

ACLT Shifts Farm Focus to Provide Fresh Produce to Food Pantries

April 2015

At the forefront of community conservation are land trusts that are listening to what the community wants and needs from its conservation-based organizations. The Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC) recently published a report that concluded, “Many Maryland families and individuals have insufficient access to food, especially fresh, nutritious produce.” The report concludes that this leads to health-related concerns including diabetes, obesity and malnourishment. http://www.smadc.com/food_farms_nutr/hubspoke.html. Much of the food that is currently distributed through food pantries is packaged food with a long shelf life. There is a deficit of fresh, locally grown farm foods, according to SMADC.

Even though Calvert County is in the top tier of the wealthiest counties in the United States, the economic downturn that began several years ago has resulted in an increasing need for healthy food among, not only those living below the poverty line, but also many other families that must choose between providing nutritious food and paying the electric bill. The End Hunger website estimates 10,000 people in our area are “food insecure.” <http://www.endhungercalvert.org/about-us/hunger-facts/>

SMADC has developed a three-year pilot program called the “Hub and Spoke Program” to address this problem. The Farming4Hunger nonprofit organization founded by Bernie Fowler, Jr., keynote speaker at ACLT’s Annual Membership Meeting on March 14th, is the “Hub” of this pilot program. <http://www.farming4hunger.com>.

Farming4Hunger grows green beans, corn, and potatoes at several local area farms. This fresh produce is packaged and distributed to the “Spokes” – local food pantries and churches – for distribution to the community. Several of the local distribution points listed on the SMADC website are located in the Parkers Creek watershed within a very short drive from Double Oak Farm including, St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Trinity United Methodist Church, and Mt. Olive United Methodist Church. In addition, long-time ACLT partner St. John Vianney Catholic Church operates the Interfaith Food Pantry that serves approximately 150 families per week.

In the past, ACLT has contributed about 10% of the produce we grew at Double Oak Farm to local area shelters. Hunger in our community is a problem that ACLT has decided we are uniquely positioned to do something about. We have a productive farm and willing volunteers that have an interest in turning ACLT’s fields into a source of fresh, local fruits and vegetables to reduce hunger in our community. In weighing the benefits of ACLT’s previous Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program against this need, we have opted to change to a program that we are calling “Agriculture to Support the Community (ASC).” The majority of the food we produce this year will be delivered to local food pantries that have the facilities to store and maintain the fresh produce.

Planting for the 2015 season has begun. Our farm manager and the other work shareholders from the 2014 season, as well as several new volunteers with gardening experience have all committed to volunteer for this worthy community effort. This will cut down significantly on our operating budget for the farm. We would, however, like to make some infrastructure improvements that will help us to double the amount of vegetables we can produce and greatly extend the growing season. We will bury our irrigation lines below the frost line and provide electricity to serve the high tunnel greenhouse to enable almost year-round production.

By using an all-volunteer work force and with the investment we made last year in the productivity of the soils through the addition of composted material, we estimate that we can produce fresh vegetables and fruit for about 40 needy families in addition to 10 work shareholders on a budget of \$5,000! We are also in the process of designing and building an Edible Ornamental Garden at Double Oak Farm that will be an appealing educational arena for visitors. In short, we expect Double Oak Farm to continue to be a busy, thriving community of volunteers who are using sustainable farming practices to both educate and support our community.

Here are several suggested ways you can help:

I'd like to help ACLT's Double Oak Farm Grow Food to Feed the Hungry!

Make an [online donation](#) of \$125 to support production of nutritious food for a family of four (one share) through food pantries located in the Parkers Creek watershed. Indicate in the comment field "Double Oak Farm Donation."

Make an [online donation](#) of \$500 to support production of nutritious food for sixteen people (four shares) through food pantries located in the Parkers Creek watershed. Indicate in the comment field "Double Oak Farm Donation."

Email volunteer@actweb.org to say "I can help out occasionally by volunteering on Wednesdays from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m."

Email volunteer@actweb.org to say "I am interested in being considered for a work share position, which requires a regular 5 hour per week commitment."

Email volunteer@actweb.org to receive notice of additional volunteer opportunities at the farm.

Email volunteer@actweb.org to receive additional information about the "Second Sundays in Summer" series of farmers' markets to be held in June 14, July 12, and August 9. Any produce you purchase on these days will help to support the farm.

Thank You!