Food is Medicine Pilot Program:

The Idaho Hunger Relief Task Force (IHRTF) has some exciting news to share as we dive into the fruitful summer months. Through our partnership with the Meridian Schools Clinic, we have identified two families that will be taking part in a new, innovative program this season in the Treasure Valley. Thank you to the amazing staff at the participating clinics who have partnered with us to end hunger for all Idahoans.

This year, IHRTF will be expanding on the FMRI food insecurity program by bringing local food directly to families in need. With funding secured from community partners, and Peaceful Belly farms, the IHTRF is providing free Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares for two local families identified as food insecure through the FMRI clinics. By providing free fresh produce, every week from May through October, these participating families gain access to local, fresh and nutritional foods and at no extra cost. Participating families take part in a qualitative pre-survey and post-survey for the purpose of gaining baseline and outcome data, as well as program insight.

The participating families will also have access to information about local farmers’ markets and cooking classes, healthy recipes using the produce from the CSA, and staff support. The IHRTF staff follow up with the families throughout the season, in order to provide necessary support, answer questions and provide information. The staff use these follow up sessions to help inform and craft promising best practices for the larger scale programs. Additionally, to ensure patient equity, the IHRTF has partnered with the Health Window program supported by St. Luke’s Health System and the Mexican Consulate to assist our Spanish speaking family with finding culturally appropriate resources.

Programs such as this CSA Food is Medicine pilot project act as preventative health initiatives, steering health care providers toward the fundamental idea that food is medicine. By using their prescriptive power, health care providers can use these fresh produce referral programs to dissuade the ill effects of hypertension, obesity, heart disease, and other co-morbid health conditions.

This specific pilot will be used as a guide to scale up the program in the next couple of years.

The CSA Food is Medicine pilot project is modeled off an existing farm in Oregon, Zenger Farms. Zenger Farms is a working urban farm that engages the local community with food education programs and CSA shares. Zenger farm accepts SNAP benefits, monthly payment plans and double up food bucks to offset the initial cost of the CSA. Additionally, the Portland Area CSA Coalition will match up to $200.00 towards the cost of the share when the family participates through the Double Up Food Bucks program (a national program incentivizing eating fruits and vegetables). The Idaho Parks and Recreation department has the exciting opportunity to create a similar urban farm vision with the new ownership of Spaulding Ranch, a twenty-acre historic site with viable land for an incubator farm, as well as historic buildings onsite to be used as community and educational spaces.

IHRTF envisions a food system that enables people to have direct access to fresh, healthy, and local food. Once barriers are eliminated to accessing healthy food, opportunities for sharing recipes, attending cooking skills classes, and providing education, work in tandem to provide healthy tips and information about these new types of foods. Programs such as those offered at Zenger Farms and the CSA Food is Medicine pilot project encourage healthy eating, support our local farmers, and support a more sustainable overall food system model.

Let food be thy medicine, and medicine be thy food.

~Hippocrates