

## SHARONCROPPERS

### Curriculum rooted in garden program that pairs students with community food needs

#### SHARON

##### By FRANCES MIZE

Valley News Staff Writer

SHARON — Back when fall was just as warm as summer, Oli Shipman brushed dirt from potatoes she had harvested from a community garden on Route 14, prepping them for delivery to Sharon’s food shelf.

She made salsa for the food shelf, too, from the tomatoes and peppers that had matured on green vines through the growing season.

On Monday, as cold wind whipped over the low, flat ground just across from the White River, Shipman, a 10th grader at The Sharon Academy, was back at work in the garden. Covering the pathways between the beds in mulch to keep grass from running rampant in the winter, Shipman was putting the garden to bed.

The Sharon Food Justice Garden, which is mostly maintained and managed by students enrolled in an elective at TSA, is a project of Regeneration Corps — a collaboration between Vermont high school students and representatives from a variety of nonprofits, including Vital Communities, Building a Local Economy (BALE) and Rural Vermont.

The group hopes to foster students’ “practical, regenerative land-based skills,” an agricultural and ecological knowledge base, and community organizing experience.

“We have this framework that we’re really hoping to shift the way education is delivered, by making it more experiential and geared toward

farming techniques — like no-till farming and cover cropping. The methods focus on keeping agricultural soils healthy, instead of depleting them of their nutrients in extractive growing seasons.

“We give kids an opportunity to get real skills on the ground, working in gardens on farms, because we recognize and we know that industrial agriculture is one of the lead contributors to climate change,” Ganey said. “But its flip side is also where a lot of the solutions lie.”

Through Flexible Pathways, an educational initiative in Vermont that gives students

#### G ARDEN A6



Sharon Academy student Bryce Rikert, 15, plants

potatoes at the Food Justice Garden in Sharon during a class work session on Thursday. The garden is a collaboration between the school, Youth Empowerment and Action, Regeneration Corps and Change the World Kids.

VALLEY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS  
— JAMES M. PATTERSON



Oli Shipman, of Sharon, center; Dan “Rudi” Rudell, second from right; and Sharon Academy Middle School math teacher Linda Jagoda, right, lay cardboard in the walking paths at the Food Justice Garden in Sharon on Monday while preparing the plot for winter. The cardboard was covered with wood chips to keep grass and weeds from growing. From left are volunteer Avery Morris, Regeneration Corps facilitator Karen Ganey and Alden of Youth Empowerment and Action.

solutions,” said Karen Ganey, an educator with Regenerative Corps who taught the TSA class.

The curriculum paired teachings on Indigenous land history and climate justice, which hopes to transition from fossil fuels and large-scale agriculture in a racially equitable way, with regenerative

## Curriculum rooted in Sharon garden program

credit for personalized education opportunities, the Regeneration Corps class could easily be plugged into students’ existing schedules at school.

Shipman found her way to the garden through Youth Empowerment and Action, a Tunbridge and Sharon-based teen-run advocacy group focused on climate solutions through sustainable agriculture. Beyond TSA’s elective, the Sharon garden became a touchstone for teens and adults alike in the area who are interested in regenerative agriculture as a means of addressing climate change.

“I think it’s an interesting concept and no one really talks about it,” Shipman said.

The garden itself, which is the practical staging ground for what the course teaches in the classroom, got its start with the help of a \$5,400 grant from the New England Grass Roots Environment Fund this past summer. That allowed the group to purchase the materials to grow more than 150 pounds of food for the Sharon Food Shelf.

Central to the mission of Regeneration Corps is to ease challenges and “enrich the lives” of “youth, teachers, and farmers during the (COVID19) pandemic.” Through the elective, students learn about best practices, but they also gain hands-on

“I think it’s really helpful for kids to have that sense of possibility and connections to real solutions,” Ganey said, adding that one student had told her they were feeling “climate despair.”

Even on gray, cold days, as summer gave way to fall, The Sharon Academy students piled out of the minivan that they took from school to the garden, ready to get their hands dirty.

*Frances Mize is a Report for America corps member. She can be reached at [fmize@vnews.com](mailto:fmize@vnews.com) or 603-727-3242.*



Sharon Academy student Evan Hastings, 15, cuts back tomato plants while preparing the Food Justice Garden for winter on Oct. 25. Hastings took a monthlong elective class on regenerative agriculture, Indigenous land history and climate justice taught at the academy.



Regeneration Corps facilitator Karen Ganey, left, and Youth

skills and get time outside the classroom.

“Our goal isn’t to overwhelm them,” Ganey said. “Some of these students are just coming out of the pandemic and have been at home for a long time and are exploring their identities.”

She emphasized that a critical part of the curriculum in the garden is the opportunity to hone skills and explore passions, all while connecting to “place and purpose.”

Empowerment and Action advisor Alden, who uses only one name, right, meet at the Food Justice Garden to make plans for the use of grant money from New England Grass Roots Environment Fund in Sharon on Aug. 3.

VALLEY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS

— JAMES M. PATTERSON

---

[Copyright © 2022 West Lebanon Valley News 11/11/2022](#)  
[Powered by TECNAVIA](#)

---