

The Glengarry News

Char-Lan Foodgrains celebrates 25 years of working towards ending hunger

September 4 BY TARA MACDONALD News Staff

At 6 pm on Thursday, September 26th, Char-Lan Foodgrains Bank will be hosting a barbeque in honour of their 25th anniversary since joining the Canadian Foodgrains Bank.

In 1976, amid growing world food emergencies, Mennonite Central Committee created a pilot project to allow Canadian grain farmers to share their harvests with those less fortunate around the world. In 1983, the project was re-organized, opened to other church agencies, and re-established as the Canadian Foodgrains Bank.

Today, the Canadian Foodgrains Bank is a partnership of fifteen Canadian churches and church-based agencies representing thirty denominations with over 17,000 congregations who are working together to help fight global hunger in more than forty countries around the world.

Our local chapter, Char-Lan Foodgrains Bank, was established in 1994 to help support the Canadian organization and do our part towards ending world hunger. “Twenty-five years ago the churches of South Glengarry began a special ecumenical project,” reminisced President Mackie Robertson. “They had been asked to join the Canadian Foodgrains Bank and voluntarily grow and harvest grain which in turn would be sent wherever in the world it was needed.”

The chapter is made up of fourteen South Glengarry churches reaching from Green Valley to Glen Walter and Glen Nevis. “Not every church supports us every year but most – for the most part – do,” said Mr. Robertson. “The local churches take up a collection which pays for some of the expenses of putting the crops in the ground,” he explained. “The actual labour and machinery are donated by area farmers but there are costs for seed and fertilizer some of which will be donated by agri-business such as seed companies that often give us free seed, sometimes the chemical companies give us free chemicals for weed control but we don’t necessarily get all the inputs donated so when we take up donations in the church and make sure we let people know where that money is going.”

In the first half of the organization’s history, donations towards the Canadian Foodgrains Bank were made up almost entirely of crops. “If you think about it, countries always need wheat and lentils and rice although we don’t grow rice here in Canada and parts of our country don’t grow lentils. So if the crop we were growing were not something they ate, we would sell the crop and either send a crop from Canada that they did eat and send it to wherever it was needed,” said Mr. Robertson. “That worked reasonably well but about ten or fifteen years, we’ve been selling the crops we grow here in Canada and then we take the check and – through our partners around the world – buy whatever is needed.”

The shift was a result of the realization that by working with local partner agencies, the organization could ensure that the types of food being delivered met the cultural and dietary needs of target populations while reducing costs, ensuring aid was delivered in a timely manner, and supporting the local economy.

“So let’s say Eastern India, the province of Orissa had a terrible cyclone,” explained Mr. Robertson. “We went in there with food. We were able to source food 500 or 600 miles away and then just pay the farmer that was growing it so he then had an income and then ship it to the disaster area. That way the farmer got paid and the recipient got food fairly quickly.”

Over the last 25 years, the Char-Lan chapter has raised thousands of tonnes of grain and sometimes soybeans, corn, wheat which was shared with countries in need around the world be it a result of natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes and droughts or man-made problems like war and civil unrest. “We’ve contributed more than \$725,000 worth of food and donations, not including this year’s harvest,” stated Mr. Robertson with pride.

“I believe that we are one of the most blessed countries of the world and South Glengarry is amongst the luckiest of this particular country of ours for a whole number of reasons,” said Mr. Robertson. “I’ve been lucky enough to travel to parts of the world that are not so fortunate and firmly believe that this is one way that we can help contribute to making the world a better place to live.”

The barbeque will be held at John Fergusons farm at 5205 Highway 34 in Williamstown and will feature an appearance by Canadian Foodgrains Bank Executive Director Jim Cornelius. “When we asked Jim to speak at the BBQ he enthusiastically agreed,” said Director of Resources and Public Engagement Musu Taylor-Lewis. “Not only has this community group contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars towards the goal of ending hunger over twenty-five years but representatives of the Char-Lan growing project took the extra step of advocating for continuing our matching fund agreement with the government of Canada back in 1999. We look forward to a fruitful partnership with them for another twenty-five years.”

The event will also feature local talent, such as the Flipsen Family and others. Hot dogs, sausages, salads and more will be served. There is no charge to attend the event, however good will donations will be accepted at the door.

For more information or to support the Char-Lan Foodgrains Bank, contact Mackie Robertson at 613-347-2935.