

Veggie Box Newsletter

Week 3, March 17

You have probably heard of the term 'food desert' but what about 'food swamp'? Although related, the two are different issues and have unique health, environmental, and policy implications. A food desert is an area that, simply put, doesn't have access to healthy foods. This is defined in a number of ways, but most commonly means an urban area more than one mile from a grocery store, or rural area more than 10 miles. Food swamps, however, may have access to healthy, fresh foods and may have grocery stores, but healthy foods are outnumbered by fast food and other unhealthy options by at least a 1:4 ratio. So, for every one grocery store or place to get healthy foods, there are at least four unhealthy options. Food swamps are cropping up more and more in low-income and urban areas, and disproportionately impact People of Color and other marginalized folks. Studies have shown that food swamps, when compared to food deserts, have much stronger correlations with obesity and other diet-related health conditions. There are a multitude of reasons for this, but most simply put, food swamps create an environment where it's hard to escape the pull of junk food. Constantly seeing unhealthy food options means that the brain's reward center is being repeatedly stimulated, causing the body to crave the sweet, salty, fatty foods that it knows it can easily have. Making the choice to seek out and eat a healthier option requires mental energy, and often the folks stuck in food swamps face these decisions over and over. Being forced to make these choices repeatedly and use that mental energy each time can result in a phenomenon called 'decision fatigue', when someone has to make many hard decisions and their ability to reason and make good decisions becomes weaker and weaker. Eating unhealthy foods can also impact our decision making since foods rich in fats and sugars can lead to chronic inflammation and poor gut health, which research has indicated may have a negative impact on brain chemistry leading to mental health issues like depression, anxiety, and poor mood regulation, all of which make choosing healthy options even more difficult. What kinds of long-term impacts can this have on our communities, specifically, our vulnerable communities? What can we do to stop it?

Producer Spotlight

Hunter Park GardenHouse

The Hunter Park GardenHouse, a project of Allen Neighborhood Center, is a hub for year-round farm & garden education, where neighbors volunteer to grow food, flowers, and community, and youth develop job and life skills in service to the neighborhood. Since 2008, the Hunter Park GardenHouse has empowered neighbors to grow, prepare, and eat healthy food to better their health and become better connected with the community.

Crop Profile

Kale

Though you may have only become familiar with Kale in the recent years with its popularity rise, Kale is actually a very old leafy green. It actually was one of the most popular green throughout Europe until the end of the middle ages when other crops began to rival it. In addition to being a leafy green staple, Kale was also used medicinally to help alleviate intestinal ailments. Kale was given a new role due to World War II. Because so many countries were forced to ration, causing people to lack key nutrients, Kale production increased to help fill in some of the nutritional gaps. Kale is a great source of iron, Vitamins C and K, calcium, and many antioxidants. Please store in a plastic bag, or with the stems in water to prevent it from becoming limp!



What's in the Box?

Organic Sweet Potatoes, *Green Wagon Farm, Ada*

Organic Kale, *Green Wagon Farm, Ada*

Dill, *Hunter Park GardenHouse, Lansing*

Organic Spinach, *MSU Student Organic Farm, Holt*

Organic Purple Potatoes, *Cinzori Farms, Ceresco*

Organic Carrots, *Green Wagon Farm, Ada*

Organic Savoy Cabbage, *Cinzori Farms, Ceresco*

Organic Salad Radishes, *Green Wagon Farm, Ada*

Add-Ons

Eggs, *Grazing Fields Coopeartive, Charlotte*

Bread, *Stone Circle BakeHouse, Holt*

Chevre, *Hickory Knoll Farms Creamery, Onondaga*

Cheese, *Hickory Knoll Farms Creamery, Onondaga*

Coffee, *The 517 Coffee Company, Lansing*

Meat, *Heffron Farms Market, Belding*

Pork, *Grazing Fields Cooperative, Charlotte*

Beef, *Heffron Farms Market, Belding*

Chicken, *Heffron Farms Market, Belding*

Recipes and Tips!

Sweet Potato, Kale, and Black Bean Tacos

Roasted sweet potatoes

- 2 pounds of Veggie Box sweet potatoes (all from this week) cubed into 1-inch chunks
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- ¼ teaspoon fine sea salt

Beans

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 onion, (from last week's box) finely chopped
- 3 cloves of garlic, minced (from last week's box)
- Fine sea salt
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon chili powder
- 1/2 teaspoon paprika
- 2 cans black beans, rinsed and drained (or 3 cups cooked black beans)
- ½ cup water
- 1 teaspoon lime juice
- 1 bunch of Veggie Box kale
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees Fahrenheit and line a large, rimmed baking sheet. Toss the prepared sweet potatoes with the olive oil, cayenne pepper (if using) and salt. Arrange in a single layer and bake for 30 to 40 minutes, tossing halfway, until the sweet potatoes are tender and caramelizing at the edges. For the beans, warm the olive oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add the onions and garlic and a sprinkle of salt. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the onions have softened and are turning translucent, about 5 to 8 minutes. Add the cumin, chili powder, and paprika, and cook for about 30 seconds while stirring. Pour in the beans and water. Stir, cover and reduce heat to maintain a gentle simmer. Cook for 5 minutes, then remove the lid and use a potato masher or a fork to mash up at least half of the beans. Add in the kale, and cook for a few moments longer until the kale has softened. Remove from heat, stir in the lime juice, season with salt and pepper, and cover until you're ready to serve. Serve with tortillas, and top with crema fresca, cotija cheese, and hot sauce.

Spanakorizo - Greek Spinach Rice

- 1 1/2 tbsp. olive oil
- 1 medium onion chopped
- 2 garlic cloves (from last week) chopped
- 2 tbsp. chives or scallions chopped and divided
- 2 tbsp. Veggie Box dill chopped and divided
- Veggie Box spinach (4-5 oz)
- 1/2 cup basmati rice
- 1 cups vegetable broth
- 2 tbsp. butter
- 1 tbsp. lemon juice
- 1/4 tbsp lemon zest
- feta cheese to garnish

Heat the olive oil in a large pot over medium-high heat. Sauté the onions for about 5-7 minutes, or until translucent. Add the garlic, 1 tablespoons of dill, and 1 tablespoons of chives. Sauté for another minute or two. Add the spinach, and cook for 3-4 minutes, just until it wilts down. Add the salt, pepper, basmati rice, and vegetable broth and stir. Bring it to a boil, cover with a lid, and reduce the heat to medium-low. Simmer for 20 minutes. Stir in the butter, lemon juice and zest, and the remaining dill and chives. Garnish with feta cheese and lemon wedges. Serve.

Honey Ginger Roasted Carrots

- 1 pound Veggie Box carrots (all from this week), peeled - whole or cut into pieces
- 1/4 cup honey
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1-2 teaspoons fresh grated ginger
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- Salt & pepper, to taste
- Sesame seeds, for garnish (optional)

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. In a small bowl, whisk together honey, olive oil, ginger, soy sauce, garlic, brown sugar and salt and pepper. Toss carrots with glaze (in a large bowl, or right on the pan). Bake for 15-25 minutes (depending on the size of your carrots), turning and stirring once during cooking, until carrots are tender. If desired, sprinkle with sesame seeds before serving.

