Common Ground makes produce available to community

Common Ground Farm (CGF) is a diversified non-profit vegetable farm just north of Beacon, with a mission to serve its community as a model for food justice and education for people of all ages and incomes.

In 2017, CGF addressed food access in the mid-Hudson Valley by focusing on food systems change. Overall, the organization distributed more than 3,100 pounds of fresh produce to people in need in the mid-Hudson Valley by focusing efforts on food systems change. According to the National Retail Foundation, U.S. consumers are expected to each spend an average of about $137 on Valentine’s Day, with total sales expected to hit $23.3 billion. That adds up to a lot of dollars.

To keep your bank account in check and put a smile on your sweetie’s face this season, by taking a do-it-yourself approach instead. With a little creativity and forethought, you can treat your special someone without spending loads of dough.

Get crafty

“There is such a tremendous trend right now toward DIY, particularly in gifting,” said Risa Getman, owner of Hudson Valley Vintage, a do-it-yourself crafting and workshop studio in Rhinebeck. The shop offers a variety of how-to sessions to teach locals the secrets behind creating one-of-a-kind homegoods themselves. For Valentine’s Day, Hudson Valley Vintage will host two holiday-themed sessions. On Feb. 10, class attendees can learn the ins and outs of designing wooden signs. For a crafting session on Feb. 11, participants can learn the art of making and designing wooden signs.

Another option is to rope your significant other into a craft or cooking project that the two of you complete together. Not only will the creativity inspire you, it’s a fun date activity, but the finished product will remain a memento of your memories from that day for years to come. “A hands-on experience is often the gift itself,” Getman observed.

Community Voices

Common Ground Farm apprentices

Common Ground Farm apprentices
delivered 1,000 pounds of fresh produce to the Beacon City School District cafeterias throughout the growing season. This year CGF was the only local farm selling directly to the schools without a distributor, and in the future CGF hopes to enlist additional farms and school districts to create a local produce procurement network in the region.

CGF also operates mobile markets in Beacon and Newburgh, which get fresh produce to low-income communities and seniors who may have trouble accessing and affording fresh produce to the regular farmers markets. The organizations brought nearly 2,000 pounds of produce to the new Tenehre Fresh market at the Lake Street Apartments. This mobile market was created in 2017 in partnership with Affinity Health Plan, and will be back again in 2018. Another 3,300 pounds of produce was distributed through the Common Greens market, a partnership with CCE’s Green Teen Beacon program, which began in 2009. Common Greens pop up at two locations in Beacon every week during the summer, selling produce from CGF and the Green Teen gardens.

Greens 4 Greens is a food-focused in- tervention program unique to the Beacon Farmers Market, that began in 2006. Eligible state-funded food benefits are matched dollar for dollar through Greens 4 Greens, making the farmers market more accessible to a wider base of consumers. The program has been completely community-funded through contributions made by local businesses as well as the annual Doug 4 Greens and GGF Summer Festival events. This year will be the first year the program will run throughout the winter season, provid-
Love
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Cooking for deux
To add a bit of sustenance to that ticket, turn downtime into chance to recreate a favorite restaurant meal at home. Chef Vogt, the person who helped run A Natural Chef, a cooking and nutrition service based out of Tupper Lake, has some advised a strong start. A good quality piece of protein or a handful of locally grown, seasonal vegetables, for example, are easy to find and transform into a nourishing dinner, she noted. She is important to select a meal that everyone will enjoy and that fall within the realm of your cooking abilities.

“Your don’t want (the meal) to be something that causes you stress,” she said, adding that a simple cuisine is often the best way to keep in the whole family as well.

To add a little of a bottle of locally produced wine or cider for a restaurant-school family room, from the comfort of your dining room.

Film fest
Once the meal wraps, round out the DIY Valentine’s Day celebration with a show that will rival any trip to the movie theater. While going to the actual cinema can be an expensive ordeal, creating a theater experience at home costs nothing.

“You can create the atmosphere for yourself,” said Tyler Nelson, executive director of the Beacon Independent Film Festival. Whether that means building a blanket fort in the living room or lighting candles at the dining room table, get creative with setting up a faux screening area.

After setting the stage, take a moment to select the perfect film. Nelson recommends something thematic, like “Love Actually” or “Some Kind of Wonderful,” for an extra dose of romance. Browse Shown on Netflix or Amazon Prime before the big day to find a flick your partner will love. After that, the only thing left to do is kick back, relax and roll tape.

Samantha Davis is a freelance writer. Contact her at freelance@snyoungkeepersjournal.com.

The sign-making workshop at Hudson Valley Vintage is a fun DIY project for Valentine’s Day. RIA SETTINA/COURTESY PHOTO

Produce
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ing 146 Greens 4 Greens checks to those that were donated to a local food bank. One frequent market shopper uses the Greens 4 Greens token to shop at her son’s local food bank and delights in calling them her “magic bucks.” Customers who utilize the program often remark on how good they feel knowing their farmers market purchases encourage the use of their food benefits and that their weekly produce shopping benefits local farmers. In 2020, COF partnered in partnership with Kids 8 Kids, South Avenue Elementary School, and the South Avenue PTA (with support from United Way Dutchess-Inland) to distribute Thanksgiving Shares to 35 children who participate in the school’s Backpack program, an initiative to make sure that food insecure children have food to eat on the weekends.

Farm Director Sarah Simon recently described her week. “Some of the very best mornings on the farm are when we go out and pick a bunch of fresh, perfect lettuce mix, and then we pack up half of it for a box quality and half for a nice farm-to-table restaurant. Everything, regardless of income, deserves access to fresh, nourishing food, and we know that the same beautiful lettuce that goes for $5 at the restaurant is just as deeply valued by our food pantry partners.”

Common Ground Farm relies on the generous support of people in our community to enable food access for all. To learn more about Common Ground Farm, and to make a donation, visit annual appeal.36033 casebywick.com.

Samantha Weinman is the education director at Common Ground Farm.