

Farm Fund Spotlight 2011:

Food To Bank On

Sara Southerland, Food & Farming Outreach Coordinator, Sustainable Connections

One of the first projects the Farm Fund has helped this year was yet another brainstorm by Sustainable Connections' Food To Bank On (FTBO) program. Founded in 2003 by the Community Food Co-op Farm Fund, FTBO is a training program for beginning sustainable farmers that offers business training, mentorship, and fundraising to pay farmers to deliver a portion of food to a local food bank or shelter. In the three-year project, participants create and refine a business plan, get marketing and promotional assistance, and receive valuable feedback as a part of a close-knit peer group with mentor support to help grow their enterprises.

Sustainable Connections embarked on a new partnership this year, linking the FTBO business-planning workshop series with the WSU Whatcom County Extension's Cultivating Success Agricultural Entrepreneurship class. Workshop topics ranged from financial and

budget planning to marketing strategies and insurance options. The Farm Fund grant specifically helped fund classes for farmers on Quickbooks and Cashflow Analysis.

"A lot of time, as farmers, we focus on farming and production, when we also need to have the business side of things rolling smoothly, too," said FTBO farmer Mary Liz von Krusenstiern. "The entrepreneurship classes were extremely valuable to my business. We learned about business structures, how to read financial statements and plan for the future. It's affected what crops I grow, and how I market—it's kind of been like farmer grad school."

Direct market farming is not easy. Farmers work hard to grow and produce their food, but they also have to figure out how to best promote themselves and make the business viable at the same time. Our goal is to help farmers with the community resources they need to be successful from the start.

Currently ten beginning farmers are participating in the program, offering a fantastic mix of vegetables, beef, and poultry:

- Nooksack Delta Cattle Co., Bellingham—grass-fed beef sold in quarters, halves, or whole
- The Sandy Spade Farm, Concrete—

pasture-raised chicken, turkey, lamb, eggs, and mixed vegetables

- Rustic Moon Farm, Bellingham—pastured pork, chicken, turkey, lamb, and eggs
- Neighborhood Harvest, Bellingham—mixed vegetable CSA, farm stand
- The Carrot and Stick, Bellingham—mixed vegetable CSA, workshops/events, farm stand
- Heritage Lane Farm, Lynden—heritage-breed pork, lamb, turkey, goose, duck, and chicken
- Misty Meadows Farm, Everson—organic eggs
- Jordan Creek Farm & Gardens, Ferndale—mixed vegetables, farm stand
- Bellingham Urban Gardens, Bellingham—urban farming organization whose mission is to promote, sustain, and advocate for urban agriculture in Bellingham
- Wildroot Botanicals, Bellingham—artisan teas, tinctures, salves, lotions, products for the childbearing years and babies

FTBO has supported 34 fledgling farms since 2003. Seventy-five percent of program graduates have gone on to become strong, viable operations grounded

in sustainable business practices, and many are now Co-op suppliers. In 2010, nine participating farms provided \$7,214 worth of food to area food banks and shelters, and this year Sustainable Connections expects this amount to exceed \$10,000. To date, local hunger relief agencies have received more than \$50,000 worth of fresh, high-quality local food through FTBO, and many have developed strong relationships with local producers who will bring them good food for years to come.

Thanks to all the Co-op shoppers and members who have supported Food To Bank On from its early days to the present.

You can donate to the Farm Fund at any Co-op register. For more info about the Farm Fund contact Jean Rogers at 360-734-8158 or jeanr@communityfood.coop. For more information on FTBO or to donate, call 360-647-7093 or see www.sustainableconnections.org.

Leslie Williams and Orion Polinski of Wildroot Botanicals (3rd year Food To Bank On farmers).



Photo courtesy of Sustainable Connections



Mary Liz von Krusenstiern owner Neighborhood Harvest Farm (FTBO and a 2011 farm fund loan recipient)