

'Garden for Good'

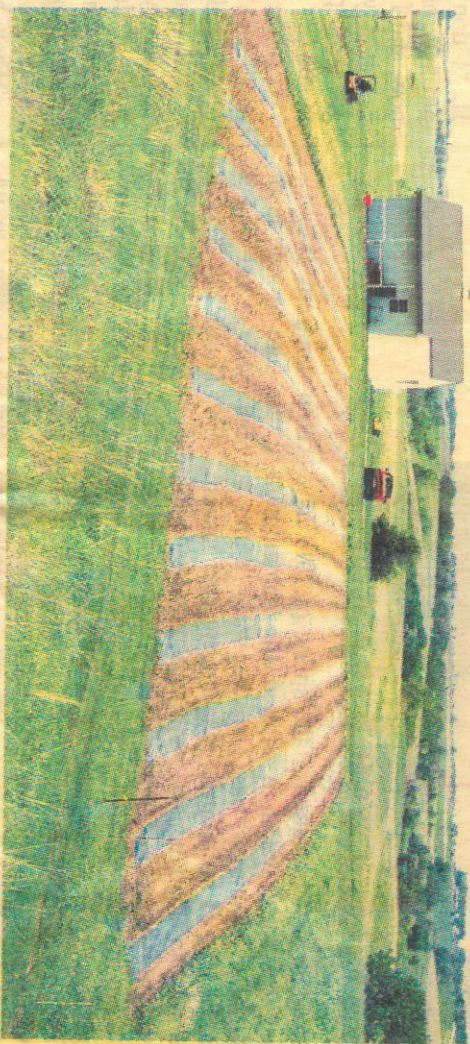


Photo by Regina Smith
An acre of ground at the Henry A. Wallace Country Life Center northeast of Orient is prepared for the arrival of sweet potatoes, which were planted last Friday. The produce grown from the slips will be donated to the Food Bank of Iowa.

Country Life Center plants sweet potatoes for Food Bank of Iowa

By REGINA SMITH
Adair County Free Press

The Henry A. Wallace
Country Life Center is plant-

ing a "Garden for Good."

One acre or approximately 25% of the total farm ground have been planted in sweet potatoes destined for the Food Bank of Iowa.

Debra Houghtaling, presi-

dent and CEO, said Wallace Centers has chosen to work with the Food Bank of Iowa

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because it impacts Adair and Polk counties, where the Wallace Centers have locations, and neighboring Union County, as well as 52 other counties in Iowa, including towns such as Greenfield, Stuart, Adair, Casey, Creston and Winterset.

The Food Bank of Iowa moves 1 million pounds of food each month, partnering with more than 500 agencies for distribution. More than 175,000 hungry Iowans live in this service area.

Houghtaling said they are excited about this venture and hopes the partnership will continue for many years.

Good came out of disaster

The Country Life Center has been growing vegetables since 1996. Previously, many of the crops were grown in hoop houses, but a storm in June 2018 destroyed four of the five hoop houses. This forced the staff at Wallace Center to re-evaluate their mission.

Because it was difficult to find local organic produce 20 years ago, the Country Life Center chose to grow organic vegetables. Now, most local grocery stores have organic foods available, and farmers markets are in nearly every small

lary Iowa-grown produce is limited.

The staff at Wallace Centers, in conversation with the Food Bank of Iowa, chose sweet potatoes because they are nutritious vegetables that are easy to grow and store for an extended period of time.

"Iowans struggling with food insecurity have a lot of trouble getting access to fresh, nutritious produce, due to its cost," said Emily Shearer of the Food Bank of Iowa. "When The Wallace Centers of Iowa donate sweet potatoes to the Food Bank of Iowa, they're helping us ensure that our neighbors in need can maintain a wholesome diet."

Planting method

Farm Programs Manager Mosa Schayan, who has been with the Country Life Center for eight years, explained the low maintenance method they plan to use to grow the sweet potatoes. Each row was covered with clear plastic, which will help heat the soil, retain moisture and suppress weeds. "Slips" or stems with a few leaves and two to three nodes were then planted last Friday through holes in the plastic - one slip every 10 inches.

Schayan said they expect to harvest approximately 3 1/2 pounds of sweet potatoes per slip.

would greatly reduce the man power needed for harvest.

Even with the undercutter, many volunteers will still be needed. The undercutter would break the ground and sever the roots making it possible for the harvesters to pick up the sweet potatoes rather than dig them up.

Volunteers

The Country Life Center has two full-time garden staff, Schayan and Adam Main, assistant manager, to do most of the work needed to raise the sweet potatoes and the fruits and vegetables the farm raises to sell in their gift shop.

Volunteers were needed to plant, but are also need to care for and harvest the sweet potatoes. Lisa Swanson, site manager, is looking for individuals and groups who would like to volunteer for as little as one day or as much as a weekly opportunity. Mondays from 10 a.m. to noon have been set aside for this purpose, but other times can be arranged.

Houghtaling said this volunteer opportunity would be good for community or church groups and youth groups such as FFA or 4-H who are looking for an opportunity to connect to agriculture.

Individuals interested in volunteering are encouraged to call 641-