

Volunteer Farm of Shenandoah

The Volunteer Farm, located in Woodstock, Virginia, is sponsored by the World Foundation for Children and is a non-profit charity that raises fresh vegetables for the hungry that are served by the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank in 25 counties and 9 cities in Virginia.

Bob Blair, Chair and CEO of the Volunteer Farm, says, "The growing food supply shortage may not be an emergency to every person, but it is a serious crisis for those with empty bellies. If you are food insecure or hungry, your neighbors can't imagine your fear and panic when you see empty shelves at your local food pantry—the place of last resort for the poor, unemployed, disabled, elderly and children. Count your blessings if you are not in the category of one in eight in Virginia who may not have enough food in the coming weeks and months. They are the people, who, as a last resort, accept food from one of the 430 food pantries or soup kitchens, served in this region by the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank."

The number of people needing assistance from the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank is continually increasing and last year 400,000 pounds more food was needed than in 2006. They are now serving 16,500 people per week and the economy is the main factor for the increase in clients. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has cut back by 70 per cent the amount of surplus food, manufacturers have improved their production systems to eliminate wasted food that had been given to non-profits and the cost of operations for non-profits has increased dramatically, with fuel as one factor.

The Volunteer Farm must grow as much as possible this year to meet the needs of the Food Bank. They plan to increase the acreage planted from 28 acres in 2007 to 40 acres in 2008 and will need \$8,500 more than is in their budget. They will also need more than 4,600 volunteers, double the number needed last year, and without the funding and volunteers they will find it difficult to feed the hungry.

They especially encourage young people, under age 18, to volunteer to help with the planting. Among the crops they plan to grow are potatoes, beets, butter beans, cucumbers, lettuce, corn, watermelon, okra, onions, peas, sweet potatoes, squash and turnips. They begin planting in March and have spring and summer planting followed by fall and winter planting.

Those who wish to help the Farm and support their hungry neighbors may volunteer online at www.VolunteerFarm.org. All food grown by the Volunteer Farm is donated to the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank. Two of the counties served are our neighboring counties of Fauquier and Loudoun. The only support the Volunteer Farm receives is from individual donations, churches, businesses, civic organizations and foundations.

The Volunteer Farm is not a mission partner of Greenwich Presbyterian Church but a financial contribution has been given to them.