

FARM to FREEZER

Fundraiser



CREATING A MORE RESILIENT
LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

North Coast Growers' Association, Humboldt County Farmers' Markets
PO Box 4232, Arcata CA 95518 (707) 441-9999
NorthCoastGrowersAssociation.org/FarmToFreezer

Press Release - For Immediate Release

Contact: Megan Kenney, Manager of Cooperative Distribution 914-419-0128
megan@northcoastgrowersassociation.org

Re: NCGA's Farm to Freezer Fundraiser to help increase Humboldt's food security

With the help of the local community and the Headwaters Fund, North Coast Growers' Association (NCGA) will purchase a freezer unit for use by its members and other community partner organizations.

After grocery store shelves were left empty last year as the national food system failed and local infrastructure proved to be inadequate to meet our area's needs, NCGA has been participating in a local movement to create a more vibrant local food system by increasing food infrastructure and collaboration between food focused businesses. This past year, as COVID 19 led to the disruption of the national food system, gaps in Humboldt's own food infrastructure became painfully apparent. Local meat producers struggled to schedule processing days with Humboldt's single USDA facility while trying to keep up with the increased demand for their products that followed the meat shortage created by closures of major meat processing facilities in the Midwest and South. They turned to the only cold storage facility that could hold large quantities of frozen products, Humboldt Bay Packers (HBP), to meet this increased demand. This additional space allowed for overflow storage of products that didn't fit in current freezers on farms and ranches, and offered new solutions for some meat producers, like Crazy River Ranch.

Brett and Julia McFarland and Jessica Lovelady from Crazy River Ranch decided to save as many pigs as they could who were scheduled for euthanization due to the closure of meat processing facilities in the Midwest last year, so that the pigs could be turned into food instead of cruelly thrown away. They needed extra space for the additional meat products, so turned to HBP. Jessica says that this extra space allowed them to also "process more beef as we could now make commitments to the community to supply them with humanely raised sustainable beef when many folks were feeling the fragility of our food supply chain. The momentum had started and we moved forward to offering delivery to our CSA members during a time when going to the grocery store was a limited activity. We are so grateful that we were able to show up and expand our beef offering at a time when it was needed in our community."

However, in April of this year HBP suddenly shuttered its business and gave its tenants notice that their products would need to be rehomed. Several of NCGA's members scrambled to find a location to move their frozen goods. After 4 days of contacting numerous local companies and

even starting to look at spaces outside of Humboldt for an emergency solution, a local cannabusiness offered one of their freezers temporarily until the harvest season began.

During these conversations, it became apparent that Humboldt's local cold storage infrastructure was unreliable and had insufficient capacity to meet local food storage needs. Even Food for People, Humboldt's food bank, has needed to cut back on their frozen product offering due to a lack of freezer space after their main facility closed for renovations because of a sewer back-up that came just before the pandemic hit Humboldt.

In order to deprivatize local food infrastructure to make Humboldt's local food system more resilient, NCGA (a membership based organization) will purchase a 10x20' freezer unit. This will allow NCGA's meat producers to confidently schedule processing days knowing that they have a reliable space to store their frozen products. Farmers will also use this unit to store fruits and vegetables picked during the height of the harvest season to save for future processing into various value added products, or sold frozen to local artisan food producers, retailers, and schools. Additional space in the freezer will be available for organizations like Food for People.

NCGA's family owned meat producers are all dedicated to providing Humboldt's local community with sustainably and humanely raised meat products. By rotating pastures, which regenerates the soil allowing for carbon sequestration and water retention, they are helping Humboldt's land become more resilient in the face of climate change. Chris and Amber at Woody Ryno Farm, another NCGA member who has been displaced by the HBP closure, are acutely aware of how their impact affects their surrounding environment. After working with Pacific Watershed Associates, the Salmonid Restoration Federation, and becoming a Certified Regrarians REX Team Member, Chris has used this full spectrum approach to include landscape restoration in his farming. Pigs raised on Woody Ryno Farm are rotated on pasture and forest land, and diets are supplemented by spent grains from 6 Rivers Brewery and the byproduct Okara from The Tofu Shop, as well as pumpkins and other vegetables from their own farm.

"When our pigs reach market weight we train them to the trailer by feeding them in it for the last week on the farm. This reduces the stress associated with loading for their trip to the abattoir," explains farmer Chris.

If local farmers are forced to cut their meat production due to a lack of storage capacity, Humboldt will need to rely more heavily on products brought from out of the county on large trucks, often from larger scale producers who factory farm their meat. Animals who are factory farmed are grown in small cages without room to move around or in pens alongside thousands of other animals. These conditions contribute to a myriad of problems within the food system: high disease and death rates in livestock, the need to feed these animals genetically modified corn and soy products, decimation of arable land in and around feedlots, and production facilities whose underpaid employees are required to operate at such speeds that workers are frequently injured. This intensive, unnatural process requires a large amount of energy input and unused waste output, as compared to animals who are allowed to freely graze outdoors on pasture and forest lands. The end products of factory farms then travel thousands of miles and have just a fraction of the nutrients that sustainably produced, local meat products contain.

The purchase of this freezer unit will not only help NCGA's current members, it will also reinforce local food system infrastructure for future generations of farmers and ranchers. The capital required to start up a farm is quite high, and many farmers report not making a profit until 7 or 8 years after this initial investment. It is a labor of love, and these barriers make it especially difficult for beginning farmers. The average age of an American farmer is 57, so many agricultural organizations recognize the need to help uplift young, beginning farmers. NCGA can support new farmers by providing increased outlets for direct sales through farmers' markets, educational opportunities for children through the Know Your Farmer program, and working with the Small Business Development Center to put on farmer-led workshop series. This freezer is another step NCGA is taking to create a reliable, secure local food system.

"We envision a vibrant local food system that connects all of the different sectors" says Megan Kenney, NCGA's Manager of Cooperative Distribution. "Individuals, non-profits, for-profits, and institutions like schools all rely on food, so why not make it easier for everyone to access locally grown, raised, and processed foods?"

With the help of the Headwaters Fund, the first \$10,000 of donations towards the \$25,000 goal will be matched. Visit the Farm to Freezer Fundraiser website to read more about this project www.northcoastgrowersassociation.org/farmtofreezer

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NCGA is the operator of ten Certified Farmers' Markets in Humboldt County. Membership in the North Coast Growers' Association is open to residents of Humboldt County who grow or raise what they sell within Humboldt County. Working collaboratively, NCGA staff and members represent agricultural interests in Humboldt County through community partnerships that promote local and healthy foods, programs that increase access to local food, and participation in local and statewide policy-making. A number of independent markets and farm stands continue to operate in various communities. For a full listing of Certified Farmers' Markets, community markets, farm stands and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms, as well as a directory of all farmers' market vendors please visit www.northcoastgrowersassociation.org