



Illinois Department of Natural Resources

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IDNR, Local Partners Feed the Hungry, Help Small Businesses in Aurora

AURORA — The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) today continued its effort to feed hungry Illinoisans and help local restaurants at the same time during an Asian carp cooking demonstration, tasting event and food relief effort.

“We’re so pleased to be a part of this important effort to support our neighbors; being able to help boost Illinois’ economy is just a bonus,” said Colleen Callahan, director, IDNR. “We know connecting local organizations and businesses with Asian carp, a sustainable, delicious, healthy and economical food choice, is a benefit for everyone.”

Sponsored by the Illinois Conservation Foundation and Aqua Illinois, the event featured the work of culinary expert and Executive Chef Chris Koetke. The IDNR partnered with Marie Wilkinson Food Pantry and the VNA Health Care to provide more than 400 people with a hot Asian carp meal during their visit to the food pantry.

“Hunger is a growing problem throughout our country due to pandemic’s negative impact on employment,” said Diane Renner, executive director, Marie Wilkinson Food Pantry. “Having access to a high-quality protein source for those in need is always important, but it is especially critical now.”

Deepa Deshmukh, a public health dietitian for VNA Health Care, arranged for VNA’s kitchen to be utilized for the food relief effort, including hosting free Asian carp cooking demonstrations and tastings for area restaurants and public institutions. VNA farmers market vendor Ralph Lopez of Lopez Farm donated the lettuce and tomatoes for the meal.

“Public health issues such as hunger and food insecurity can be resolved, and environmental sustainability can be expanded, by collaboration among community members,” Deshmukh said. “We

look forward to continuing to work with these groups to improve food security and access to healthy eating education here in northern Illinois.”

As with a previous food relief effort in Englewood, IDNR again partnered with the Get Growing Foundation for this event.

“At the Get Growing Foundation, our mission is to help provide fresh foods to underserved communities by providing plants or seeds so people in food insecure areas can grow their own food,” said Tony Abruscato, founder, Get Growing Foundation. “So, lending our support to boost healthy food options for local families in need was a natural fit.”

More Asian carp food relief events are being planned throughout the state. For additional information, contact IDNR Director of Community Outreach Ted Penesis at Ted.Penesis@Illinois.gov or 847-608-3108.

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