



TROY R. BENNETT | BDN  
South Portland Food Cupboard volunteer Sharon Shearer sets out acorn squash donated by Jordan's Farm in Cape Elizabeth recently. Fresh produce is also donated to the cupboard by a private family in Cape Elizabeth and the South Portland community gardens.

## Kitchens learn from Belfast's example

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS  
BDN STAFF

BELFAST — A couple of weeks ago, when Yvonne Chick of Orland had her two hogs slaughtered, she wasn't looking forward to the big, messy task of processing the meat in her own kitchen. Fortunately, she had another option available to her — the community kitchen at Halcyon Grange No. 345, which was open to the public in May after a major renovation effort. The kitchen, licensed and built to commercial standards, is intended to be an incubator for small, value-added businesses and a community resource for other types of cooking projects, such as Chick's hog processing ordeal. "We just had this great place to cut it all up and get it into the freezer," she said of the kitchen. "It's big and clean and has big, stainless steel counters, a huge stove, a dishwasher. The space is fabulous."

Chick, who also is the volunteer kitchen coordinator for the grange, said that she and other grange members are excited about the possibilities for the community kitchen. So far, the kitchen has attracted bakers, an older man who makes crackers, and a couple of other small producers who have come in and made their wares in a clean, licensed establishment. It is among a few other similar enterprises that recently have opened in the area, including the licensed commercial kitchen at the Orland Community Center.

Lots of people in Maine are cheering on the growth of this type of commercial kitchen, including Donovan Todd, the state executive director for the Farm Service Agency. He said Thursday that the more kitchens like this there are in Maine, the better it will be for the state's farmers. "They're kind of an incubator-type situation, to help people come up with new markets and new products," he said. "Value added is where the money is. From my perspective, a lot of the farmers today are surviving by being producers of raw products, but the ones making more of the money are the ones that can process the food and sell it as a value-added product."

### Fall from grace

But just because licensed commercial kitchens are a good idea doesn't mean that their success is going to be a slam-dunk. Todd and others are quick to mention Coastal Farms and Foods Inc. in Belfast, a large-scale food processing facility that went bust dramatically in the spring of 2014, just two years after it began operations in a former manufacturing warehouse.

When Coastal Farms, a 50,000 square foot enterprise, went dark, it cost its investors nearly \$2 million, according to co-owner Jan Anderson of Belfast, who invested in it herself. Producers renting space there also had to scramble to find a new home. The essential problem, she said Thursday, was one of undercapitalization. That meant that when things didn't go as predicted — such as when the blueberry processing and freezing

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# Farm to food bank

### Growers extend harvest to Maine's food insecure

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE  
BDN STAFF

Robust ears of corn plucked earlier from a nearby farm burst from bins. In the next aisle, acorn squash and juicy red apples exude a Whole Foods-like quality.

On Thursday mornings when the doors of the South Portland Food Cupboard swing open, low-income families can't believe their eyes.

"The produce is so absolutely beautiful that our clients just cry," said director Sybil Riemensnider, who receives the weekly bounty from Jordan's Farm in Cape Elizabeth. "These are things they can't afford."

Healthy, fresh and nutrition-dense vegetables, fish and dairy are flourishing at food pantries across Maine. Now in its fifth season, Mainer's Feeding Mainer's, a program run by the Good Shepherd Food Bank, pairs farmers with food pantries and soup kitchens to augment the canned and boxed rations that have sustained the hungry for decades.

"You can fill people full of cakes and cookies and all the bakery items and say we are feeding people," said Nancy Perry, who directs the program. "But we are not addressing obesity and diabetes when we feed people empty calories."

Starting with nine farms in 2010, the program is now partnering with 35 Maine farmers and food producers, from Oakhurst Dairy to Pineland Farms. Mainer's Feeding Mainer's supplies 300 pantries and soup kitchen with fresh, locally grown food. Such efforts are gradually chipping away at the state's staggering food insecurity problem.

The USDA estimates that 16.2 percent of Maine house-



TROY R. BENNETT | BDN  
Sybil Riemensnider stands in the doorway of the South Portland Food Cupboard, which she founded nearly two decades ago after a career in microbiology and marketing. "I'm a volunteer, like everyone else," she said.

holds, or 208,000 people, lack access to nutritious food.

"Despite everything we are doing, the numbers are still high," said Clara Whitney, the food bank's director of public affairs.

Across the nation, Maine ranks 12th for food insecurity and has the most acute problem in New England. To address the dilemma, last year the Auburn-based hunger relief organization purchased a million pounds of produce and farmers donated an equal amount to the program.

"What we get from our farm partners is very good quality — what they call grade A, the best," said Perry, making community efforts like these part of the solution.

Through a series of grants, Good Shepherd pays farmers a below-market rate to offer kale, carrots and other enviable pro-



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Fresh green beans donated by Jordan's Farm wait to be bagged at the South Portland Food Cupboard recently.

duce to pantries across the state. Farmers don't balk at the discount though — on the contrary, they are relieved to have a guaranteed buyer. The part-

nership is a boon to the hungry who can't afford to eat healthy and fresh and are largely locked out of Maine's burgeoning

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The old barn at The Apple Farm is surrounded by plump pumpkins and other farm treats.



ABIGAIL CURTIS | BDN

### ABOUT A FARM

## Old-time apples, barn in Fairfield delight visitors

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS  
BDN STAFF

FAIRFIELD — In a child's picture book about a farm, the barns are always red, the pumpkins and apples are bright and glossy and the farmers are smiling.

In reality, though, the apples sometimes have worms or dark spots, barns are different hues and the farmers, well, they don't always smile.

But at The Apple Farm, located in the rolling, fertile hills of central Maine, the storybook image of apple farms comes alive. In the busy fall harvest season, as groups of schoolchildren wander around

the rows of apple trees in search of the perfect fruit to fill their small bags, the old red barn stands at the heart of the action.

When Marilyn and Steve Meyerhans purchased the farm in 1973 as a couple of hopeful back-to-the-landers, they became part of an agricultural tradition on the land that began when Maine was still part of Massachusetts. The couple moved into a renovated ice house and began caring for and expanding the orchards with a focus on the old-time and delicious apple varieties that come from the area, including Northern Spy, Golden Russet, Pearmain and Winter Banana.

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