

## **Grow a Row**

*By Emily Maughan; Public Health Coordinator for the Island County Public Health Department*

Want to help make a difference in your community, but don't know how? Why not plant an extra row of vegetables in your garden this year and donate them to your local food bank!

The Island County Public Health Department has received a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) grant to help individuals and families from low income homes gain better access to fresh and local produce. This will be achieved in several different ways. First, local farmers are being encouraged to become "EBT certified" and accept SNAP benefits at their farm stands and at the farmers markets. Several farmers throughout Whidbey Island already accept EBT. To learn more and find out who they are, go to the Island County Public Health website: [www.islandcountywa.gov/health](http://www.islandcountywa.gov/health)

Second, Island County Public Health is kicking off the Island County "Grow a Row" campaign, encouraging community members and local farmers to grow extra vegetables in their gardens this year and donate the extra produce to a local food bank. Examples of produce that could be donated include lettuce, squash, peas, beans, tomatoes, carrots, or any other fruits and veggies you want to share!

There are three food banks on Whidbey Island. Good Cheer Food Bank in Langley serves South Whidbey residents, Gifts From the Heart Food Bank serves residents in Central Whidbey and the North Whidbey Help House serves residents in the Oak Harbor and North Whidbey area.

Each food bank serves hundreds of individuals each month. Jean Wieman, the Executive Director of the North Whidbey Help House in Oak Harbor said, "...fresh produce is an expensive item to buy and if you are feeding a family and depend on food stamps, you buy what is affordable. By providing the food bank with fresh produce you provide clients with nutritious foods that they may not otherwise be able to have."

Each food bank is unique and has a different protocol for accepting produce donations. Please be sure to contact them directly before dropping off your donations. Contact information and food bank hours can be found at the Island County Public Health website: [www.islandcountywa.gov/health](http://www.islandcountywa.gov/health)

In addition to promoting the "Grow a Row" campaign, the Island County Public Health Department will be hosting cooking demonstrations at the various food banks. Recipes and other educational material on how to store and cook fresh produce will be provided.

Kathy Calvin, CEO and President of the United Nations Foundation once said, "Giving is not just about making a donation. It is about making a difference." Your small act of kindness and generosity can make a huge difference in someone's life.