

FrederickNewsPost.com

Future Farmers of America illustrates hunger close to home

Originally published January 21, 2013

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MIDDLETOWN -- Americans often are sympathetic toward hungry people, and they support causes worldwide to counter food deprivation. But hunger exists in Frederick County as well, and the Middletown High School FFA is doing something about it.

FFA members performed a skit at a banquet Tuesday to illustrate hunger locally and worldwide. Another goal of the event: Make the case for a vibrant agriculture industry responsible for feeding 9 billion people by 2050.

Attendees were divided into high, medium and low-income groups. High-income people represent 15 percent of the world's population, who can afford a nutritious daily diet. Middle income people -- 25 percent of the world's population -- live on the edge and would be thrown into poverty by one drought or a serious illness. The low income group, who were sitting on the floor in the Middletown High School cafeteria, represent 60 percent of the world's population with an annual income of \$911.

The high-income people were served a nutritious meal of pasta, salad and dessert. Middle income people got rice, beans and water, and the low-income group were served only a small amount of rice and water.

The skit represented a small slice of life that plays out each day around the globe, the students said, even in Frederick County.

For example, 5.4 percent of Frederick County residents, or approximately 12,800 people, are living below the poverty level, 7,733 children in Frederick County schools were eligible for free lunch in 2012, and 1,713 for reduced lunches. As of October, 18,970 people in Frederick County benefited from the federal government's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, also known as food stamps.

The students' presentation was a good demonstration of "life in the world as it is, not how we want it to be," said Elvin Stottlemeyer, a member of the Grossnickle Church of the Brethren in Myersville.

"We don't often think about that little bit of rice and



Photo by Travis Pratt

Crystel Toler, Frederick High School Future Farmers of America member, scoops a spoonful of rice into her hand during a world hunger awareness banquet Tuesday night at Middletown High School in Middletown.

Hunger and poverty by the numbers

- 5.4 percent of Frederick County residents, or about 12,800 people, are living below the poverty level.
- 7,733 children in Frederick County schools were eligible for free lunch in 2012, and 1,713 for reduced lunches.
- 18,970 people in Frederick County benefited from SNAP, also known as food stamps, as of October, 2012.
- One in six Marylanders were unable to afford enough food in 2011.
- 9.0 percent of Marylanders live in poverty, about 525,000 people
- In 2010 — the most recent year for which statistics have been compiled — 46.2 million people in the United States were in poverty and the nation's official poverty rate was 15.1.
- 30,000 children around the world die daily due to lack of food.
- By 2050, American farmers will have to feed more than 9 billion people.

— Sources: Maryland Food Bank; Maryland Hunger

water many people eat every day."

Solutions; A Hungry World YouTube video

The Middletown FFA is doing its part to help counter hunger locally. The organization used a \$2,500 grant from the National FFA organization to collaborate with Michael Dickson, owner of Seed of Life Nurseries, to start Bethel Farm in Frederick. The 20-acre tract grows lettuce, tomatoes, pumpkins, squash, radishes, potatoes and other vegetables.

Much of the food the venture grows is donated and delivered to needy people in Frederick. The remainder is sold to raise additional funds for the farm.

"We invite everyone to come out to the farm to help out," FFA member Skylar Weddle said, "and if you can't come out, maybe you can sponsor the garden."

A second goal of the banquet was to inform people about how important agriculture is to everyone, Middletown FFA president Whitney Wastler said.

"We need more kids to get involved with agriculture as well as major in agriculture careers to help feed the world," Wastler said. "Ag majors don't just become farmers -- they can be scientists, engineers, inventors, and much more. They don't just have to be in the field working."

Maryland FFA Association President Amber Hill commended the Middletown FFA Chapter for becoming advocates for agriculture, highlighting hunger, and for going out and creating food to help their own community.

Many children in poverty are afforded the opportunity to receive free food when attending school, Dickson said, but the question becomes, what do they eat after school and on weekends?

"Responding to that question is the driving passion behind our partnership with the Middletown FFA, the community and our future plans," Dickson said.

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