



TUESDAY EDITION



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SERVING PASO ROBLES, TEMPLETON, SAN MIGUEL AND SURROUNDING AREAS SINCE 1886

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## Program aims to curb hunger



Photo by Julia Bluff

Paso Robles residents and 6-year-old twins Joely and Jett Rush work to plant vegetables at Steinbeck Vineyards and Winery Saturday. Along with their parents, Dina and Al, the twins were among volunteers that helped to turn a donated acre into the first Central Coast location for the Vineyards Growing Veggies program.

Julia Bluff  
STAFF WRITER

Steinbeck Vineyards and Winery of Paso Robles has partnered with Kathy Kelly of the Winery Music Awards and the nonprofit organization Urban Farming to combat the growing issue of hunger in San Luis Obispo County by growing a little something of

their own — produce.

The effort is part of Urban Farm's new initiative, Vineyards Growing Veggies. Urban Farming, headquartered in Detroit, Mich., is an international nonprofit organization that plants food on unused land and space to feed the hungry. According to its Web site, [www.urbanfarming.org](http://www.urbanfarming.org), the organization plants produce gardens on rooftops,

on walls, in planters in malls, and sidewalks cafes and has Green Science Gardens on school campuses in an effort to combat hunger on a large scale.

The organization, founded by Taja Sevelle in 2005, is based around a revised model of the "victory gardens" that sprung up all over the country during the time of the World War II, said

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## News



Photo by Julia Bluff

Joyce Lapinsky, left, and Cheryl Price plant a donated pallet of produce.

### FARM

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program development consultant Joyce Lapinsky.

"During World War II, 20 million people planted gardens in their homes and they grew 40-percent of American's produce," she said. "We want to bring that back."

What started out as just a handful of gardens in Detroit has developed into a network of more than 500 produce gardens in a number of states around the country and even abroad — all as part of the organization's goal to eradicate hunger within the current generation.

Locally, Steinbeck Vineyards and Winery has become a new modern day model for how to combat hunger within the community and the county. Steinbeck Vineyards and Winery, located at 5410 Union Road in Paso Robles, has donated an acre of unused land for a community produce garden, the proceeds of which will be donated to local area food service programs to be redistributed to those families and individuals at risk of going hungry.

The project was the product of a chance meeting between Kelly, founder and producer of the Winery Music Awards, and Sevelle at the event held at the River Oaks Hot Springs Spa in October of 2007.

The two began to brainstorm how they could collaborate to bring Urban Farming projects to the Central Coast. That collaboration has resulted in not only the Vineyards Growing Veggies program, but also a newly forged relationship with Cal Poly's Agricultural School. Students at the university are now germinating more than 4,000 seedlings as part of a vertical farming project dubbed the "edible wall" system. The food grown on the site will be transported to residents of downtown L.A.

The Vineyards Growing Veggies project is a perfect match for the Central Coast and its burgeoning wine industry, Lapinsky said.

"Vineyards are perfect because they

have everything that they need," she said. "They will typically have excess land, and it may not be right or good or necessary for their vineyard to grow the grapes. They have land, they have fertile land, and they have access to farming interests, equipment and people."

Cindy Newkirk and her husband, Tim, owners of the family operated winery, said they were eager to be the first vineyard in the United States to launch the Vineyard Growing Veggies project.

"My family has been in Paso for six generations — both sides, my mom and my dad — and just the idea that this community has supported us for so many years and now we can give in this kind of way is just fantastic for us," Newkirk said.

The acre of land that was donated to the project is normally unused and dense with weeds during the summer months, Newkirk said. While the plot of land is a bit too fertile for growing grapes — the vines do better when they struggle — it is perfect for planting produce, she said.

More than 20 volunteers turned up at Steinbeck Vineyards and Winery on Saturday morning to lay the groundwork for the garden. Those volunteers planted melons, corn, cucumbers, zucchinis, tomatoes, peppers, marjoram, onions, carrots and chives.

"We are struggling as a family, and we think we have it bad, but there are other people that are really, really struggling and so that we are going to help the community is just huge to me," said Paso Robles resident Dina Rush, who came out to volunteer with her husband, Al, and their 6-year-old twins, Joely and Jett. "It is just nice to see so many people come together, and the kids — it is just priceless the lessons that they are learning; teaching them about giving and what is really important."

The community has literally rushed to be of aid to the project and its mission of supplementing food pantries throughout the region with fresh produce, Newkirk said. Farm Supply Company of Paso Robles donated over \$1,000 worth of

goods and services to the project, including the irrigation system design plans, hardware and installation. Greenheart Farms donated more than 500 seedlings to the effort. Community Recycling contributed 25 tons of compost, which was spread over the acre plot by volunteers from Premier Ag.

When the fledgling garden is fully grown, it will literally produce several thousand pounds of fruits and vegetables for needy families and individuals around the county. In a time of rising food prices and economic strain, those fruits and vegetables are desperately needed to supplement the shelves of food pantries and local food service programs.

Paso Robles resident Amy White, director of the Paso Robles chapter of Backyard Harvest, is well-aware of how much local food pantries are in need of nutrient-dense, fresh fruits and veggies. Backyard Harvest is a grassroots organization that coordinates garden growers into a network of donors for organizations that distribute food. Backyard Harvest volunteers will be lending a hand to ensure the garden's success.

"I was really excited about this," White said. "This is a great way to get a quantity of fresh produce and it such a great community building event, to do something like this."

The hope is that Steinbeck Vineyards and Wineries will be the first to plant the seedlings of a movement that will spread to other Paso Robles area wineries. With its strong tradition of farming and pioneering spirit, Newkirk said that Paso Robles is the perfect place for that movement to take hold and grow.

The program is in need of volunteers to help in the up keep of the garden, especially in the picking season. Lapinsky said she is appealing to all faith-based organizations, youth clubs, corporations and businesses to get involved in the fight against hunger in their community.

For more information or to volunteer, contact Newkirk at 674-1909.