

From the Pages of **The Ellsworth American.**

Thursday, July 7, 2012

Blue Hill Food Pantry Getting Farm-fresh Veggies

BY JENNIFER OSBORN

BLUE HILL — Horse Power Farm in Penobscot will be supplying the Tree of Life Food Pantry with fresh vegetables this summer thanks to the Mainers Feeding Mainers program.

Mainers Feeding Mainers is a program started by the Good Shepherd Food Bank in 2010. The contract with Horsepower Farm is Good Shepherd's first in Hancock County.

The program was a solution to reduced donations.

"We realized that we needed to be able to source more reliable food options for those that we serve because our donations have dropped off considerably over the last several years,"

Since 2010, Mainers Feeding Mainers has worked with over 20 farms to purchase and distribute over 1.3 million pounds of fresh food to needy families.

said Nancy Perry, project director for Mainers Feeding Mainers.

"So far it's been a win-win for them and for us," Perry said.

When the program first started, farms delivered produce directly to the Good Shepherd Food Bank for distribution to pantries.

Last summer, the food bank decided having pantries pick up directly from farms or having farms deliver to pantries would make more logistical sense, Perry said. So

a trial program was launched with four farms.

"It worked so well that we wanted to be able to increase that this year," Perry said. "This year, there will be 60 pantries that go to a farm to get the produce instead of one of our warehouse locations.

"The farm to pantry works so well because the pantries all have different hours of operation. "Some are open once or twice a month. Many of the agencies don't have enough storage."

Perry said if the Tree of Life is open on Thursday mornings, the vegetables can be picked up Wednesday evening or early Thursday morning for immediate distribution.

Rick Traub, a volunteer and food purchaser for Tree of

Life, said Horse Power Farm would be paid \$2,400 to supply the pantry with tomatoes, zucchini, cucumbers, kale and chard this summer and fall.

"We are grateful for the support of the many donors who have made this program possible and for Good Shepherd for agreeing to expand the program into Hancock County," Traub said. "It really is an extraordinary program providing financial support to local farmers and fresh organic produce to Peninsula residents who come to the pantry for food assistance."

Perry said Good Shepherd is always working on new programs. She hopes to one day see a fish-to-pantry offering.