

Harvest for All: A ‘Neighbor Helping Neighbor’ Initiative

By John Hart

It is in difficult times when neighbors reach out to neighbors in their time of need. This is particularly true in rural America where lending a helping hand is part of the ethos, as firmly engrained as the ritual of friendly greetings at the post office, coffee shop or grocery store.

Ask any Farm Bureau member and he or she will certainly tell you that the “neighbor helping neighbor” philosophy is one reason they choose to be active in their county and state organizations. Without a doubt, Farm Bureau families make good neighbors.

This is particularly true when it comes to Farm Bureau’s commitment to Feeding America, a network of food banks across the country that provides food to more than 25 million Americans each year, including 9 million children and 3 million seniors. Serving the entire United States, more than 200 member food banks operate 63,000 agencies that address hunger in all of its forms.

For six years, Farm Bureau Young Farmer and Rancher (YF&R) members have been actively engaged in Feeding America’s hunger-fighting efforts through the “Harvest for All” program.

Last year, Farm Bureau and its farm and ranch families raised more than \$160,000 and donated more than 6.7 million pounds of food to hungry Americans through Harvest for All. Combined, the monetary and food donations provided the equivalent of 6.4 million meals through Feeding America-affiliated food banks across the country.

Both the money raised and food amount donated are the highest ever in Harvest for All’s six-year history. Because food bank donations are down overall in the United States, Farm Bureau and YF&R members know the effort is all the more critical this year.

Aside from raising food and funds for the initiative, farmers and ranchers tallied 5,738 volunteer hours assisting hunger groups through the program.

In its six-year history, Harvest for All has provided nearly 16 million pounds of food, logged in 30,000 volunteer hours and raised more than \$778,000 in donations. Combined, the food and monetary donations amount to nearly 18 million meals.

Mathew Meals, the American Farm Bureau YF&R chairman, says Farm Bureau’s young farmers and ranchers are firmly committed to doing even more in hunger relief in 2009. “Young farmers and ranchers know they are blessed to earn a living by providing food, fuel and fiber to America and the world. As Farm Bureau members, we are dedicated to helping those less fortunate than we are, and Harvest for All is a great way to share our bounty,” says the first generation Newville, Pa. crop farmer.

Harvest for All is clearly a “neighbor helping neighbor” success story. To learn more about Feeding America’s hunger-relief efforts, access the organization’s Web site at www.feedingamerica.org.