

Beet Box Mobile Farmers Market makes fresh produce accessible and affordable

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EDWARDSVILLE - Homegrown tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, red and green bell peppers, yellow summer squash and zucchini are among the fresh vegetables Southern Illinois University Edwardsville graduate student Shari Blakeslee has enjoyed eating this summer.

She didn't have to go far to access the delicious health foods for her family. The new Beet Box Mobile Farmers Market brought the colorful array to her in SIUE's Cougar Village.

The Beet Box, supported primarily by the Goshen Market Foundation, as well as numerous community partners, has officially hit the road to offer affordable fresh vegetables to individuals who live in areas considered food deserts, where grocery stores are not available within a one-mile radius.

Its weekly route includes the following stops:

- Mondays
- 4-6 p.m. at the Fairmont City Public Library, 4444 Collinsville Road

Wednesdays

- 10 a.m.-Noon in Granite City at Niedringhaus United Methodist Church, 1311 20th Street
- 12:30-1:30 p.m. in Madison at Soup n Share, 1634 7th Street

Fridays

- 3-5 p.m. at SIUE's Cougar Village, 4A & 4F parking lots

“The Goshen Market’s broader vision is supporting a healthy, local food community,” said Jessica Despain, PhD, president of the Goshen Market Foundation and associate professor in the SIUE College of Arts and Sciences’ Department of English Language and Literature. “The Beet Box supports that mission by bringing affordable produce from local farmers and SIUE’s Rooftop Teaching Gardens to neighborhoods and community centers whose residents lack access to healthy foods as a result of food-desert conditions.”

“The Beet Box has added so much fresh vegetables to my family’s dinner table and the children’s lunch boxes,” said Blakeslee. “It offers a wonderful opportunity for students, single or those with families, to eat healthy food that is locally grown and fresh, while staying on a budget.”

The market on wheels is among the initiatives supported by SIUE’s food sustainability consortium, a constellation of courses, projects and services related to agricultural education and food access.

SIUE students Sophia Bodenbach, of Alton, and Olivia Russell, of Granite City, are taking the Beet Box on its weekly runs, alongside Land of Goshen Community Market Managers Tara Eberlin Pohlman and Candice Watson.

“The Beet Box is a fantastic way to help families living in food deserts,” said Bodenbach, a senior majoring in social work and English. “It’s an impactful offering that is genuinely helpful. The Goshen Market truly cares for the community. Those involved are taking action and doing something about the issues they see.”

Customers can use their Illinois Link Card and receive matching coupons of up to \$25 to purchase additional fruits and vegetables. At its weekly stops, the mobile market also works with Illinois Extension Services to provide nutrition workshops and recipe distributions to the community.

“Although providing the opportunity to purchase whole foods affordably is a decent step toward food security, education is also an integral part of the equation,” Despain explained. “We equip customers with recipes, food processing techniques, preparation demonstrations and nutritional information, so that they might more effectively use and enjoy fresh produce.”

The Beet Box was made possible through the support of many partners, including the SIUE College of Arts and Sciences, Edwardsville Community Foundation, SIUE Meridian Society, TheBANK of Edwardsville, The Auto Body Shop, Inc., Newsong Fellowship, St. John’s Mission Garden, and Creative Options Graphic Design, Inc.

Land of Goshen Community Market vendors support the mobile market by offering produce at affordable prices, including Rustic Roots and The Family Garden.

Learn more at facebook.com/goshenmktfoundation or at GoshenMarketFoundation.org.

[Southern Illinois University Edwardsville](https://SouthernIllinoisUniversityEdwardsville) provides students with a high quality, affordable education that prepares them for successful careers and lives of purpose to shape a changing world. Built on the foundation of a broad-based liberal education, and enhanced by hands-on research and real-world experiences, the academic preparation SIUE students receive equips them to thrive in the global marketplace and make our communities better places to live. Situated on 2,660 acres of beautiful woodland atop the bluffs overlooking the natural beauty of the Mississippi River’s rich bottomland and only a short drive from downtown St. Louis, the SIUE campus is home to a diverse student body of more than 13,000.