

INNOVATION BRIEF

FROM THE GIA RURAL AGING INITIATIVE

Food Pantry and Wood Banks in Rural Maine

Project: Friends of Aroostook: Providing Fresh Produce and Firewood in Rural Maine

Challenge: Food and heat are two of the basic necessities of life. Yet, many older adults in Maine do not have access to nutritional fruits and vegetables and are in need of firewood during the long, severe winters. Lack of access to transportation compounds both problems.

Objective: The Friends of Aroostook farm was founded in 2008 to assist Maine's elderly, low-income residents and others in need through donations of fresh produce and emergency winter firewood.



Program Description: Friends of Aroostook (FOA) is a six-year-old nonprofit farm cooperative that connects local resources with local needs, with volunteers coming from up to 100 miles away to harvest and pick up crops for seniors in their area. The produce is distributed to Meals on Wheels (Aroostook and Eastern Area Agencies on Aging); seniors at Greater Eagle Lake; Central, Northern, and South Aroostook food pantries; and Danforth food pantry.

Through a partnership with the Aroostook County Sheriff's office and the Maine Department of Corrections, carefully screened, minimum security inmates plant, maintain, and harvest crops. The inmates learn farming skills, gain meaningful work, and connect and contribute to the community. Volunteer workers and donations keep the farm in operation.

FOA also operates Operation Wood Heat, a program that provides free processed firewood to disadvantaged individuals and families. The Salvation Army screens applicants to determine need.

Outcomes: Since the first harvest of 3,600 ears of corn, Friends of Aroostook has donated more than 200,000 pounds of fresh fruit and vegetables and 100 cords of wood.



“The greenhouse perfectly met the criteria that we have for the grant program because it involves so many other organizations and so many other food pantries in the area and can help the low- to moderate-income families on a widespread basis.”

— Jackie Jones,
Machias Savings Bank

Keys to Success: Generous funders and supporters such as AARP, The Maine Community Foundation, The John T. Gorman Foundation, The Elmina B. Sewall Foundation, Stephen and Tabitha King Foundation, Houlton & Presque Isle Rotary Clubs, and a host of other supporters have made FOA’s mission of “serving the less fortunate” a reality.

Location: Houlton, Maine

Lead Agency/Nonprofit: Friends of Aroostook

Funding: Operation Wood Heat receives funding from United Way and the County Federal Credit Union in Houlton. The Farm to Pantry program operates in partnership with Mainers Feeding Mainers, which receives funding from Coastal Enterprises, Inc. (CEI). Funding for a greenhouse to grow fruit for seniors came from Machias Savings Bank’s community investment grant and Johnny’s Selected Seeds, which also matches FOA’s purchases dollar for dollar.

For More Information:

FriendsOfAroostook.com Website and video “With Friends Like These: Dale Flewelling & Friends of Aroostook” (bit.ly/2e1Ft9t).