

Bridging the Gap from Farm to Plate

by Aidan Coffin Ness,
summer fellow

Last March, REAP Food Group's board of directors, corporate sponsors and many of you, our dedicated members, put their charitable dollars where their local food-loving hearts were during The Big Share and helped our organization raise \$10,000 to launch a vegetable processing pilot project to help sustainable Wisconsin farms get their produce onto the plates at Madison's anchor institutions.

It has been a dream in the making for two years. On July 15, a crew of six workers met at the Madison College culinary arts kitchen to wash, chop and bag our first order of 800 pounds of locally and sustainably grown broccoli. Days later, those bags of broccoli were delivered to the kitchens of UW Health, UW Dining and the Madison Metropolitan School District to be used in the approximately 39,000 daily meals these institutions serve to staff, students and hospital patients.

Leading the project is REAP Food Group's Farm to Business Director Brianna Fiene, who joined our staff in September 2018. We call her the conductor of the cruciferous symphony because she oversees many steps of the process, from procurement to processing to delivery to make this project run smoothly. Even at this relatively modest pilot scale, our institutional buyers have committed to purchasing more than \$100,000 worth of value-added produce in the project's first year and we are working with suppliers like Olden Organics, Fifth Season Cooperative and Tri-County Produce Auction Co-op, which represent more than 75 Wisconsin family farms.

Building a localized supply chain means these dollars will stay in the state and be reinvested in our regional economy and mark a significant market opportunity for Southern Wisconsin's farmers, especially in light of Wisconsin's loss of 638 family farms last year.



Processing takes place at the Madison College culinary arts kitchen with a six-person crew and is led by Farm to Business Director Brianna Fiene (pictured center).

“Supporting local food greatly reduces carbon emissions while also providing healthier and fresher food choices to those who are eating within the institutional settings.”

Kristen Martinek, member and marketing coordinator with Fifth Season Co-op

“Institutional support and use of local foods is critically important to directly support local producers financially and in tandem building a more robust local economy,” said Kristen Martinek, member and marketing coordinator with Fifth Season Co-op. “Buying and supporting local food greatly reduces carbon emissions while also providing healthier and fresher food choices to those who are eating within the institutional settings.”

The project is in its pilot phase and will operate for 20 weeks in partnership with Madison College, which has generously offered its Truax Campus culinary arts production space for the project.

As REAP closes in on its 23rd year working to build a strong local food system in Southern Wisconsin, we take a moment to extend a heartfelt thank you to you, our donors, who believe in us and believe in this work. Together, we are helping our community's institutions become champions of a thriving good food system.

FROM THE DIRECTOR: *Of gardens, weeds and saving the world*



These days, my morning starts more often than not in the garden. I head out there for a few minutes, inspecting this, watering that, tackling a weed or two (always). But I've incorporated a new practice: to pick something and eat it, really savor the sunshine, the love, the water and thought that went into it.

Growing food feels like a small miracle every time. It's not lost on me how much this applies to the work we do as a non-profit to make our community and our environment a better place to be. We put a lot of love in the work, worry about the surrounding conditions, get caught in the weeds (always). It's all too easy to keep thinking about what isn't going the way we want it to, how we may want to change how we're doing something. But I try to apply the same practice to our change-making work as I do to my garden: stop to savor the sweet fruits of our labor.

This committed, smart staff of REAP Food Group are making so much good happen in Madison and Wisconsin. Last week one of our REAP Ambassadors, Aida, a community health worker based at Centro Hispano, took the children who showed up at Leopold Park for lunch on a tour of her family's community garden plot and let them sample what was there - almost all those kids had never picked a snap pea off the

vine and tried it. Meanwhile, across town, 10 months of logistics and planning were coming together as the first shipment of broccoli from Fifth Season Cooperative growers was being processed at Madison College by REAP to end up on the meal lines at UW Health, UW Madison Dining and Madison Metropolitan School District. REAP's newest initiative to strengthen our local food system has officially launched.

In this issue, we also honor a well-loved board member, Kathy Trudell, who passed away unexpectedly this winter and whose presence is missed daily. As a board member, Kathy was passionate about two things: how REAP could further the dialogue about agriculture and conservation in our community and how REAP can support and facilitate staff development. We've established a fund in her memory to further both those goals for our organization.

Sincerely,

Helen Sarakinos, Executive Director

IN MEMORY OF OUR BELOVED BOARD MEMBER KATHRYN TRUDELL

by Susan Troller Cosgrove, REAP board member

When REAP board member Kathy Trudell passed away unexpectedly in February, she left behind not only her grieving family but also a large community of friends and colleagues who could scarcely believe that someone so vibrantly alive could be gone.

An environmental scientist who spent her career in the electric power sector researching ways to improve the industry and protect the environment, Kathy had boundless enthusiasm for the natural world, from exploring the Driftless area near her cabin in Gays Mills to hunting morel mushrooms every spring. She also loved sewing, spinning, dyeing and knitting natural fibers, often with fellow fiber enthusiasts. She was a gifted gardener, cook and backyard chicken keeper who also loved to kayak, ski and bike. She even took her spinning wheel camping!

For Kathy, the world was full of wonders; her great curiosity was matched by an equal capacity for taking action and making things happen. Her impact in all things has been significant and her loss is to be deeply mourned. There was

much more that she wanted to do.

Shortly after she joined the REAP board, Kathy spoke with Executive Director Helen Sarakinos about her goals as a board member. She was clear about two issues: She wanted to help staff have more opportunities for growth and enrichment, building skills that would be valuable to them personally and professionally. In addition, Kathy wanted to see REAP increase its leadership on issues surrounding the environment, climate change and how food raised well improves climate resilience.



To honor Kathy's memory and legacy, REAP has established the Kathryn Trudell Memorial Fund. This fund will allow REAP staff members to expand their environmental expertise through participation in conferences, workshops and other educational opportunities that focus on agricultural sustainability and resilience. And, as staff shares the knowledge they've gained, REAP will become even more effective as a pioneer in creating local food systems that are healthful, just and sustainable.

We are so grateful to have known Kathy, and to have her as a continuing inspiration in our work.

THANK YOU, DONORS!

David S. Bourne Foundation - \$15,000

The David S. Bourne Foundation has been a solid supporter of REAP's Farm to School Program for many years. Their dedication to our work in the community and local schools continues with a \$15,000 award to support our Farm to School program and the Uproot by REAP Farm to School food truck. We are honored to be a part of their investment in our community.

Blooming Prairie Foundation - \$7,000

Since 2005, this Madison-based foundation has awarded nearly \$3 million to promote initiatives in the cooperative, community, sustainable agriculture and organic sectors. We are thrilled to have their financial support as our Farm to Business team pursues the creation of institutional and business markets for farmers who list in the Farm Fresh Atlas of Southern Wisconsin.

Alliant Energy Foundation - \$2,000

With a focus on supporting local family, education and environmental initiatives, the Alliant Energy Foundation this summer awarded REAP a grant to support our summer program work in Madison. We are proud to be one of 145 organizations to receive funds from the foundation during this semi-annual grant cycle.

FARM TO SCHOOL BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

by Haley Traun, Farm to School Education Coordinator

School may be out for summer, but our Farm to School programming is still in full swing!

Every weekday since June 24, our Farm to School AmeriCorps service members have been running the Leopold and Southdale park sites for the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), a USDA-funded program that provides free meals to children 18 and younger at more than 30 sites across Madison.

Many children and families depend on school for reliable and nutritious meals, and when school is not in session, the SFSP addresses this need by providing no cost meals to any child 18 and younger at summer school, community and park sites. However, the program reaches far fewer children than rely on school meals during the academic year. Many families remain unaware, or cannot access this service.

For the last four years, REAP has coordinated a partnership with city and county agencies with the goal of increasing participation in the free lunch program and to bring more Wisconsin-grown fruits and vegetables to these meals. The support of City of Madison, Madison Parks, Public Health Madison and Dane County, and the Madison Metropolitan School District has allowed us to increase marketing of the program city-wide and has



Lunchtime at Southdale Park is accompanied by fun, educational activities led by REAP.

enabled REAP to host lunch sites at city parks and make meals available to not only children, but also their adult caregivers. Summer also provides an excellent opportunity to source local and affordable produce for these meals.

In addition to providing meals, the AmeriCorps team and volunteers are ensuring kids have the opportunity to engage in programming centered around good food and fun. On Thursdays at Southdale Park, the Badger Rock Neighborhood Center set up a donation-based farm stand featuring student-grown produce from Badger Rock Middle School. Students at each site have enjoyed making natural food dye bandanas, preparing and trying homemade pickles, and learning about food groups and nutrition.

With the goal of providing impactful programming, we are thrilled to continue our ambassador partnership with Centro Hispano of Dane County and two Roots for Change Promotoras de Salud (community health workers). Aída Inuka and Maricela Martinez, as REAP ambassadors and trusted community health leaders, have engaged children and adults around issues of food access and nutrition. Together, our organizations seek to meet Latino families where they are to improve food education and access to fresh and healthy food.

A recent interaction between Aída

and a mother and her infant son at our Leopold Park lunch site really highlighted the impact this partnership has. Aída picked a variety of amaranth greens from her personal garden at the community plots within Leopold Park, which is a common ingredient in Latinx cuisines. Aída provided leaves for each student around the table to try, which they did happily, and then offered her last bunch to the baby, who has been enjoying his new venture into solid foods. We were all enamored with his delighted reaction to the new food.

"I come from Ecuador and everyone there talks about how these greens are good for your brain. I gave this to my babies when they were growing to develop their palates and give them practice eating new textures," Aída said. "Now they are stubborn and smart and don't want big pieces of greens in their food, so I find new ways to prepare it, like blending it with maíz and cream so that they keep getting the benefits even though they are a bit more picky!"

We are so glad to have these ambassadors at the table!



Our Farm to School summer intern Sylvan Bachhuber paints a young girl's face during Centro Hispano's Mercadito.

SUMMERTIME STAFF

This summer, REAP was fortunate to host two incredible interns: Sylvan Bachhuber and Aidan Coffin Ness. Sylvan has been part of Farm to School efforts with Centro Hispano while Aidan assisted with our vegetable processing pilot project and communications projects. We were grateful to work alongside them!

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SAVE THE DATE FOR REAP'S UPCOMING EVENTS

HERITAGE ON THE HILLSIDE

Sept. 22 at Raleigh's Hillside Farm

FARM TO SCHOOL
NIGHT OUT

OCT. 2, 2019



harvest gala

NOVEMBER 3, 2019
THE EDGEWATER HOTEL

REAP Food Group's mission is to transform communities, economies and lives through the power of good food. You can support our mission by making a donation online at reapfoodgroup.org/give. Every annual donation above \$45 makes you a REAP member.