

Local farmers work to aid COVID-19 afflicted families

By **BRETT KANE**
STAFF WRITER

Kenzie Hansell has been farming wheat for Farmers Ending Hunger since the nonprofit's inception in 2004, but this year he'll be doubling his efforts.

The organization, which takes produce donations from farmers around the state and ships them to food banks, set a goal earlier this month to double their output in order to supply the Oregon Food Bank and smaller organizations to provide area families who are in the midst of financial strain in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak with enough food to make it through the crisis.

According to a recent press release, an average of 84,000 children in Oregon rely on meals from emergency food boxes.

"Our board of directors decided that, in this time of need, we donate our efforts," Farmers Ending Hunger Founder and President Fred Ziari of Hermiston said. "We asked our growers to give more, which has never been an issue in the past."

Although wheat and alfalfa are their primary produce, Hansell Farms also grow grass seed, lima beans, and carrots. They also lease a portion of their land to watermelon, onion, and potato farmers.

"EVERYONE NEEDS TO EAT. EVERYONE IS IMPACTED BY THIS IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER — PRODUCER OR CONSUMER."

Kenzie Hansell, who is farming wheat for Farmers Ending Hunger

"It's a goal, and that's the most important thing," said Hansell, who runs farms in Athena and Hermiston with his brothers, T.J. and Luke. "It's a situation where food insecurity is on a lot of people's minds. If us farmers can come together, we will continue to be connected and work as a state to make sure some people's insecurities can be met."

Hansell's farm in Athena is roughly 2,500 acres of owned and leased land that primarily grows wheat and alfalfa. The wheat that he donates is used for pancake mix at Pendleton's Grain Craft and Continental Mills based out of Seattle.

"This is good product," Hansell said. "Everyone needs to eat. Everyone is impacted by this in one way or another — producer or consumer."

Hansell and his brothers spend their days planting, seeding, working the ground, and harvesting their product to ready it for donation. They are part of

approximately 100 farms across the state working with Farmers Ending Hunger to aid in coronavirus relief.

The nonprofit delivers to food banks across the state, at minimum, once a month.

"This is a time where people are afraid," Ziari said. "Food shelves are empty. People are losing their jobs. The stress of food insecurity is even greater (now). We as a farming community wanted to make sure our fellow Oregonians are not hungry."

The nonprofit's efforts will likely span all year long and into the next, according to Executive Director John Burt.

"It's planting time right now, and they're planting extra," said Burt, a resident of Dallas. "It'll grow as the year goes on. The response is positive from the growers. They understand the issue, and they want to help."

Along with the portion of their harvest donated by participating farmers, addi-

tional help from food processors and public donations aid Farmers Against Hunger in their mission. Last year, Eastern Oregon farmers in Umatilla and Morrow counties donated more than 3 million pounds of produce. Their goal of doubling that number this year will help food banks struggling to keep up with need.

"Food banks are scrambling right now," Burt said. "Lots of people are going to need food, and lots of people are afraid to go out. They're going to run out of things. People are also going to be out of work. That unemployment check might not come soon enough. Farmers, we're still going. Nothing has changed."

While the day-to-day routine for participating farmers has remained relatively unchanged, Farmers Ending Hunger has faced its share of setbacks due to the COVID-19 outbreak. They were the target nonprofit for the Dancing With the Pendleton Stars event that was canceled due to concerns over the coronavirus spread, along with two fundraisers set for April.

The organization accepts public help through their Adopt-an-Acre program. Supporters can donate at www.farmersendinghunger.com, or send contributions to P.O. Box 7361, Salem, OR 97303.



Photo contributed by Kenzie Hansell

From left to right: Kenzie, Luke, and T.J. Hansell are among the over 100 farmers across the state doubling their efforts to supply Farmers Ending Hunger with enough produce to aid families afflicted by the COVID-19 outbreak.

Plaza project seeks artists for mural designs

Contest open to artists throughout the region

By **TAMMY MALGESINI**
COMMUNITY EDITOR

The Milton-Freewater Downtown Alliance is looking for Umatilla County artists to help paint their town.

Plans are underway to create the Freewater Square plaza, which is envisioned as a community gathering place, said Julie Culjak, executive director of the Milton-Freewater Downtown Alliance. It will be located in an underused lot on the corner of North Main and Fifth Avenue.

As part of the Freewater Square project, the downtown alliance is holding a mural competition and is seeking artists to submit designs. Plans include the installation of four individual wall panels.

"We've been wanting to improve our downtown district," Culjak said "People seem to be gravitating to these types of plazas."

The contest is open to all artists living in Umatilla and Union counties in Oregon,



Contributed by MFDA

Conceptual drawings of the Freewater Square plaza. The Milton-Freewater Downtown Alliance is seeking entries from artists from throughout the region for a mural contest as part of the project.

and Columbia and Walla Walla counties in Washington. Participants may be individual artists or teams of two-three members. The team leader must be at least 18 years old.

There is no entry fee to submit a design for consideration. The finalists, who will paint their winning mural, will receive a cash award of \$500. The mural installation is currently set for May 1-15. However, the time-

frame may be adjusted for weather or community gathering restrictions because of COVID-19.

Themes for the murals, which will measure 15 feet by 15 feet, should highlight Milton-Freewater's unique culture. Designs could focus on the area's agriculture, multi-cultural influences, pioneer history, arts and culture, the Blue Mountains and more. Organizers encourage artists to submit uplifting,

colorful, fun and engaging designs that are suitable for community gatherings.

Paint and other materials will be provided. Artists also are welcome to bring their own painting tools.

For more information about the mural contest, including rules and an entry form, visit www.mfdowntown.org and click on "Projects." For questions, contact Culjak at mfdadirector@gmail.com or 541-861-1208.

BRIEFS

Blue Book seeks student essays

All elementary and middle school students are encouraged to reflect on their favorite activities, offerings and memories of Oregon's state parks.

Oregon Secretary of State Bev Clarno invites kids to write down their thoughts and enter the 2021-22 Oregon Blue Book Essay Contest. The Oregon Blue Book, published biennially since 1911, is the official state almanac and fact book.

The theme of the contest is 100 years of Oregon's state parks. Next year Oregon will celebrate the 100th anniversary of the opening of its first state park. Essays should answer the question: "What is your favorite Oregon State Park and why?" Students are also encouraged to illustrate their essays with drawings.

Contest winners' entries will be included in the 2021-22 edition of the Oregon Blue Book. The winners will be invited to the Oregon Capitol for the official Blue Book release party and celebration in early 2021.

For contest information and details, visit <https://sos.oregon.gov/blue-book>. The deadline for entries is Oct. 22. Each essay must

be identified with the student's name, grade, teacher's name, school's name and address, and be mailed to: Theresa Rea, Oregon State Archives, 800 Summer St. NE, Salem OR 97310.

Schools cash in with BEO mascot debit cards

A number of school districts across the region are featured in the Bank of Eastern Oregon's exclusive mascot debit card program.

Bank customers can show their colors as they support local high school sports and activity programs. BEO's mascot debit card program began in 2013 and currently serves high school associated student body programs in Athena, Boardman, Condon, Heppner, Ione, Irrigon and Colfax, Washington.

The program generates 5 cents per transaction performed with the mascot card to that school's program and the full annual renewal fee for each card (\$10) also goes directly to the ASB. Since the inception of the school mascot debit card program, more than \$35,000 has been contributed to ASB programs.

The program, said Gary Prophet, BEO executive vice president and chief operations officer, is a great

way for fans and students to show support for their school. In addition, he said the program demonstrates the bank's commitment to helping local communities prosper through a robust activities program.

"We encourage everyone to sign up for this mascot card supporting their school, as 5 cents per transaction adds up," Prophet said.

Initially chartered as the Gilliam County Bank in 1945 in Arlington, it expanded a decade later and changed its name to Bank of Eastern Oregon. Based in Heppner, BEO has 20 branch locations and five loan production offices across the region. For more information, visit www.beobank.com or call 541-676-0201.

Library suspending curbside pickups

The Hermiston Public Library is suspending its curbside service for now.

After the library closed to the public, staff had still been offering the option to call for a book and pick it up. On Friday, the library announced in a news release it was ending the practice for now and the duration of the suspension will "be determined based on direction from state and federal

authorities."

"We look forward to being able to welcome everyone back to the library without the worry of safety," library director Mark Rose said.

Online services, such as audio books and e-books, are still available at hermistonlibrary.us. For more information, call 541-567-2882.

Me and My Prince Ball postponed until 2021

Due to uncertainties of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, the Me and My Prince Ball committee has decided to postpone the annual father-daughter dance until next year.

In its 16th year, the next Me and My Prince Ball will be held May 15, 2021, at Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center in Hermiston. Businesses and individuals who have already made contributions for the 2020 ball are being notified of the change in plans. They are being given the option to either be reimbursed or stay on as sponsors for the 2021 dance.

United Way's online sponsorship form (www.uwbluemt.org/sponsorship) will remain open for those who would like to support next year's ball.

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