

Article for The Bristol Herald Courier Agriculture Page  
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“Organic Produce for Needy Families”

On a hot July day in 2002, I pulled up to the door of Appalachian Sustainable Development’s produce packinghouse in Stickleyville, only to be greeted by the stench of rotting produce. The smell came from the dumpster where a few thousand pounds of tomatoes, peppers and squash awaited removal to a landfill. When I looked into it, I found out that most of this produce had been perfectly usable, but had been culled because it did not meet the rigorous aesthetic standards of our supermarket buyers. It wasn’t pretty enough for consumers like you and me. As a result, a third of everything local growers brought in was being discarded.

All of us hated to see this waste, and while we discussed composting as an alternative to the landfill, it still seemed an inadequate solution. People were hungry and we were tossing out tons of good quality, nutritious food.

What’s more, the farmers were losing money. Every box of these “seconds” cost the same to raise - to mulch, to fertilize, to pick – as the number ones that were purchased.

Out of this problem arose a sensible solution, a program we call “Healthy Families ~ Family Farms”. Here’s how it works: People contribute money which is used to purchase these organic produce seconds at a discounted price; it is then delivered to the Second Harvest Food Bank, from where it is distributed to thousands of needy families through local food pantries. Every dollar contributed is used to purchase the food. ASD and the Second Harvest Food Bank run the program at no charge, with help from numerous volunteers. Farmers get enough to offset their costs and families in need get tasty, nutritious fruits and vegetables.

Since the Healthy Families ~ Family Farms program was initiated, it has grown dramatically, from a little more than \$3,000 in 2003 to nearly \$20,000 in 2005. That translates to almost 60,000 pounds of local organic produce making its way to the tables of struggling families. Most of these funds have been contributed by churches and individuals, along with several contributions from civic organizations and local businesses. All are tax deductible.

Our goal for 2006 is \$25,000 of funds and 75,000 pounds of fresh produce. We are hoping to expand the program to include east Tennessee. If you’d like to learn more about Healthy Families ~ Family Farms, or would like someone to make a presentation to your church or civic group, contact ASD at 276.623.1121 or visit our website [www.appsusdev.org](http://www.appsusdev.org).

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