY

This regional agency, founded in 1982, distributes food donations to 400 agencies in Dutchess, Putnam and four other counties.

- foodbankofhudsonvalley.org
- 195 Hudson St., Cornwall-on-Hudson, NY 12520

FRED'S PANTRY

Operated by Caring for the Hungry and Homeless of Peekskill, the pantry has seen an annual increase of about 5 percent in the number of people it serves since its founding in 2010. Hosted by St. Peter's Church at 137 N. Division St., it is open from 4 – 6 p.m. on Wednesday and from 9 – 11 a.m. Saturday.

- chhop.org
- CHHOP, 200 N. Water St., Peekskill, NY 10566

GLYNWOOD CENTER FOR REGIONAL FOOD AND FARMING

Glynwood runs a program called the Food Sovereignty Fund; this year, 17 farms led by minority, gay and/or women farmers grew food for 15 food-access programs in the Hudson Valley and New York City.

- glynwood.org
- P.O. Box 157, Cold Spring, NY 10516

MUTUAL AID BEACON

The community group provides free groceries each week at 9 a.m. Wednesday for vehicles at Memorial Park (enter by Ron's Ice Cream) or for pedestrians at the Beacon Recreation Center.

- beaconmutualaid.com

OPEN ARMS FOOD PANTRY

This Fishkill ministry provides groceries at the Beacon Recreation Center from 10 a.m. to noon on Saturdays.

- openarmschristianministries.org
- 831 Main St., Fishkill, NY 12524

PHILIPSTOWN FOOD PANTRY

Operated by the First Presbyterian Church of Philipstown, the pantry is open Saturday from 9 to 10 a.m. It always needs fresh produce, canned soup, 1-2 pound bags of white rice, frozen vegetables, canned fruit, cereal, tuna, spaghetti sauce, peanut butter, jelly, coffee, tea and hot cocoa mix, toilet paper, tissues, paper towels, laundry detergent and household cleaning supplies. Donation drop-off is Friday from noon to 1 p.m. or Saturday from 8:30 to 10 a.m., or email ptfp2481f@gmail.com. Foodtown shoppers also can donate their points toward gift cards.

- presbychurchcoldspring.org/food-pantry
- 10 Academy St., Cold Spring, NY 10516

PHILIPSTOWN SENIOR CENTER

This Putnam County program at 6 Butterfield Road in Cold Spring provides weekday lunches for $2.50, or $3 delivered. See putnamcountyny.com/osr or call 845-808-1705.

ROCK STEADY FARM

Last year the farm sent 4,340 boxes of vegetables to low-income families through its CSA Food Access Fund.

- rocksteadyfarm.com/food-access
- 41 Kaye Road, Millerton, NY 12546

SALVATION ARMY

The Salvation Army, at 372 Main St. in Beacon, provides grocery pickup between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m., Tuesday through Friday. Call 845-831-1253.

- salvationarmyusa.org/usn/cure-hunger
- P.O. Box 494, Beacon, NY 12508

SECOND CHANCE FOODS

The nonprofit this year has redistributed more than 217,000 pounds of recovered groceries.

- secondchancefoods.org
- P.O. Box 93, Carmel, NY 10512

SPRINGFIELD BAPTIST CHURCH

The Beacon church provides groceries to seniors (ages 50 and older) at noon on the last Saturday of each month. Call 845-831-4093.

- 8 Mattie Cooper Square, Beacon, NY 12508

ST. ANDREW & ST. LUKE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The church operates a food pantry in Beacon from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. on Saturdays. It is open for food donations from 10 to 11 a.m. on Fridays. Call 845-831-1369 or email saslecbeacon@gmail.com.

- beacon-episcopal.org/food-pantry
- 15 South Ave., Beacon, NY 12508

A Faregound collection basket at the offices of Gatehouse Compass real estate in Beacon.