Mason County is located in the Olympic peninsula, directly west of Kitsap County in the traditional territory of the Skokomish and Squaxin peoples. Today, one of the largest cities in this county is Shelton, which has a population of about 9,750. In the Shelton school district, 2,571 students applied for the Free and Reduced Price Meal Program, which indicates that food banks are valuable resources for the people of Mason County.

The Saints’ Pantry Food Bank is located in Shelton but feeds people across Mason County. In 2014 Saints’ Pantry distributed almost 750,000 pounds of food to 57,000 individuals. The food bank partners with various community organizations in creative ways in order to increase the availability of fresh produce. Their partners include the Master Gardeners, the Shelton High School Future Farmers of America, the State Fishers, and Washington State Correction Center.

About ten years ago, the Director of Saints’ Pantry took a tour of the Washington State Correction Center and noticed a large garden that was cultivated and cared for by the inmates. The Director inquired about surplus produce, and worked out an arrangement. Inmates box up surplus, load it onto pallets, and a WSCC employee drives the produce over to the food bank. Since then, Saint’s Pantry Food Bank has been receiving an average of 15,000 pounds of fresh produce a year from the Washington State Correction Center.

Saints’ Pantry also links with schools like Washington State University and Shelton High School. Saints’ Pantry is partnered with the

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**KNOW THE LANDSCAPE**

To grow your farm to food bank program, it’s important to know the landscape of your community, that is, who is doing what.

- Keep your eye out for potential community partners, even in the most unexpected places (such as the Washington State Correction Center).
- Consider the scope of agriculture in your region; what crops are grown, size of farms, and what are their major markets?
- Consider: do you have other sources of fresh local food, in addition to fruit and vegetables, such as fish?
WSU Master Gardeners program and purchases food grown exclusively for the food bank. Last year this purchasing program garnered over 4,000 pounds of fresh produce. Additionally, an extension program within Master Gardeners prepares fresh food for the food bank and serves the food warm to clients. With this meal, they also receive menus and cooking instructions—connecting clients with fresh produce, warm food, and the tools to create that for themselves.

Additionally, Saints’ Pantry also has a partnership with the Future Farmers of America at Shelton High School. The school has two large greenhouses and students learn to grow produce from seed. This program donates several hundred pounds of fresh produce to the food bank a year. Another connection they have is with the State Fishers, who harvest fresh salmon for the food bank.

With the multitude and diversity of their programs and partnerships, Saints’ Pantry not only provides fresh produce for clients but also grows and cultivates sustainable relationships with the community.

For more information about produce purchasing, see Northwest Harvest Growing Connections Resource Guide, especially Guide 4. Also see Rotary First Harvest Produce Purchasing Pilot Report.

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