

Commentary: May 1 is a perfect day to aid Nourishing the North Shore mission

Commentary Nourishing the North Shore
Apr 28, 2022



The spring season brings an opportunity for hope and regeneration. As pandemic restrictions begin to ease and communities resume in-person gathering, this season may be especially hopeful. Yet, many in our community are being left behind as others move on. The North Shore is often seen as a wealthy area, hiding the fact that food insecurity is a daily reality for many residents, and one that has been greatly exacerbated by the pandemic. Now is the time for our community to work together to build a more just food system.

According to research from the U.S. Census Household Pulse Survey, current trends show food insecurity rising in Massachusetts households with children. It is estimated that 21% of households currently face food insecurity as of early March 2022. This figure is inching closer to 23.6% — the rate we saw during the onset of the pandemic. Meanwhile, federal and state food assistance programs have become less available while food costs continue to rise.

Wealth and resources continue to be consolidated among the few, while moderate and low-income households are forced to choose between paying for food, childcare, transportation or housing. Simultaneously, farmland is disappearing due to increased property values and development pressure. The Massachusetts Agricultural Census of 2017 determined the greatest loss of farmland across the state, over 5,000 acres, occurred in Essex County.

In 2020, the need for consistent access to healthy food became a central priority for many organizations here in Essex County. While this need existed prior to the pandemic, it became glaringly evident in communities most impacted by systemic inequities, racism and poverty. During this unprecedented time of need, Newburyport-based Nourishing the North Shore has been on the front line, maintaining its focus on increasing equitable access to nutritious local produce.

Nourishing the North Shore partners with Essex County farms to distribute thousands of pounds of produce to regional food pantries. Through these partnerships with farmers and regional food pantries, Nourishing the North Shore is working to create reliable access to free and subsidized local produce for middle-and-low-income community members.

The collective capacity of North Shore residents to meet the needs of our most vulnerable residents is being tested once again. Looking at recent statistics, we have an opportunity to support organizations working to build lasting change in our food system. Whether it's supporting local farmers, asking legislators to expand the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP), volunteering or committing to a consistent financial contribution to local organizations, there are many ways to use your individual capacity to help build a food system that works for all.

This coming Sunday, May 1, Nourishing the North Shore will be hosting a local Walk for Hunger event along the Clipper City Rail Trail from 10 a.m. -12 p.m. The event will start and end at the RiverWalk Brewing Co. Following the walk, RiverWalk is hosting a Mother's Day Market with doors open at noon. Nourishing the North Shore will be selling cold-hardy seedlings, with over 20 other local farm and craft vendors. The funds Nourishing the North Shore raises at this event will support its community programs that offer equal access to local healthy food.

Whatever your capacity, you are invited to join Nourishing the North Shore for this family friendly event. You may also consider donating to the organization's efforts to expand access to nutritious local produce (www.nourishingthenorthshore.org/donate). Here's to a new season of gathering, growth and hopeful change in our North Shore communities!