



Emily Sanderson, a worker at Vickis Veggies in Milford, Ont., hands over a bag of carrots to Christine Renaud. Renaud collects the 'seconds', vegetables considered unfit to sell due to imperfections, on a routine basis. She collects the vegetables to make soup for her Food Not Bombs chapter in Picton, Ont.

# SOUP NOT BOMBS

Photos and Story by Mitch Ward.



Clockwise from bottom:

Christine Renaud (centre) works in her dining room in Milford, Ont., preparing vegetables with two of her grown children, Kevin (far left), and Sarah (left), and their partners, Justin Tanner (right) and Summer (far right). The people who prepare the food are different almost every week, as the Picton chapter is low on committed volunteers, which is frustrating for Renaud.

Christine Renaud talks with Lenny Epstein in the library in downtown Picton, Ont.

Donated vegetable are prepared in Christine Renaud's dining room in Milford, Ont. Renaud collects donations on a regular basis from local farmers and other food producers.

Christine Renaud and Jennifer Warr prepare vegetables to be made into soup for the Food Not Bombs chapter in Picton, Ont. Renaud routinely uses the kitchen in the Prince Edward Learning Centre, where Warr works.

In 2013 the Children and Youth Services Network released a report highlighting that Prince Edward County and Hastings County in Ontario, Canada consistently had the highest level or second highest level of food insecurity in the province.

Food insecurity is defined by Health Canada as "the inability to acquire or consume an adequate diet of quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do."

For Christine Renaud, who lives in Milford, Ont., and works at the library in Picton, Ont., that statistic was disturbing, and it was surprising. How, in a county like Prince Edward, a county with hundreds of farmers' fields and sprawling pastures with cows and sheep, can there be any sort of food insecurity at all?

There are multiple answers to that question, but for Renaud, she simply wanted to do something to help, so in the summer of 2013, Renaud founded a chapter of Food Not Bombs for Prince Edward County.

Renaud had first seen a Food Not Bombs group in action in Toronto, where she lived for several years with her family, at protests and occupations in the city. So when Renaud wanted to try to fight the food insecurity issue in Picton, she decided that a Picton chapter of Food Not Bombs was in order.

"I got involved in Food Not Bombs because I wanted to do something that was direct action and I also happened to be a vegan cook, so that seemed like a natural fit for me."

Food Not Bombs is not much of an organization. That's the point of it. As an organization, there is no formal leadership, no titles given to anyone, and no top to bottom structure. That was how the founders of the group wanted it when they started in Cambridge, Mass. in 1980. Everyone involved is a volunteer, and groups evolve over time. With that structure, anyone can start a chapter who wanted to.

Food Not Bombs, as an organization, is simply a collection of independent chapters of volunteers in cities all over the world, who collect food donations and work to reclaim food that would otherwise be wasted, in order to produce vegan meals to feed to any person who needs healthy food. In most cities the groups focus on feeding the homeless and the poor, but anyone is welcome to eat.

Renaud founded the Picton chapter in August of 2013. In the recent cold months, she has been able to move the group indoors, serving food in the basement of the Picton library.

The main issue concerning the group however is a lack of available volunteers.

"The group here has a fairly decent number of people, but they're not super committed. They're great people, it's just they have a lot of things going on. There aren't enough young people engaged, that's one of the real problems."

Renaud has found a handful of local food producers who have agreed to donate leftover food to the Food Not Bombs cause. The group, despite a volunteer shortage, continues to consistently put on a Free Soup Fridays at the library.

