

what next?: example projects for your congregation

Congregation Supported Agriculture: Members buy shares in a season's produce from one farm. The farm provides members with weekly deliveries and has the funds in advance to put in the crops. Churches across the country are now offering their buildings for deliveries, using their networks for coordinating orders, and buying a shares for hungry households. A group of congregations in Washington state sold vouchers, redeemable at local farmer's markets, instead of CSA shares, and then put 10% of the proceeds towards vouchers for low-income households. One church hosted a "That's My Farmer!" thank-you celebration where participating families met their farmers in person. Leaflight, in Orange County, N.C., operates a successful, church-based CSA program.

Food Fairs: A Guilford County congregation had farmers bring food to the church basement on successive Saturdays. Those who didn't grow food or have enough food could can or freeze while sharing time with each other. It became a cherished summer gathering, cementing relationships.

Church Lot Farmers Markets: Several years ago the Rural Life Committee set up 14 new church parking lot or church-based tailgate farmers markets. Besides getting fresh and nutritious foods, surveys show that a major reason people go to these markets is the fellowship, the community contact. The group made certain that low income households could use WIC and food stamp coupons for the fresh food. A group in California uses church lot markets to raise awareness of organic and local foods among parishioners, many of whom are low-income and Latino families who do not have easy access to information about organics. Each Sunday five farmers are at the stand after services, two of whom sell produce. Farmers participate on a rotating basis.

Community Gardens: Community gardens provide healthy food, community-building, and education in agriculture. Anathoth Community Garden, in Cedar Grove, N.C., was inspired by the Biblical injunction to "plant gardens and eat what they produce...and seek the peace of the city..." (Jer. 29:5,7). The garden hosts potlucks, harvest celebrations, and music events. The garden not only provides tasty organic vegetables, but creates community across racial, economic, and religious boundaries.

Gleaning: Society of St. Andrew offers congregations an opportunity to glean food left after harvest. Farmers open their fields, church members harvest, and food banks are replenished with fresh fruits and vegetables.

Sacred Food: Immigrants are showing up in record numbers in rural North Carolina. Fast paced growth of Latino and Southeast Asian people in rural areas is particularly prominent. Brought in by agricultural processing and farm worker jobs, they are becoming permanent residents, farm owners and church members. The Sacred Foods approach asks community members to bring their sacred foods and share food and spiritual stories from respective cultures.

Community Kitchens: Many churches already have commercial kitchens at fellowship halls, child care facilities, or adult day care facilities. These kitchens can be opened to farmers during off hours. This allows local farm families to store food and create value-added products. Consider sharing some of the products with local families in need.

And more... Buy local food for your next church event or fund-raiser. Grow a "demonstration garden" to illustrate the Bible's lessons about seeds, plants, and food, and share the produce. Teach classes on local food and Christian stewardship, on hunger and poverty, or on the issues facing farmers. Ask members to share local produce at monthly dinner, and invite the folks from your local soup kitchen. Be creative!