

Self-Reliance in the Midst of a Pandemic

by Chloe Joule



Note from the IIT Desk:

We here at Islesboro Islands Trust remain hopeful that July (maybe June?) will usher back exciting environmental activities such as Island Explorations and Nature Walks and Talks. However, scheduling IIT events is unfortunately in a hold pattern for now. In the meantime, the IIT trails and preserves provide opportunities to get outside while strictly following CDC guidelines, including interpersonal distancing, along the way.

In lieu of our annual Spring Newsletter describing the many upcoming IIT events, Chloe Joule, Robyn Congdon and I will occasionally send brief news and information about the island's ecology and our integral place within, starting today with this reflective and forward-looking narrative from Chloe.

Steve Miller

It's a Thursday evening and my husband Gabe and I are discussing a mainland grocery trip for the weekend. Not an unusual scene in our house, but this week the conversation holds some amount of strain. "Should you and Oggie just plan to go over Friday morning?" Gabe asks. "Do you think there will be much of a difference between Friday and Saturday?" I reply. "Yes, more people will be out on Saturday."

Normally, the thought of busy grocery stores wouldn't bother us, but this time we are shopping with the knowledge that we may be confined to our homes for the next several weeks. Planning to stock up for a few weeks is not such an unusual thing for many islanders. Our remoteness forces a certain amount of preparedness. But, this time when we go over to shop, everyone else will be stocking their shelves for the coming weeks as well. We are in the midst of the COVID-19 virus outbreak, and the first confirmed cases have just reached the state of Maine.

So, with the decision made that a Friday morning shopping trip would be best, I

began to take stock of what we need. It was comforting to realize that the answer was... not much. As I looked in cupboards, fridge and freezer, I was reassured that my family was already well set for sheltering in place. My next thought, equally as bolstering, was that much of our preparedness was due to Islesboro's recent efforts in making local Maine food accessible to the Islesboro community. Particularly through the Islesboro CSA, for which IIT is a fiscal sponsor. Pam Larson's incredible efforts to keep a constant stream of local food coming to the island from Fall through Spring enabled me to find cupboards full of locally sourced and milled grains, a freezer brimming with local, humanely raised chicken and beef and a stockpile of onions, carrots and potatoes from an organic farmer not far from Islesboro.

Reflecting on this, I am appreciative of all that living on an island has taught me. Here, we have no choice but to be resilient. We learn to cook because the possibility of dining out is either limited or non-existent. We also learn to cook *well!*... because who wants to eat terrible food? Going to any potluck event on Islesboro is a treat of excellent home chefs presenting varied and delicious dishes.

Indeed, one of my favorite things about IIT's Local Food Fair in July of 2019 was that it not only highlighted those who grow and farm for commercial purposes, but brought together island residents who demonstrate resiliency in everything from beekeeping to breadmaking to fermentation and keeping dairy goats. And with two burgeoning farms that started on Islesboro in the last year, joining other long-time homesteaders, Islesboro is getting closer and closer to sustaining its year-round population with little off-island supplementation - a goal that seems ever more important to reach in our current and unpredictable global climate.

So, as I sit in my cozy home while the world around seems to be in panic, I give appreciation to organizations like IIT, whose support of locally grown food has spanned over three decades. I am humbled by the island that gives me space to grow as a person in my own self-reliant endeavors. And I am relieved and soothed by the smell of sourdough bread rising on my counter and the sound of chickens announcing a job well done in their egg-laying efforts of the day.