



GOODWILL FARM TO FREEZER

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Winter in Northern Michigan presents a formidable challenge when it comes to sourcing local produce. While season extension systems and storage crops provide great options, the depths of winter still result in limited local produce availability. Exciting as these systems are, additional local produce choices are always a welcome joy in the winter months. Thankfully, here in northern Michigan we're blessed with the Goodwill Farm to Freezer program.

Goodwill's Farm to Freezer purchases fruits and vegetables from local farmers and flash freezes them so our community can have access to summer produce all year long. Farm to Freezer products — including everything from cherries, peaches, and blueberries to asparagus, carrots, and romanesco — are available to retail consumers in more than 25 grocery stores. And it doesn't end there! Larger packages are also available for restaurants and institutions. In fact, the whole operation began with the hope of bringing more local produce into school cafeterias and that's just what they're doing. Students throughout the region are getting excited about local strawberries, blueberries, cauliflower, and carrot medleys.

For the farmers, Farm to Freezer creates an new outlet for their products, allowing more to be grown and sold than would normally be consumed by customers during the summer months. In 2015, the program purchased 120,000 pounds of fruits and vegetables from farms throughout the region, and in 2016 they expect to purchase an incredible 180,000 pounds. Farm to Freezer



er has also begun production of an organic line of local fruits and vegetables to reach another consumer and producer audience.

Not only is Farm to Freezer creating a much-needed outlet for local produce, but they're also helping an underserved population get back on their feet in the process. The folks who work in the Farm to Freezer kitchen preparing and freezing the produce are gaining new skills and developing workforce experience that may otherwise be difficult to find. They've typically had trouble starting anew after various unfortunate circumstances, but Farm to Freezer gives them a second chance.

The transitional work experience program includes an intensive one-week training, followed by 90 days of paid work experience in the kitchen. This understanding and supportive environment is exactly what many people need to regain their confidence and learn valuable work skills to change their lives for the better.

Every purchase of Farm to Freezer products — for the home kitchen, a small restaurant, or an entire school district — is a win-win-win situation: farmers are benefiting by gaining a larger market for their crops, local people in need of a second chance are gaining valuable skills to reenter the workforce, and consumers are given an additional way to support our local economy.

So, next time you find yourself in the freezer aisle, consider choosing a Farm to Freezer product. It's a simple way to support your community on many levels, and put flavorful local produce on your table all year long.

