

Nothing goes to waste

BY JOHNNY WHITFIELD, MANAGING EDITOR

ZEBULON — No farmer wants to see his crop waste away on the vine.

So last year, when Jimmy Lee finished harvesting watermelons for a contract with Harris Teeter grocery stores, he began looking for another outlet for the rest of the melons in his fields.

His father-in-law, Glenn Dickinson, found just the place.

The Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina took about 100,000 lbs. of watermelons off the Lee family's farm last year. Jimmy Lee says he was glad to donate the surplus produce.

"We know there are people out there, especially now, who don't have much. A place like the food bank can help those people when they need it," Lee said.

Lee is a third-generation farmer. He spent most of his life growing tobacco, but he quit producing the golden leaf in 2004 in the wake of the tobacco buyout.

He turned to watermelons and last year, he planted 20 acres of melons. The Lee farm, in Johnston County, is a family operation. Lee works with his wife, Barb, his children, Jacquie and J.K., and Dickinson.

Near the end of last year's harvest, Jimmy Lee says it was evident there would be watermelons left in the field after the obligation to the grocery store ended.

"We talked about it and decided we wanted to find something we could do with the watermelons that would help somebody," Lee said.

The family members each looked



Jimmy Lee inspects strawberries in a field outside Zebulon.

By Johnny Whitfield

Story Tools

 [Printer Friendly](#)

 [Enlarge Font](#)

 [del.icio.us](#)

 [Email to a Friend](#)

 [Decrease Font](#)

 [Digg it](#)

More Front

- [Tropical paradise](#)
- [Small schools go under the microscope](#)
- [Zebulon teacher assistant charged](#)
- [Nothing goes to waste](#)
- [Easter egg scramble](#)

Advertisements

Most Popular

- › [Stories](#)
- › [Emailed](#)

Last 24 Hours

- › [Tropical paradise](#)
- › [Small schools go under the microscope](#)
- › [Zebulon teacher assistant charged](#)
- › [First time in a long time](#)
- › [Nothing goes to waste](#)

Last 7 Days

- › [Zebulon teacher assistant charged](#)
- › [Tropical paradise](#)
- › [Michael Blake's Garden Center opens](#)
- › [New seafood market opens in Knightdale](#)
- › [Easter egg scramble](#)

Last 24 Hours

- › [First time in a long time](#)
- › [Small schools go under the microscope](#)
- › [Parks and recreation scores: Zebulon](#)
- › [Tropical paradise](#)

for places to sell or give away the produce. When Dickinson found the Food Bank, Lee said the decision was an easy one.

"Everybody was comfortable with it. It didn't take us long to decide," Lee said.

Christy Simmons is glad the Lee family found the Food Bank.

She is the manager of public relations for the Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina.

She says farmers who donate excess produce to the agency

› [Local teacher dies in car wreck](#)

Last 7 Days

- › [Government Resources](#)
- › [Teen with gun forces lockdown](#)
- › [Parks and recreation scores: Zebulon](#)
- › [Local teacher dies in car wreck](#)
- › [Parks and recreation scores: Knightdale and Zebulon](#)

[Happy I'm Jobless \(Amazing Story\)](#)

Learn how this man earns \$5,700 per month using search engines.
[KeithsMoneyBlog.com](#)

[New Love Story Premiere](#)

My Fake Fiancé premieres April 19 at 8/7c only on ABC Family.
[www.ABCFamily.go.com](#)

[double door front](#)

Front Entry Doors at Factory Direct Prices - 5 Star Service.
[www.ManorHouseDoors.com/frontdoors](#)

Ads by Yahoo!

help improve the nutritional value of packages the food bank distributes.

"We provide our agencies with recipes they can give to their clients so they can make use of the fresh produce. We live in a world where a lot of things come out of a can," Simmons said.

Large donations, like the Lee family's, go a long way toward supplying a major portion of the 7.7 million lbs. of food the Food Bank gave away last year.

Simmons says farmers tend to be cognizant of how their donations can help others.

"It's especially important during these tough economic times. But that's how a lot of the relationships start. ... It is out of genuine concern and care for their communities," Simmons said.

Lee agrees. "We appreciate what we've got. When we sit down to a meal, we know where the food has come from and what it took to get it there. We don't ever want it to go to waste," Lee said.

The Lee farm is a technologically-modern operation.

They use drip lines to keep plenty of water on their crops and reduce waste. They grade their melons on a conveyor belt as they are pulled out of the field at harvest.

Lee says such technology allows him to grow more food with less wasted money, time and land.

"We can grow so much more on these same fields than we used to be able to," Lee said.

And, with one year under his belt working with the Food Bank, Lee expects to add to his donation next year.

The farm will triple its watermelon acreage and expand its crop offerings to include strawberries and cucumbers.

Lee also says the Food Bank will likely see an increase in the donations from his farm.

The increase will be a welcome one. Simmons said agencies served by the Food Bank in its 34-county service area are reporting increases in patronage of between 30 and 60 percent as the economy continues its decline.

While farmers can donate in bulk, everyone can get involved in supporting the Food Bank.

The News & Observer and its community newspapers, including the Eastern Wake News, are sponsoring Feed the Need this Saturday.

The morning-long event is a food collection effort with a twist.

People can donate canned goods, but they can also purchase a special edition of The News & Observer for \$1.

The newspaper company will donate 75 cents for each newspaper it sells during the event to the Food Bank.

Volunteers will man donation drop off points and newspaper sales locations at Harris Teeter grocery stores from 9 a.m.-1 p.m., and at Triangle-area Bojangles' and freestanding Starbucks from 7 a.m.-1 p.m.

Contact Managing Editor Johnny Whitfield at 269-6101 or johnny.whitfield@nando.com.

© Copyright 2009, The News & Observer Publishing Company
A subsidiary of The McClatchy Company 