In 2019, 250 students from three Milwaukee Public Schools took part in a nine-month Farm-To-School Program about nutrition education. The program offered students the opportunity to learn about healthy food through an abundance of hands-on experiences.

Students engaged in weekly classroom lessons, art projects and field trips to the Hunger Task Force Farm. While at The Farm, students were immersed in growing and harvesting fresh produce, cooking, hiking and taste-testing new recipes of their creation. Twenty-eight school garden beds produced tomatoes, peppers, okra, peas, sour gherkin, squash, kale, brussels sprouts and herbs. Students learned essential kitchen etiquette in the demonstration kitchen, such as proper knife skills, reading and measuring recipe ingredients, mixing, baking and sautéing; all while demonstrating math, science and knowledge of the MyPlate healthy eating model.

In addition to the school year session, the Farm-To-School program branched out and collaborated with other local organizations during summer, including the YMCA. Over eight weeks, an additional 200 students ages 5-15 cared for the school garden, engaged in physical activity and created healthy recipes.

The success of this year’s Farm-To-School program was evident both by the reactions and positive energy of the students, and through the results of extensive research conducted by Hunger Task Force via surveys and questionnaires. Overall, 77% of students reported intent to eat more fruits and vegetables across breakfast, lunch and dinner after nine months of programming.
This year, Hunger Task Force had the special honor to partner with Farm Aid—a live performance at Alpine Valley featuring Willie Nelson, Neil Young, John Mellencamp, Dave Matthews and more. Before the concert, farmers and farm-related organizations from around the country came to visit The Farm to learn about our unique model for feeding those in need.

Over 30,000 people attended the concert and had a chance to learn about The Farm in the festival’s HOMEGROWN Village and donate food to Hunger Task Force! These events created great exposure for Hunger Task Force, The Farm and our shared mission, and culminated in a $7,000 grant check, signed by Willie Nelson himself!

Hunger Task Force is dedicated to providing healthy food, free of charge, to Milwaukee’s low-income children, seniors and families. The Hunger Task Force Farm offers a unique opportunity to not only feed vulnerable populations, but to also be stewards of the 208 acres of farmland, crops and natural areas that comprise The Farm.

The Hunger Task Force Farm’s primary goal is to grow fresh, healthy produce for those in need in Milwaukee County. We have a unique opportunity to not only feed vulnerable populations, but also to be stewards of the 208 acres of farmland, crops and natural areas that comprise The Farm.

In the fields, sustainable agriculture practices include cover cropping, crop rotation, conservation tillage, controlled traffic farming and integrated pest management. We are currently working on our most ambitious sustainability project to date—the installation of subsurface drip irrigation in 75 acres of farm fields. These practices reduce erosion and compaction; minimize our carbon footprint; increase soil biology, fertility and carbon sequestration; reduce insect and disease damage; and increase water use efficiency.

In addition to our cropped acreage, The Farm manages approximately 100 acres of natural areas. This space includes one of Milwaukee County’s few remaining Oak Savannas—a natural ecosystem native to Wisconsin—a 30-acre prairie, and wetlands bordering the Root River.

It is hard to overstate the transformation that has taken place in this nature preserve at The Farm since the shift in focus to sustainable management. Thriving wildlife populations, native plants and butterflies all point towards the success of The Farm’s sustainability program. Through the efforts of volunteers, donors and staff working together, these sustainable growing practices allow The Farm to feed people today while simultaneously guaranteeing our ability to do so well into the future.