

FREEDOM FARM NEWS



YMPJ YOUTH HARVESTING ONIONS (LEFT), HARVESTED TOMATOES READY FOR DONATION (ABOVE)

Seed To Serve by Ann Rader

“Seed to Serve” is the name we brainstormed for this past season’s curriculum whose weekly themes describe our work: Planting seeds, Growing, Tending, Harvesting, and Serving. Youth learned each week’s topic in the field then used it as the basis for reflection. After learning how to plant seeds outside, the young people spent time in small groups envisioning seeds they want to plant in their own lives. During our “Tending” session, we pulled up invasive grass weeds in the garden and used drama to root up “weeds” like violence, racism and self-doubt; while “trellises” of friendship and trust were built to support growth. After 13-21 year olds from Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice completed four sessions at the farm, we did our final “serve session” together at their youth center in the Bronx. Fall crops, like collard greens, that were grown at Freedom Farm were transplanted into their urban garden. Also, a table was set up to share our produce with the community for a small donation. Unfortunately, by the time the senior citizens arrived, the food was already gone. Since it went so fast, the youth eagerly served them garden soup and watermelon they prepared for their own closing feast. What a fitting way to enact the final theme of serving.

We celebrate that the curriculum worked well this year, but perhaps my favorite part of the sessions wasn’t written into the plan. At each gathering, inevitably someone picked up Edgar’s djembe’ drum, and people began to dance. In those moments when young people are free to truly be themselves, Freedom Farm lives up to its calling. In heaven, it’s going to be like that... all the time. Dancing. Dancing to the ultimate beat.



Food Justice, Food Security by Edgar Hayes

Have you ever experienced seeing something for the first time...again? It's something you may have seen hundreds of times before, but hadn't been cognizant of its existence. Suddenly, your brain recalls it. Well, that's what happened to me when I read the caption on my favorite tea mug. I must have drunk from this cup a thousand times while studying for my lieutenant's exam(FDNY). The words read "When I give food to the poor, I am called a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist." -Dom Helder Camara

It was like a light bulb had gone off in my head. (The light flashed like the sun's blinding rays during an early morning drive heading east). Better yet, it was like the jolt I got while weeding too close to the electric fence surrounding the garden (I sometimes forget to turn it off in the morning). As the words made their way from my eyes to the cerebral cortex of my brain, I consciously screamed "that's food justice" as high as my mental voice could go. Then quickly followed with "well sort of" a few decibels lower. Luckily, it was all in my head so I didn't wake my family up at five in the morning.

Food Justice covers a broad spectrum of definitions. I like Stoney Point Retreat Center's assessment- "all people at all times having economic and physical access to sufficient, culturally appropriate food for a healthy life." If you dig deeper into the rich, nurturing soil of truth and understanding that lies beneath the surface of this simple statement, you will find a network of terms whose nourishing roots extend for miles. It encompasses reverence for the earth and all of God's creation, growing food sustainably, helping those in need, accessibility of fresh-wholesome food for all and not just a select few, ending hunger, health issues, racial inequality, etc. You cannot grow food sustainably unless you are conscious about the stewardship entrusted to you to take care of all of God's creation (land, water, air, animals, people) "*The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good.*" *Genesis 1:12 NRSV*

Then God created and put humankind in the garden "*to till it and keep it.*" *Genesis 2:15 NRSV*

In the book of Isaiah 58, God calls us to share our bread with the hungry, loosen the bonds of injustice, and let the oppressed go free. Jesus follows this up by feeding 5000 with a few loaves of bread and some fish. It was one of the many lessons for us to take care of "*the least of these who are members of my family.*" *Mathew 25:40 NRSV*

Rather than having concern for the land, our food, water, animals, or our health, the current food system is more focused on market price and profitability. We've allowed control of our food security to rest in the hands of a few corporations while family farms dwindle. This capitulation has led to:

- animals created to eat grass are being pumped with chemicals, fed grains and other animal parts to speed up growth and increase production.
- over-usage of antibiotics is practiced to counteract the inevitable sickness caused by their diet and environment resulting in our body's inability to control viruses.
- Genetically modified (GE) food has infiltrated the market supply with little or no testing of its effect on the environment or our health.

Can you tell the difference? Do you have a choice in what you want to purchase? The answer is no. Big business lobbying has prevented the labeling of GE or chemically sprayed products. What is the connection between the subsidizing of corn, the low price of beef, the high rate of diabetes in children, and the amount of corn in the American diet? Why continue with such an inefficient, wasteful, and un-

sustainable system? How can it be changed? There are so many questions that need to be asked in order to create solutions to the ongoing social problems. As people of faith, we can work together to find the answers to these troubling questions. We can begin by:

1. shortening the distance our food travels- buying locally grown food supports the community's finances.
2. eating out less and cooking more together- builds strong family ties.
3. shopping at farmers markets or joining a csa (community supported agriculture)- community relations get better through conversation and interaction, direct knowledge and awareness of where our food comes from increases
4. supporting organic, sustainable farms and green businesses- we have allowed mainstream corporations to pollute our water, air, earth, and food for far too long.
5. growing our own food in a backyard garden, on a rooftop garden, or even a garden on the pavement of an empty lot(it is amazing and creative where people are growing food).- provides direct access to fresh, healthy food to share with all.
6. writing to representatives-getting support for initiatives like food labeling laws, composting, etc.
7. praying together- turn to God for help.
8. sharing a meal together with someone from the community-improves relationships.
9. taking care of the "least of these"- you can never go wrong when following in Jesus' footsteps.
10. continue to ask the tough, unpopular questions-why do we waste billions of pounds of food yearly?, why are people hungry in this land of plenty?, etc.-makes a dent in seeking answers and solutions

Jesus spoke to his disciples saying *"Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me."* Mathew 5:11

By continuing to ask the tough questions, we may be labeled a communist, radical, job killer, socialist, a do-gooder, hypocrite, whatever...but I hope you, like me, would rather be called a Christian.



Intern Corner

Internships

Young adults spend the growing season living in intentional community; working in the garden, sharing in contemplative prayer, meals, cleaning, homesteading, helping to develop curriculum, and working with the youth during the summer.

Freedom by Julia Humenik

I would write something, but I honestly have no idea what to write. FFC was so much more than I could have ever asked for in a summer internship. More than I could have asked for in an experience. With everything I've learned and all of the ways that I've grown, I feel like a better person for getting the chance to experience it all. Now that I'm back at school going through the daily grind of homework, exams, and coffee, I would give anything to be able to wake up one morning and find myself back at the farm, able to look out my bedroom window and see a herd of cows quietly grazing in the morning hours. I'm happy to say that they have established a student-run farm on campus this year, which is exciting, but between classes and work, I don't have time to visit it as much as I would like to. With all of the friends I have met, memories I have made, and lessons I have learned, I don't know what I could submit to the newsletter that could accurately describe what Freedom Farm has meant to me, except maybe....freedom.

Harvest Prayer shared by Cary Parkes

Holy Spirit, help me plant the good seeds of righteousness.
I yearn to reap a crop of peace, love, and harmony.

I plow up the hard ground of my heart, for now is the time to seek the Lord.

Test me, Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind, for your love is ever before me, and I continually walk in your truth.

I am a peacemaker planting seeds of peace and I will reap a harvest of goodness in the name of your Son, Jesus.

Why I interned at Freedom Farm this summer by Autumn Cutting

One of my personal favorite things to do is get lost in the immensity of nature, to feel like a speck of dust or a little ant wandering this awesome, vast universe; like just another tiny piece of this incredible creation. It's an extraordinary feeling, and I don't think enough people experience it. If we can open our eyes and our hearts to the intricate interconnectedness of our lives to the natural world, perhaps we will become more humble, and community requires humility.

People need to get back in touch with the earth that gives us life, and get back in touch with each other. We would not be here if it weren't for the ground we walk on, and we've been doing our best at ignoring and abusing the earth for the last century. Helping others connect to the humus which makes us human is not only one of the best ways to take care of the environment; it also does something for our souls.

My deeper calling, as I have so far discerned, is to help others find inner wholeness and healing through connecting to the earth. I am particularly drawn to working with children, especially those from underprivileged families in urban settings. This is what drew me to Freedom

Farm this summer. I want to teach others to be radically amazed at nature and at life to feel whole and healed by connecting with nature; to become humble and caring in their attitudes toward the earth and one another; to be enlightened about the unjust distribution of wealth, food, power, and energy in the world and our role in it; and to be inspired to live differently.

As I've grown older and learned about the growing environmental crisis our planet faces, I've become more and more aware of how disconnected our society is from nature. This general ignorance and/or disregard for the earth and its processes has led us to abuse it and pollute it, which although tragic in its own right, is also to the detriment of our own health and survival! When I was in college, I began to learn more about the global food system in terms of unsustainable agricultural practices and so-called "free" trade (especially during my semester abroad in Central America), and particularly the way this affects small farmers and the urban poor. I became interested in the fair trade, organic, and local food movements, and began intentionally searching for ways to live more ecologically friendly and be less beholden to exploitative economic systems. So for the last few years, I've been practicing living simply on the earth, learning how to grow organic food, and trying to inspire others to do the same. Growing your own food makes for a healthier lifestyle and diet, it subverts the industrial food economy, it helps the environment, it restores our relationship with the earth, and it reconnects us to the ground of our being.



THE CREW

EDGAR RIDES THE GARDEN
CADILLAC
CHEESY SMILES BY THE CORN
(L-R) AMANDA, AUTUMN, CARY,
JULIA, ANN

EVEN THOUGH ALL SIX OF US ONLY OVERLAPPED AT THE FARM FOR ONE WEEK, THE COLLECTIVE GOOD OF OUR PHYSICAL LABOR IN THE FIELD AND CREATIVE PREPARATION FOR THE SESSIONS MADE THE GARDEN FLOURISH AND THE CURRICULUM COME TO LIFE.



SEED TO SERVE

JULIA AND AUTUMN FACILITATE THE LESSON OF HOW AND WHAT IT TAKES FOR A SEED TO GROW INTO A BEAUTIFUL PLANT. THE CURRICULUM ALSO ASKS WHAT IT TAKES FOR US (AS GOD'S SEEDS) TO GROW.



LEAFY GREENS

CARY YUCKING IT UP IN THE GREENS SECTION. LEAFY GREENS ARE THE 1ST TO COME DURING THE GROWING SEASON, BECAUSE THEY CAN TOLERATE COLD WEATHER.

Freedom Hill Farm by Julie Vreeland

We are friends and neighbors of Freedom Farm Community. We enjoy visitors to our dairy farm on a daily basis, especially visitors from Freedom Farm Community.

This year we formed a volunteer group to help out at FFC.

It was awesome! On any given day we had anywhere from 1 to 15 kids show up to help out. We would arrive at 10:00 and leave at 12 noon. We helped make seed boxes, plant seeds, dig up

the soil, plant seedlings, weed, mulch and finally harvest the fruit (vegetables) of our labor. Before starting, we would always begin with prayer and end with lunch. We're looking forward to next year.

We are so thankful for Freedom Farm Community and their commitment to feed the hungry and pray God's blessings on them and the work they're doing for the Lord every day.

THE FREEDOM HILL GANG



Sharing the Harvest

In addition to eating delicious food and sharing it with volunteers and visitors, this season Freedom Farm Community donated around 1,500 pounds of organic produce (i.e. sweet corn, potatoes, squash, tomatoes, collard greens, kale, raspberries...) to:

*Youth Ending Hunger,

a local school organization started by elementary students. They have identified 50 families in need of food in the area and helped take fresh Freedom Farm produce directly to the homes of these very pleased recipients!

*Shepherd's Food Pantry

In addition to introducing us to and taking food to Youth Ending Hunger, our friend April Nastro volunteered weekly to harvest and take food to Shepherd's Food Pantry, a large local pantry that distributes fresh produce

*Camp Deerpark

Chef Rick came to Freedom Farm to harvest a variety of vegetables and herbs to take back to camp and cook in delicious meals for many youth and church groups from areas in New York City such as Harlem and the Bronx. A group of 9-13 year olds came to Freedom Farm each week in the summer to learn about how to grow food and grow as children of God.

*Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice (YMPJ)

A Bronx-based community center whose youth also come for our six-week summer program. We harvested and cooked lunch from scratch each session. The center trains young people to become community organizers and implements community rebuilding initiatives particularly along the Bronx River waterfront.

*RECAP

Cornell Cooperative Extension's Gleaning program helps us deliver produce to RECAP, a local Middletown organization that has a half-way house for folks recovering from addiction and a food pantry for the hungry.

*Hudson Valley Food Bank

Cornell's Gleaning Program also has linked us to the Hudson Valley Food Bank. The Food Bank's facility enables a variety of soup kitchens and nonprofit organizations across the Hudson Valley region to order and pick up food to serve people in need.



Sustainably Grown Produce

As stewards of the Earth, we grow our food with people and the environment in mind. Chemical pesticides/herbicides are not used. Cover crops, compost, and cow manure replenish nutrients in the soil taken up by plants in the growing season.



COMMUNITY BUILDING

People from all walks of life come together to break down barriers that perpetuate misunderstanding, injustice, and violence; and build bridges of peace grounded in our common identity as children of God.



Gardening for education

Through an innovative curriculum and hands on work, youth experience the benefits of sustainable agriculture by learning about and reflecting on the connection between the wellness of the earth, our body, spirit and God's creative love. They harvest, prepare and bring produce back to share with their families, neighborhood, and people who are in need.



Support Freedom Farm

Please consider helping support the work of Freedom Farm! Volunteers are welcome and needed to keep things running smoothly. Freedom Farm Community is a non profit organization and donations are tax deductible.

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