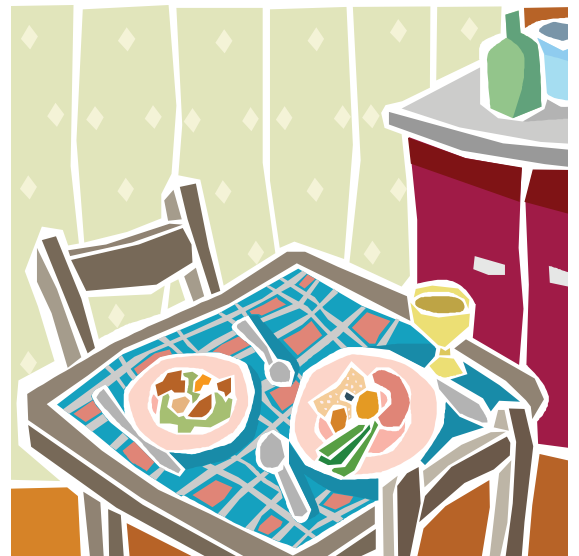


# Food Sovereignty for All

## *Overhauling the Food System with Faith-Based Initiatives*



*Interfaith Food & Farms Partnership*  
A Project of *Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon*  
and its *Interfaith Network for Earth Concerns*



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# Acknowledgements

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) would like to express its thanks to the granting organizations, cosponsors and partners who made this handbook possible.

## Granting Organizations

Presbyterian Hunger Program

United Methodist Church, General Board of Global Ministries

Catholic Campaign for Human Development

USDA Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service Community Food Projects Grant #2007-04085

## Cosponsors of 2009 Interfaith Summit: Food Sovereignty for All

Benton County Health Department, Corvallis First United Methodist Church, Eco-Justice Team of the Presbytery of the Cascades, Episcopal Environmental Commission, Corvallis First United Methodist Church, Corvallis Slow Food, Lutheran Advocacy Ministry, Oregon Farmers' Markets Association, Oregon Food Bank, Oregon State University Horticulture Department, Slow Food Corvallis, Ten Rivers Food Web and Westside Community Church.

## Local and Regional Partners

Mid-Willamette Valley Farms: Afton Field Farms, Bina's Patchwork Garden, Brooklane Specialty Orchard, Denison Farms, Gathering Together Farm, Heavenly Harvest Farm, Kings Valley Gardens, La Mancha Ranch & Orchard, Matt-Cyn Farm, Midway Farms, My Pharm, Oven & Earth, Sunbow Farm, Spring Hill Farms, Turpen Family Farm and Wood Family Farm.

Benton County Organizations: Beit Am Mid-Willamette Valley Jewish Community, Calvin Presbyterian Church, Corvallis Mennonite Fellowship, First Congregational United Church of Christ, First Presbyterian Church, Good Samaritan Episcopal Church, Grace Lutheran Church, Saint Mary's Catholic Church and Willamette Neighborhood Housing Services.

Greater Portland Area Farms: Her Family Farm, Lucky Flower Farm, Little Frog CSA, Northwest Organics and Great River Farm

Greater Portland Area Organizations: First Presbyterian Church, First United Methodist Church, Hacienda Community Development Corporation, Julia West House, EMO's Northeast Emergency Food Program (NEFP), Sunnyside and Lincoln Street United Methodist Churches, Saint Andrew Lutheran Church of Beaverton, Saint Andrew Catholic Church, Redeemer Lutheran Church and Saint Philip Neri Catholic Church.

# *Food Sovereignty for All*

## *Overhauling the Food System with Faith-Based Initiatives* A Handbook

*Interfaith Food & Farms Partnership*  
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Publication Date: August 2009,  
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon  
First Edition for October 3, 2009, Interfaith Summit

The Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership is supported by the Community Food Projects Program of the USDA Cooperative State Research, Education and extension Service.  
Grant #2007-04085.



# Introduction

*Congregations often have resources and infrastructure—land, kitchens, buildings and volunteers—that can be harnessed for community and economic development.*

## What Is Food Sovereignty?

Food sovereignty is the right of all people, communities and countries to define agricultural, food and land policies that are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally relevant. Food sovereignty holds that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and food-producing resources. This framework calls for actions and strategies on local and global levels to address the root causes of hunger.



Food sovereignty holds that food is a human right.

## A Call to Action: Moving Beyond Charity

Faith communities can play a pivotal role in bringing about the conditions to end hunger. Congregations often have resources and infrastructure—land, kitchens, buildings and volunteers—that can be harnessed for community and economic development. Gardens, buying clubs and other projects that promote health and awareness are examples of ways in which faith communities are advancing the ideals of food sovereignty. These initiatives empower families and neighborhoods to grow and process their own food, collaborate with local farmers and regain control over their

health. They may even provide an incubation site for microbusinesses. Many communities are turning to these kinds of creative solutions to foster self-reliance and social justice.

## About Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

Founded in 1974, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) is a statewide association of Christian denominations—including Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox bodies—congregations, ecumenical organizations and interfaith partners working together to improve the lives of Oregonians through community ministry programs, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, environmental ministry and public policy advocacy. One of EMO's core programs is the Interfaith Network for Earth Concerns (INEC). INEC connects, informs and empowers people, congregations and religious institutions to work for the care and renewal of the earth. INEC began the Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership (IFFP) in 2005, building on a decade of food system education and advocacy. Since then, partner congregations have launched a range of projects from farmers' markets coupon programs to canning classes and farm stands. This handbook is a distillation of lessons learned over the past several years.

## How to Use This Handbook

Our intent is to inform and inspire those interested in developing food projects within the faith community context. In this handbook we focus on the types of initiatives we have tried in recent years. However, there are infinite variations and possibilities for innovation. We attempt to shed light on the major questions that arise as projects get underway, but by no means address them all. At the end is a brief list of resources you might find helpful as you move forward with projects.

If your faith community is just beginning to consider a food project, begin by reading section one, "Creating Effective Projects: How to Make a Real Difference." As your ideas take shape, pay closer attention to section two, "Common Elements of Faith-Based Organizing." If your congregation has space for a garden or



community kitchen, or would like to collaborate with local farmers on a buying club, see the sections specific to these projects. Be sure to read the information on low-income collaboration in the first two sections if you plan to partner with an underserved population.

No two faith-based initiatives are exactly alike, and each must fit the unique characteristics, needs and assets of its community. This fact makes generalized information about community food projects limited in its applicability. We hope you will find this handbook useful as a starting place—a resource to help you assess where to begin and how to get started.

*No two faith-based initiatives are exactly alike and each must fit the unique characteristics, needs and assets of its community.*

# Creating Effective Projects:

## *How to Make a Real Difference*

*There is no better time for congregations to support local farmers, increase access to healthy food for all members of the community and reduce our dependence on foods produced thousands of miles away.*

*It is better to start small and grow your project than to do too much initially.*

Faith-based organizations from many traditions have long been committed to helping less fortunate members of the community through contributions to charity, community ministries, volunteer projects at home and abroad, and working toward social justice through advocacy and community organizing. Recently, care for creation has become a motivation for involvement in food systems and local food.

In the United States today, millions of Americans are facing new or continuing economic struggles as health care, food and energy costs rise, while work hours are reduced, jobs eliminated or wages frozen. At the same time, one of the leading health concerns is the epidemic of obesity seen in both adults and children. Because of these concerns, many communities are seeing a revitalized interest in community gardens, farmers' markets, and local, fresh and healthful foods.

There is no better time for congregations to support local farmers, increase access to healthy food and reduce our dependence on foods produced thousands of miles away—in a world with limited energy resources. Fortunately, there are many opportunities to become involved. Nevertheless, setting up a faith-based project requires careful planning, organization, community education, and the commitment and hard work of many members. You may find that working in collaboration with other faith-based groups in your area is more sustainable and has the added benefit of strengthening relationships across communities, while creating opportunities to learn about other faith traditions.

### Setting Realistic Goals

The first step in setting up a food-related initiative that supports local farmers and increases access to healthy foods is to decide what sort of project might work best for your faith community. Do you have access to land that could be turned into a community garden or donation garden? Is there a farmer who attends your services who might be interested in setting up a farm stand after services? Is there a group of people such as a men's or women's

group who could set up a buying club? Are you interested in going beyond simple donations to a food pantry to work in collaboration with a particular low-income community? How would you go about doing so? Many valuable projects are possible, but no one model will work for every faith community.

For many faith communities it is best to start with education, drawing connections between food and faith. Such education can provide a deeper understanding of community food projects and tangible expressions of faith and values. If your faith community already has a social justice or care for creation committee, that might be a good place to start discussing possible food projects. You could set up a subcommittee, or form a new committee, to explore ideas. Try to look realistically at the pros and cons of each project. Look carefully at how the costs (money, time and energy) of the project compare with the available resources. If you have a team of four wildly enthusiastic volunteers, perhaps their first task should be to recruit four more volunteers and help them to get just as excited about your project. Get input from other faith communities that have tried similar projects, including those that did not work. A project that generates broad enthusiasm and sounds fun and interesting to many members of the faith community (youth as well as adults) is likely to be more successful and sustainable. It is better to start small and grow your project than to do too much initially. Food and faith projects are a bit like gardens—it you plant too much all at once you can quickly become overwhelmed by all the weeds, watering and zucchini! Projects that start small and then add new components (and partners) over time are more likely to flourish. A high level of ownership among many people in the congregation is also important for ensuring participation and volunteers. Setting goals includes thinking about strategies for long-term sustainability. How will you ensure that the project doesn't just fall on the shoulders of one highly motivated person and that it is integrated into the life of the faith community, including finances, if required?

## Reaching out to Low-Income Communities and Small Farmers

Many faith communities place a high priority on working with low-income individuals as a part of their food and faith projects. Many small farmers struggle to make a living and are low-income themselves. Simply partnering with a local farmer may increase his or her economic viability by increasing sales and providing a reliable outlet for fruits and vegetables.

Partnerships that build close relationships between faith communities and farmers give producers and consumers an opportunity to understand each other's circumstances and to support one another. Farmers benefit from new economic opportunities. Congregation-based farm stands have the potential to provide customers in a short time frame and often less set up time and fewer equipment needs than farmers' markets. Immigrant farmers gain social support and useful connections.

Other congregations might plan to work more directly with a particular low-income community through a sustained effort such as a soup kitchen, community garden or other venue. Doing so is likely to be more successful if the



Partnerships between farmers and faith communities build awareness of local agriculture.

leadership and community members understand the root causes of poverty and hunger. Despite widespread attitudes that blame poverty only on laziness and bad choices, research clearly indicates that structural factors, such as high housing and childcare costs, low wages and underemployment (in part due to government policies that make outsourcing so profitable) and changing family demands have contributed to high rates of poverty in the United States. In fact, most poor people work quite hard, often in two or more physically-demanding low-wage jobs. Having a greater understanding of the challenges faced by the poor could lead not only to increased compassion, but also to increased enthusiasm for working for systemic change.

If your faith community hopes to work with a particular ethnic or immigrant population, learning about their cultural traditions and practices is essential. Congregation members may quickly realize that they are gaining as much as they are giving in a cross-cultural partnership. Having one or more cultural or linguistic translators will certainly make such projects more successful. Youth can sometimes facilitate communication across groups.

Try also to address the needs of those with disabilities. Think about how to create wheelchair accessible raised garden beds, kitchens and pathways before you begin your project. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) offers guidelines for how to design accessible spaces. A horticultural therapist may also provide ideas for accessible gardening. Partner with organizations that serve the disabled population to invite input and participation.

Learning about the challenges faced by the individuals you hope to work with will lead to greater program success and satisfaction. For example, having a better understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty may mean that your program can anticipate the need to help with transportation costs or childcare. Similarly, offering cooking classes to help immigrant mothers learn how to use unfamiliar vegetables in healthy recipes could encourage them to try low-cost locally grown foods and lead to better nutrition for families. Having engaged participants who are excited about cooking classes or placing buying club orders is rewarding for both members of the congregation and the participants themselves.

*Having a greater understanding of the challenges faced by the poor could lead not only to increased compassion, but also to increased enthusiasm for working for systemic change.*

## Evaluating Your Program

During the planning process it is important to keep in mind how you will measure the effectiveness of your project. Good programs have ongoing evaluation and analysis and use this information to make improvements. Your results may help you decide to expand services, change the population you are working with or close some element of your program and start something new.

How will you know if you're doing a making a difference? One way is to return to your original goals and simply have a discussion about how well you are meeting them. Ask volunteers and participants how they think the program is working. If you have participants who have dropped out, try to get their feedback. Is there anything you can do to better meet their needs? Usually people are quite willing to tell you what worked well and what didn't. You can collect feedback using short surveys, in-person or telephone interviews or focus group discussions. If you want to do a more thorough evaluation, you may have someone in your congregation who has experience help you. If not, try contacting a local college or university. Sometimes faculty members are looking for an interesting project for their students and would be happy help. Having an independent and unbiased point of view can be enormously helpful.

Starting a faith-based food initiative that supports local farmers and increases access to healthy foods for all members of the community is hard work, but also exciting and deeply satisfying. It is an opportunity to live out one's faith in a concrete way. As one member of a Corvallis congregation noted, "What we are doing here is required by our faith, not optional. For us, it's where it all started—supporting local farmers and reaching out to others in need."



Dot surveys are an easy way to gain insight into people's needs and ideas, evaluate your work, and spark conversation.



# Common Elements of Faith-based Organizing

Whether your congregation is planning a garden, community kitchen or partnership with local farmers, there are a few universal issues to consider.

## Gaining Community Support

Building and maintaining a broad base of support is essential to a healthy project. People will develop a sense of ownership when they participate or volunteer. Seek people within your faith community who have gardening, cooking, community development, food preservation or farming expertise. If your faith community has a committee working on social justice or hunger, be sure to include its members in your efforts. Their mission might align well with your project, enlarging your group of supporters.



You may find some great enthusiasts within your own faith community.

**Here are many ways to publicize your project within your faith community:**

- Publicize meetings; advertise them as a potluck meal
- Make pulpit announcements
- Write bulletin or newsletter blurbs
- Visit committees within your faith community to present the project
- Send information via internal e-mail listservs
- Communicate face to face and make personal invitations

**Here are ways to publicize your project beyond the walls of your faith community:**

- Post fliers
- Write press releases
- Use e-mail listservs
- Post to Web sites
- Advertise opportunities for national service days
- Give presentations to neighboring faith communities, nonprofits, task forces and coalitions
- Write letters or make phone calls to businesses such as nurseries and building supply stores
- Contact parks and recreation, county extension agents, master gardeners and garden clubs

**Offer people an explanation for why the project will be a valuable use of energy and resources.**

**What topics will resonate with your community?**

- Here are a few examples:
- Building community food security
- Addressing hunger and the obesity epidemic
- Promoting physical activity and healthy eating habits
- Beautifying your surroundings
- Supporting local farmers
- Reaching out to the community
- Addressing environmental or social justice concerns
- Providing opportunities for youth

*Seek people within your faith community who have gardening, cooking, community development, food preservation or farming expertise.*



Food-related activities for youth are rewarding for everyone.

As you inform your membership and the public, offer them a concrete way to get involved. Weekly work parties, potluck meals, cooking classes or other community-building activities (with childcare provided if necessary) are great ways to spark participation.

## Raising Funds and Soliciting Donations

The ideas we describe in this handbook can take shape as small pilot projects or large, resource-intensive programs. A community kitchen could be as simple as a group of families who gather to cook and eat together, with each contributing a few dollars to cover the cost of ingredients. A community garden could rely heavily on donated tools, soil amendments, equipment and labor if organizers are resourceful and patient. Buying clubs, farmers' tables and other farm-to-congregation partnerships can all be designed to require minimal equipment. A scale, a table, some bags or boxes and a cash box are examples of materials you may need to gather depending on what kind of project you are creating. Some equipment, tools and materials can be found at no cost or very low cost through Craig's List ([www.craigslist.org](http://www.craigslist.org)) and Freecycle ([www.freecycle.org](http://www.freecycle.org)). Many of these things can be found at your faith community or donated by members

if you publicize your needs. You might also want to ask local businesses for in-kind donations. For example, many nurseries will donate plant starts for community gardens, particularly if the garden is benefiting low-income families.

Organizers may wish to apply for grants, hold fundraising events and solicit major donations from individuals and businesses to support projects on a larger scale. If your congregation is envisioning a larger project, put together a fundraising campaign with supporting materials such as a project description and a budget showing plans for expenses and income. There are many foundations and government grants that will support projects to quell hunger, empower low-income people and support economic development. Many local and national discount stores have grant funds available. Regional or national religious denominations and organizations often have special hunger grants available that can help defray expenses. In some areas, community gardens qualify for neighborhood improvement funds from local government agencies.

Fundraising can also be "fun-raising" or "friend-raising," as participants make a food product to sell, plan a dinner or organize a garden tour. You might want to sell tickets to sample the results of a cook-off among local chefs, using only food

available in typical monthly boxes from food pantries. Faith community members or others could endow scholarships to allow students to attend cooking classes.

## Planning for Successful Partnerships

Whether you are starting a community kitchen, buying club, garden or other project, carefully consider the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved. One way to articulate and clarify these expectations is to write a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). An MOU is a simple document that outlines the goals of the project, the purpose of the collaboration, the organizations involved and the role of each participant. It can also include plans for resolving conflict, such as face-to-face meetings or hiring a mediator for a facilitated discussion. An MOU should be reviewed by all parties, including faith communities, farmers, nonprofit collaborators and so on. At least one member of each organization should keep a signed copy of the final MOU for future reference. An MOU is one way of ensuring that your project will come to fruition and withstand changes in leadership and membership.

## Gaining Low-Income Participation

Engaging low-income populations is perhaps the biggest challenge in faith-based organizing. Many low-income people will not come to a middle-class congregation without a great deal of outreach and careful planning. Having a liaison to the community you are trying to include is essential for building collaborations. Look for ways in which your faith community can learn from the low-income population and work with them rather than on their behalf. This approach will help you in developing trusting, respectful relationships. Low-income people often feel judged for their circumstances, so winning these relationships is a large part of the battle. Be sure to maintain reasonable expectations along the way—this may help you guard against disappointment.

*Look for ways in which your faith community can learn from the low-income population and work with them rather than on their behalf.*



# Faith-Based Community Gardens

*Gardens foster social involvement, opportunities for healthy activity and connection to the land and environment.*

A community garden is a shared space gardened collectively by a group of people, or a cluster of individual plots tended by different people within a garden. It is a perfect addition to a faith community, as gardens foster social involvement, opportunities for healthy activity and connection to the land and environment. They may serve as a place for gatherings, classes, mentoring opportunities and friendship. Community gardens build food security by offering access to fresh produce at little expense, especially for apartment-dwellers who lack land or other essential gardening resources. They can also serve as gardening and nature education venues for children and adults. With proper planning and upkeep, your faith-based community garden may also provide thousands of pounds of nutritious, organically grown food to families in need, as well as habitat for beneficial insects and wildlife.

## Challenges

In the faith community, there are a few issues to consider before starting a garden on your land. All of the concerns can be overcome with careful planning and clear goals.

### Potential challenges include:

- Cost of infrastructure required to create and maintain a garden, including ongoing expenses such as water, soil amendments and plants (unless you can solicit donations)
- Engaging a core group of advocates with gardening expertise to spark community-wide enthusiasm
- Outlining a clear plan and long-term vision for the garden
- Development of an overall garden management plan, including plot allocation, use of the garden, maintenance of plots and seasonal cleanup
- Transportation and accessibility for low-income gardeners
- Ongoing management and volunteer coordination



Community gardens can be a beautiful and productive use of your congregation's land.

### Initial material needs generally include:

- Irrigation system
- Fencing
- Shed or storage area
- Soil amendments
- Tilling or plowing equipment
- Basic gardening tools
- Soil test

Ongoing expenses may include increased water usage. Having a plan and keeping people motivated and enthusiastic even as you tackle start-up costs will insure that your garden thrives.

Nonprofit organizations and coalitions working on community food security and sustainable agriculture in your area will want to know about your garden and may be able to contribute volunteer labor, publicity and donated items. Service clubs and youth organizations are often a good source of volunteers. Faith-based gardens are more sustainable and successful if they involve others in the community. It is worth the time and effort to spread the word about your garden.

## Types of Gardens

Your congregation may want to discuss the various types of gardens before you start. Each of these models requires leadership and coordination to operate smoothly, resolve conflicts as they arise and ensure continuation of the garden for many seasons.



The least resource-intensive way to facilitate creation of a garden is to find an outside organization to coordinate the garden on your land. Some areas have organizations that run community gardens that may be interested. In this case, you will want to carefully outline roles, responsibilities, expectations and rules—essentially a lease agreement between your faith community and the organization responsible for the garden.

Another option is a food bank garden, tended and harvested by a group of participants for donation to local food pantries or soup kitchen. This garden might also serve as a demonstration garden which models such techniques as composting, rainwater catchment and organic methods as an example for your members and the greater community.

A traditional community garden consists of many small plots that are rented or claimed by individuals or families who plant, weed, maintain and harvest their plots throughout the season. Your congregation may choose to reach out to a particular audience to fill its garden, such as low-income people, residents of your immediate neighborhood or members of your own or other faith communities. Charging a fee for garden plots will help offset costs and encourage people to develop a sense of ownership over the garden.

## Getting Started and Keeping Your Garden Going

Forming a committee of engaged members, who are informed and excited about gardening, is the best way to develop a plan.

### Ask yourselves a few financial, logistical and legal questions:

- Do you need to raise funds or can you solicit donations to get started?
- Will you charge a fee for garden plots?
- Will you be creating an application form?
- Who will serve as the primary coordinator or contact person for the garden?
- Will your faith community's insurance cover gardeners?
- Will your organization need to write a memorandum of understanding (MOU) or lease agreement?

### Choose a site with the following characteristics:

- Good soil
- Abundant sun
- Adequate drainage
- Nearby neighbors

Nothing is more frustrating for a first-time gardener than having plants fail to thrive because of a poor site choice. In urban areas, and often rural as well, it is essential to have the soil tested for toxins before you break ground. If there was a buried heating oil tank at one time or the land was used for industrial uses, the soil might contain high levels of toxins that you should take into consideration before growing food.

Once the site has been chosen and the soil tested, begin designing your garden to fit your faith community property. Remember to include space for community gatherings, compost, paths and signage.

Your community gardeners will be an essential source of labor over the years. Monthly work parties, required work hours and a jobs list can help you ensure that the garden is cleaned and prepared each year. The garden committee or coordinator will need to be responsible for oversight.

### Upkeep will include the following types of tasks:

- Soil amendments
- Tilling
- Cover-cropping in common areas
- Maintaining pathways
- Removing invasive weeds and mowing common areas
- Maintaining picnic tables or other communal gathering places
- Maintaining signs and bulletin boards
- Winterizing
- Maintaining irrigation systems and fences

*In urban areas, and often rural as well, it is essential to have the soil tested for toxins before you break ground.*

## Case Study

“Would you like to grow your own food?” asks the handbill advertising a community garden at Westside Community Church in southwest Corvallis.



Westside Community Garden is home to a 15,000 square-foot garden.

In May 2008, Westside partnered with EMO to establish a community garden on its property. The goals of the garden were to promote linkages between the faith community and low-income people, to build community self-reliance and to foster comprehensive responses to local food and nutrition issues. The partnership included funding for three seasons of work, thanks to EMO's USDA Community Food Projects grant (\$8,662.00 for garden supplies and infrastructure, and \$12,375.00 toward paying a coordinator).

Sue Domingues, a member of Westside who has extensive experience developing community gardens in Corvallis, stepped up to coordinate the garden. Sue was able to leverage her contacts and expertise to get a 10,000 square foot garden plowed and available for use by the first of July. Half of the space was divided into plots for low-income individuals and families. The other half was planted as a common space in which volunteers grew produce for donation to local organizations.

In its first season, 216 volunteers helped prepare the garden and harvest the produce. More than 1,100 pounds of fresh vegetables were donated to local pantries and cooking classes. Sue obtained in-kind donations totaling \$3,460.00, including building materials for a shed, a large rototiller, plant seeds and starts, and soil amendments. In addition, low-income gardeners participated in a variety of work parties and community building events, for a total of 32 gardener participation days.

In the garden's second season, members of Saint Mary's Catholic Church created a “Neighbor to Neighbor” program, expanding the garden to 15,000 square feet. Produce grown in the Saint Mary's plot is donated to local soup kitchens and pantries. Beit Am, the Mid-Willamette Valley Jewish Community, pledged youth involvement and volunteers to the effort.

The 20 individual plots filled quickly in spring 2009, mostly with Spanish-speaking Latinos connected to the garden through the Iglesia Cuadrangular Emmanuel in northwest Corvallis.

Gardeners pay an initial sliding scale fee of \$5.00 to \$35.00 for a 400-square-foot plot, which can provide enough produce to save hundreds of dollars for families. The sliding scale fees grant gardeners access to water and many supplies.

“Our church is excited to host a garden as a way of welcoming the community and benefiting low-income neighbors,” said Pastor Joel Abrams. “We’ve been thinking about getting a garden started for a long time.”



Westside currently offers plots to 20 families.

## Sample Garden Expenses

Soil test, including Nitrogen-Phosphorus-Potassium (NPK), lead, cadmium and organophosphates, \$200

Irrigation (pipe, fittings, 24-inch trenches, posts, spigots, signs, permit), \$1,000

Hoses \$120

Shed (concrete pad, materials, door, paint, caulk, lock, hardware, gravel, roof), \$2,600

Two accessible (ADA) beds (cedar or Trex lumber raised beds 4x8x2 ft tall), \$800

Pathways around the ADA beds (5 ft wide and paved or crushed granite or gravel), \$400

Plowing and tilling, \$300

Lime and fertilizer for soil amendments, \$200

Compost, manure, leaves - donated

Straw or wood chips for paths, \$100

Shovels, rakes, hoe, garden fork, pitch fork, wheelbarrows, garbage cans, \$250

Stakes, string, \$75

100-foot tape measure, \$50

Banner, \$180

Bulletin board, \$950

Bike rack, \$300

Port-a pot, \$45 per month

Mileage per year for garden coordinator, \$300

Office supplies (printing fliers, posters, application forms), \$100

Postage (for communicating with gardeners and doing outreach), \$42

Plant seeds and starts, donated

**Total Garden Expenses, not including fencing, access road and gate: \$7,570**



# Community Kitchens

*Establishing a community kitchen allows the congregation to practice “radical hospitality.”*

When members of a congregation transform their kitchen into a community kitchen, they make a conscious decision to share their facilities with their neighbors. This transformation can fill some very real needs and build bridges between faith groups and their surrounding communities. It also represents good stewardship of resources.

## Challenges

Establishing a community kitchen allows the congregation to practice “radical hospitality” in a way that can both deepen faith and make the people uncomfortable. Establishing a community kitchen may create anxiety within a congregation over the “control” of the kitchen. Conflicts may arise over scheduling; what, if any, parts of the kitchen should be off-limits to “outsiders”; cleanliness standards and operational procedures. There may be some increased expenses in utilities, repairs and custodial time. Congregations may also face liability questions and need to discuss issues and options with their insurance carrier.

## Types of Community Kitchens

**A community kitchen can take a number of forms. It can do any or all of the following:**

- Provide “soup kitchen” meals
- Organize volunteers to make food products that are needed in local food pantries
- Offer food literacy, food preservation and cooking classes
- Host cooking clubs and cook-offs for gleaning groups
- Nurture start-up micro-businesses that need a commercial kitchen
- Host or cater meals for other nonprofit groups
- Foster job skills in low income participants

**In considering creating a community kitchen, here are some questions to ask:**

- What are your goals or intentions?
- What are the needs of the surrounding community?
- Who will participate?
- What resources are available?



Community kitchens can fill basic needs, such as teaching healthful cooking and eating habits.

- Are there other groups with whom you might collaborate?

A community kitchen might serve people seeking social interactions, knowledge of food, health and cooking, or connections with local farmers. It may families facing food insecurity and chronic diseases who might benefit from cooking, learning and eating together.

## Getting Started and Keeping Your Kitchen Going

After deciding to start a community kitchen, begin the “nuts and bolts” work of building it. It is wise to start with a small project requiring few resources that will serve as a center for fostering health, knowledge of food and cooking, and community.

**Consider reaching out to the following groups to inform them about the kitchen and invite involvement:**

- Farmers
- Gleaning groups
- Local and regional food pantries
- Senior centers
- County extension service personnel
- School districts
- WIC (Women, Infants and Children)
- Parenting programs

In most cases, volunteers will staff the kitchen. However, a small stipend for a part-time coordinator may be a good investment.

Collaborations should be clarified with a memorandum of understanding (MOU). Insurance policies need to be examined to determine if teaching classes, serving meals and preparing food for pantries are covered under current policies. If not, an insurance rider can be added at a reasonable cost.

Licensing requirements for a community kitchen depend on its specific use. To promote safe food practices, someone with a current food handler's permit should be present whenever the kitchen is open. Classes can be taught without any particular license. For teaching canning classes, a certified Family Food Education Volunteer or the advice of an extension agent is a great help. However, a commercial kitchen license insures that the kitchen meets basic standards and that kitchen leadership is informed regarding the best food safety practices. State agencies such as Oregon Department of Agriculture usually license kitchens for processing food for sale (or to give to food banks). Typically county agencies (Public Health or Environmental Public Health Department) license kitchens to serve meals to the public. The physical requirements for a food processing license or for a temporary restaurant permit are adequate and safe food storage (pantry space, refrigerator and hot food warmer) and a sanitizing dishwasher or washing regime. Handwashing, food prep and dishwashing sinks need to be present. The kitchen coordinator or volunteer staff must also demonstrate knowledge of safe food handling and/or processing. Food products that are made for food pantries or for sale must follow specific labeling guidelines.

Equipment needs vary depending on the type of kitchen developed. For cooking classes, basic kitchen supplies are adequate. For students who are food insecure, teach cooking methods that do not require special equipment or expensive ingredients. Supply sufficient knives, cutting boards and other basic tools so that everyone can participate. For canning sessions, canning kettles and basic canning equipment are musts. If stovetop space is limited, electric waterbath canners hold more jars and free up precious stove-top space for actual cooking. Microbusinesses using the kitchen should provide for their own special equipment needs.

## Case Study

The Corvallis First United Methodist Church (FUMC) finished building its Community Center in 2002. The new building was called the "Community Center" to foster stronger connections with the surrounding neighborhood and Corvallis residents.

In its first four years, the Community Center Kitchen (CCK) was used primarily for church functions and church-related groups. In spring 2007, the Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership (IFFP) of EMO requested permission to hold cooking classes for low-income people. Oregon State (OSU) Extension Service provided instruction for the classes. Corvallis faith communities provided volunteer kitchen and childcare support, and members donated basic kitchen equipment as gifts for class participants to nurture their expanding cooking skills.

EMO obtained a three year grant in fall 2007 that included a stipend for a quarter-time kitchen coordinator as well as funds to support cooking classes. Collaborators and supporters of the grant included a local food bank, the county health department, OSU Extension, local farms, a gleaning program, a non-profit coalition and many others. The goals of the community kitchen expanded beyond classes to include cook-offs for gleaning groups and support for micro-enterprise development. A local chef taught over 40 classes to low-income audiences in 2008. As a result of the increased use of the CCK, the church formed a task force to manage hospitality and stewardship issues. This group continues to develop guidelines regarding kitchen use.



The community kitchen at Corvallis First United Methodist Church offers canning instruction during harvest season.

*Licensing requirements for a community kitchen depend on its specific use.*

In 2008, a long-time volunteer began the Jammin' for the Hungry (Jam 4tH) project to make fruit spreads for local food banks. This project brought more knowledge about licensing requirements necessary for the micro-enterprise program and strengthened connections with other faith communities via volunteer recruitment and material donation requests. It also provided OSU students with volunteer hours to build resumes and fulfill requirements. The program brought in 17 new volunteers and several important donations by participating in a "National Day of Service" event in January 2009. The Oregon-Idaho Conference of the United Methodist Church provided a grant from the Bishop's Hunger Initiative to the program to defray costs such as licensing and jars.

There have definitely been challenges with scheduling and sharing storage space. Although there are challenges ahead in implementation of the microenterprise program, Corvallis FUMC is excited about the ways its "Community Center" kitchen is growing into its name.



The kitchen provides valuable social opportunities to many participants.



# Buying Clubs

In this handbook, “buying club” refers to a group of people who purchase farm direct products together in large quantities to benefit from lower prices. The size of the group and the types of products may vary widely.

At farmers’ markets, prices reflect the costs of transporting food to market, setting up a display and staffing a booth for several hours. With a buying club, a farmer can deliver a large amount of produce to one location (usually one of several on a delivery route) in a short amount of time. These cost savings are passed on to members. Members are responsible for splitting up the product into individual orders, but each individual reaps the benefits of ordering with the group. Some products, such as local meat, may only be available in large quantities, or be prohibitively expensive in smaller amounts. Buying clubs enable access and affordability.

Gaining a personal understanding of how products were grown is another benefit. Considerations of animal welfare and treatment can be evaluated first-hand at the local farm on which meat is raised. Ordering produce in bulk from a local grower means you are getting a freshly harvested product, directly from the farmers’ hands. Members have a regular opportunity to get to know the farmer and his or her growing practices.

In addition, buying clubs provide the social benefit of collaborating within a community. Clubs based in congregations can help strengthen relationships among congregation members and the surrounding community.

## Challenges

The main challenges involved with running a buying club are logistical. There must be a central location where food can be delivered (and stored, if members will not be picking their food up that day). One person must serve as the collector of orders and money and communicate with the farmer. On a small scale it is feasible for a volunteer to act as this person and to use a home for a delivery site. On a larger scale, the infrastructure offered by a faith community (space, paid staff, regular meeting hours) is very valuable to the smooth operation of a buying club.

## Types of Buying Clubs

The size of the group and amount and type of product ordered will be the biggest factors in creating the structure of your buying club. It may be a neighborhood group ordering several flats of strawberries and doing a big canning project or a group of friends splitting a whole animal between their freezers at fall butchering time. For a one-time order like the latter, the structure may be very informal. A single person can pay the farmer and other members pay her back. Alternatively, the farmer can accept partial payment from each person.

However, to coordinate regular orders it is important to have a more formal flow of money. It is preferable for both the coordinator and the farmer that customers pay in advance. Customers can order for the following week when picking up their produce and pay at that time. Your faith community may be able to act as the fiscal agent for your buying club so that members can keep money in an account there to be debited with each week’s order. At the most formal end of the spectrum, some communities use an online order system. Online systems allow customers to access multiple farms’ products and pay by credit card.

*With a buying club, a farmer can deliver a large amount of produce to one location (usually one of several on a delivery route) in a short amount of time. These cost savings are passed on to members.*



Local growers may be willing to deliver produce to your faith community on a regular basis.

*Make sure there are enough interested people in your faith community to meet the minimum order requirement regularly, and that the farmer can deliver product at a time that is convenient for members of your buying club.*

## Getting Started and Keeping Your Buying Club Going

If your faith community is interested in starting a buying club, it should be customized to fit the habits and needs of your congregation, as well as the capabilities of the farmer(s) you are working with.

### Questions for your faith community should include:

- What kinds of products are people excited about ordering?
- How many members can your volunteers or staff accommodate?
- When do people generally congregate at your community?
- Do you want the farmer provide SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or food stamp) access?

Keep these issues in mind as you look for a local farmer. Your local farmers' market or the Local Harvest Web site (see resources section at the end of the handbook) are good places to start looking for farmers.

### Ask farmers:

- Are you willing to add another wholesale customer?
- What days do you deliver in town?
- What kinds of products do you offer through the season?
- What is your minimum order requirement?

Make sure there are enough interested people in your faith community to meet the minimum order requirement regularly, and that the farmer can deliver product at a time that is convenient for members of your buying club.

### Next, choose a site that is convenient to both parties.

- The farmer may need a parking lot large enough to turn a truck around in, or help unloading his or her products.
- Your site should be out of the sun, or inside, so that products do not spoil in summer heat.
- It should be in a location where all members of the community feel welcome.
- If you are planning to accept Electronic

Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards from SNAP (food stamp) recipients, electrical outlets or a wireless machine will be necessary.

### The equipment needs of the buying club are fairly minimal:

- Table
- Scale
- Record book
- Cash box
- Signs to publicize the location of the club

If there will be a delay between delivery and pick up, cool storage may become necessary.

A strong volunteer base is the most important resource to sustain a club over time. Having several people committed to the club and knowledgeable about logistics will mean there is less chance of overburdening your volunteers, and more chance that the club will continue to meet. Ideally, volunteers will be members who benefit from the club and share the responsibilities equally. Ongoing outreach efforts ensure that the club does not become exclusive. If the size becomes too large for the coordinators to handle, create several smaller groups.

Coordinators could be a small group that meets regularly for fellowship and study. The buying club should be open to all who are interested. However, keep in mind that the time involved for coordinators to collate orders and distribute produce may be a limiting factor in the number of members accepted. A small number of committed members who order frequently may be more practical than a large number of members who order occasionally.

Fundraising events related to the buying club may be a good way to get people excited about participating. For instance, a stand with produce donated from local gardeners and sold to benefit the buying club could stimulate interest in a produce buying club while raising money. Contact local businesses for in-kind donations. Farmers may be willing to help with start-up costs, since they will recover their investment with the added customer base.



## Case Study



La Fresa Feliz Buying Club provides wholesale produce to members throughout the season.

La Fresa Feliz began at Saint Mary's Catholic Church in the summer of 2008 with support from IFFP. It grew out of a desire of Latinos in the Corvallis community to shop for fresh, local produce at a venue which was bilingual and more affordable than the local farmers' market.

In its first year, the club had eight produce deliveries and 12 families in total participating. The numbers were lower than hoped, partly because of some shuffling before they found a farmer who could deliver regularly, and partly because of lack of publicity. There were also complaints from members about making an extra trip to Saint Mary's to fill out their order form and pay for their orders in advance.



Aaron and Kimberly Bolster of Deep Roots Farm provide the produce for La Fresa Feliz.

In the second season, organizers addressed these issues by increasing publicity and setting up a centralized accounting system. To order in advance, members were required to keep money (at least \$5.00) in an account at the church. Accounts were debited each week with the amount of their order. At pickup, they could fill out an order form for the following week and add money to their account. Having money in an account allowed the option of ordering by phone or e-mail, which saved members a trip to the church. The farm was also registered to accept SNAP benefits using an EBT machine, making La Fresa Feliz more accessible to the low-income consumers EMO was trying to reach. La Fresa Feliz members were required to help out at two deliveries to foster a sense of ownership, a key ingredient in sustainability.

# Other Farm-to-Congregation Partnerships

*These partnerships help raise awareness in the faith community about the importance of supporting local farmers.*

Farm stands and community supported agriculture (CSA) are other farm-direct connections that can work well in a congregational setting. They can be especially helpful for farmers who are just getting started and cannot afford to purchase a stall at a farmers market or do not have the time and resources to do extensive marketing. With an understanding and interested audience, farm stands at congregations can be good for immigrant farmers who face cultural and language barriers in regular direct marketing venues. These partnerships help raise awareness in the faith community about the importance of supporting local farmers.



Farm stands offering fresh flowers and produce can be an excellent arrangement for both faith communities and growers.

## Types of Partnerships

**Farm Stands:** In a faith community setting, a farm stand allows a farmer to sell produce and possibly eggs, cheese, fish, meat, chicken and flowers on a weekly or monthly basis. A farm stand may also be set up on a one time basis to raise awareness about local food and farmers. Farm stands generally take place before or after services.

**Community Supported Agriculture (CSA):** CSA refers to a type of farming operation in which consumers become shareholders of the farm in exchange for weekly produce. Sometimes called a “food box,” members usually pay a one-time fee before the season begins, and each week they receive a certain amount of produce. This guarantees security and capital for the farmer and consistency for the member. The member shares in the risks and rewards of farming. CSA farms can be supported by faith community members and the faith community can serve as a weekly drop site for produce.

## Challenges

If your congregation is working with an immigrant farmer, language barriers or cultural differences may arise. It is important to be aware of this and seek help from a translator if necessary.

Getting sufficient support from your congregation to ensure an economically viable farm stand is essential. Be sure to take

into consideration timing of local farmers’ markets—you may not have a lot of customers at your faith-based farm stand if people have recently shopped at a farmers’ market. Explain the program to the congregation to ensure there is significant interest before inviting a farmer. Farmers put a lot of effort into growing, harvesting, transporting and displaying produce and your farm stand needs to be worth their investment. Remind your congregation about the stand throughout the year. To attract the broader community, publicity needs to be regular and effective. Keep in mind that, for various reasons, some people may be uncomfortable coming to a faith community.

Finding a person or team with enough time to coordinate a program and volunteers to run it successfully is critical.

Many people do not know what to do with fresh vegetables. Provide recipes and cooking classes to improve food knowledge and skills. If vegetables are from a different culture than the primary background of most members, be sure to provide information. For example, Asian cucumbers may look oversized and past their prime to someone who is used to English cucumbers.

## Getting Started and Keeping Your Project Going

Hold a meeting or conduct a survey to make sure there is the interest and commitment to support a local farmer. Ask that the congregation's governing body or leader give the program official support. Designate a point person who is willing to communicate with the farmer, figure out logistics, advertise in the bulletin or newsletter, and help with tracking and evaluating the success of the program. Be prepared to let the farmer know that he or she should not come if there are circumstances when a large number of members will be away, such as a retreat or picnic. The congregational point person will also recruit volunteers when needed.

To include low-income families, consider several options. Think about raising money to purchase a CSA share for a low-income family, or buying leftover produce at the end of each farmer table and donating the food to a food pantry. This also prevents the farmer from having to return home with unsold produce. For CSAs, set up a relationship with a program serving low-income people that can make good use of any unclaimed shares each week (if members are away or forget to pick up their boxes). Encourage your farmers to file the paperwork to obtain an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) machine and accept Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program and WIC benefits.

Once the program is established the time commitment can be quite minimal, assuming everything seems to be working and the volunteer base is sufficient to prevent burn-out. You will need to invest ongoing effort in publicity. If you are hosting a farm stand you may want to track the number of customers and the amount of produce sold to determine how successful the program is, especially in terms of economic viability for the farmer. Is he or she making enough to cover expenses and make a small profit? At the end of the growing season, conduct a survey or several interviews to gauge the success of the program. Dot surveys, where people answer just a few questions on a newsprint sheet with a sticky dot, are a quick and simple way to get valuable consumer information before, during or at the end of the season.

## Case Study

The First Presbyterian Church in downtown Portland holds a farmer's table from 12:15 to 1 p.m. after services on most Sundays during the summer. Produce is sold in the fellowship hall and people pass by the table on the way to coffee and refreshments. This arrangement makes the table highly visible and garners high participation. Since 2007, the table has been served by the Her family farmers. At first, they were joined by another family farm, but it worked better for both farmers and the congregation to have a relationship with just one farm. The congregation wanted to include a component that would make the table accessible to low-income neighbors, especially those served by First Presbyterian's Julia West House and the Alder Street low-income housing facility.

Using the Corvallis "That's My Farmer" program as a model, IFFP Portland staff and First Presbyterian members created coupon booklets containing \$18.00 worth of coupons, sold for \$20.00 to derive a \$2.00 profit to buy booklets for low-income neighbors. Most of the low-income coupon recipients are people who have taken a cooking class offered at the church for people who don't have kitchens or only have a microwave or hot plate. Booklets can be purchased well before the season begins to encourage participation, as well as every week that the farmers come to sell produce. One volunteer sits at a table near the farmers and sells the booklets. She or he has a cash box, a sign advertising the coupons and a sheet to record sales.



At the Lincoln United Methodist Church in Portland, customers take home weekly CSA box.

*Getting sufficient support from your congregation to ensure an economically viable farm stand is essential.*

What support does the church provide to sustain the program? At First Presbyterian, the church accountant organizes the books and holds the cash box from week to week. Brief articles are published in the weekly electronic version of the church newsletter. On a less frequent basis, articles are written for the printed newsletter and announcements are made by a pastor from the pulpit. It is always helpful to have volunteers to help with both the farmer's table and the coupon sales.

The church purchases leftover produce at wholesale prices to donate to the downtown Loaves and Fishes program, which provides nutritious meals to low-income seniors. Sustaining participation in the coupon program by low-income families is an ongoing challenge. Participation was strongest when a volunteer was a regular presence at Julia West House and built relationships with people who received the coupons. Using feedback from these participants, the church continues to explore new ways to make the farm stand more accessible to all.



# Resources

## Community Gardens

American Community Gardens Association: <http://communitygarden.org/>

For information on accessible gardens, see the Americans with Disabilities Act: <http://www.ada.gov>

American Horticultural Therapy Association: [www.ahta.org](http://www.ahta.org)

*Community Garden Organizer's Handbook*, [www.cacscw.org/gardens/handbook](http://www.cacscw.org/gardens/handbook). A comprehensive, downloadable manual by the Community Action Coalition for South Central Wisconsin.

*Community Gardening: All Regions Guide*, by Ellen Kirby, New York: Brooklyn Botanical Gardens, 2008. For list of links to community garden how-to-manuals go to [www.bbg.org/cg](http://www.bbg.org/cg).

Groundwork USA. Helps people transform derelict land and wasted public space into valued community assets including community gardens: [www.groundworkusa.net](http://www.groundworkusa.net)

*LA County Cooperative Extension Common Ground Garden Program*, [celosangeles.ucdavis.edu/garden](http://celosangeles.ucdavis.edu/garden). A community garden start-up guide, school garden resources and e-mail groups, master gardener training, and more.

Organic Materials Review Institute: <http://www.omri.org/>

Tips for sprinkler installation:

<http://www.sprinkler.com/information/tips-and-tricks---designing,-installing,-and-maintaining>

For Soil Testing, see the Oregon State University Extension for laboratories serving Oregon:

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/html/em/em8677/> and ANTECH Diagnostics in Corbett, OR: <http://www.antechdiagnostics.com/>

## Community Kitchens

Accessibility Professionals: <http://www.accessible-kitchens.com/>

Fresh Choice Kitchens, the Community Kitchen Program of the Greater Vancouver Food Bank Society: <http://www.communitykitchens.ca/main/>

La Cocina Alegre, Austin, TX: [http://www.sustainablefoodcenter.org/THK\\_overview.html](http://www.sustainablefoodcenter.org/THK_overview.html)

La Cocina, Cultivating Food Entrepreneurs, San Francisco, CA: <http://www.lacocinasf.org/>

## Buying Clubs and Other Partnerships with Farmers

USDA SNAP Retailer information: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/retailers/register.htm>

For a for-profit buying club model, see Eugene Local Foods:

<http://www.localfoodmarketplace.com/eugene/Default.aspx>

Local Harvest, A national database of farms, farmers' markets and more:

<http://www.localharvest.org>

Tuv Ha'Aretz, Hazon's Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) Program. Hazon CSAs are a platform for innovative educational and community-building programs that explore the intersection of food and Jewish tradition: [www.hazon.org/CSA](http://www.hazon.org/CSA).

A story about a produce stand at Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church in Salinas, CA:  
[http://www.ncrlc.com/SalinasCalifornian\\_article.html](http://www.ncrlc.com/SalinasCalifornian_article.html)

The Robyn Van En Center provides a national resource center about Community Supported Agriculture (CSA): <http://www.wilson.edu/wilson/asp/content.asp?id=804>

## EMO Publications

Farm to Congregation: A Handbook on Starting a Congregational Farmers Table:  
[www.emoregon.org/pdfs/IFFP/IFFP\\_Farm\\_Stand\\_Toolkit-Draft.pdf](http://www.emoregon.org/pdfs/IFFP/IFFP_Farm_Stand_Toolkit-Draft.pdf)

“That’s My Farmer,” A Handbook to Starting a Grassroots Farmers’ Market Coupon Program:  
[http://www.emoregon.org/pdfs/IFFP/IFFP\\_Toolkit\\_2008.pdf](http://www.emoregon.org/pdfs/IFFP/IFFP_Toolkit_2008.pdf)

## General Resources

For an excellent resource list on a wide range of topics related to community food, check out the Community Food Security Coalition: [www.foodsecurity.org](http://www.foodsecurity.org).

Calculate the carbon “foodprint” of your food at Low Carbon Diet Calculator:  
[www.eatlowcarbon.org](http://www.eatlowcarbon.org).

To learn about other projects and to access handbooks on various types of community food projects, go to WHY’s Food Security Learning Center: <http://www.whyhunger.org/programs/fslc.html>.

Useful handbooks in the Why Publications section include *Serving Up Justice: How to Design an Emergency Feeding Program & Build Community Food Security* and *Filling Our Bowls: A Grassroots Guide to Fundraising*.

The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy promotes resilient family farms, rural communities and ecosystems around the world, “Food and Faith: Strategies for Healthy Eating,” May 2009, Institute for Agriculture Policy. Download the report on faith and food: <http://www.iatp.org/>

## Food and Faith Study Resources

*A Home Like This: Seeking a Sacred Ethic of Community and Land* by John Pitney, 1997. Order from Alternatives at (800) 821-6153.

*Food and Faith: Joy, Justice and Daily Bread* by Mike Schut, Denver: Earth Ministry, Living the Good News, 2002.

*Food for Life: The Spirituality and Ethics of Eating* by L. Shannon Jung, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2004.

*Food for Thought and Action: A Food Sovereignty Curriculum*. One of the four modules of this curriculum on strengthening food sovereignty locally and internationally is designed for use by faith groups. Available free for download: [www.foodforthoughtandaction.org](http://www.foodforthoughtandaction.org).

*Just Eating? Practicing our Faith at the Table*. A seven-week curriculum for congregations exploring the relationship between the way we eat and the way we live. It aims to bring into dialogue daily eating habits, the Christian faith and the “needs of the broader world” through readings, action steps and healthy eating tips. Order or download: <http://www.pcusa.org/hunger/features/justeating.htm>

*Menu for the Future*. A six session study on food and sustainability. Not faith-based but several sections delve into justice issues: [http://www.nwei.org/discussion\\_courses/course-offerings/menu-for-the-future](http://www.nwei.org/discussion_courses/course-offerings/menu-for-the-future)

*Simply in Season Cookbook* by Mary Beth Lind and Kathleen Hockman-Wert, Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2005. This delightful cookbook explores how the food we put on our tables impacts our local and global neighbors. It shows the importance of eating local, seasonal food—and fairly traded food—inviting readers to make choices that offer security and health for our communities, for the land, for body and spirit.

*Simply in Season, Leader's Study Guide: Connect Food and Faith while Exploring the Value of Eating Local, Seasonal Food* by Rachel Miller Moreland, Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2006. Based on the seasons and themes in the *Simply in Season* cookbook, this leaders guide contains Bible reflections, discussion questions, group activities, and ways to integrate local food into each session. Download the Study Guide and Leader's Guide for free: <http://www.worldcommunitycookbook.org/season/studyguide.html>

*The Kabbalah of Food* by Rabbi Nilton Bonder, Boston: Shambala, 1998.

*Wake Up and Cook: Kitchen Buddhism in Work and Recipes* by Carole Tonkinson, New York: Riverhead Books, 1997.

*25 Ways to Be a Good Steward of Creation* is a good list of food-related actions for a study group to consider: <http://www.ncrlc.com/25WaysGoodStewardCreation.html>