



FEEDING OUR NEIGHBORS

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In 2014, families in need made 528,767 visits to 70 pantries and meal sites throughout Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, and Wexford counties. The need to connect everyone in our community to healthy, local food is clear and compelling—though not always as easy as it should be.

Taste the Local Difference (TLD), in partnership with Food Rescue Northwest Michigan, hopes to bridge the communication gaps between local farmers, pantries, meal sites, and consumers with the launch of a new food pantry resource site: OnePantry.org. The site lists the hours of operation, addresses, and donation requests of pantries and meal sites throughout Michigan, providing a direct line of communication between farmers or retailers that may have excess products they'd like to donate, and pantries who would like to offer more whole, healthful, local foods to their clients.

In Traverse City, the Father Fred Foundation—our largest food pantry in the

region—is leading the way in increasing the amount of healthful, local food available to their clients.

“The food pantry at the Father Fred Foundation is committed to providing food assistance to any person residing in the five-county Traverse City area who reaches out and expresses need,” said Les Hagaman, Father Fred’s Operations Director.

With each visit to the pantry, guests to Father Fred receive three days of food for all members of their household, and families are welcome to visit twice a month. Food at Father Fred is carefully selected to provide a diet as balanced and nutritious as possible. Guests are offered choices within each food group and multiple sources of protein and fresh produce. The goal is to intervene in the cycle of poverty by improving the dietary habits of all Father Fred’s guests, particularly children.

“We see daily the devastating effects of poor diet and its undeniable link to poverty and how these habits and consequences

are passed onto the next generation,” Hagaman said. “We believe that if we can successfully intervene in this cycle and educate our guests about the benefits of local food sourcing and fresh produce in their diets, we can improve lives.”

Father Fred is working to increase the financial resources to purchase fresh produce staples—locally sourced when possible—such as broccoli, beans, carrots, potatoes, onions, apples, and grapes. The Foundation is also committed to education and offers recipes and cooking demonstrations by Foundation volunteers and MSU Extension nutritionists.

“This dual commitment of improved food selection and education is central in our endeavor to pivot the American diet toward healthy, fresh, single ingredient foods, and away from highly processed foods high in sugar, high fructose corn syrup, sodium and artificial ingredients,” Hagaman said.