

Community Farm increasing production during pandemic

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Hometown Weekly Staff

May 19, 2020



Over a year in the works, the installation of Needham Community Farm's high tunnel was completed this month, just in time for the spring 2020 growing season, and just in time for COVID-19.

The tunnel shelters five new raised beds on previously unused land to provide protection from the elements to the lucky crops within. The new beds extend the farm's growing season by two months, enabling an increase in production up to 20 percent overall, including a 50 percent increased yield of tomatoes.

These production increases are fortuitous, given the current economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In just one month, from March to April 2020, the demand for food assistance at the Needham Community Council Food Pantry has already increased by 20 percent. Thanks to the high tunnel, the farm is ready to help meet this increase in demand.

Approximately 50 percent of the farm's total produce goes to lower-income Needham families, either through the food pantry or direct delivery to Needham Housing Authority locations.

Planting is still in progress, but under the tunnel alongside the tomatoes, one is likely to see peppers, cucumbers and sweet potatoes this summer - with hearty greens like kale and spinach over the winter.

The \$15,000 cost of the high tunnel was shared by three generous local donors: The Rotary Club of Needham, Dedham Savings, and The Foundation for Metrowest.

“We were pleased to support Needham Community Farm,” said Director of Programs Caroline Murphy at the Foundation for MetroWest. “Increasing the capacity of our local nonprofits is critical to enhancing the quality of life in our region.”

“The Farm’s improvements will mean more food donations to a growing population of people in need,” adds COO/CFO Mark Ingalls of Dedham Savings. “During these unprecedented times, it has become strikingly clear how essential organizations such as the Needham Community Farm are to the health, support, and prosperity of our community.”