



WILLOW POND FARM CREATES A HEALTHY COMMUNITY

Exeter Area YMCA, a branch of the Southern District YMCA

In 2016, the Southern District YMCA assumed the management of Willow Pond Farm, one of the oldest Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms in the state. Now considered a part of YMCA Camp Lincoln, camp director Mark Cadman and farmer Erika Gorgenyi have worked tirelessly to augment the production of affordable locally grown organic produce to bring farming education programs to youth and families in the Seacoast of New Hampshire.

As with all YMCA programs, financial assistance is available for CSA shares. Additionally, a portion of every harvest made at Willow Pond is donated to the local food pantry, St. Vincent de Paul in Exeter. On average, St. Vincent De Paul **provides food to 34 households in the community** on a regular basis. Willow Pond donations offer healthier organic options to these households. Executive director Molly Zirillo tells us that these contributions are “a critical part of what we can offer in the summer months. This increases the variety of healthy options we are able to make available to our clients.”

Willow Pond Farm’s locally grown food has helped to bring the community together.

A monthly healthy eating series at the Exeter Area YMCA unites local chefs with seasonal produce for cooking demonstrations. To date, 126 adults and 189 youth have participated in the learning. **YMCA Camp Lincoln campers got their hands dirty working the farm and gained an appreciation for where local produce is sourced.** Neighboring Phillips Exeter Academy students were lucky enough to take part in farm activities as were a volunteer AmeriCorps team.

YMCA Camp Lincoln director Mark Cadman observes, “It certainly is a project that’s still evolving, but **I think we have a strong start in providing education for all ages within the community on local, fresh and healthy eating options.**”

