

First Fruits Farm

Catholic community galvanized behind farm

BY TODD KARPOVICH
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Numerous Catholic organizations throughout the Archdiocese of Baltimore are supporting First Fruits Farms, a non-profit ministry dedicated to growing and providing fresh, nutritious produce to those experiencing hunger in the Mid-Atlantic region.

Last year, the staff at First Fruit Farm and 16,000 volunteers harvested, picked, packaged and donated 2.4 million pounds of food to share with the more than 130 distribution partners to help end hunger.

The ministry recently announced a barn expansion project in 2023 – its 25th anniversary year – which will nearly double the square footage to more than 13,000 square feet on the 203-acre farm property in Freeland. The project is expected to be completed in April.

“First Fruits Farms is one of NDP’s longest-standing community partners,” said Steven M. Pomplon, director of social service at Notre Dame Preparatory School in Towson. “We annually take students to Freeland for the summer harvest and visit during the academic year to investigate food insecurity with our AP Human Geography service-learning classes.

“Particularly with our service-learning class, having the ability to not just talk about food insecurity, food deserts, and agricultural systems – but be on a farm that connects us in a tactile, spiritual, and visceral way – it is an invaluable opportunity that guides us into becoming more connected to justice work, and networks of change.”

Some of First Fruits Farm’s distribution partners with ties to the Catholic Church include:

- Beans and Bread
- Franciscan Center
- Gallagher House (part of Catholic Charities)
- Little Sisters of the Poor
- Our Daily Bread Ministries (part of Catholic Charities)
- St. Francis Neighborhood Center
- St. Joseph School of Fullerton
- St. Joseph Pantry of Carroll County

In addition to NDP, other Catholic groups that have volunteered at the farm include Calvert Hall College High School in Towson and Loyola Blakefield; St. Ignatius in Hickory, Immaculate Heart of Mary in Baynesville; the youth group of St. Bartholomew in Manchester, among many others.

“When we talk about empowering our Dons to be

Men for Others, one of the key movements is turning the focus away from oneself to the needs of those in our local and global community,” said Brendan O’Kane, director of Ignatian Mission and Identity at Loyola Blakefield. “The team at First Fruits Farm does this every day and we cherish the opportunity to partner with them throughout the year including in our orientations and alumni service days. We also love seeing alumni Dons whenever we visit the farm.”

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

“First Fruits Farm’s fresh, nutritious produce has become part of countless meals we’ve served to the homeless, indigent, and working poor in Baltimore City,” said Jeff Griffin, executive director of the Franciscan Center. “The Farm’s staff and volunteers are indispensable partners for us, and a clear sign of the Holy Spirit at work in central Maryland. Not to mention, their stewardship of the farm’s fields and woods would certainly gain the approval of our patron, St. Francis of Assisi.”

The new barn is expected to be completed this spring and should have a positive impact on operations for this upcoming harvest season and years to come. First Fruit Farm will have the ability to grow more food and provide for the local community, which supports the Farm’s strategic plan and vision for the Farm’s future.

“First Fruits Farm has been a great experience for all of our students, it teaches them about the importance of humble service,” said Maddie Pikus, campus minister at Calvert Hall. “They come back from service trips with a greater understanding of food insecurity in our area, after having bonded with one another while harvesting or boxing crops.”

Funding for the expansion project has been secured in full with support from several foundations as well as the Farm’s first-ever support from the Maryland legislature and governor’s budgets.

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. **CR**

Richard Bernstein, executive director of First Fruits Farms, stands in part of their newly expanded 13,000 square-foot operations building in Freeland, Baltimore County.

Notre Dame Preparatory School junior and senior AP environmental science students learn the basics of agriculture while volunteering at First Fruit Farm March 29, 2023, in Freeland, Northern Baltimore County.



Volunteers who work the crops at First Fruit Farms in Freeland, Baltimore County, will now enjoy a shaded packing and prep area in the back of the newly expanded operations building that will keep crop distribution moving in almost any weather.