

# The Baltimore Sun

## Volunteers grow 3,000 pounds of vegetables per year for Howard County Food Bank



Columbia resident Whitney LeBlanc works on watering the raised beds of newly planted vegetables at the Community Action Council of Howard County's community garden on Friday. The produce grown in the garden supports the Howard County Food Bank. (Brian Krista/staff photo)

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On a chilly spring morning, master gardeners and volunteers tended to plant boxes, pulled weeds, spread mulch and watered vegetable sprouts, working diligently to cultivate crops for the spring and summer seasons at the Community Action Council of Howard County's community garden.

Whitney LeBlanc, 71, of Columbia, said he had no interest in gardening prior to retiring more than a decade ago, but for the past 13 years he has volunteered twice a week in the community garden.

LeBlanc hopes the work he and other volunteers do there reduces food insecurity in the county.

“The way we see it is, it’s part of our contribution to our community to come out, grow crops, harvest and send them to the food bank,” LeBlanc said. “We hope [the community] can have more nutritious meals, a wider variety of meals and a wider variety of vegetables and fruits to be able to eat.”

Established in 1965, the Community Action Council of Howard County’s mission is to “diminish poverty and enable self-sufficiency for all Howard County individuals, families and children in need,” according to its website. Providing early childhood education, energy and housing assistance and food assistance, the council resolves to quickly meet the community’s needs, strategically, thoughtfully and with compassion.



Jim Cimaglio, a master gardener from Woodbine, left, is joined by Wilde Lake resident Ted Pope and other volunteers working to tend the vegetable plots at the Community Action Council of Howard County's community garden on Friday. The produce grown in the garden supports the Howard County Food Bank. (Brian Krista/staff photo)

The council maintains an active volunteer base of more than 600 volunteers, and the garden is supported by 11 core volunteers that are heavily invested in the garden and work in it several times per week, according to Joanna Lake, public affairs coordinator

for the group. Volunteer groups from local organizations and businesses also schedule a day or two per season to assist at the garden.

Growing vegetables, including asparagus, beets, cabbage, lettuce and onions, the garden produces an average of 3,000 pounds of vegetables per year that are donated to the Howard County Food Bank.



Volunteer David Crabbe of Oaklands Mills spreads mulch between the raised garden beds while tending to the Community Action Council of Howard County's community garden on Friday. The produce grown in the garden supports the Howard County Food Bank. (Brian Krista/staff photo)

Through the Howard County Food Bank, the council feeds roughly 2,300 households per month, Lake said.

“Produce from the community garden adds to the abundance of produce that is already generously donated each day to help our clients eat well-rounded, nutritious meals,” Lake said.

Carrie Ross, director of food bank services at the Community Action Council, said the organization prioritizes which vegetables to grow based on the community's needs.

“What we do every year is we ask our clients what kind of vegetables would you be interested in getting,” Ross said. “Although we have such an amazing amount of produce that’s donated through the local grocery store, through the Howard County Conservancy [and] through other areas, we still like to grow our own vegetables because they come in at peak season.”



Nichole Motley of Hanover works on planting rows of vegetables in one of the raised beds at the Community Action Council of Howard County's community garden on Friday. The produce grown in the garden supports the Howard County Food Bank. (Brian Krista/staff photo)

This year, the organization will be growing bok choy, collard greens, potatoes, squash and tomatoes and will be introducing jalapeño and serrano peppers.

Ross said the garden has helped the organization teach the community about healthy eating.

“We do promote healthy eating and part of healthy eating is produce and if you introduce produce to small children, they grow up to enjoy those types of foods,” she said. “Helping the seniors enjoy healthy food options is [also] really important to us.”

Ted Pope, 78, of Wilde Lake, who has been volunteering with the organization for about seven years, said volunteering has allowed him to give and receive.



The hands of Wilde Lake resident Ted Pope forms the dirt around newly planted buttercrunch lettuce at the Community Action Council of Howard County's community garden on Friday. The produce grown in the garden supports the Howard County Food Bank. (Brian Krista/staff photo)

“There’s a camaraderie that develops amongst the volunteers and you derive a great deal of satisfaction out of doing it and knowing that the end product is that you’re contributing in some way,” he said. “I think a lot of people don’t think of volunteering in those terms, but you get a lot back from doing it.”

For information on how to volunteer, visit [cac-hc.org/volunteer](https://cac-hc.org/volunteer) or email [cacvolunteer@cac-hc.org](mailto:cacvolunteer@cac-hc.org).