

Food Villages = Food Security: Are You Ready to Grow?

"The wave of the future is on the local level. Don't waste your heart and mind trying to pull down what is already destroying itself. But come into where you're almost below the radar and reorganize life. We want communities where we live and work and fight for the future."

- Joanna Macy

Every weekend during the summer we talk to many people at local farmers markets—seasonal visitors and local residents. We may have talked to you! Often we hear visitors say, “This is a farmers market, but I don’t see many people selling food. Where are all the farmers? Where’s all the fresh food?” These questions serve up an educational opportunity for the staff manning the Lodestar Gardens Learning Center booth.

We tell the visitors why the White Mountains is such a challenging place to grow—poor soil, pre mature spring, late frost, infamous spring winds, early fall frost, pervasive draught conditions, insufficient labor force, etc. We explain that the time it takes to harvest and process food, plus the very long distance required to transport perishables from farm to market make it really tough for growers to see any profit. We are one of a few remaining small direct farmers raising chemical-free produce in the White Mountains to sell at farmers markets. Over the past four years, four of the largest growers in our area had to stop selling produce.

All too often visitors look puzzled because at their home the soil is rich and population centers are nearby. But even after the script has been delivered, they are still baffled and disappointed they can't take local food home to their tables. We can appreciate their confusion. We know it's a matter of educating people about the enormous health benefits of eating local food and explaining the gritty realities of growing our own food here. That's why we are now focusing on food education. Helping someone learn how to grow a turnip is a lot more impactful than simply selling a turnip at the market.

For residents in the White Mountain region who want to eat local healthy food for longer than more than a few months out of the year, there are some workable solutions. You can start by finding people in your area who share your desire to eat fresh food year round, who want to grow their own food and have help in the process. Start there. Who do you know? Once you find others who are interested in food security, how do you begin? Take a field trip, talk to other growers, take gardening classes, read books, research online—do this together and multiply your energy and future food stores.

My husband and I came to the White Mountains 20 years ago with the goal to live a more self-reliant lifestyle and find like-minded members in our community with whom we could work and grow. We found good gardening teachers to help us understand extreme gardening in our high desert. Over the past ten years we adapted what we learned by trial and error. We feel lucky to have started the process as early as we did. Not too many in the generation coming up have the time or the resources to start up a farm, but perhaps they can join a gardening collective, or better, start up a gardening collective.

Lodestar's original mission to simply offer nutritionally-dense food to our communities has evolved into creating a learning center with an art – agriculture curriculum. Our purpose is to

inspire people to explore more self-reliant lifestyles. We encourage classroom teachers, home school-ers, groups, and families to experience how we grow good food. We have discovered a wealth of wisdom in our own communities and provide a forum for community members to share their insights and discoveries with the public in **free workshops**. We are experimenting with the best methods to grow food year round. We offer **free tours** for groups of five or more people with an advance notice of at least one week. Fall and Winter workshops will be posted on our website: lodestargardens.com.

We advocate food independence and for the remainder of this summer Lodestar Gardens is walking it's talk. We are stepping back from the markets and using the food we produce to feed our immediate community, the Lodestar Grassroots Co-Op. Over the past three years the Co-Op learned much about growing food and growing community. Our most recent Co-Op members, the Keeble family, come out to Lodestar twice a week to work, learn and harvest. When the Co-Op asked them why they wanted to participate, they responded: "Our decision to join the Lodestar Co-Op was fueled by the desire to learn permaculture, organic gardening and sustainable skills for providing food and a future for our family and others." The Keebles are an example of the next generation taking things into their own hands--learning by doing.

We now offer **free consultations** for anyone who is serious about creating their own food village, food co-op, food family, or whatever you want to call working to produce food together. There are no best practices in establishing a food collaborative. The needs of each group of people are different as are their skills, experience, personality and resources. Is your desire for fresh local food strong enough to start asking questions?

If you are already aware that we live in a food desert here in northeastern central Arizona, if you don't need to be convinced that most patterns in our lives are changing and you want to better understand how to adapt to them and thrive, if you are committed to living a lifestyle most compatible with the land and its resources, if you believe that your personal independence can be enhanced through collective wisdom, cultural enrichment, and food sovereignty we want to talk with you and support you in your efforts to create a food village. Call (928) 587-1660 between 8-10 a.m. Mon – Thur. to set up an appointment. Food villages strengthen food security for all of us.

“Cultural anthropology teaches us that the way people get their food is the most reliable determinant of virtually all other social characteristics. Thus, as we build a different food system we will inevitably be building a new kind of culture, certainly very different from industrial urbanism but probably also from what preceded it. As always before in human history, we will make it up as we go along, in response to necessity and opportunity.”

Richard Heinberg [Fifty Million Farmers](#)