



JONNAH PERKINS

Marrying sport, food and the land

Farmer, activist, ultra-distance trail runner, mother. These are just a few of the facets that make up Jonnah Perkins, grower and creative manager at Vermont Valley Community Farm in Blue Mounds. In 2019 she'll add video series producer to her résumé as she tackles a new project called Eat Local Run Wild.

The series combines the many aspects of her life and allows her to share her passion for the local food movement, travel and running.

"What's been interesting to me is how good the outdoor industry is at talking about environmental issues, but food never comes into that conversation," Perkins says.

Her plan is to partner with a well-known outdoor brand, then feature professional athletes in each episode, allowing them to guide Perkins through a region important to them, exploring local food options using Perkins' expertise. Then Perkins and the athlete join a local farmer or rancher to cook a meal using food harvested from the region, ultimately bringing together the sport, the food and the land.

"My main mission as a food activist is to get people asking questions and supporting their local food economy. Even if it's just in a tiny way," says Perkins. Her hope is that Eat Local Run Wild will start this conversation and bring the small, local farm into the big picture. —Emily Leas

JENNY CZERKAS

Tutoring pupils in need—and feeding them

She's dedicated her life to helping those who need food and support. In 2005, Jenny Czerkas, and her husband, Andy, founded The River Food Pantry. The Czerkas' leadership helped grow the pantry and fill a critical need on Madison's North Side.

Czerkas now volunteers as operations director for Selfless Ambition, a faith-based, nonprofit on a mission to close the racial achievement gap and give families access to healthy food. Last year, they opened a food pantry at Glendale Elementary, one of 25 Madison schools with 50 percent or more students receiving free or reduced-priced lunch.

Czerkas' passion for helping families isn't solely about feeding the body. It's also about feeding the mind. She hopes tutoring will set students up for success and shrink the racial achievement gap. "This is a deep-rooted, not new, systemic problem that has been going on for a long time," says Czerkas.

Selfless Ambition CEO Henry Sanders says Czerkas has a fierce passion to attack racial disparities in education. "Jenny has made a career out of serving others and making sure some of our most vulnerable populations are embraced and treated with the dignity they deserve," he says.

Czerkas will continue to focus on opening food pantries and providing tutoring at schools. She has plans of her own too. "I need to take care of myself, spend time with grandkids and take vacations!" —Hywania Thompson

