

THE AGRO-ECO PROJECT

IMPACT REPORT 2023



The most important goal that this organization has is to grow food regeneratively for our local food pantries. Balancing ecological stewardship with food production is a difficult task all farmers face. Our challenge therefore is to increase food production all the while regenerating the soils on which we farm. Not always are these two aims compatible, and this tension is ever present in every decision we take on our farm. The two most important farming practices we use to achieve this delicate balance include agroecology and no-till farming. We have seen these practices pay off in reduced pest pressure (thanks to a highly diversified crop make-up) and reduced weed pressure thanks to not tilling the soils and carefully managing our raised beds.

2023 has been the year in which we added a new suite of farming techniques belonging broadly to the umbrellas of agroforestry and perennial agriculture. By embedding many perennial crops within our market garden we aim to increase our biodiversity, diversify the crops we grow, retain moisture in the soil and further reduce erosion and nutrient run off. Additionally, we have greatly increased the practice of alley cropping annual plants in between rows of berries or fruit trees, and have had great success in optimizing space thereby increasing overall food production. These important changes will make our farming system more resilient and increasingly self-sufficient, particularly when faced with a changing and wildly fluctuating climate.

2023 has also been a year of expansion. We recently gained access to 8 new acres adjacent to our current operation on which we will be growing vegetables and fruit within a chestnut orchard. Here too, our aim is to take advantage of the practice of alley cropping: growing food within rows of nut trees. We will also be building a brand new processing center to expand our ability to create value-added products. More on that in 2024.

Finally, this past year we have expanded our value-added offerings for the food pantries that we serve. This was the first year we began processing our own produce at the Food Hub in Worcester, where we baked our own pies, dried our own fruit and mushrooms and made jams. We look forward to expanding these operations in the new year, which also allows us to extend our season into the cold New England winter months.

I would like to end this message by expressing my gratitude towards the Agro-Eco team consisting of Katie, Kate and Pieter, who work very hard to make sure we fulfill our core mission of alleviating food insecurity in Worcester County and are utterly devoted to this mission. I am also very thankful for all the volunteers that work tirelessly in the food pantries we serve. May 2024 be a year of great and delicious bounty to be shared widely throughout our community.

Grazie!

Giulio Caperchi

OUR FOOD DONATIONS



WHO DID WE DONATE TO?

RUTLAND FOOD PANTRY



CHARLTON FOOD PANTRY



ST. JOHN'S FOOD FOR THE POOR PROGRAM



BARRE FOOD PANTRY



WORCESTER COMMUNITY FRIDGES



LOCAL CHEF INITIATIVE



MEALS BY *Mayari*

Mayari's Voyage, our local chef we use, made 345 meat and 345 vegetarian meals this year for us.



690 MEALS DONATED to St. JOHNS



PRODUCE DONATED FROM FIELD

4,898.5 lbs. DONATED

→ 128.5 lbs.



→ 517.5 lbs.



→ 4,252.5 lbs.



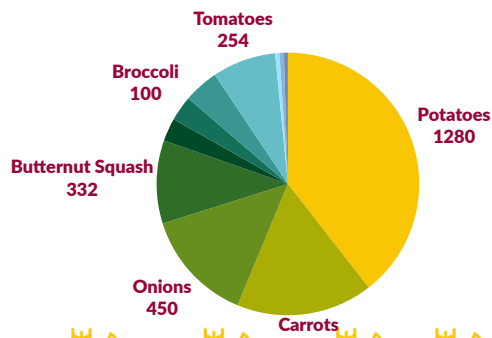
25 DONATIONS

399 Pies/Crisps

GREATER TABLE INITIATIVE

PURCHASING LOCAL FOOD FOR LOCAL FOOD PANTRIES

Total Pounds (3293.5) Bought and Donated



EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

GARDEN SALAD SEED KITS

We continued our at home educational activity this season with a garden salad seed kit. Our seed packets contained a variety of seeds including: green oakleaf lettuce, mixed greens, scarlet nantes carrot, longfellow cucumber, early scarlet globe radish and sutton tomato. The packets, beautifully illustrated in-house by Katie Greger, contained a card including instructions on how to grow the seeds and a recipe card. We produced around 50 seed packets and distributed them through the food pantries that we serve.



RECIPE CARDS

This season we provided recipe/informational cards to our donation bags. We made 7 cards ranging from how to cook greens to a fun recipe of herb salsa.



RECIPE CARDS

How to Cook Summer Veggies


Summer veggies can be prepared in many ways but one of the easiest is to simply chop them, put them in a sauté pan and cook until tender.



ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS:
Butter/Olive Oil, Garlic, Onion/Shallot, Salt & Pepper

OPTIONAL INGREDIENTS:
Lemon, Parmesan, Red Pepper Flakes, Herbs (Fresh or Dry)

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Sautéed Summer Veggies

VEGGIES:

- Summer Squash
- Zucchini
- Beets
- Carrots
- Peppers
- Tomatoes
- Broccoli
- Eggplant

Chop, Sauté, Season

Heat a sauté pan on low and add your butter or olive oil. Add in onions and/or garlic and cook gently until translucent and fragrant. Add in your chopped veggies and raise heat to medium. Season with salt and pepper, stirring occasionally until your veggies are tender and cooked through. Add fresh or dry herbs at any point or red pepper flakes if you like your food spicy. Finish your dish off with a squeeze of lemon and some freshly chopped herbs.

Tips: Chop your veggies in similar sized cuts to ensure even cooking. If the veggies start sticking to the pan, add a little bit of water to unstick while cooking.

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Microgreens

HOW WE GROW THEM

Our microgreens are grown on coco coir sheets, this is to provide a surface for the plants to grow roots on. Coco coir is made from fiber of the coconut and completely biodegradable. The sheets are cut into squares to fit into our packaging. They are immersed in water until saturated and then moved to trays where they are then seeded. It takes about two weeks under lights before the microgreens are ready.




How to Eat Microgreens

Simply trim the microgreens from the coco coir sheets and add them fresh to a salad, use as fresh herbs, in a pesto or even sautéed. Microgreens, although tiny in nature, are packed with great flavor. You can even plant your coco coir sheets and watch the microgreens grow into mature plants, although thinning would be required.

TYPES OF MICROGREENS:

We offer a variety of microgreens including: Turnips, Romaine Lettuce, Mixed Greens, Kale, Carrots, Leeks, Arugula, Cabbage, Swiss Chard, Cilantro, Basil & Dill.


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What are Sunchoke?

Sunchokes, also known as Jerusalem Artichokes are a flowering tuber. The plant produces stunning and very tall yellow flowers similar to sunflowers that bloom during the Fall. They also grow an edible tuber that is similar to a potato and other starchy root vegetables. Sunchoke are harvested late Fall after the first frost, when its tubers are at their sweetest by pulling up the flowering stalk and digging out the tubers.

Some tubers can be replanted for next season's harvest, or alternatively stored in a perforated bag in the fridge for 10 days, or kept in a root cellar for a few months. Raw sunchokes, just like water chestnuts, go great in a salad, but you can roast, sauté, or even pickle them. Sunchoke are high in a dietary fiber called inulin that acts as a prebiotic that promotes beneficial bacteria in the digestive system.




Brussels Sprout and Sunchoke Salad

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup sunchokes sliced thinly
- 2 cups brussels sprouts, thinly sliced
- Small handful of baby salad greens
- Olive oil and butter for the pan
- Red pepper flakes
- Pine nuts
- Parmesan cheese shavings
- Salt & pepper

DRESSING

- 2 tbsps. olive oil
- 1/2 garlic clove, minced
- 1 tsp. dijon mustard
- Juice from half a lemon
- Drizzle of honey
- Salt & Pepper

- In a small bowl whisk the dressing ingredients together, taste and adjust seasonings, set aside.
- Lightly salt the shaved brussels sprouts and sliced sunchokes before cooking them.
- Heat the olive oil and butter in a large skillet, use enough to coat the pan. When the oil is hot add the sunchokes and cook for about 2-4 minutes per side until tender and crispy around the edges. Remove the sunchokes from the pan.
- Wipe out the pan and reheat more oil and butter and add the brussels sprouts. Cook them for 2 minutes per side until they get a little golden brown on the edges. Remove from pan.
- Toss the brussels sprouts and sunchokes with the dressing. Top the salad with with a handful of salad greens, pine nuts, red pepper flakes and parmesan. Serve with extra dressing on the side.

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Pesto



Herbs

Basil, Cilantro, Parsley, Spinach, Arugula

Greens and Herbs may be used interchangeably or mixed.



Coleslaw



Cabbage, Carrots, Radishes, Turnips



Herb Salsa (Chimichurri)

Parsley, Mint, Cilantro, Dill, Chives

Herbs can be interchanged or mixed together depending on what is available.




Value Added Products

This season we added some extra goodies to our donations like microgreens and dehydrated mushrooms, apples and herbs. In honor of the holiday season, we used the many pounds of berries harvested from the fields to make pies and crisps. Although our winter squash did not produce heavily this season we were also able to make some pumpkin pies. Additional value-added products to be produced and rolled out in early 2024 include a salsa verde made with our own tomatillos and jalapeños, as well as berry jams made with strawberries, gooseberries, currants and husk cherries.

HOLIDAY PIES



MICROGREENS



MUSHROOMS



From Our Farm

From our Farm Manager Katie

As the rest of the world experienced record setting heat in 2023, our region did not. In fact, the lack of warm weather, regular sun-exposure and over-the-average rainfall led to many stunted plants, root rot and disease. This led to lower production volume this season than what we expected. However, some crops did do extremely well. We had a stellar berry and apple season and some truly excellent root veggies. We had 25 donations this season that spanned from April to November which so far has been our longest growing season yet. This season also brought on new work with getting in the kitchen to process our fruit/produce and to the exciting new adventure of expanding the farm for next season with more land. I am looking forward to expanding our growing operation for next season and what opportunities having more land has to our mission as a non-profit.

Here's to another season!

From Our Community Outreach Coordinator Pieter

Although we had some poor weather for farming this year there were a few developments that I am personally excited about. Early this spring, we set up a Johnson-Su Bioreactor on our farm; this is an efficient style of composting that does not require turning. We are hoping it will let us utilize the extra organic material collected throughout the year and minimize the need for outside compost to be brought in. The other development I am thrilled about is our new relationship with the Worcester Fridges. Throughout the summer we did a few donations to the fridges which completely filled them with much needed fruits and vegetables. I am hoping that this relationship grows and strengthens in the coming year.

Cheers!



Pictures From our Donations

