

NewsWatch

FAMILY TRADITION: The mother-daughter team of Katrina Willoughby (left) and Kenzie Griffith, 16, of Charlotte have made visiting the farm a family tradition, coming every year since Kenzie was a baby.



Pick a peck for people



FRESH GOODNESS: Kim Harkness, who is in charge of food sourcing and operations for the Greater Lansing and Mid-Michigan Food Banks, says having fresh apples to hand out to hungry families is a blessing.

By **JENNIFER VINCENT**

IT was dreary, overcast Sunday, but The Country Mill in Charlotte was bustling with extra activity.

More than 1,000 volunteers showed up after owner and operator Steve Tennes made an open invitation to “Pick a Peck for People.”

The project had multiple objectives, but first and foremost, it was to supply local food banks with fresh apples.

In just four hours on Oct. 30, volunteers picked more than 6,900 pounds of apples for local food banks, smashing the previous record of 5,000 pounds. Two thousand bags of fresh, ripe apples will be given to local families in need during the next two months.

Tennes says all he had to do was step into the shoes of the local food banks. “There’s a real need there, and I have the ability to help with that,” he says.

The project is part of Harvest for All, focused on boosting food bank donations.

Key Points

- The program invites volunteers to harvest apples for local food banks.
- In its fifth year, the event set a record of 6,900 pounds of fresh apples.
- Families and service groups enjoy the opportunity to volunteer.

Now in its fifth year, Pick a Peck for People is hosted late in the season when all varieties of apples are ripe. “But they are not surplus,” Tennes says. “I make cider and wine, so there’s no surplus on this farm. We don’t let anything go to waste.”

All the apples are taken right from the trees. And giggles erupted as youngsters were boosted up to collect apples otherwise out of reach. The day included several children, who came with their families or groups, like the Girl Scouts, to perform community service.

“This event brings people together, and it serves as a connection to the farm,” Tennes says. “For some, it’s their first trip to a farm or orchard.”

The apples are picked with supplied bags, not in bulk. “That saves us time in processing them, and we can get them out quicker and easier,” says Kim Harkness, who is in charge of food sourcing and operations for the Greater Lansing and Mid-Michigan Food Banks. “This is a tremendous gift to the food banks, and it’s a wonderful opportunity for families to come together and see where their food comes from.”

For others, it was an opportunity to be a volunteer. Tom Salik, who has volunteered for St. Vincent DePaul in Charlotte for 18 years, and Jerry Arriaga, a food bank volunteer, worked side by side collecting and stacking the bags after they were brought in from the orchard.

“There’s no better feeling,” says Arriaga, who retired from Oldsmobile four years ago and has been volunteering at the food bank ever since. “It gives me a purpose; I just can’t sit around. And when someone says, ‘Thank you for your time,’ I guess I did something right.”



DAY OF SERVICE: Joe Sanchez III and his son, Anthony, 12, picked a wagonful of bagged apples and enjoyed the day on the farm along with his wife, Michelle, and daughter, Alexander, 16.



NOTHING BETTER: Tom Salik (left) and Jerry Arriaga volunteered by helping organize and stack bags of apples as they were brought in from the orchard.

NewsWatch Briefs

MSU’s Gray will retire next year
Ian Gray, Michigan State University’s vice president for research and graduate studies, will retire June 30. Gray, a nationally recognized food scientist and former director of MSU AgBioResearch, formerly the Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station, has served as vice president since 2004. Gray began his MSU career in 1978 when he joined the faculty as an assistant professor of food science and human nutrition. He became the associate director of the experiment station in 1988 and was named director in 1996. Gray’s research expertise focuses on the formation of toxic compounds in foods as a result of processing and cooking. His research has contributed to a large body of work that has led to safer, healthier food. Among his work: MSU’s findings that tart cherries possess healthful antioxidant properties.

Fritz joins Specialty Hybrids
Specialty Hybrids has added Janna Fritz as district sales manager for the Thumb area. Fritz is a native of Chicago and graduated from Michigan State University with a degree in agriculture communications. She will be providing innovative seed solutions to farmers in Huron, Sanilac, Lapeer, St. Clair, Tuscola, Saginaw and Bay counties.

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CONTACT US:

Editor: Jennifer Vincent, jvincent@farmprogress.com
710 W. Park St., St. Johns, MI 48879
Phone and fax: 989-224-1235

Contributing Editors:
Tom J. Bechman, Dan Crummett, Josh Flint, Alan Newport, Fran O’Leary, John Otte, Holly Spangler and Arlan Suderman

Executive Editor: Frank Holdmeyer

Corporate Editorial Director: Willie Vogt,
651-454-6994, wvogt@farmprogress.com

Sales: Tom Shearing Phone: 585-476-2426

Subscription Questions: 800-441-1410

For additional sales and company information, see last page of marketplace section.

POSTMASTER:

Please send address corrections to *Michigan Farmer*, 255 38th Ave., Suite P, St. Charles, IL 60174-5410.