

Growing in Community: Dan's Story



"My name is Dan McMaster and I am a farmer and retired teacher.

I started farming when I was about 4 years old – it all started when I harvested the leaves on my mother's snake plant for silage. While I haven't farmed my whole life, since 1973 I've lived on a family farm in Laingsburg that was my great grandfather's – it's been in the family for over a hundred years.

There was a time that no matter where you went in the Lansing area - and I don't just mean bulletin boards, I mean even inside elevators - there would be fliers for the Allen Farmers Market. I first got involved as a vendor through my brother, Jeff, back in 2005. I was at another market, which was also on Wednesdays, and we had some extra produce. So he started coming over to set up and then we would finish the market together. He loved it here. We did that for a couple years, but had to stop when we didn't have as much produce. Then, in 2012, I was having a lot of problems with deer eating the vegetables, so I put up a fence. I knew I had been losing a lot to the deer, but I didn't really realize how much until I had way too many vegetables, so I came back to Allen Farmers Market. The rest is history, as they say.

The Allen Farmers Market is unlike any market I have ever been to. It seems much more cooperative; there is such a strong sense of community. It's not just a place to sell vegetables, it's engaging. It's a comfortable place to come and just be yourself.

I began volunteering at the GardenHouse about 3 years ago. I was a lettuce harvester during the winter. While at the summer market I learned about BreadBasket. After the summer market ended, I became a BreadBasket volunteer. Once a week, Kat Logan and I go out to the food

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bank and get a load of produce, which varies widely in its makeup, but we try to get at least 800 pounds. We have a half hour to pick it out, and then we come back and lay it out with the bread, and sort it by the various categories. Starting at one o'clock, we make the bread and produce available to the community. During the afternoon, 80-100 people participate.

Volunteering pulls you in closer to the community. I enjoy talking with folks and answering questions. Actually, I probably ask as many questions as I answer - about, you know, how other people prepare things. You develop a relationship with the neighbors. Two weeks ago, near the end of the day during BreadBasket, a lady came in for the first time to get food. With tears in her eyes she said, 'You have no idea how much this helps.'

ANC has a bigger impact on a one-to-one basis than most organizations. I would say that the purpose of Allen Neighborhood Center is to make life better for people. Being a vendor at the farmers market and volunteering with BreadBasket allows me to help ANC achieve this goal, and I'm so thankful to be a part of it."