



HARVEST CELEBRATION: In late October, five churches gathered to celebrate their joint harvest for the hungry.

Fighting hunger together

Editor's note: We first shared this story of a unique rural-urban harvest effort seven years ago. Lisa Casey provides a first-person account of her involvement.

By **LISA CASEY**

SINCE joining Jefferson Center Presbyterian Church in Saxonburg, Pa., I've gotten to know many farmers, and my admiration of them continues to grow. We'd be very hungry without them.

Sadly, millions of people around the world still are hungry. In answer to this dilemma, Foods Resource Bank was formed in 1999 as a Christian response.

Jefferson Center Presbyterian was introduced to FRB's idea in 2001 by Norm Braksick, its executive director, and the Rev. Jean Henderson of Sewickley's Presbyterian Church. The Rev. Jeff Moore and a men's group in-

Key Points

- Five rural and urban churches now team up to raise hunger funds.
- Over seven years, this group has raised more than \$100,000.
- This year, 57 acres of corn and soybeans will be donated to the effort.

cluding Dave McConahay, Roy Kennedy, Dick and Craig Miller, and Bruce Walker agreed to try the project for one year.

The harvest continues

Seven years and more than \$100,000 later, the project is bigger than ever. A neighboring church, Summit Presbyterian, is part of the group. Funding continues to be provided by the Sewickley church, West Alexander Presbyterian and by the Christian Church of Wilkinsburg, Pa.

After taking care of their own farms,

these farmers share their bounty with others worldwide. This year, Jefferson Center had 57 acres of corn and soybeans to benefit an FRB program in Africa. Numerous volunteers and donors contribute to the program's success.

For the past four years, crop income has been matched by grants from the United States Agency for International Development. Through FRB, USAID dollars are doubled.

Last year, the project supported a program in Dakoro, Niger, that built and stocked four grain banks, dug two water wells and set up two kitchen garden centers.

This fall, the five churches involved joyfully gathered in Saxonburg for a potluck lunch. The farmers humbly allowed public acknowledgement. These were people who were actually doing something to alleviate world hunger.

Casey is from Jefferson Center, Pa.

How the 'twinning' harvest works

THROUGH Foods Resource Bank, urban or suburban churches are matched or "twinned" with nearby rural churches where land is available to be farmed. Like the children's story of the country mouse and the city mouse, the city church generally supplies financial resources while the country church provides land and labor, explains Norm Braksick, FRB's executive director.

Participating churches support rural growing projects to raise a crop, sell the harvest and donate the proceeds to FRB. Donated funds go through FRB to its members, most of the mainline Christian denominations and their partners overseas.

A rich harvest of help

Last year, FRB supported 193 growing projects in 19 states, raising \$2.28 million to support 49 food-security programs across the world. The programs benefited 470,000 people at an annual cost of about \$4 each.

Overseas, FRB members provide seeds, tools, fertilizer and education about composting, raised beds, drip irrigation, wells, proper harvesting, storage and other food-security issues. New crops such as amaranth, moringa, high-vitamin-A sweetpotatoes and soybeans are introduced. Goats, rabbits and chickens provide a fast turnaround on protein.

Communities are given every opportunity to feed themselves with extra to share, barter or sell. The confidence they gain cannot be measured, adds Braksick.

All project revenues go toward supporting sustainable food-security programs overseas. No overhead is taken out.

FRB is built on volunteerism intertwined with a small staff. Its costs are covered by its members, individuals, businesses and foundations.

Learn more about Foods Resource Bank at its Web site: www.foodsresourcebank.org.

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Northeast News & Notes

Pennsylvania gets primed for biofuels growth

Pennsylvania's biofuels industry has been like a tank of biodiesel on a cold morning — slow to start. But now it's firing up with the injection of state alternative fuel grants.

This fall, Lake Erie Biofuels opened a 45 million-gallon biodiesel refinery at Erie, Pa. Brad Davis, company president, expects the facility to reach capacity by early 2008 — making it one of the five largest biodiesel refineries in the country.

Davis notes that this may be the only U.S. plant to refine vegetable oil, recycled grease and animal fats. Lake Erie Biofuels is targeting its B100 product to petroleum-diesel and home-heating-oil blenders and exports to Europe.

Other refineries cranking up

Here's a quick look at other biofuel refinery projects recently announced by Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell. They hold opportunities for producing fuel feedstock crops for and/or purchasing biodiesel and feed byproducts.

■ Allegheny County: United Oil Co. expects to produce 7 million gallons of biodiesel.

■ Beaver County: PA Biofuels is constructing an 18 million-gallon biodiesel plant at one site plus another for 12.5 million gallons.

■ Dauphin County: Middletown Biofuels is converting from batch to continuous production to produce 6 million gallons a year.

■ Luzerne County: Alternative Fuels Inc. intends to build a 50 million-gallon biodiesel plant deriving the fuel from algae.

■ Lycoming County: Choice FuelCorp Inc. plans to produce 5 million gallons of biodiesel.

■ Schuylkill County: Green Renewable Energy, Ethanol & Nutrition Holding is installing a corn-oil extraction system to create a biodiesel feedstock from dried distillers grains, a byproduct of a 100 million-gallon ethanol plant in development.

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