CAMPUS LOCAL FOOD SUBSCRIPTION PROGRAMS

INTERVALE FOOD HUB

Program Name: Intervale Food Hub with University of Vermont and Saint Michael’s College

Institution Locations:
• Burlington, VT (University of Vermont)
• Colchester, VT (Saint Michael’s College)

Number of Students:
• University of Vermont: 12,815
• Saint Michael’s College: 2,123

Percentage of Students Living Off Campus:
• University of Vermont: 49 percent
• Saint Michael’s College: 2 percent

Meal Plan Requirements:
• University of Vermont: required for all on-campus students
• Saint Michael’s College: optional

Program Summary:
Intervale Food Hub (IFH), an enterprise of the Intervale Center, works with colleges in the Burlington, Vermont area to deliver weekly local food subscriptions featuring produce, meat, cheese, and other value-added products from over 30 Vermont farmers and producers directly to students. Their college-specific spring and fall subscriptions are tailored to college semester schedules and delivered to campuses.

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THE STORY

In 2007, with funding from a Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) grant, the Intervale Center conducted market research and worked with farmers to identify the type of market development that would help to expand fresh local food sales. A business plan was drafted in 2008, and the initial model for the Intervale Food Hub was a multi-farm CSA offering workplace delivery.

The model continued to evolve and expand. By 2014, the Intervale Food Hub offered over 30 CSA-style subscription options to over 50 locations, plus college campuses. In 2015, IFH adjusted their model with the goal of streamlining ordering, packing, and delivery logistics, and improving member experience. They currently deliver 12 subscription options to about 20 year-round delivery locations, plus college campuses. This allows staff to focus more attention on building strong partnerships, improving member experience, and developing new markets, including wholesale distribution.

In 2011, the Intervale Food Hub reached out to campus sustainability coordinators at three local college campuses, University of Vermont, St. Michael’s College, and Champlain College, with a plan to offer subscriptions that fit the academic calendar. In partnership with like-minded sustainability coordinators, IFH created a grassroots movement to offer local food subscriptions to students. In the first two years, IFH saw tremendous interest from students despite limited involvement from the colleges. In response, they began to think about strategies for expanding the subscription program at each college campus.

All three colleges exclusively contract their campus food services with Sodexo, a national food service management company. In order to expand and institutionalize their campus subscription program, they needed to formalize support from the universities and increase their visibility on campus. In 2014, the Intervale Food Hub initiated the process of becoming an approved vendor with Sodexo at UVM. The Intervale Center and the IFH already ad a decade-long history of working with staff at UVM and Sodexo to further their mission of strengthening the local food system. The process for becoming an approved Sodexo vendor includes obtaining $5 million in liability insurance and completing third-
THE STORY (cont.)

party audit. As both UVM and IFH staff worked on the vendor approval process, they recognized the opportunity to leverage this partnership and vendor status to supply wholesale produce to UVM dining halls. In 2015, IFH officially became an approved vendor to Sodexo.

“Coordinating through the appropriate channels is really important, to get approval from the right people,” Kendall Frost, Intervale Food Hub Marketing and Outreach Coordinator said, adding that while the process takes time, you must be respectful of your partners’ work plans, and focus on developing strong relationships.

“We had a lot of relationships with faculty and staff at UVM, and the Intervale Center has a really good relationship with UVM, so all those factors helped in getting our subscriptions delivered to campus and our food into the dining halls,” Frost said.

Today, Intervale Food Hub continues to deliver subscriptions to college students at UVM and St. Michaels’ College. They no longer deliver to Champlain College, because of low participation rates. The IFH continues to work with UVM and Sodexo to grow their wholesale market, and plans to extend the wholesale program to other local college campuses.

SUBSCRIPTION OPTIONS

Members can pay in full or monthly installments. The costs for college subscriptions are as follows:

- Vermont Vegetable: $25 per week x 12 deliveries = $300 total
- Omnivore’s Package: $55 per week x 12 deliveries = $660 total
- Cheddar Cheese: $5.50 per week x 12 deliveries = $66 total
- Bread: $5.25 per week x 12 deliveries = $63 total
- Eggs: $3 per week for a half dozen x 12 deliveries = $36 total
- Chicken: $25 per month x three deliveries = $75 total
- Ground Beef: $22.50 per month x three deliveries = $67.50 total
- Wild Salmon: $20 per month x three deliveries = $60 total
- Sausage: $21 per month x three deliveries = $63 total
- Wild Fish: $40 per month x three deliveries = $120 total
- Tortillas & Beans: $9.50 per month x three deliveries = $28.50 total
- Bean Burgers: $9.25 per month x three deliveries = $27.75 total

FUNDING

The Intervale Food Hub is an enterprise of the Intervale Center, a nonprofit in Burlington, Vermont working to strengthen community food systems. The enterprise covers operational costs through earned revenue and utilizes grants to support efforts related to expanding their farm to institution initiatives.
They currently deliver 12 subscription options to about 20 year-round delivery locations. During the college seasons, they also deliver to two locations on the UVM campus, one on the Saint Michael's College campus, and one off-campus location.

Members order online each season, choosing their delivery location and subscriptions, and set up optional monthly payment plans. Intervale Food Hub purchases food from farms and businesses, which deliver food to the IFH facility at the Intervale Center in Burlington, Vermont. IFH staff pack individual baskets for each member, then deliver the baskets to community pick up locations. Members pick up their food once a week at the location of their choice. Members pick up their baskets at their pickup location of choice each week.

The Intervale Food Hub strives to offer traceability, transparency, and plenty of useful resources to members. They send an e-mail newsletter every week so members know each item being delivered and which farm or producers it came from. The newsletter also lists the growing methods for each item — specifying certified organic, “Eco Apple,” pasture raised, grass fed, or wild caught. In addition, they offer recipes, cooking tips, storage tips, and other educational resources so their members can make the best use of their food.

**FIVE CSA SEASONS AT THE INTERVALE FOOD HUB:**

- **SPRING** (14 WEEKS)
- **SUMMER** (22 WEEKS)
- **FALL/WINTER** (14 WEEKS)
- **COLLEGE SPRING** (12 WEEKS)
- **COLLEGE FALL** (12 WEEKS)
STUDENT INTEREST

To garner interest in participation among students, Intervale Food Hub outreach staff makes talking to students in person a priority. Staff and interns spend time on campus, table in student centers, and they go to different activity festivals, often in partnership with different student clubs. IFH interns support outreach efforts throughout the year by fostering relationships with on-campus contacts and engaging students, faculty, and staff on campus.

While partnering with Sodexo supported the logistics of delivering food to campus, maintaining a grassroots network to promote subscriptions has been essential to their sales and outreach strategy. The frequent turnover of students and a young audience creates a dynamic challenge for effective marketing and education.

The Vermont Vegetable is the most popular subscription among students. Ninety-five percent of student subscription purchases include the Vermont Vegetable or the Omnivore Package (which includes the Vermont Vegetable plus three additional ingredients each week, such as meat, fish, dairy, and other value-added products like honey, maple syrup, and pesto). The remaining members purchase subscriptions like bread, eggs, cheese, meat, and fish, without purchasing the Vermont Vegetable.

“Purchasing veggies can be challenging for people,” Frost said. “Getting pre-selected packages is desirable for students because it gives them an opportunity to try new foods and to learn new recipes and cooking techniques without the stress of grocery shopping. Since so many students live with friends both on and off campus, preparing food from their IFH subscriptions offers a great combination of a fun, social activity while developing a healthy habit and lifelong skills.”

PURCHASING

Intervale Food Hub is committed to their farmers and food makers. They offer them a stable market, fair prices and advanced working capital, improving farm viability and quality of life. Intervale Food Hub works with between 30 and 40 producers. They have strong relationships with their producers, and they are thoroughly familiar with each farm’s growing practices and business practices. Most of the producers are certified organic. Those who are not certified organic use production methods that IFH staff trusts as safe and sustainable.

Intervale Food Hub works with a group of committed farmers and producers for crop and purchasing planning on an annual basis. Producers who sell to the IFH must meet the following standards:

- Proof of $1M liability insurance
- Completed IFH food safety checklist (adapted from the USDA GAP certification checklist)
- Value added producers must comply with appropriate state and federal regulations

“Sometimes, labels like ‘certified organic’ don’t tell the whole story about food. Many of our producers go above and beyond when managing their land and resources. Our relationships with our producers are the key to ensuring the best quality food.”

-Kendall Frost
Farmers and Businesses

Sales accounts with Intervale Food Hub represent a significant portion of business for many farms, but it is often only one of several sales channels. Since it can be risky for farm businesses to sell their entire product through one market channel, IFH recommends that sales to their food hub do not exceed 20 percent of a farm’s overall sales.

One of Intervale Food Hub’s farm partners, Burnt Rock Farm of Huntington, Vermont, is a diversified, certified organic vegetable farm, focusing on sweet potatoes, spinach and garlic. Sales to the Intervale Food Hub represented approximately 15 percent of their total sales in 2015.

Maple Wind Farm of Richmond, Vermont, is a diversified livestock and certified organic vegetable farm. Around five percent of their total sales of meat (grass fed beef, pasture raised pork and pasture raised sausage) and certified organic vegetables are to the Intervale Food Hub.

Does’ Leap Farm of East Fairfied, Vermont, is a diversified organic farm, focusing on fresh and aged goat cheeses, kefir, and farm-made sausage. Goat cheese sales to Intervale Food Hub represented 3.6 percent of their total sales in 2014-2015.

Lessons Learned

Relationships are the name of the game for the Intervale Food Hub. Frost emphasized the importance of building relationships and good communications with interested parties. The Intervale Food Hub’s first step in building a college subscription program was developing relationships with sustainability coordinators at each university.

“Introduce yourself to other people you may need to work with,” Frost said. “At UVM we work with building management staff, we work with student clubs, with student volunteers who help manage logistics and delivery sites, with communications people, with different partners to market around campus, and with student interns and the career center. We have to build relationships, so the right people can help you with the right types of activities.”

Intervale Food Hub emphasizes that having strong relationships with each farm is essential. Annual crop planning, regular weekly phone and e-mail communications, and annual meetings are essential to staying connected to their producers and their mission. Working with farmers and producers to plan subscriptions and to assess farmers’ needs helps to inform how their business can evolve.

Intervale Food Hub values its relationships with community partners. By decreasing the number of delivery locations they work with, they made sure their staff had the time and resources necessary to cultivate strong relationships with the people who value their work.

“We’re dedicated to creating an ethical and sustainable business that provides good jobs for our employees, great food for the community and ensures the viability of our farmers. We’re dedicated to educating our community and engaging individuals in the community food system,” Frost said.
FINE’s Farm & Sea to Campus Project aims to increase the amount of local food served on campus and elevate awareness about the regional food system through connecting and communicating with campus food system stakeholders, developing and sharing resources, collecting data, and identifying collaborative opportunities for action. Get connected with the New England Farm & Sea to Campus Network by visiting: http://www.farmtoinstitution.org/new-england-farm-sea-campus-network.

To learn more about farm to institution efforts across New England, visit www.farmtoinstitution.org.

QUESTIONS?

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- Intervale Food Hub, www.intervalefoodhub.com
- Intervale Center, www.intervale.org
- St. Michael’s College Dining, www.smcvt.edu/on-campus/green-campus/sustainability-initiatives/local-food

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