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California flower grower helps feed the hungry with Outreach Farm Project

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Floral farmers usually concentrate solely on growing flowers, but Kendall Farms in Fallbrook, CA, is an exception to that norm. The Southern California wholesaler, well-known for its sunflowers, has 500 acres of land for flower growing, but Kendall Farms also dedicates a few acres each year to growing produce that is used to help those in the community.

Troy Conner, general manager of Kendall Farms, told The Produce News that the idea to grow produce came to him in 2009.

“When I first heard that the local rescue mission was out of food, it really struck me,” said Conner. “Here we are in Southern California, the Disneyland of America, and there are families who don’t have enough food and shelter.”

Despite Kendall Farms’ still dealing with the aftermath of a fire two years prior and a tumultuous economy, the company decided to get involved.

Conner reasoned, “If we can grow organic sunflowers, we can grow food too.”

Though the farm got a late start to the season that year, it still managed to harvest 30,000 pounds of produce. It then donated the food to Temecula Murrieta Rescue Mission, a local mission now known as Community Mission of Hope.

Kendall Farms didn’t stop there. After several successful seasons, the farm put together a produce

stand to sell part of the harvest to the public. The proceeds from the produce stand are also donated, and Community Mission of Hope then distributes the money and food to those in need.

The Outreach Farm Project grows a wide variety of produce including watermelon, carrots, rhubarb, beans and tomatoes. The farm's biggest crop, however, is potatoes. In 2013, Kendall Farms harvested 89,248 pounds of produce and is anticipating around 75,000 pounds this year. The produce stand typically raises about \$10,000 each year and may even reach \$12,000 in 2014.

Conner attributed the success of the Outreach Farm Project to its volunteers. He estimated that there are about 4,000 to 4,500 volunteer hours that go into this program, and people from all over the community come together to make it happen, ranging from Boy Scout troops to military groups to church clubs.

While Kendall Farms prepares the land for planting and helps with irrigation, volunteers are responsible for planting, weeding, harvesting and cleaning up the fields. People volunteer from late March to late September, coming to the farm on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.

"To see that dedication [from the community] — it's phenomenal," Conner said.

Though one of Conner's dreams would be to someday harvest over 100,000 pounds of produce, he also has other goals in mind.

"It'd be neat if other flower farms, or even other produce farms, did something similar," said Conner. "The impact is pretty substantial."

Conner said it takes hard work and a lot of dedication. However, he recognizes that the program does not just happen from his effort.

"It's not [just] Kendall Farms, it's bigger than that. The community comes together to make it happen. I'm very thankful for the support to ensure that it all gets done," he said. "There are people in need, and we want to help. That's the bottom line."

To learn more about the Outreach Farm Project, visit www.kendall-farms.com or www.facebook.com/kendallfarms or phone 800/900-0848.

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