

Maverick Magazine – Outdoor issue – April 2022  
Submission by Barbara Hockabout, Lodestar Gardens, LLC  
Title:

# WHO Will Most Likely Be Growing Local Food in the White Mountains in 2022 and HOW People Will Access It – Part 2

Part 1 of this article concluded that the answer to who will provide you with quality, *local* food is only a best guess because **we really have no way of assessing who is currently growing *local* food for market.** After further inquiry, a month later, the conclusion remains pretty much the same. With a few exceptions, the farmers and herdsman I talked to have decided to withdraw from marketing. They cannot justify the time, effort, and minimal profit. Instead, they have scaled down their production to meet their own needs, or produce enough for a few special customers, or share their food with family and neighbors. Most of these growers and ranchers are over 57 years of age and cite a lack of labor help as their greatest challenge. However, fuel prices may be the biggest deterrent to getting their wares to market in the upcoming season. **How do we access local food? The logical conclusion is that you and I grow it.** We all need to be growing our own food. For greater food security, we can create our own neighborhood food hubs. Part 2 of this article explores how to do this. There are more first-time gardeners today than ever before. Our society is recognizing the need to be as self-sufficient as possible. Let's talk about growing our own food here in the White Mountains.

Spring is officially here in the White Mountains. During the past two very atypical years, many White Mountains residents have spent more time at home. This has served up an opportunity to explore gardening, research what grows best in our area, and develop a garden plan for front or back yard growing spaces. Working in a garden can be as beneficial to one's physical health as working out in a gym. It costs less. It offers tangible fruits for your labor. If you want to eat healthy, local food, gardening is the best way to supplement your food intake. Sharing your surplus garden goodies is a wonderful way to strengthen your family and neighborhood relationships, as well as open up the opportunity to share the garden work. Since we are spending more time at home, let's garden!

First and foremost, new gardeners should know this is a notoriously challenging region in which to grow food. That said, we have the great advantage of access to some of the cleanest air and water anywhere. Here we don't have to restore our soil; we simply must develop it. The best advice for beginning a garden is to find someone near you who is already gardening. Ask them to share their gardening stories — chances are, they will love to do so.

Gardeners here know that when the last snows melt and the famous spring winds begin to blow for a good month or so, the growing game begins. We put our seeds into the newly thawed and highly amended soil with a promise to keep them hydrated during the annual wind-whipping season. We take little plant starts from our south-facing windows or from our greenhouses and transplant them into frost and wind protection devices in our outside gardens. We stake down our walls-of-waters, hold down our

row covers with heavy rocks, drive sturdy hoops well into the ground to frame protective cloth over beds of young plants. We bide our time. We go out every morning and put things back together after the gusts penetrate our wind barriers. Daily we take inventory of our small, hearty plants.

The period of wind fortification abruptly gives way to the period of high temperatures. We are hopeful that the drought-resistant seeds we selected will prevail during the wind and thrive in the hottest months ahead--late May once the winds have more or less subsided and of course, June, the month of multiple daily garden waterings. The sturdy little soldier plants that successfully continue to grow through the spring then begin to flourish, bloom, leaf and fruit. Each day in the early morning we walk between rows and check for pests hiding in the most tender parts of the plant or in the shaded soil underneath. We check for holes in our fences. We put our fingers in the soil here and there to make sure the irrigation is uniform, that no rodent has chewed holes in the drip system. We take our early morning cup of coffee and sit in our gardens savoring the quiet, basking in the early gentle sun, casting an appreciative gaze over the food that is growing for us. In those moments we know it's all worth it.

I certainly hope I'm wrong about this, but food will be less available to the public this year than ever before. You know the reasons—gas prices, supply chain issues, somersault economy, etc. In addition, we must consider our short growing season and all the gardening challenges we discussed earlier in this article.

The most important suggestion we have for new gardeners is to **reach out to others nearby and propose some form of gardening collaboration—equipment, materials, labor**. Reach out to those people who are already gardening and ask their advice. Assess your resources—space, soil, soil amendments, materials you have access to such as mulch (pine needles, wood chips, grass or leaves), water access to your garden, compost possibilities. Start talking with each other. Have a pot luck together and let the ideas bloom.

Start growing your food. If you have a garden, grow more food and save your seeds for the next year. Work with others. People who grow local food agree that **this summer, the summer of 2022, is a pivotal time for creating greater self-sufficiency**. This is the last call before food shortages are part of our daily life. Do it!

Here are a few of the growers who may be marketing in our area:

\*\*\***Pinedora Farms** 501C3 – events and workshops – Pinedale, Navajo County

\*\*\***Meadowlark Farms** – events and workshops – Linden, Navajo County

\*\*\***Ashokala Gardens** – education, soil building, greenhouse consulting, plant starts (activities will resume next year 2023) Snowflake, Navajo County

\*\*\***Gary Hull Gardens** – sells produce at the Show Farmers Mkt – May-Aug- his gardens grow in Snowflake, Navajo County

\*\*\***Lodestar Gardens, LLC** – sells produce Saturdays May-Sept at the Stanford General Store at the 'Y' hwys 60 & 61, self-reliant health & lifestyle workshops, Homesteading Apprenticeship Program (HAP) accepting applications 2022-23 – Concho-Vernon area, Apache County

Here are the most treasured of gardening books used here at Lodestar Gardens:

Eliot Colman's books: *The New Organic Grower*, *The Winter Harvest Handbook*, *Four-Season Harvest* (Eliot Coleman grows year round in New England and offers excellent extending the season strategies that we have successfully adopted at Lodestar Gardens)

John Jeavons *How to Grow More Vegetables* (biointensive growing method, building soil)

David Holmgren *Permaculture* (pioneer of the Permaculture movement, philosopher, visionary)

Brad Lancaster *Harvesting for Drylands, Volumes 1 & 2* (AZ guru for rainwater harvesting movement)

Peter Tompkins & Christopher Byrd *The Secret Life of Plants* and *Secrets of the Soil* (inspiring, provocative, alternative, nature-honoring experiments that will blow your mind—written 50 years ago—you will never look at your garden the same way again after reading these books)

Here are the seed companies we order from most often because (1) they are cooperatives (2) we share more in common with the plant hardiness zones in Maine than we do for the zones in the rest of Arizona. The White Mountains require unique growing measures (3) these companies hold their seed sources highly accountable.

\*\*\*Fedco Seed Company - a seed cooperative out of Waterville, Maine

\*\*\*Johnny's - a seed cooperative out of Winslow, Maine

Here is our wish list for future food production and accessibility:

- Incubation farms for future farmers are established all over the country
- Support for neighborhood food hubs
- Financial support for transitioning aspiring farmers taking over retiring farmer farms
- Free Seed Libraries
- Free soil tests
- Community supported gardens and garden caretakers
- County supported master gardener teams who assist in building residential gardens county wide and offer physical help and sustained coaching throughout the first year of gardening
- Free County Extension Office agriculture-related workshops
- Free garden consultation (online and in person)
- Free Community College courses in agricultural curriculum
- Free vendor spaces for growers at Farmer's Markets
- Support for Farmers Market organizers
- Free local online network marketing to connect growers and customers
- Grants for small growers who are willing to sell food to their immediate community
- Free soil amendments and fertilizers for established gardens
- Support for farmers to host guest workers
- Grants to offer financial compensation to guest farm workers
- Water credits for owners of established gardens/crop lands
- Neighborhood garden equipment and agricultural machine cooperatives
- Free healthy lunches for public schools
- Support for creating and maintaining school gardens
- Offer financial support to school garden workers and organizers
- Reinstate Nutrition, Home Economics, Vocational programs, and Life Skills in public school curriculum
- Support for individual agricultural research (all ages)
- Create college and university degree programs for Food as Medicine and include it as a prerequisite for all medical degrees and programs
- Create a panel of elected local food advocates in every town, city, and municipality who consult, inform, and work with existing County Extension Offices
- Create a panel of elected regional food advocates in the Department of Agriculture whose purpose is to achieve state-wide food production equity so as to eradicate food deserts and address malnutrition.

THESE IDEAS ARE POSSIBLE!

If we agree that local food is our right, and we hold it as a high value in our country.

This isn't an unrealistic pipe dream; collectively, we can and must create food sovereignty.

Lodestar Gardens is accepting applications for:

- (1) A unique, share-cropping residential opportunity for the summer season (call for more information - deadline for apps April 1, 2022)
- (2) An opening in our Lodestar Gardens Co-Op for anyone living within a 10-mile radius of our farm to join the Lodestar Co-Op (contact us by June 1, 2022)
- (3) Participation in our 2023-2024 Homesteading Apprenticeship Program (submit online HAP application on our website by Nov 1, 2022)

Barbara & Clark Hockabout, owners of Lodestar Gardens since 2000, now offer a free consultation for any group desiring to start a small food co-op (or as we prefer to say, food cooperation group). We will share our experience organizing and hosting the Lodestar Gardens Food Co-Op since 2010. Consultation will include a tour of Lodestar. We ask that a representative of each potential household participant in your future food co-op attend the consultation. Call for an appointment on Monday or Thursday afternoons March – May 2022.  
(928) 587-3163