Notes from the Field

Student Power - S.H.I.F.T. and the Ferndale Food Bank

By Alex Arroyo

Begun by Ferndale High School students Ryan England, Kevin Rietveld, and Elizabeth Hand, S.H.I.F.T. is a student-run effort to grow food and raise money for the Ferndale Food Bank.

The concept for S.H.I.F.T. (Sustainable, Healthy, Informational, Friendships and Thrive) came about in the winter of 2015. Discussions with friends and family about issues in agriculture, the cost of fresh food, and how rising prices can limit access to the most healthful of foods illuminated the need for affordable fresh produce and led to the idea of growing food for the local food bank. The England family has “several acres of land,” and Ryan thought it would be great if he could use some of that space to make a difference.

Ryan contacted a few of his friends and asked if they would contribute. Both Kevin Rietveld and Elizabeth Hand, co-founders, were immediately on board. Ryan then got in touch with Suzanne Nevan of the Ferndale Foodbank, and S.H.I.F.T was formed. Suzanne was delighted and explained the ever growing need for produce. She outlined that one in every five seniors and children in the Ferndale community are using or have sought out the food bank as a provider for food.

The project developed rapidly and produce was being delivered to the food bank that May! For the students, their first donation, which was 40 pounds of several different types of vegetables, “was a very satisfying experience,” and “something different in our lives,” said Ryan.

By the end of the growing season in September, 20 student members had grown and delivered nearly 1,200 pounds of fresh produce to the Ferndale Food Bank.

Co-founder Ryan England took time to answer a few questions about how the program works, who is involved, and what its goals are for coming years.
Where do you grow the food? How does it get to the Food Bank?
The food is grown all across the Ferndale/Custer region on the land or in the backyards and pots of the 20 S.H.I.F.T. members. My family has dedicated close to a quarter of an acre for S.H.I.F.T. Others grow food in their backyards or wherever they can. The produce is delivered directly to the food bank by the members who grow the produce.
A big part about growing food on behalf of S.H.I.F.T. is seeing the impact that it’s made first-hand. It’s pretty impressive to watch upwards of 150 pounds of produce get passed out in the few hours that the food bank is open. It really sheds light on the issue for the members and gives them a sense of purpose.

How are things going as you get into the growing season this year?
Are you making any adjustments from last year?
The Ferndale Food Bank in collaboration with the City of Ferndale and others, have purchased a large hoop house that will be built at the Ferndale community garden. S.H.I.F.T and its members will be the operators. This will allow S.H.I.F.T to expand and will provide even more opportunity for high school students living in the city.
We are very excited about the hoop house expansion at the community garden. Not only will this add to our contribution, it will give other S.H.I.F.T members a great opportunity to make a difference. The biggest challenge this year will be to continue to grow this project.

What are your plans for sustaining the program into the future? Is there interest from other students?
There has been a number of students this year who have expressed interest in joining the S.H.I.F.T. program. A month ago I gave a presentation at the high school that was very successful. A lot of kids want to get involved in the community but don’t know how or where to go. When I speak to people about S.H.I.F.T. I really emphasize that you don’t need to have a large space to grow vegetables in large quantities. What I find people are really sold on is that they can have a real direct impact on hunger locally.

For more information about S.H.I.F.T., visit their website: 
http://shiftfoods.org/#shift
Support the Ferndale Food Bank: http://www.ferndalefoodbank.org/

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