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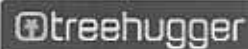
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Community Kitchens A Lot More Than Free Food

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Economists are predicting zero growth next year...if an [Obama stimulus plan works](#)! Which means community kitchens will be more important than ever for those in need.



Volunteering in a community kitchen can be one of the best things about the holiday season, and certainly a way to count your blessings. An economic crisis is also a good time to reflect on what's really important. And it's generally good friends, good family, good food and a good community that top the list (especially if economic security is looking a bit shaky).

Now a new wave of community kitchens is fusing those values with local, organic, and sustainable food.

In Salt Lake City and Spokane, Washington, the [One World Community Kitchens](#) offer local organic meals to their community with a unique idea - patrons take from a buffet-style table of different choices, and then decide themselves what to pay. This pay-as-you-go style, says One World owner Denise Cerreta, reduces food waste and offers food within most people's price reach.

One World also gives out eating vouchers for volunteer work, lets children eat free with a parent using a voucher, and includes one staple dish that is always complimentary.

Inspired by the concept, Brad and Libby Birkey opened So All May Eat cafe, also serving organic pay-as-you-go food in Denver, Colo. In addition to taking away some of the loss of pride associated with a hand out, One World's concept is a way to bring different socioeconomic groups together.

One World's concept is an extension, in some ways, of the growth of community supported agriculture, because these food kitchens rely on CSAs and local food. They are way for the "eaters" to get connected to the region they eat in.

In Berkeley the community kitchen concept gets a slightly different twist at Three Stone Hearth "community supported" kitchen. Three Stone follows the nutritional guidelines of Weston Price and is a worker-owned cooperative offering "nutrient dense" foods to families in the Bay Area. Basically at Three Stone you become a member (for free) and then you can order and pick up from a selection of what the kitchen makes that week from local ingredients. The prices are fair, and Three Stone is committed to supporting volunteers and community members with nutritious food and job skills training.

Three Stone also hosts community dinners where members can come and share the nutritious meals of organic and local foods the kitchen puts out. Volunteers are lifeblood to Three Hearth, and classes on different traditional food preparations also give back to the community.

These new community kitchens are tying together organic, local, sustainable food with a community building ideal. If not all of us can afford the luxury of eating out quite as much in the coming months, sitting down at a community table is the next best (or possibly even better) option.