

HTF Position Statement on HOC Farm and Fish Hatchery



The House of Correction farm and fish hatchery in Franklin is one of the last of its kind in the nation, benefitting Milwaukee County and its citizens.

History

The farm was originally established in 1946 to feed inmates at the Milwaukee County House of Correction, a tradition modeled after a Minnesota prison. The 652 acre location in the town of Franklin remains active as the current farm site today.

A 150 acre parcel was leased to Hunger Task Force in 2006 under County Board Resolution Res. File. No. 04-414(a)(c) in order to create a partnership for continuing operation of the farm. Milwaukee County would provide inmate labor and three Correctional Officers to supervise the inmates. According to our lease, all costs to employ the Correctional Officers would be met through fees charged to inmates and not tax levy, meaning the inmates, not the citizens, bear the cost of operating the farm. In turn, Hunger Task Force would fundraise, add staff and mechanize the operation in order to grow food for the needy.

What is the value of the farm and fish hatchery?

The farmland surrounding the House of Correction is one of Milwaukee's last urban farms. The farm operation is one of 50 work farms remaining in the nation. The farm serves as an effective buffer between the jail and the City of Franklin. Milwaukee County has made significant investments in building and maintaining a jail and Sheriff's Training Center on this County owned land.



The farm grows over 300,000 pounds of food for the needy each year. Adding healthy produce to emergency food supplies is important when the jobless rely on food pantries as a primary source of food. The 32 crops grown and harvested on the farm are distributed free of charge by Hunger Task Force to a safety net of 80 qualified charities: food pantries, soup kitchens and homeless shelters.

Non-violent offenders nearing release volunteer to work on the farm. This work provides restitution for past crimes and teaches work skills. In fact, throughout the year inmates pack boxes of food for 5,000 local low-income seniors each month. The Warehouse Forklift Training Program allows inmates to learn to operate a fork truck and pallet jack, qualifying them for skilled work that pays a decent wage after release.

The farm supports the Milwaukee County Parks. A one of a kind fish hatchery is operated at the farm. Each year, 40,000 fish are dropped at 19 Milwaukee County Park lagoons for fishing clinics and citizen anglers



alike. Felled trees are chopped by inmates and the wood is returned to the County Park lodge fireplaces. Acres of sapling trees are grown on site at the farm, home to the County Park's tree nursery. Pumpkins grown at the farm decorate the Milwaukee County Zoo each October.

Hunger Task Force has invested over \$215,000 in equipment alone for the Farm since the 2006 lease signing. Among the items purchased are tractors, seeders, planters, crop diggers and pickers, an orchard sprayer, a vegetable washer, and new bins and containers. Hunger Task Force has also spent over \$50,000 in building maintenance and equipment repair and also pays for two full-time employees at the HOC farm and fish hatchery.

Next Steps

The 2010 Milwaukee County budget passed an amendment to "save" this project – but the amendment may only keep the program alive through July 1, 2010. Specifically, the 2010 County Board budget requires:



- The farm and fish hatchery to move from the Sheriff's budget to the Parks Department. Beginning in January 2010, the Parks Director will meet with Hunger Task Force, County Board staff, and the Sheriff's office to develop a transition plan to move full operational oversight and support of the Farm and Fish Hatchery to the Parks department by July 1, 2010.
- The Parks Director to provide quarterly reports on the progress of the transition plan to the Committee on Parks, Energy, and Environment beginning in March 2010.
- One .5 FTE Correction Officer Agriculture to be maintained to manage the fish hatchery during the transition period from the Sheriff to the Parks.

Hunger Task Force needs the County Board and the Sheriff's Office to provide a specific number of Huber-eligible inmates for this project. The standing Board language is inadequate: "To assure successful maintenance of the farm and fish hatchery, it is anticipated that the Sheriff's Office will continue to identify and supply and inmate work crew consistent with the terms of the existing lease agreement."

Want to help keep the farm and fish hatchery alive? Here's what you can do:

- Write a letter to the editor at the Journal Sentinel saying that you think the Hunger Task Force farm and fish hatchery is a valuable resource and urge the County to do all it can to support it. Please keep your letter to 150 words. When writing, add a personal touch explaining why you care about the farm and fish hatchery and keep it positive, avoiding personal attacks or divisive remarks. Submit your letter to jsedit@journal sentinel.com and bcc or send a follow-up email to mary@hungertaskforce.org so we know you sent it.
- Contact your Milwaukee County Board Supervisor and express your desire to save this valuable resource and urge him or her to monitor and support progress at the farm and fish hatchery. Find your County Board member by calling 414-278-4222 or visiting milwaukee.gov/FindDistrictSupervisor. You will get a list of public officials who represent you, including the name, phone and e-mail of your county board member.