

## **Weaver Street Market Brings Communities Together to Provide Healthy Food for Hungry Neighbors**

Earlier this year, Weaver Street Market formed the *Community Food Partnerships*, a community initiative to raise public awareness about the severity of local hunger and get healthy food into the hands of low-income families in Orange County. The co-op's first food campaign featured bags of fresh produce donated to PORCH, a grassroots hunger-relief organization that serves communities in Carrboro, Chapel Hill, and Hillsborough. More than 2,500 shoppers made donations totaling over \$32,000. The co-op is leveraging its buying abilities to turn the donations into 1,100 bags of fresh vegetables, fruits, and eggs valued at \$64,000.

Brenda Camp, Community Outreach Coordinator at Weaver Street Market, commented on the generous response from the community, "The campaign was a huge success—in part because we offered our owners a way to contribute that resonated with their values. When you value fresh, healthy food, it feels good to imagine paper bags stuffed with fruit and veggies being placed in the arms of your neighbors."

For its second Community Food Partnership campaign, the co-op is partnering with TABLE, a Carrboro-based nonprofit that delivers healthy food to at-risk school-aged kids. For two weeks, May 20 through June 2, co-op shoppers will have the opportunity to make donations to **fill backpacks with healthy food for kids at risk for hunger** during the summer months.

A key component of the campaign is reminding donors that hunger does not take a vacation. According to Ashton Chatham Tippins, Executive Director for TABLE, "Summer is often a time when kids are most susceptible to hunger, because they aren't receiving free school meals. By providing them with the healthy food they need through TABLE's Summer Program, kids are receiving the nutrition they need to simply be a kid, enjoy their break from school, and return to school in August eager to learn."

TABLE estimates that more than 2,500 kids in the Carrboro-Chapel Hill School District come from food-insecure families. Weaver Street Market's goal for the food campaign is to provide food for 2,100 backpacks (that's weekend food for 350 children for six weeks). Ruffin Slater, General Manager at the co-op, observed, "We'd like to see the campaign donations position TABLE to start the school year with fortified funds to help them achieve their goal of reaching 500 kids by the end of the year."

The community response to the food campaign is spreading. According to James Watts, Merchandising Manager at Weaver Street Market, "Vendors of many familiar brands have stepped in to help. KIND is donating Healthy Grain Bars for each backpack donation, Organic Valley is giving us a substantial price reduction on shelf-stable milk, and Pacific Foods sent us 2808 cartons soup at 50% off." When asked about their participation in the food campaign, Dana Rosenberg, the Director of KIND's social mission, the KIND Movement, said, "At KIND, we strive to make the world a little kinder. We are proud to be a part of Weaver Street Market's Community Food Partnership and to help bring nourishment to those who need it."

Through the partnership, the co-op has discovered that it can have the greatest impact on social issues in the community by utilizing its unique capabilities as a food market and cooperative. In addition to

sourcing the food for the donations, the co-op has organized volunteers to help sort and pack the food, which is stored at WSM's Food House facility in Hillsborough and then trucked to delivery sites. Recently, the co-op refocused its Cooperative Community Fund (CCF) to support local projects addressing "access to healthy foods." The CCF is now accepting applications from nonprofits for grants totaling \$3,000. Camp, who chairs the committee reviewing the grant applications, noted, "We've funded many creative approaches to connecting neighbors with food, from community gardens to veggie vans." The CCF is a sustainable endowment fund for community donations. WSM grows the endowment fund through contributions from owners and shoppers, including the purchase of Hope for the Holiday products, proceeds from the April and October wine shows, and donated owner dividends and shares. The endowment's current value is \$135,000.

"With a singular focus, we are sending out a strong message," noted Board Chair Curt Brinkmeyer. "Connecting communities to healthy food is what the co-op is about, and we're exploring ways to extend that access to more individuals and families in our communities."

**Contacts:**

Brenda Camp, Weaver Street Market, [brenda.c@weaverstreetmarket.coop](mailto:brenda.c@weaverstreetmarket.coop), 919-929-2009 ext 145  
Ashton Chatham Tippins, [achatham.tablenc@gmail.com](mailto:achatham.tablenc@gmail.com), 919-636-4860