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E-NEWS

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provider, and employer.

Local farms honored at annual Farm of the Year reception

The Food Bank celebrated local farmers at a special Farm of the Year award ceremony on March 10 (made possible by a donation from event sponsors Bob and Barbara Carroll). Farmers throughout western Massachusetts were honored for their contributions to The Food Bank this year, and to celebrate their commitment to supporting our community.

Last harvest season, local farms donated more than 546,000 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables to The Food Bank. This healthy food was distributed to local feeding programs as well as directly to people in need through our Brown Bag: Food for Elders program and our Mobile Food Bank. Additionally, The Food Bank purchased 500,000 more pounds from local farms.

Plainville Farms in Hadley received the Farm of the Year award for their commitment to helping feed western Massachusetts. Their donation provided 161,296 pounds of fresh vegetables to families in our community struggling to make ends meet.

“I see so much waste in the food chain,” explains Wally Czajkowski, of the Plainville Farm. “This country wastes so much food. A lot of it is edible and really good — it’s just not cosmetically perfect. It’s foolish to throw it away.”

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Pictured above: Wally Czajkowski (left) and his team from Plainville Farm were named the 2016 Farm of the Year.

In Search of Prime Farmland



Executive Director
Andrew Morehouse

Dear Friends,

The other day, Robin Bialecki, the director of the Easthampton Community Center, told me about a child and mother who recently came for food assistance, and how surprised Robin was when the child was

given an apple. He had never seen one before. Of course, he loved it when Robin encouraged him to try it.

Food comes from the earth. Our Food Bank Farm is our direct connection to the earth. We are proud to be preserving 59 acres of farmland in perpetuity under an agricultural preservation restriction, otherwise known as an APR.

We are equally proud to partner with Mountain View Farm in Easthampton, which grows USDA-certified organic vegetables on our farm for their Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm *and* for The Food Bank.

A couple of years ago, this sustainable model convinced The Food Bank's Board of Directors that we should try to acquire more farmland and replicate it to augment our own source of local vegetables. (In this edition, you'll read about the critically-important generosity of our local farmers who support neighbors in need.)

I've had the privilege over the last couple of years of working closely with Kristin DeBoer, executive director of the Kestrel Land Trust (KLT), to search for prime farmland in the Pioneer Valley to buy. (As a result, I recently joined the KLT Board of Directors.) Our partnership is determined to combine land conservation through agricultural farmland protection with our Food Bank Farm as a model for more households to enjoy the beauty *and* organic vegetables grown right here in the Pioneer Valley.

Last year, we were very close to a farm purchase that fell through in the end. Since then, we have continued to look for scarce, prime farmland for sale in Amherst, Ludlow, Westfield, Hatfield and Whately. We will continue our search until we are successful because being able to provide fresh, local vegetables to hungry households is critical to our mission. ●

*“Food comes from the earth.
Our Food Bank Farm is our direct
connection to the earth.”*

Your support of Farm to Cocktail helped provide 105,000 additional meals

On the evening of May 4, a sold-out crowd filled the event barn at Quonquot Farm in Whately for The Food Bank's Farm to Cocktail Competition. This fund raising event challenged eight local bartending teams from around the region to mix their most creative cocktail using locally-sourced ingredients.

Thanks to your support, the event raised \$35,000 for The Food Bank (the equivalent of 105,000 meals) to support our mission to feed more than 223,000 of our neighbors in need annually.

All of the competing bartenders chose from a variety of spirits and locally-sourced ingredients to craft a signature cocktail. Event guests sampled the cocktail creations and voted for their favorite. The top two vote-getters, Latitude (People's Choice winner) and Public Eat + Drink, advanced to the final round of the competition, where they had two minutes to craft a new cocktail using a special mystery ingredient — sriracha hot sauce. A special panel of judges sampled the mystery cocktails and determined the champion.

At the end of the night, it was Jesse Egan Poirier, of Public Eat + Drink in North Adams, who was crowned the Farm to Cocktail champion.

The other competing bartending teams included Firefly (Lenox), Hadley Farms Meeting House (Hadley), Hope & Olive/Magpie Woodfired Pizza (Greenfield), Sevenstrong (Northampton), Theodores' (Springfield) and The Tunnel Bar (Northampton).

The Farm to Cocktail competition was made possible by numerous sponsors, including gold sponsors Pioneer Cold and Stop & Shop. The event was hosted by John O'Brien from media sponsor Rock 102. All spirits for the event were donated by Berkshire Mountain Distillers. ●



Jesse Egan Poirier, of Public Eat + Drink in North Adams, was crowned the Farm to Cocktail champion.



See more photos from the Farm to Cocktail event by visiting our photo album at <http://tinyurl.com/kcog9gu>.

Joe is not alone in his struggle

Far too often, food takes a backseat to other needs. If Joe doesn't put gas in the car, he can't get to work. If Joe doesn't refill his prescriptions, he won't be healthy enough to work. So where do 223,000 of our neighbors turn when they need nutritious food?

They turn to you – and to The Food Bank.

Joe hasn't always needed help making ends meet. Employed full-time, he was living comfortably. But over the last year, his health took a turn for the worse, and the bills began to mount. As a last resort, Joe came to The Food Bank for help.

"I was out of food because I had to pay my rent and get my medication," he said. "I couldn't afford to do it all. A price increase for the medicine I needed to survive stressed me and my budget to the breaking point."

With every dollar you donate, you're improving the life of someone like Joe who needs a helping hand. Thanks to you, we were able to provide 8.3 million meals last year.

Your support is critical in meeting our mission. By visiting foodbankwma.org and making a donation, you will be playing a key role in the health of the individuals and families who rely on The Food Bank for this most basic need.

Food Bank volunteer honored by Human Service Forum

Linda Milewski, a long-time volunteer at The Food Bank, recently received the Human Service Forum 2017 Richard A. Stebbins Volunteer Award at a public presentation ceremony at The Log Cabin. The award — named for Dick Stebbins (1936 – 2000), a stalwart volunteer in the community — is given annually to an individual who has volunteered in a non-profit or public human service organization for at least five years and has selflessly given time and expertise to improve the lives of those served by the agency.

Linda has been volunteering at The Food Bank for more than 15 years, becoming a vital member of our day-to-day operations. Volunteering sometimes as many as five days a week, she has the ability to step in for full-time staff in their absence, prepare projects for new volunteers, and complete vital paperwork. Her tireless efforts allow us to consistently provide our local member agencies with a steady stream and variety of food choices for their clients.

On her own time, Linda has visited other hunger relief organizations outside the region, and shared her gained knowledge with The Food Bank. While on a recent vacation, she visited the Nantucket Food Pantry and toured their facility. She returned with numerous ideas to help the efficiency of our warehouse, and provided our staff with valuable networking connections.

With her warm smile and upbeat personality, Linda's value to the organization extends above and beyond her work-related responsibilities.

"There is a sense of community within our group of volunteers that is fostered by Linda," said Mike Cortis, The Food Bank's food operations manager. Not only does she organize volunteer luncheons in the break room, she also helps recruit new community volunteers through her church.

"Linda has directly affected our volunteers' ability to sort 1.8 million pounds of food last fiscal year, which we distributed to our member agencies," said Cortis. "She not only improves the lives of those we serve, but also those that are lucky enough to know her." ●



Denise Cogman (left), Human Services Forum Board President, presented Linda Milewski (right) with the 2017 Richard A. Stebbins Volunteer Award.



the gathering A FARM-TO-TABLE SERIES

The Food Bank is collaborating with three of our partner farms to offer a series of three intimate farm-to-table dinners seeded in local agriculture.

Join us for this elegant dining experience and engage in a discussion about the important role local farms play in feeding our neighbors in need. The meals will be prepared by the creative chefs at Wheelhouse Farm Truck & Catering, using ingredients sourced directly from the farm where the dinner is being held.

We are proud of our long-standing relationship with area farmers, who partner with The Food Bank so that everyone may have access to healthy food, regardless of their circumstances. Last year, one million of the 10 million pounds we distributed, was grown right here in the Pioneer Valley by 28 local farms.

Together, with your support, we can continue to cultivate these partnerships and put more fresh food on dinner tables across our region.

Tickets for these 21+ events are \$80 per person (per dinner). To purchase tickets to any of the three dinners, visit our website at www.foodbankwma.org/events/farmtotable. ●

JULY 23: Szawlowski Farm/Honey Pot Farm (Hatfield)

AUGUST 20: Mountain View Farm (Easthampton)

OCTOBER 8: Red Fire Farm (Granby)

\$80 per person, per dinner
Ticket includes a multi-course meal, beer, cider and non-alcoholic beverages.

Beverages provided by Berkshire Brewing Company and Artifact Cider.

7th Annual

WILL BIKE 4 FOOD

Presented by  Stop&Shop®

SUN., SEPT. 24, 2017

The Lion's Club Pavilion
Hatfield, Mass.

A charity cycling event through the Pioneer Valley to benefit The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts.

Our annual ride to end hunger is returning for its seventh year on Sunday, Sept. 24. Join the hundreds of riders throughout western Massachusetts who have already registered for this fun and exciting event. When you participate in Will Bike 4 Food, you're raising awareness of hunger and food insecurity in our area.

Cyclists of all abilities can choose to ride one of four different routes through the scenic Pioneer Valley — 10, 25, 50, or 100 miles. There's sure to be a ride that's just right for everyone, regardless of your experience level. You can also recruit at least four family members, friends or co-workers to form a team.

Register before the end of August and receive \$75 off your fund raising minimum!

Registration is already open at willbike4food.org

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thank you

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Farm of the Year continued from page 1

Last year's winner, Atlas Farm in South Deerfield, was this year's runner up with 110,890 pounds of food donated. Szawlowski Potato Farm in Hatfield was second runner up with 90,000 pounds donated.

We are proud of our long-standing relationship with area farmers, who partner with The Food Bank so that everyone may have access to healthy food, regardless of their circumstances. ●