

## Article 3.

# Cayuga County farmers lend a hand to food pantries

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My pantry exists because of volunteers and the ideas of service that are deep-rooted in this historic town. It is, of course, exemplified by Audrey and Ken Mochel's mission, going on five years, at the Calvary Food Pantry gardens, to bring fresh vegetables to those in need. Coordinators of the Calvary Pantry Gardens, these senior citizens, grow seasonal crops from June into October as part of the Calvary Food Pantry's fight to feed nutritional sustenance to hungry people. They spend the other months fundraising and grant writing in order to plant again in the coming spring. They exemplify the American ideals of volunteerism because they are spending their retirement helping the pantries of Auburn. Last year, \$12,000 dollars worth of fresh vegetables were grown from acreage the size of two football fields at the BOCES complex outside of Auburn. Thank you, volunteers extraordinaire!

I could not do my job year round without balanced nourishment, so important to feeding hungry people, without Audrey and Ken in the summers and the CNY Food Bank, local businesses and area farms the rest of the year.

The CNY Food Bank, a not-for-profit organization, administered through About Hunger Solutions (and discussed in last month's article), delivers food to pantries at discounted prices. There are businesses, like Panera Bread, Wegmans and Walmart that give end-of-week food to local pantries. Then the local farmers markets, from June to October (now at the Curley's parking lot on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays), give end-of-day produce to Auburn pantries on a rotating basis.

Please note that Gov. Cuomo recently signed, for a year, a Farmers Market Nutrition Program for low-income families. With a \$24 dollar booklet from their local WIC office, families can buy locally grown food at farmers markets. There are eight in Cayuga County. This government subsidy is just in time, as the sequester has sent more working families into food pantries. What stands between low-income working families and hunger are food pantries like mine. Calvary Food Pantry receives help and support from all the above businesses. But continual longstanding, substantial help from local farmers and farms is the basis of our efforts to feed hungry people here in Auburn. They are our heroes this month.

In my 28 years as executive director of the Calvary Food Pantry, Auburn and Cayuga County farms have never stopped in their missions to help me, even when crop yields were abysmal. Now when the House has rejected the Farm Bill, the farms could scale back. Additionally, the sequester is putting pressure on them because so many people are now out of work. My needs in the coming months also will increase tenfold. The farmers have pointed out to me, individually, that they fear more and more people will be hungry by the year's end. Let me tell you that not

one Finger Lakes farmer, on my roster, has backed down in his or her continual commitment to this pantry! Here is a list of a few farmers helping to feed Auburn's hungry:

Burtless Farms, Bibbens Farm, Hewitt's Owasco Valley Farm, Bob Horsford (who gives us seeds for the gardens, and then volunteers his time in them), Owen Orchards, Gary Pepe Peaches, Bradtke Farms and, of course, the wonderful efforts of Sharon and Ben Vitale. Hungry people in my care get nutritionally sound food from these farms. Thank you all!

Our Finger Lake farmers are considered the best in the country because most food, produced on farms, is not wasted. Waste is a problem of epic proportions in this country. Farms have always had to recycle; after all, manure goes right back onto the land as fertilizer. Our farmers, surrounded by our lakes, tell me that the region has always been on the cutting edge, with the USDA's plan to tackle food waste, which is now at 40 percent in this country, with 31 million tons of food being added to landfills per year. Rotting food in landfills contributes methane gas into the atmosphere. Go ask your children to look up what methane does to our planet and their future! We, here, give leftover food to our pig and chicken farmers.

I salute our Finger Lake farmers and acknowledge their continual participation feeding hungry people. They should be recognized as Auburn Heroes for Hunger.

P.S. By the way, garlic planted in October waits all winter to sprout in the spring. Is it considered a herb or an annual?