FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Monday March 30th 2020

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Launching today, Working Food Relief gives community a way to help keep families fed, farmers farming and food entrepreneurs cooking

GAINESVILLE: Amid acute food insecurity facing area families and plummeting income for local restauranteurs and farmers, a new program called Working Food Relief will harness fresh crops, idled food professionals and community generosity during the COVID-19 crisis to keep healthy, local food on Alachua County tables.

The program seeks to meet the nutritional needs of families by providing delicious meals featuring locally grown food, according to Anna Prizzia, cofounder and board president of nonprofit Working Food. Major supporters include the University of Florida, City of Gainesville, the Community Foundation of North Central Florida, Peter and Lisa Gearen, and Kim Tanzer and Rod McGalliard.

During the initial phase, area chefs including Joshua Joseph of Chef JJ’s Creations, Chef Carlton Watts of Underground Kitchen and Chef Bert Gill of Mildred’s will be preparing meals with ingredients sourced from local farmers with support from Working Food’s culinary director, Ashely Rella. Meals will be distributed through community partners serving distressed families, such as the Partnership for Strong Families.

Donations may be made at www.cfncf.org/workingfoodrelief.
Nearly half of all households in North Central Florida, and one in three children, faced some level of food insecurity prior to COVID-19. Closed schools, shelter-in-place orders and a ban on all restaurant dining have multiplied the hardship.

“We’re laying off hundreds of people, if not thousands at this point, in the community,” said Gill, also owner of Gainesville’s Blue Gill, which he’s had to close during the crisis. With logistics and tax-deductible donations flowing through Working Food, Gill said, the relief project will allow him to keep ordering from local farms and paying remaining employees while responding to the community crisis.

With additional donations and a “buy-one, donate-one” model in the next phase, organizers hope to expand to serve more families and include more food-service establishments. A $35 donation funds a meal for a family of four.

The idea is not only emergency relief today, but a more-resilient local food system for tomorrow. “While this was born out of crisis,” said Prizzia, “we hope to inspire a new, sustainable model that strengthens our connections among farmers, food-entrepreneurs and one another.”

Working Food is also offering a drive-through produce and garden seed pick-up on Wednesdays from 4-6 p.m. and Saturdays 9-11 a.m. Residents order and pay through participating local farms and pick up at Working Food, 219 NW 10th Avenue. Visit workingfood.org or the Facebook page for more information.

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