

Tackling food insecurity with fresh vegetables

*The natural cycle of growing crops
in Prince Edward Island*



Canada

For those struggling to put food on the table, eating healthy is not always the first consideration.

However, a team effort between Soleil Hutchinson at Soleil's Farm and the Immigrant & Refugee Services Association (formerly the PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada) was able to provide fresh and nutritious vegetables to a number of food insecure Islanders.

The Food Security and Agriculture Awareness Program for newcomers to Canada program saw clients from the Association pick up vegetables from Soleil's Farm weekly at the Farm Centre in Charlottetown. This was while Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) customers of the South Melville farm picked up their weekly baskets.



"For our food insecure clients, it meant they had access every week to fresh and nutritious vegetables," said Yvette Doucette of the Immigrant & Refugee Services Association.

The program received funding through the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, under the Community Food Security and Agriculture Awareness Program. Doucette said recent immigrants dealing with food insecurity may not have the luxury, time, or knowledge of Canadian foods to make nutrition a top priority, and "low cost is seldom the most healthy option."

She said the Program has served to introduce people to different vegetables, and they have an opportunity to ask representatives from the farm how the vegetable has been grown and how they can be used. For example, she said many of her clients have no experience with kale.

"We ask them 'do you stir fry greens?'" She said, "if they say yes, we would tell them these are greens that can be used like that."

Doucette said the project has offered a chance to familiarize newcomers to the province about the crops that grow here. Since the Program offered a chance to explore the Farm Centre, she said a number of the Association's newer clients have also started garden plots in the Community Garden there, and began growing their own vegetables.

"That wasn't the main goal of the Program but we are definitely glad to see it happen," she said. "We are not just giving people a bag of food. There is an opportunity to talk to people from the farm and learn more about how the food is produced. The products change with the seasons. Initially they were getting a lot more tender little greens, and things like that, and then as you move towards fall, it was more into the zucchinis, tomatoes, and peppers. As you move further and further into the fall, it is more root vegetables, kale, apples. This is the natural cycle of growing crops in PEI."

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She said there are several other farmers assisting Soleil as well, and “there are some greenhouse products but it is all organic growers.” Yvette said one thing she heard frequently from those taking part was how the project connected them to the community and engaged them with agriculture on PEI.

Some of the participants are looking at growing their own food or working within the agriculture industry, noting “when you make connections in the community, other things are possible.” Doucette said the program helped both refugees and international students through her organization.

As to why she spearheaded the project, Soleil said, “food security has always been really important to me and I wanted to help people that were potentially food insecure.” She was also hoping to gear the program to people that could cook and that could come to pick up the food weekly.”

“It is not everybody that knows how to cook with different vegetables,” she explained. “That has actually been the most challenging part of this.”

Soleil said the relationship with the Immigrant and Refugee Association has been a really great fit “because a lot of the members taking part in the program know how to cook different vegetables.”

Soleil said she has thoroughly enjoyed working with the people from the Association and introducing them to a community that enjoys food. She added, “they are getting top quality vegetables and I feel that food insecure families often get seconds. That was very important to me.”

Thanks to donations from Soleil’s regular CSA customers, some clients from the Chances Best Start Program also received food baskets at the same time.

“We are so fortunate to work with Soleil,” Yvette said. “She is such a champion of organic, nutritious food here on PEI and getting those who are food insecure access to it.”