

Arvada Veggie Van

2020 Season in Operation

By the Numbers:

Season: July – Mid-October, 14 weeks

Produce purchases: \$1748.00
 Estimated lbs, CSA Shares:
 Grow Girl Organics: 280 lbs (est)
 Forever West: 322 lbs (est)

Produce donations made to AVV:
 Arvada Gardeners: 977 lbs.
 Go Farm: 655 lbs.
 CSU Ext./Jeffco
 Master Gardeners: 2300 lbs
 Rose Roots Comm. Garden: 232 lbs

Total produce volume: **4806 lbs**
 Per week: 343 lbs



Ready to head out from our new digs at the Arvada Garden Club

Fair market value of all: \$11,101.86
 (Donations valued at average of our per pound cost from the paid CSAs, \$2.31/lb.)

Average realized price, per lb: \$.49

Total sales: \$2357.44
 (81% increase over '19)

Kit sales: 1/3 of sales by volume
 (from prior counts)

Other donations to AVV:
 ~40 carving pumpkins, Miller Farms
 ~150 herb seedlings (basil, thyme, parsley,
 Bill Orchard.)



...and untold hours by the individuals who donated their produce



Neighborhood highlights

Memorial Park Neighborhood – Wednesdays

Our Memorial Park route is through mainly multi-family residential areas. The neighborhood park is the most used of our four sites owing to the popularity of the disc golf course.

In general, we had a solid response along Yarrow, Brooks Drive and W. 62nd, including at Yarrow Gardens, right and below, and especially at Memorial Park itself – where reliably a number of residents would wait for our arrival.

Other notable stops included 6021 Yarrow (that’s the name) and the Brookview apartments on Yukon -- where kids playing out front would alert their parents to our presence. We loved hearing, “The Veggie Van is here!”



Neighborhood Takeaways:

Face masks, and our requirement of them, could be a challenge in every neighborhood, this one included. The easiest and best response, we found, was to have a supply hanging right there in the van, and to hand one to individuals as they approached. (We very much appreciated the free PPE supplied through the Arvada Resiliency Taskforce.)



Mcllvoy Park/Olde Town Neighborhood – Thursdays

Along with Wednesday, our Thursday route was our most successful. We always began our run at the Columbine Senior Apartments on Allison, with reliably 12-15 customers and probably half of that, right, willing even to brave a cold and rainy day. (And also, we thought, to enjoy a bit of socializing with their neighbors.)

Shirley Wilcoxon, standing at right, was a our volunteer outreach resident. We'd text her to let her know we were on the way and she quickly circulated the news to others. She promoted the exchange of information on Facebook, too.



The second location with a reliably good turnout was Allison Village Apartments. It's a Jefferson County Housing Authority affordable housing community. One regular patron faithfully waited outside for us as we sailed by on the way to Columbine and then doubled back twenty minutes or so later. In the photo, the teen on the left took a keen interest in our offerings after trying a single recipe kit early on – and consequently tried several others over the course of the summer. And her little brother, hidden behind her, would run inside to get her when we arrived.

Creekside and East Wads Neighborhood – Fridays

The Creekside neighborhood is named for a park nestled between two large apartment communities. It's where we realized, immediately, the almost catnip quality of the veggie van for kids. While the novelty has worn off a bit, kids are still some of our best customers. Part of the reason, we feel, is that the vehicle is on their scale -- see photo from prior year. Also in prior years, not this one, we frequently handed out samples -- especially when cherry tomatoes (what we thought of as our 'gateway veggie') were available.

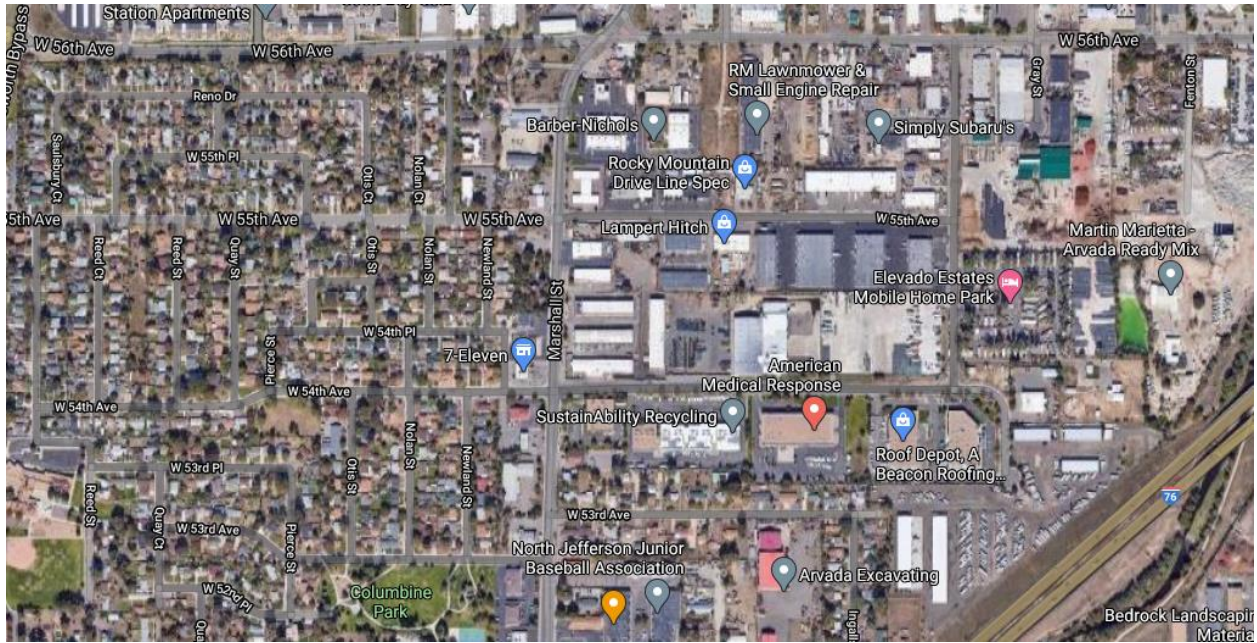


This year we saw the most interest while staged on Pierce Street at the park. People driving by, or heading home after work, would pull over. It was a weekly thing, not at all like other years. In addition, we re-drew the boundaries of our Friday route to take in Olde Wadsworth, especially the east side -- and that as well greatly expanded contact and sales. Turns out the Friday afternoon visit worked better for many residents along the corridor, including these who had previously been our first stop on Wednesdays, photo below. (From prior year, at Elwood Estates.)



Columbine/Foster Elementary neighborhood – Sundays

Our final neighborhood of the week, Columbine/Foster, is a predominantly single-family neighborhood, nestled in the Clear Creek valley among various agricultural and industrial uses. Over our time operating, the park has evolved to become a reliable and successful sale location, with a number of area residents signing up for text notifications -- and being at the park



when we pull up. Meanwhile, we note gentrification in the post-WWII small frame and brick home subdivisions, given this area's location near the G Line and Olde Town, and also the relative affordability.

This neighborhood is our last of the weekly cycle – so once park sales have finished, we continue through to a variety of homes and areas where we've built relationships over time -- a woman with young kids who can't readily venture out, say -- and then ending on the east side of Marshall Street. Here there are scattered single family homes, Elevado Estates (a mobile home community, marked by a pink flag on the map) and a women's shelter. It's our last day of the week, and even though we pick up ample fresh veggies that morning, we aim to clear out most - - as our next operating day isn't until Wednesday. To do this we steeply discount and donate what's left. It works well all around, we believe, as this wrap-up route corresponds with some of the greatest need of our entire service area.

Recipe Kits

We continue to be convinced of the value and importance of the recipe kits. Not only are we getting veggies into residents' hands and fridges, we believe (anecdotally - based on feedback) that kits do much to assure the goodies actually make it into bellies.

On top of that aspect, the kits are a strategy for moving veggies that otherwise might go to waste. Consider the humble rutabaga – a root

Hasselback Rutabaga

A delicious, nutrition-packed alternative to potatoes! Serves 2.
From www.floridacoastalcooking.com

Ingredients:

- 2 Rutabagas
- 2 cloves Garlic, thinly sliced
- 1 Red or sweet yellow onion, thinly sliced
- 2 packs Marconi's Extra Virgin Olive Oil 2 tsp +/-

Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

Prep: Scrub and if desired peel rutabagas. Preheat oven to 400°. Cut root part off of rutabaga so it will stand up. Next make very thin slices into but not all the way through, as shown. Stuff each slice with alternating onion and garlic pieces. Place on large square of aluminum foil. Drizzle each with one packet of olive oil and sprinkle with salt.

Cook: Wrap tightly and bake for about 30 minutes, or until inside is soft. Remove foil and bake an additional 15-20 minutes until golden brown.



vegetable related to turnips. It's high in several vitamins and fiber; stores very well; and is less expensive than many veggies. But they're less known and popular, and unfortunately some consider them unattractive. Combine them with a tasty and visually appealing recipe, however, and suddenly there's real demand; the rutabagas soon disappear.

Which brings up a third advantage of the kits – they can promote healthier, yet cost-effective meal preparation, long after the veggie van has wrapped up its season. The kits are accompanied by the recipe itself, printed on quality photo paper. In the case of the rutabaga, our patrons can easily incorporate this inexpensive veggie into their regular shopping as a healthy addition to their family's ongoing diet.

Some limitations and challenges

Google “recipe” and the name of a vegetable or two – our chief means of finding recipes to develop into our kits – and what turns up are almost always dishes that have no cultural relevance or connection to a significant portion of the communities we serve. Adding to the challenge is the fact that the kits are developed by non-professional cooks, and they cannot include meats. Thus, an aim of the coming year is to find ways to introduce culturally appropriate dishes for our kits.

Here are the recipes offered so far:

** New in 2020*

- Baked Stuffed Mini White Pumpkins
Caramelized Onion and Peppers
Daikon Radish French Fries*
 - Easy Green Salsa
 - Hasselback Rutabaga
Kale Sauce Pasta
- Pan Fry Apple with Honey and Cinnamon
 - Pasta with Zucchini and Tomatoes*
- Plum Salad with Pepper and Parmesan
Quick Fresh Tomato Sauce
Roasted Beets with Balsamic Vinegar*
Roasted Eggplant and Tomato
Roasted Kohlrabi with Parmesan
 - Roasted Onion and Delicata Squash
- Roasted Radicchio with Parmesan Cheese and Balsamic Vinegar*
 - Roasted Tomatillo and Tomato Salsa
Sauteed Mustard Greens*
Skillet Parsnips
- Spicy Cinnamon-Chili Roasted Carrots*
Summer Zucchini with Spring Onion
Thai Cucumber Salad with Jalapeno Pepper*
 - Tomato and Red Onion Salad*
- Turnips Roasted with Honey and Ginger*
Zucchini with Parmesan (our all time best seller!)

Summary

The Jeffco Health Department in 2017 hosted an annual day-long seminar called “Imagining Jeffco’s Food Future.” That year’s event featured keynote speaker Mark Winne, author of *Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty*. Winne urges that food banks focus not so much on securing donations and food enough to feed needy populations, but instead on ending hunger and poverty. Extrapolating to our program – with its more diverse constituency -- our focus might be appropriately stated as ending poor consumption. Or stated more positively, for residents to consume high quality food that’s fresh and, to the extent possible, locally grown.

From the start of our operation we have felt a tension on pricing. We wanted the food to go out, so we modified pricing, often, to reflect the influence of demand. But as we learned more about the incredible work and skill on the part of the farmers, we became conscious of the need not to devalue their product.

In spite of this, we have underpriced overall, quite significantly. On the plus side, more people enjoyed the produce than would otherwise be the case. And they tried some foods they may not have. Even so, we need a longer term strategy to build on current efforts to promote awareness of and appreciation for the benefits of such good local food, and the people who make it possible. As mentioned, we also need to learn and develop a better, customized ‘tool box’ of recipe kits, practices and understanding so that we can better facilitate eating well easily and, especially, inexpensively.

Afterthoughts – from our first year’s report (but worth repeating):

Each of us involved felt that the social interaction was the most enjoyable and notable part of the Veggie Van. There was a realization that, while we were involved in an already worthwhile effort (the direct one of making fresh food more readily available to people) there might be an unexpected upside worth exploring. Could traversing an area in a consistent way act to bring its residents together and actually foster an openness to new approaches, even a tiny bit? Sociologist Mark Granovetter describes the importance of sociological ties in the “diffusion of influence and information...”¹ He in particular focuses on the benefits of weak ties, such as those fostered by the occasional meeting and casual conversation of neighbors at the Veggie Van: “More novel information flows to individuals through weak than through strong ties,” he notes. “Because our close friends tend to move in the same circles that we do, the information they receive overlaps considerably with what we already know.”² Extrapolating, “Societies and social systems that have more weak ties are more likely to be dynamic and innovative.”³

Thus, we learned that the periodic, casual coming together at the veggie van provided a weak linkage of experience and anecdotes and knowledge about a few things -- and not just from us

¹ https://sociology.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/the_strength_of_weak_ties_and_exch_w-gans.pdf

² <http://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/0895330053147958>

³ http://changingminds.org/explanations/theories/weak_ties.htm accessed on December 6, 2017

but between neighbors who otherwise had more limited interaction. That contact and gleanings of new information can, it appears, facilitate the embrace of new approaches about food. And who knows, it might more broadly foster a bit of social capital within the area.

Social Equity. Drawing again from Winne's book and beyond, one very satisfying element of the Veggie Van is the fact that everyone we came in contact with, of a variety of incomes and backgrounds, has access to this high quality food. Also: we marvel at how a gathering at the veggie van, especially near the parks, often provides a rare chance to connect with all kinds of other people.

Finally, we believe that our original assumption is correct, that the cart will support our permanent facility, if there ultimately is one, and will be the tie we envisioned between neighborhood, our building's residents and our place within.



Heartfelt thanks to these major donors who have made our 2020 season possible:

Jefferson County Public Health
LiveWell Colorado
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Jack McHugh
Chris MacMillan and Bob Maddalena
Lynn Guissinger
Floyd and Kelly on Ammons



And very special thanks to the folks at Calabrese Greenhouse, who have kept the Veggie Van warm and dry each winter!