May Segle believes that your motivation for helping people should come from the heart. The Administrator and Executive Director of the Entiat Valley Community Services Food Bank (EVCSFB) puts her beliefs to action, sharing a hug and a warm thanks with anyone who stops by the food bank to drop off donations.

EVCSFB will celebrate its 30th anniversary in September 2015. Over the years, it has expanded its services from a food bank to a multi-service provider dedicated to Chelan and Douglas County residents. Its services include benefits enrollment and employment training, a health clinic, nutrition education, and transportation services for the elderly and homebound. An entirely volunteer-run facility, the EVCSFB food bank serves 300 to 500 people each month.

The EVCSFB uses several farm-to-food bank strategies to increase the amount of fresh produce available to their clients. On a small scale, the food bank has a summer program called Garden Sprouts, which distributes seeds and plant starts to kids, along with activity books and garden tools. Kids meet once a month to update each other on their plants’ progress, learn about vegetables, and cook together. At harvest time, they donate part of their yield to the food bank, and cook a meal for their parents, eating their food in the EVCSFB’s Community Learning Kitchen.

Different strategies may work for some food banks and not as well for others, depending on the specific organization and their clients. For example, the EVCSFB also tried giving out farmer’s market vouchers to encourage clients to

**SHARE A ROW**

Many people in your community probably plant backyard gardens. Why not ask them to plant a row to donate to your food bank?

**How to get started:**

1. In the winter, ask local nurseries, growers, garden centers, or seed centers for donations of last year’s seeds and extra plant starts.
2. Advertise your program in the local paper, on social media, in fliers at nurseries and grocery stores and other community centers, and in school newsletters.
3. In early spring, hand out seeds, plant starts, and signs to food bank clients, at master gardener events, or at other community gatherings where gardeners congregate.
4. Over the summer and fall, watch the donations roll in!
purchase produce locally. Given many of their clients’ transportation issues, this didn’t work as well as hoped. The EVCSFB found greater success with their Share-A-Row program, which is still going strong eight years on. The food bank distributes seeds and plant starts to gardeners, as well as signs that advertise “This Row is Dedicated to the Food Bank”. The food bank works with gardeners to grow varieties of produce that are most needed by clients, and offers suggestions on their website about when to drop off produce in order to leverage cold storage space. At the end of the year, EVCSFB sends donors tax information, a photo collage of the food bank’s clients, and an annual report letter detailing the total amounts of produce collected during the growing season, which averages 1800 pounds a year.

May is savvy at publicizing the EVCSFB and uses a variety of methods to inform the community about donating fresh produce. Volunteers hang flyers all over the community, and the school newsletter publishes letters written by May that explain how the community can get involved. Due to this outreach, the EVCSFB receives numerous calls from local growers asking how they can donate to the food bank. After receiving a call, May engages directly with the farmers by visiting their farms, introducing herself and the food bank’s mission, making a face-to-face connection, and building sustainable relationships where the farmer arranges to donate to the food bank.

The EVCSFB is prompt about thanking people for their support. Within two to three days of a grower’s donation, the food bank sends out a thank you note. May also maintains an active Facebook page to keep her community up-to-date on the EVCSFB happenings and needs and often posts heartfelt thanks to the community: “This is what a community is about - helping others! Thank YOU!”
The EVCSFB is an integral part of the community and has become a natural leader in times of disaster. During the devastating wildfires of 2014 and 2015, the EVCSB has acted as a center for donations and communications. They mobilized relief efforts for those who had been evacuated and gathered supplies for firefighters. A recent Facebook post from May reads, “Thank you to all our spectacular donors for providing hope and help to those who desperately need it - and for giving from your hearts!”

Check out the EVCSFB website for more information on their Share-A-Row program. For more resources on starting a Share-A-Row program at your food bank, see Rotary First Harvest’s Resource Guide on Plant a Row.

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