

Community Food Co-op

The Community Food Co-op in Bellingham, WA is an integral part of our community in so many ways, and their value of sustainability shows through their actions. By using renewable energy to power their building, promoting local businesses and farmers with prime product placement and identifying items as local, and being active members of the community through Co-op events and other organizations such as Sustainable Connections, the Co-op is a forerunner in sustainable business practices.

The innovative *Food To Bank On* project is just one example of what the Co-op does to promote a sustainable local food system in Whatcom County. It was launched by the Farm Fund with support from Sustainable Connections, and partners new farmers, experienced growers, and area food banks to provide fresh, organic, and locally grown produce to low-income community members. Participating farmers are paid Co-op wholesale prices for produce delivered to food banks, and learn to deliver their goods during a narrow time frame – an imperative skill for entering the food service market. The *Food To Bank On* project was launched with four farmers in 2003, and in 2005 expanded to incorporate nine participating farmers who produce fresh local produce for five Whatcom County food banks. Farmers can participate for three years before moving on, which allows other interested and eligible farmers to join. This relationship guarantees the food banks receive produce of the highest quality while also ensuring that new local farmers are given the opportunity to have their quality produce put to good use.

As well as being one of nine farms participating in the *Food To Bank On* program, Alex Rhoades and Hilary Stember of Red Tail Farms run a Community Supported Agricultural program. CSA programs offer local consumers fresh produce directly from the farmer. A buyer purchases shares in the CSA, entitling them to farm fresh produce for the duration of the growing season - around 20 weeks. Participating households can pick up produce shares from CSA farmers at the Saturday Bellingham Farmers Market, at the farm itself, or sometimes get home delivery. Call Hilary at (360) 303-8393 if you're interested and would like more information.

Uprising Organics is another farm participating in the *Food to Bank On* program and is run by Brian Campbell and Crystine Goldberg. Located in Acme, WA, Uprising Organics offers an assortment of certified organic fresh vegetables. Their goal is to integrate organic seed production and breeding into their already growing farm. Their produce can be found at the Anacortes Farmers Market, Skagit and Whatcom Co-ops, as well as restaurants like Nimbus, Pacific Café, and Mt. Bakery.

With support from the Community Food Co-op, Sustainable Connections and generous individuals in this community, our farmers will flourish and all of us will benefit from a strengthened local food system providing the freshest local produce! The Co-op is looking to expand the number of participating farms in the coming years and encourages input and donations from the community at the register or www.sconnect.org.

Sustainable Connections is a nonprofit business network establishing and supporting a Local Living Economy that sustains itself, our community and a healthy environment. All of our members are local and independently owned businesses, organizations and supportive individuals who value Strong Community, Healthy Natural Environment, Meaningful Employment, and Buying Local First. Look for more

information about membership and upcoming events at www.sconnect.org, or give us a call at 360-647-7093.