



PARTNERING TO PROVIDE FRESH PRODUCE

BY LUKE ELZINGA, COMMUNICATIONS & ADVOCACY MANAGER

Since May, the DMARC Food Pantry Network has been distributing boxes of fresh fruits and vegetables from Capital City Fruit through the USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program.

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OUR COMMITMENT TO EQUITY

BY MATT UNGER, CEO

A little over a year ago when I came into this position, I never would have imagined we would be where we are today—in the midst of a global pandemic, operating under procedures we thought we left in the past years ago, and on the precipice of what I hope is our nation’s taking long overdue action to create real, lasting equality—specifically for Black and Brown Americans, but truly for everyone engaged in the human experience.

Thankfully, our strategic plan, adopted in December, aims to ensure that, no matter the circumstances set in front of us, we bend toward a thriving community for all through addressing food insecurity more effectively, building community partnerships and engaging in changing mindsets through leading advocacy and systems change.

While the way we do business has necessarily had to shift, our commitment to nutritious products and fresh produce has remained. This is an important priority because it speaks to the health dignity of food pantry visitors. For too long, pantries were populated almost exclusively with high sodium, preservative-filled canned goods—sometimes merely out of the spirit of service, but too often because they were cheap to acquire. Today, we know a diet absent nutritious foods and fresh produce leads to additional health problems which the population we assist increasingly can little afford to address. That’s one reason we’re proud to partner with Capital City Fruit and the USDA on a program you’ll read about in these pages.



That commitment to dignity has also led us to evaluate how our organization may have, intentionally or otherwise, created barriers to equity for all who are in need of food assistance. To that end, our entire team recently engaged in implicit bias training to better understand how those barriers are created so we can seek to eliminate them. We have also engaged a number of our team members to serve on an Equity and Inclusion Committee to keep exploring ways we can provide a more equitable experience for everyone who seeks assistance from our pantry network. Also, to continue to grow in our understanding of different cultures, perspectives, and people so that we are part of solving inequities—not part of creating them.

Our work is seldom easy, as I’ve found is true of the most worthwhile things I’ve been a part. But, it’s through solving the difficult that we can help create ease for others, which is what meeting basic human needs is truly all about.

Matt Unger
CEO

THE "COVID" CAMP

BY REV. SARAH TRONE GARRIOTT,
COORDINATOR OF INTERFAITH ENGAGEMENT

The COVID-19 pandemic meant some big changes to the 2020 Interfaith Youth Leadership Camp. Each summer for the past three years, DMARC and the Comparison Project at Drake University gathered students on Drake's campus to reflect on their own religious background by creating digital storytelling projects, visiting the diverse religious communities of Greater Des Moines, and building relationships with one another. When it became clear that fourth annual Interfaith Youth Leadership Camp could not happen in person, the planning team got creative and moved the entire experience to an online format.

From July 15-19, high school students from around the metro and incoming first-year Drake students from across the country signed on to Zoom to explore the diverse religious landscape of Greater Des Moines. Despite the participants being in so many different places, the group was able to visit the Sikh Temple in West Des Moines,

be present for prayer at the Bosnian Mosque in Granger, take part in Shabbat services at two local Jewish communities, visit with the Buddhist Lama from a local Temple, attend Christian churches throughout the metro, and even get up and out of their seats to dance with the Nepali Hindu community near Easter Lake.

For a tangible experience alongside the digital programming, each camper received a box of camp supplies, including a t-shirt, sampling of treats from local ethnic grocery stores, a custom camp journal, and mask. On the night the group would have enjoyed dinner at a local restaurant, participants received take-out deliveries so that all could eat together online. The counselors created informal opportunities to hang out online, and managed an ongoing text chat to build relationships between the students.

Check out digital storytelling projects from this year's and previous camps on the Iowa Interfaith Exchange website: iowainterfaithexchange.com. For more information, please reach out to Coordinator of Interfaith Engagement Sarah Trone Garriott at stronegarriott@dmarcunited.org.



In addition to distributing the produce boxes through DMARC's network of 14 partner food pantries and additional mobile food pantry locations, public giveaways were held on Fridays at the Southridge Mall parking lot from late May through the end of August.

"Capital City Fruit has been partnering with DMARC for over a decade to get fresh fruits and vegetables to food pantry users in an effort to improve nutrition among that population," said Brendan Comito, Chief Operations Officer at Capital City Fruit. "We have been able to reach even more people through the USDA Food Box program, which is a win on multiple levels. It is a win for US growers, for the companies and their employees assembling the food boxes, for the nonprofits such as DMARC, and for the people in our community that need food assistance."



The produce boxes include approximately 20 lbs. of a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables and are being distributed along with additional food items through the DMARC Food Pantry Network.

"Providing healthy food to people in need remains our top priority," said DMARC CEO Matt Unger. "We are so grateful to partner with Capital City Fruit during this time to provide additional fresh fruits and vegetables to the people we assist."



Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig loads produce boxes into a vehicle at Southridge Mall on Friday, June 12.

The USDA produce box program has also provided opportunities for DMARC to advocate with elected officials to share about the success of the program and provide input on its future. DMARC met with Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig and Congresswoman Cindy Axne to provide insights and recommendations on the USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program.

"The USDA Food Box program is a win-win for local farmers and food insecure families right here in our own community," said Secretary Naig. "This program gives farmers a market for their protein, dairy and produce and families get to enjoy a variety of fresh, Iowa-grown foods."

Since the program started in May, through the end of August, DMARC distributed a total of 28,332 boxes, or 566,640 lbs. of fresh produce. 12,900 of those produce boxes were distributed through DMARC's network of partner food pantries, with 15,432 distributed at public giveaways at Southridge Mall on Fridays during the summer.

DMARC would like to thank the dedicated volunteers who stepped up to help at Friday giveaways. Many volunteers assisted at multiple events, with a few volunteers showing up at every single public giveaway. Without the help of these outstanding volunteers, DMARC and Capital City Fruit could not have possibly distributed over 15,000 boxes of fresh fruits and vegetables to lines of vehicles waiting for assistance.

AGAPE GARDEN SHOWS LOVE THROUGH GROWING

BY LUKE ELZINGA,
COMMUNICATIONS & ADVOCACY MANAGER

Tucked behind Ankeny First United Methodist Church's Faith Chapel on the southwest limits of the city, you will find the Agape Garden.

What started as a simple garden plot in 2000 has grown into a sophisticated growing operation complete with a drip irrigation system, rain barrels, composting, a small tractor, and other machinery and equipment for the garden.

All of the food grown at the garden is donated. To date, the Agape Garden has grown over 150,000 lbs. of fresh produce to donate to local nonprofits like the DMARC Food Pantry Network.

Agape is a Greek word found in the Bible and refers to "the selfless love of God." Christians regard *agape* as the love from God for humankind, and the coordinators and volunteers of the Agape Garden view their service in this way.

The Agape Garden grows a variety of produce, including potatoes, onions, cabbage, peppers, squash, and tomatoes. Berries and fruit trees help the garden sustain itself— fruit is harvested and made into pies and jams that garner donations to pay for the next year's growing season. The garden also receives grant funding to support its work.



Garden volunteer Craig Crist (pictured bottom-left) credits many people for the success of the Agape Garden, from local businesses to faith communities to diverse groups of volunteers.

Volunteers are always welcome at the Agape Garden, and regular shifts are held on Tuesday and Thursday evenings and Saturday mornings. To learn more about the Agape Garden and how you can help, please visit their Facebook page.

The Agape Garden is not the only garden that donates what they grow to help fight food insecurity in Greater Des Moines. Other groups with giving gardens include St. John's Lutheran Church, Grace Lutheran Church, St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, Community Youth Concepts, and the Faith and Grace Garden. Individual backyard gardeners also support DMARC with donations of fresh produce.

Additionally, DMARC has a number of corporate giving garden partners through the United Way of Central Iowa's corporate giving garden network. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many of these gardens have not been active this summer.

DMARC is so thankful for the incredible work of volunteer gardeners who donate produce to the DMARC Food Pantry Network.

To learn more about how you can support the DMARC Food Pantry Network through the donation of freshly grown fruits and vegetables, please contact DMARC at info@dmarcunited.org.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Working Together to Meet
Basic Human Needs.

STAFF:

MATT UNGER,

Chief Executive Officer

LESLIE L. GARMAN, CFRE,

Director of Development & Outreach

REBECCA WHITLOW,

Food Pantry Network Director

DANIEL BECK

MONICA CURL

JOE DOLACK

LUKE ELZINGA

ANDREW FIRESTINE

CHRIS HAUGEN

NISHA KISHOR

CARRIE LA RUE

JOHN MCPHEE

PATRICK MINOR

MICHAEL SIROIS

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JUST *One* SOCIETY

Your Legacy. Our Community.

JOIN DMARC'S JUST ONE SOCIETY

These are difficult times for everyone. In order to keep fulfilling our mission of meeting basic human needs in our community, we need your help today—and tomorrow. One way to do that is through legacy or planned giving through DMARC.

The Just One Society is DMARC's legacy society. It is comprised of individuals—both living and past—who believe so much in our mission that they have made a financial commitment to our organization which will help us not just today—but tomorrow. Only through planning is this possible.

With the pandemic, many are evaluating their estates. One of the simplest ways to make a legacy gift is through your will. You can leave all or a percentage of your estate to DMARC, ensuring that DMARC is here for those in need far into the future. You can also give a gift through your life insurance policy or a gift of property.

Whichever way you elect to give, DMARC will ensure that your legacy continues through our mission. Learn more today by visiting dmarcunited.org/planned-giving/.

VOLUNTEER ON A DMARC COMMITTEE

Join a committee and support our mission of meeting basic human needs in Greater Des Moines!

There are several for you to consider, including helping us expand our Fund and Food Drives, helping us plan our annual signature event Spring Greens, and much more! We know we have the perfect activity to have fun, meet individuals committed to fighting food insecurity, and make a difference through volunteer service.

To learn more, contact DMARC Volunteer & Outreach Manager Nisha Kishor at nkishor@dmarcunited.org.

THE "PLAYBOOK" FOR HOSTING A SUCCESSFUL COMPETITIVE DRIVE

BY LESLIE L. GARMAN, CFRE
DIRECTOR OF OUTREACH & DEVELOPMENT

The "big game" between Iowa and Iowa State is an annual tradition! As part of the fun each year, DMARC encourages groups and organizations to host a competitive food and fund drive for DMARC in honor of the game, using the friendly rivalry to support a great cause.

But this year, it's a different story. The game may be cancelled, but the rivalry lives on!

Here's a few ideas of activities that your company, congregation, or other group might consider doing instead of the traditional competitive drive in lieu of "Iowa's Super Bowl."

Socially-Distant Tailgate

"Vote" with your dollars for your favorite tailgate food! Set up tables (six feet apart) and place food items there. Label them and place a jar near each item. Segment the times that people have the opportunity to taste test (or have pre-packaged grab and go items). You can also use DMARC's website to set up a Virtual Food Drive to raise funds for DMARC.

Marble Racing

Create a "race course" for inanimate objects such as marbles! You can set the number of colors—and teams—and thereby encourage competition between the colors! This can be done virtually, with only a few people handling the logistics.

Canned Food Sculpture

Get creative—and competitive—by hosting a sculpture contest using the food collected during your drive. Have team members "vote" virtually for their favorite sculpture! Be sure to share your best creations on social media and tag DMARC!



"Running with the Pigskins"

On October 16, piglets from the Des Moines Public Schools agricultural program will wear team colors (ribbons) and run a short obstacle course (created by the carpentry program) to see which team (piggy) wins! Team colors will include: Black and Gold, Cardinal and Gold, Purple and Gold, Blue and White, and Red and White.

The event will feature a live commentator and "pre-game" show. A tailgate is suggested over the noon hour and the event will follow at 1:00pm via Facebook live!

You can also "meet the piggies" two weeks prior, so that you can learn more about your contender and select your favorite. Individuals and teams can "vote" for your favorite team (piggy) with their dollars or donations of food.

The winning team from this event (raising the most money/donations by Friday, October 23) will receive a special prize!

Interested in hosting a competitive drive with your workplace, congregation, or group? To learn more, contact Leslie Garman at (515) 277-6969 x13 or LGarman@dmarcunited.org.



UNITED TO MEET THE NEED

Des Moines Area Religious Council
1435 Mulberry Street
Des Moines, Iowa 50309

515.277.6969
dmarcunited.org

Warehouse: 515.282.2026
Fax: 515.274.8389
Email: info@dmarcunited.org

 **Des Moines Area Religious Council**
 **@DMARCunited**

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VOTE TO END HUNGER THIS NOVEMBER

DMARC is a member of the Iowa Hunger Coalition, a group of organizations and individuals that advocates for effective policies and helps educate Iowans on the causes, effects, and solutions of food insecurity and hunger in Iowa.

The Iowa Hunger Coalition (IHC) is proud to partner with Vote to End Hunger to elevate the issue of hunger and food insecurity with candidates during the 2020 election cycle.



IHC asked all candidates for federal office in Iowa the following question:

“If elected, what will you do to end hunger, alleviate poverty, and create opportunity in the U.S. and worldwide?”

Read the candidates’s responses and learn their plan for ending hunger at:

iowahungercoalition.org



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