

# Fresh eggs



GRADE 'A' NEWS FROM THE  
LOWCOUNTRY FOOD BANK

## letter from the executive director

Dear Friends,

Over a period of five years our dedicated staff has increased our food distribution more than tenfold, the second highest increase in the nation among food banks. The almost 11 million pounds of food distributed to 400 agencies last year shows our commitment to feeding the hungry by making \$20 of market value food for every dollar you give.

Our next big hurdle is to deal with, not how much we eat, but what we eat. We are taking the issue of nutrition seriously, and our board of directors has instructed our staff to move to nutritious food only in the future.

Three issues related to nutrition are worrying me. First, adult onset diabetes is becoming epidemic among middle school aged children in South Carolina. Secondly, we have earned the reputation of not only being the "Bible belt", but also the "stroke belt" of the nation and the world because of poor diet and excessive fried foods. Third, over 100 million dollars is spent each year in the state on the hospitalization of low birth-weight babies, much of that due to poor diet in expectant mothers.

The Food Bank would be a failure if it distributed 30 million pounds of food each year at some time in the future and did not address the critical issues of nutrition and diet. We are doing something about it.

Thanks to Joanne Milkeret of our board of directors we now have a Nutrition Strategic Plan (write us if you want a copy) and we have a goal of moving toward 75% of all food we distribute being "nutrition dense" within three years. In addition, we have our most ambitious plan ever in a "Growing Food Locally" initiative. The goal of this plan is to use a network of local farmers to help us grow a million pounds of fresh vegetables within three years, and to get people to eat it!

Stay tuned. We are excited about the future. I think it could be a healthy one, and it will taste good too!

Archie D. McRee  
Executive Director

## Whale Branch Students Use Science to Feed Children

By REBECCA QUIGLEY—*The Beaufort Gazette*



Leanna Ryans and Joshua Fose harvest fresh collard greens while their classmates rake the field and remove weeds Friday morning at Whale Branch Middle School. The students and the Lowcountry Food Bank are partnering to provide science education to kids while feeding the area's hungry. (photo by Bob Sofaly/*Gazette*)

Blackberries, plums, okra, corn, broccoli, squash, tomatoes, eggplant, butter beans and collard greens grown in the gardens of Whale Branch Middle School are headed for the plates of Beaufort County's hungry children.

Whale Branch Middle and the Lowcountry Food Bank have partnered for about a year to provide students with hands-on science education and the rewards of performing a community service.

This week, the food bank donated \$2,000 to the school's Coastal Living Program to purchase equipment and supplies to grow and harvest bushels of produce that the food bank will use for its Kids Café, a hot-meal program for children in poverty.

The partnership is part of an important initiative to increase the amount of locally produced food for the food bank and improve children's eating habits, said Archie McRee, the food bank's executive director.

"I hope we will have a permanent partner-

ship," he said. "The program is unique for us in South Carolina, and I certainly hope that if it works we can replicate it in other schools."

The food bank receives 11 million pounds of food each year from all over the country and could save shipping costs and time by having more locally grown produce.

"The whole idea here is kids feeding kids," said Jerry Josey, director of the Coastal Living Program.

Brianca Hugue, 12, re-potted pepper and tomato plants this week in preparation for spring planting, she said.

"We are helping the community and Beaufort County people who don't have much food or a roof over their head," Brianca said.

Having the greenhouse and the garden at school is important "because we are learning science in a fun way," she said. "Instead of sitting in class taking notes, we can see it for ourselves."

But the program is more than just tending the greenhouse and garden — students also receive fun, hands-on botany and ecology lessons that coordinate with their science classes.

Students learn things like how the reproductive parts of a banana plant work, how to identify animal tracks and how coastal ecosystems work, Josey said.

"Kids get involved here and take what they learn home," Josey said. "The whole thing here is it's a practical kind of program."

Special education students, after-school program students and students with discipline problems all help out in the greenhouse and the gardens, and they all get something different from the experience, Josey said.

Some kids can't help out enough, especially at harvest time, he said.

"I have to fight them to keep them away from the garden," he said. "I don't know how many times a day I've seen kids going across the field with bags of collards."