Planting Seeds of Hope

The mission of Flint River Fresh is to increase access to fresh, local, affordable, healthy food for families, create new economic opportunities for local farmers, develop young people through agriculture, and conserve natural resources for future generations.

He’s an innovator, a visionary, a trusted advisor, and a servant leader in the community. Fredando “Farmer Fredo” Jackson, Executive Director of Flint River Fresh, is transforming communities in rural southwest Georgia one seed at a time.

Children are getting their hands dirty and planting gardens at their schools and learning that good nutrition builds healthy minds and bodies. They learn that a carrot grown from the dirt is a lot healthier and tastes better than a bag of chips.

Working in underserved neighborhoods, Farmer Fredo brings neighbors together to dig in the dirt, learn gardening skills, and then reap the benefits of healthy, fresh fruits and vegetables. Not only are people growing food, but they are learning about the value of good nutrition for their own health, developing job skills, and how to start a business. This empowerment makes their neighborhood and community stronger, and creates a sense of pride from their accomplishments.

As a Feeding the Valley partner, he also donates fresh produce for our food distribution programs in the counties we serve in southwest Georgia. We’re grateful for this partnership and collaborating with Flint River Fresh to increase our outreach as we spread our roots in Albany.

“I like to talk about healthier communities and the whole wellness of a person. It’s very therapeutic to be outdoors, put your hands to the plow, and receive the benefits of a harvest. Since 2020, we like to donate whatever we grow. We’re happy to provide healthy, nutritious food to families in the community,” says Farmer Fredo.

When you realize that the words heart and earth have the same letters and think about the heart of the mission of this organization: to connect with the earth; communities in southwest Georgia are enriched and stronger, and hope thrives and blossoms.

To learn more about Flint River Fresh, visit flintriverfresh.org.
The reality of hunger came to the forefront in 2020, and now most Americans are familiar with the term “food insecurity” and the essential role of food banks. There was no time to react to the shock and awe the pandemic brought. We had to mobilize and go into disaster relief mode immediately and serve our clients and thousands of people who have never needed our assistance before.

There has been a 50% increase in our food distribution throughout the year, and we are still experiencing record months. Our impact numbers are included on the back page of this newsletter. If there was ever a doubt about our flexibility and resilience, we just proved that we are nimble and can adjust and react immediately.

- Mobile Pantries became touchless, drive-thru style with COVID protocols in place.
- Volunteers and Partner Agencies could not be in our warehouse. The Georgia National Guard served as our volunteer army for 14 months.
- Our children’s feeding programs had to be revamped.
- Food supply chains became a challenge, and we had to be resourceful.

Generous gifts by donors of all kinds have enabled us to expand our fleet, acquire a much-needed generator to safeguard our freezer and cooler, and purchase equipment on our dream list that makes us operate more efficiently.

Plans for the fiscal year of 2019–2020 had to be shelved in order to react to the extraordinary environment we found ourselves in. And now, we feel like we can begin to implement some new ways to enhance our programs.

- We recently introduced a new “Working Hands Pantry” for people who cannot be at our Mobile Pantry during the work day. It is now convenient for them to come to our warehouse after work hours to pick up a supplemental food box plus frozen meat, fresh produce, and dairy and bakery items.
- Our Kids Café and Senior Meals Programs are now receiving sealed, individual prepared meals with new equipment purchased. This new method will enhance these programs tremendously and allow us to provide meals in many of our rural counties.
- We have purchased a building in Albany to have as a permanent home in order to serve our most southern counties.

I am very proud of our team and their commitment to live and breathe our mission. And, we could not accomplish any of this without the help of our donors, Partner Agencies, and wonderful volunteers who helped at our Mobile Pantries all year.

It takes a valley to end hunger.

Sincerely,

Frank Sheppard
President & CEO

They ARE BACK! Volunteers have returned to Feeding the Valley with passion and enthusiasm, and we are so glad to see our old friends again. It didn’t take the Synovus team long to sign up and make it a team-building day.

Interested in volunteering? Visit feedingthevalley.org/Volunteer.
For many, good food is about the attributes of community, culture, love, and joy. But for many people experiencing food insecurity, it’s just about survival. Across the U.S., food lines are getting longer and longer at food pantries. Food insecurity is defined as a “lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life.”

In all of the counties we serve, there are food deserts. Some of the counties we serve in rural Georgia have only one grocery store for the entire county.

The Food Mill Food Farmacy, in Columbus, Georgia, is addressing this issue in a small, sleepy part of town that has no close access to nutritious food within a reasonable distance. Working in partnership with us and a non-profit healthcare clinic, MercyMed, the families and children of Truth Spring Academy, North Highland Community Church, and Fox Elementary School are receiving special, much-needed attention.

Partnering with MercyMed and its urban farm and Feeding the Valley, the goal of the Food Mill is to provide healthy, nutritious food and healthy meals. Children at Truth Spring Academy receive a healthy Food Mill breakfast at the start of the school day, and then a nutritious lunch through our Kids Café Program. Families of nearby Fox Elementary students receive healthy, prepared, family-style weekend meals from the Food Mill. In addition, they have started working with a nutritionist at MercyMed to establish a Medically Tailored Meals Program for MercyMed patients.

Feeding the Valley and these organizations are working together on the Columbus Mayor’s Task Force, a collaborative effort with other organizations to address food accessibility and create a long-term plan to reduce the rate of diet-related illnesses.

We can be much stronger and make an impact when we work together.

Collaboration, innovative thinking, and teamwork harness the best from everyone and make the dream work.

Hats off to Circles of Troup County!

Our Partner Agency Circles of Troup County’s mission is to identify and eliminate the causes of poverty and support those wishing to lift themselves out of poverty. It is one of 80 Circles programs in the United States and Canada.

They were recently recognized with two national awards during the national Circles USA conference.

Deb Brown, a bus driver for Troup County Schools, received the “Most Powerful Circle Leader Success Story” award. Deb has been with Circles for almost two years and has met many of her goals, including raising her credit score, reducing debt, and saving to purchase a house. She bought a home in 2020, while also reducing her housing costs from 70% of her income to just 14% of her income.

Calvin Neely received the “Outstanding Ally” award. Calvin, owner of Kona Ice of LaGrange, has volunteered with Circles for seven years. He has volunteered in multiple positions, and in 2019 he initiated a process that resulted in a collaboration between Circles of Trup and Center State Bank to provide low-interest loans to Circles participants. The loans allowed Circles Leaders to pay off high-interest loans (about 400%) with a loan at just 3%.

Helping break the poverty cycle is a worthy goal of many non-profit organizations, and we are proud to be a supporting partner.
20-21 OUR IMPACT!

15.7 Million Pounds of Food Distributed

28,160 Volunteer Hours

3.4 Million Mobile Pantry Pounds Distributed

18 Serving Counties

4,199,110 Pounds of Fresh Produce Distributed

3,843 Donors

40 Food Donors

300+ Partner Agencies

82,630 People Served

480,000 Kids Cafe Meals

9,371 Senior Meals

5 New Trucks and 2 Vans