Notes from the Field

F2FB at the Brinnon Food Bank: Lessons from Success
By Alex Arroyo

Brinnon is a small, rural town located on the eastern edge of the Olympic Peninsula, and is home to the Brinnon Food Bank. One major challenge facing residents is that the cost of driving often makes it prohibitively expensive to travel to a store with a larger selection and buy food. With limited access to affordable and nutritious food, it is exceedingly difficult to maintain a healthy diet. This increases the risk of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and other diet-related diseases.

The Brinnon Food Bank distributes food to over 200 families per week and supports a backpack program for Quilcene and Brinnon, which supplies backpacks of food to school children in the area who might otherwise have nothing to eat on weekends. The Food Bank also runs the twice-weekly Senior Dinner program at the Brinnon Community Center. This popular event serves about 25 people each night and reflects the spirit of Brinnon. “It’s a small community,” said Eloise Langenbach, Executive Director of the Brinnon Food Bank. “Everyone tries to take care of everyone else.”

The Brinnon Food Bank has prioritized making fresh produce available to their clients. The Food Bank has had success with grocery rescues and was initially the recipient of gleaned produce from a local farm that was casually offering some surplus produce and left-overs from market. Soon after, a client suggested the food bank go directly to the farm and ask about surplus produce.

When approached, the farm owners had the idea that, rather than deal with disparate or inconsistent gleaning, the farm could agree to sponsor the Brinnon Food Bank for the growing season. The farm sought to work with just one food bank, in order to keep things at a manageable level for them. The Food Bank and the farm quickly worked out a schedule whereby a food bank volunteer travelling to Port Hadlock would be able to stop by the farm the same day every week.

This consistency made the process of getting surplus produce from the farm to the food bank extremely efficient. The farm that Brinnon FB works with is very successful and very productive. They were able to donate 50-150 pounds of food EVERY WEEK. The farm supplied beautiful green vegetables, kale, radishes, cucumbers, flat leaf parsley, cilantro, and squash. They hope to recognize the farm for over 4000 pounds of donated vegetables.

Over the season, that amounts to a substantial amount of produce made available to low-income community members. In addition, the produce that the farm donates are not seconds, but are, as Eloise describes, “stunningly gorgeous” and “absolutely lovely!”

For more information about starting or developing your farm-to-food bank initiative, please email growingconnections@northwestharvest.org, or contact Laura Titzer at 206.923.7423