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Maryknoll farm helps feed Westchester's hungry

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New York City firefighter Denis Mandel, 34, prepares the beds with other volunteers on land at Maryknoll in Ossining, where volunteers and priests gather each spring to tend to the Pachamama Farm. Last year, the farm yielded more than 16 tons of fruits and vegetables. The produce was distributed to six food pantries in Westchester County. photos by tania savayan/the journal news The Rev. John Hudert, co-director of the farm: "I can watch the food grow and do things that have meaning for others." The Rev. John Hudert at work on the farm. He leads a group of some 15 volunteers from April to November in tilling, planting, weeding and harvesting the crop. photos by tania savayan/the journal news Dan Malone, 70, a retired teacher from Ossining, takes a break from preparing the beds on a patch of land at Maryknoll. "To me, it's not work, it's recreation," Malone says. / Tania Savayan/The Journal News

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Each morning at 7, the Rev. John Hudert can be found on a fertile patch of land at Maryknoll, tending to the rows of cabbage, squash, tomatoes and lettuce that will eventually make their way onto the plates of Westchester's needy.

"It keeps me sane," said Hudert, 77. "I can watch the food grow and do things that have meaning for others."

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On a recent visit to the Catholic mission's Ossining headquarters, temperatures soared above 80 degrees, and yet Hudert, wearing a straw hat and sodden T-shirt, was hard at work preparing the garden beds on the 1.5-acre Our Global Neighborhood Pachamama Farm before heading off to Mass at noon. The growing season was off to a late start this year, he said, due to the cold, wind and rain.

Even so, shoots of swiss chard, beets and turnips sprouted from the ground.

As the farm's director, Hudert leads a group of some 15 volunteers from April to November in tilling the land, planting, weeding, and harvesting a bountiful crop that last year yielded 33,000 pounds, or 16.5 tons, of fruits and vegetables.

The produce was distributed to several food pantries in Westchester County in 2010, including the Community Center of Northern Westchester in Katonah, the Ossining Food Pantry and Fred's Pantry in Peekskill. Other benefactors in the past have included the Lord's Pantry in White Plains, which prepares three meals daily for AIDS patients and their families.

"They are very generous," said Sherry Wolf, executive director of the Community Center of Northern Westchester. "Our clients look forward to it because it's fresh and wonderful and it's local."

During the season, 350 pounds of produce is delivered to the center each Tuesday by Betty and Rudy Cypser, said volunteer Pat Muldoon.

The agency's food pantry serves about 550 families per month, Wolf said.

"It is all organically grown produce," Muldoon said. "They bring it with the dirt and the dew still on it."

Pachamama Farm was the brainchild of Mary Murphy, a Maryknoll affiliate.

Murphy presented the idea to the Maryknoll community in 1999, and by 2000 the farm was seeing its first harvest, she said.

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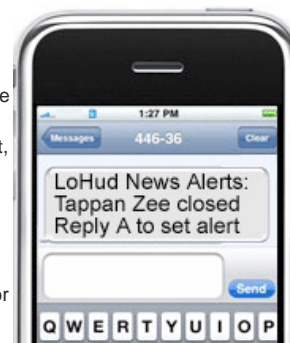
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