A-MAIZING DONATION

S. Brunswick farm helps fight hunger

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SOUTH BRUNSWICK — The people who run Von Thun's Country Farm Market have found a unique way to help the fight against hunger.

From Sept. 27 through Oct. 31, they'll be operating a corn maze they are calling a MAiZE. It costs $8 a person to enter it, with children under 2 getting in for free.

The proceeds will benefit New Jersey Farmers Against Hunger, an organization connected with the New Jersey Agricultural Society that has donated over 10 million pounds of food for the hungry in the state since it started in 1996.

"It's all about giving back," said Cindy Von Thun, 43, whose husband Bob Von Thun Jr., also 43, is the fourth of five generations to work on the farm.

A group of pre-kindergarten children from the South Brunswick Family YMCA, all dressed in blue T-shirts that said "I'm a Y Kid," came to help pick tomatoes and cucumbers to be donated to the hungry.

"We like to try and teach kids where food comes from. A lot of kids think it comes from the supermarket," said Bob Von Thun.

This farm is a regular weekly contributor to the hunger charity.

Judy Grignon, program director for New Jersey Farmers Against Hunger, said the farm would probably donate 4,000 pounds of food that day alone in addition to the 500 pounds of produce the kids picked.

"The farm donors are the backbone of this program," she said, adding that the food that

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was brought to a food bank in Franklin yesterday would most likely be consumed by people that night.

Grignon said the organization picks up from farms throughout New Jersey from Hope in northern New Jersey to Cape May County. The food is then distributed to needy people through local community organizations.

Just a few years ago, it cost $75 a week to fuel a truck to transport food for the organization, but it now costs $500 or more a week in gas to make collections and distribute the food.

She said that, despite hard times, many farms still devote parcels of land to growing food for this cause.

“It shows what kind of people they are,” she said.

Grignon works out of her home and car, a testament to what she calls the “no frills” operation of the charity. She said it’s satisfying to see families who can’t afford to buy food receive nutritious pickings from the farm.

“Little kids say, ‘I’ve never had a peach before,’” she said about children from low-income families who get fresh fruit through the program.

Christina Bifulco, an employee at the farm, helped put the corn-maze project together.

The MAiZE, designed by Brett Herbst, a maze designer based in Utah, is set in a corn field on more than 5 acres near a pumpkin patch on the farm.

The imagery within it features two ears of corn and the Farmers Against Hunger logo, with a map of New Jersey in the center.

A number of participating businesses are selling tickets to the MAiZE and splitting the proceeds between the New Jersey Farmers Against Hunger and their own charities.

The Von Thun farm has been family-owned since 1913. Tim Von Thun, son of Bob and Cindy, represents the fifth generation to work the land.

These days, business includes a farm market and fields were people can pick their own strawberries, raspberries, peas and pumpkins.

“It’s opened our eyes. We’re all middle class. I never thought there was a percentage of New Jersey kids going to bed hungry. I think it’s not around us, but it is,” said Cindy Von Thun.