



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 24, 2023

REPUBLIC FOOD ENTERPRISE CENTER PARTNERING WITH FOOD BANK, LOCAL FARMERS TO BENEFIT FAMILIES

Uniontown, PA - The Fayette County Community Action Agency (FCCAA) receives quite a few donations to its food bank from local farmers and other groups – so much, sometimes, that the agency must get creative to use it all. Fortunately, the partnership with Republic Food Enterprise Center (RFEC) has helped provide a great solution.

The center takes some of the donated food and finds innovative ways to preserve it, or simply makes it into something else. For example, RFEC General Manager Joe Ambrose said, the food bank received more than 400 dozen ears of corn from local farmers Mark and Andrew Duda last fall.

“They brought it to us, and we cryovaced (vacuum sealed) them, and the Fayette County Community Action Food Bank gave them away at their food distribution,” Ambrose said. “This served a little over 800 families.”

This wasn’t the solution, however, when the Bruderhof community donated roughly 50 bushels of apples to the food bank. Instead, RFEC workers cooked the apples down and made them into 888 jars of apple butter, Ambrose said.

This creative partnership helps increase the shelf life of the donated items, cutting down on waste and allowing the food bank to give away more of what it receives.

“Once something is put in a jar, it is good for two years,” Ambrose said. “So, if the food bank is unable to give it out right away, they know they have a two-year window. They get a lot of food donated, some in such large quantities that they just can’t distribute it immediately. In that case, they can give it to us, we can make a product and they can give it away all year. It works out. It’s a very, very unique opportunity we have here.”

RFEC chef Scott Spike said cooks pay attention to maintaining the quality of the products, in part by working with the donated items in small batches, turning what would have been unused food into something delicious that will keep.

“We get to utilize a lot of the farmers’ goods that they may not be able to sell at their farmer’s markets,” he said. “They can bring it down to us, and we can make sauces out of it, we can make soups out of it, things like that.”

The food bank distributes products like the apples-turned-apple butter at its food pantries, of which there are nearly five dozen. FCCAA Project Manager David Bork said the food bank’s reach extends throughout the county.

“We have 59 food pantries, as far north as Brownsville, all the way out to Everson, and as far south as Point Marion. We cover the entire county,” he said.

Bork said the agency’s food pantries typically help between 1,800-2,000 households each month, a figure that works out to roughly 3,500 individuals.

“We are lucky to have a wonderful staff here at the food bank and good relationships with local partners,” Bork said. “We do have some faithful volunteers that come and help. There’s always a need for more volunteers, of course.”

Bork said there are volunteer opportunities both with the food bank and with the FCCAA as a whole, and there is a senior volunteer program as well. Anyone interested in volunteering with the agency can visit www.fccaa.org.

To learn more about the Republic Food Enterprise Center, visit www.republicfoodenterprisecenter.org.

###

This communication is part of the Fayette County PR Initiative, which is funded through the Fayette County Local Share Account (LSA) and Hotel Tax Grants in cooperation with the Fayette County Board of Commissioners, Fayette Chamber of Commerce, The Redevelopment Authority of the County of Fayette, The Redstone Foundation and other partners. This funding has been designated for the continued promotion and marketing of Fayette County, PA.

For more information, contact Kristi Kassimer Harper, Public Relations Specialist, at 724-437-4571, kkassimer@fayettecountypa.info or Jamie Rankin, Journalist, at 724-437-4571, jamierankin13@gmail.com.