



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 15, 2023

Contact: Natalie Van Buskirk/Nicole Halsey
Polished Nichols Public Relations & Marketing
443-956-4765/410-952-2122
natalie@polishednichols.com
nicole@polishednichols.com

FIRST FRUITS FARM ANNOUNCES BARN EXPANSION - THE FARM'S LARGEST CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROJECT DURING 25TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR

— Project Nearly Doubles the Existing Square Footage, Transforming Operations on the Farm to Grow More, Give More, and Serve More —

(BALTIMORE, MD) — First Fruits Farm, a non-profit ministry dedicated to growing and providing fresh, nutritious produce to those experiencing hunger in the Mid-Atlantic region, announced today its barn expansion project during its 25th anniversary year. As the farm's largest capital investment project to date, the existing barn/shop building is currently under construction, and will nearly double the square footage to over 13,000 SF on the 203-acre farm property in Freeland, MD.

Features of the expanded barn include a production line for packaging, large open and enclosed storage areas with refrigeration, a new loading dock to accommodate vehicles of all sizes, equipment/repair shop, additional offices, and restrooms.

"This capital investment will be a game-changer for the Farm and transformational for all aspects of our operations providing the necessary infrastructure to better manage our expanded production operations; provide a safer, more efficient workspace for our volunteers; offer new volunteer opportunities; facilitate donations from other local farmers to our network; and better serve our community partners," said Wes Krock, Chief Operating Officer and Project Manager for the expansion.

Slated for completion by Spring 2023, the new barn will impact operations for the 2023 harvest season and years to come. With the expansion, First Fruit Farm will have the ability to grow more, give more, and serve more - all of which supports the Farm's strategic plan and vision for the Farm's future.

The effects of COVID on the farm and its distribution partners created a need for this capital facility project. Prior to the pandemic, the Farm's distribution network included approximately 35 partners who would pick up produce in large bulk bins. For safety protocols, First Fruits Farm adjusted its process to package smaller containers for safer and more manageable distribution to a growing number of 80 plus partners in 2021. By 2022, the Farm tripled its distribution network to more than 130 partners in Maryland and the Mid-Atlantic region.

"The need for fresh, healthy food has increased exponentially, and the number of farms donating or providing reduced-cost produce is rapidly declining. With more partners in need of food, the distribution logistics are quite complex and labor-intensive. This facility will help us more efficiently process higher

volumes of food and allow for better product management from the point of harvest to the final product ready for delivery,” shares Jamison Hunsberger, Director of Farm Operations. “The Farm hopes that by sharing our blessings of access to healthy food and nutrition education with those in need, it helps to nourish not only their bodies, but also begin to be a source of strength for their communities.”

“From the very beginning — twenty-five years ago on our own backyard farm, building community has and will always be at the heart of our work at First Fruits Farm. The pandemic was a stark reminder of why our mission and local agriculture are so critical to the people we serve and with whom we partner,” said Richard Bernstein, Executive Director. “By engaging with more people and educating them about food insecurity, improving access to healthy food, and climate change realities; connecting them to nature and agriculture; and sharing with them the impact of our efforts, the Farm believes it helps bring people together and provides a powerful message of hope.”

Bernstein continues, “As always, we stay true to our Christian faith and values, particularly during this time of tremendous growth, keeping our efforts focused on our mission and how we can serve more people in need. First Fruits Farm is excited about the future with new opportunities on the horizon in 2023 allowing us to serve more people and communities throughout the region. We are grateful for the support of all of our funders and partners in this critical capital investment.”

Funding for this project has been secured in full with support from several foundations as well as the Farm’s first-ever support from the State of MD State – legislature and governor’s budgets. Generous investors in this project in addition to the State include Central Pennsylvania Food Bank, The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, A. James & Alice B. Clark Foundation, The Keith Campbell Foundation for the Environment, The Marion I. & Henry J. Knott Foundation, Lockhart Vaughan Foundation, and Middendorf Foundation.

Harvey Construction based in Cockeysville, MD is the General Contractor for the expansion. JMT Architecture generously assisted in the design and bid process for the project.

Founded in 1998 and celebrating its 25th anniversary, First Fruits Farm’s mission is to cultivate the sustainable miracle of food to meet each person’s hunger for nourishment, service, and inspiration, through volunteer service and community partnerships. In 2022, the Farm’s staff and 16,000 volunteers harvested, picked, packaged, and donated 2.4 million pounds of food to share with the 130+ distribution partners in the Mid-Atlantic region to help end the struggle with hunger in our region.

[First Fruits Farm \(www.firstfruitsfarm.org\)](http://www.firstfruitsfarm.org)

First Fruits Farm is a non-profit ministry based on a 203-acre farm property in Freeland, MD. Founded in 1998, First Fruits Farm works to grow and provide fresh, nutritious food for the hungry through volunteer service and community distribution partnerships. Learn more about First Fruits Farm by visiting <https://www.firstfruitsfarm.org>.