

## Feeding Ourselves

When times get hard, we turn to family, friends and neighbors for help. In the last year, unemployment rates in San Juan County have doubled from 4% in 2008 to 7.5% in the first quarter of 2009. While having lunch at a local deli, someone told me that 75 families were homeless on San Juan Island. Though I cannot confirm that number, it awakens me to the potential of our idyllic islands being just as vulnerable to hunger and homelessness as any other part of the country. We are not immune to the realities of recession and economic hard times. But we still have plenty of neighborliness in the islands and we can help one another.

On San Juan Island, we are encouraging folks to “grow a row” for the Food Bank. By adding a row of popular vegetables like lettuces, beans, peas, squash, potatoes and cabbage, individual gardeners can grow a significant amount of food to donate to the Food Bank and help islanders that have fallen on hard times. Other groups around the islands are also finding ways to help, but one way we can all help to get a better picture of what we are growing and how many we can feed, is to participate in the San Juan County Garden Food Survey.

In 2008, the Agricultural Resources Committee of San Juan County began collecting information from islanders about how much food is being grown in home gardens. Maps and surveys were available at the San Juan County Fair as well as the Lopez Island Library. To date, forty-three garden surveys have been returned. An impressive amount of food is being produced in these gardens and we have a hunch that we’ve only begun to see the potential of such efforts. Everyone who grows food for themselves, their families or their neighbors is encouraged to fill out a survey found at [www.sjcarc.org](http://www.sjcarc.org) on the home page select “San Juan County Food Producer and Garden Surveys ([Click Here for Survey](#)),” print it and return it to ARC, PO Box 3370, Friday Harbor, WA 98250. Surveys may remain anonymous, if you choose.

Another way to contribute to our food security is to support our local farmers through shopping at the local farmers markets and joining a CSA-Community Supported Agriculture. Subscribers form a relationship with a farm and receive a weekly basket of produce. By making a financial commitment to a farm, subscribers share in the success of a local food system. A number of our farmers who offer a CSA subscription also contribute to local food banks. In order for them to help the community, they need our support in making their enterprise successful.