

Hilltown Churches Food Pantry Garden (FPG) Report 2025 Season

To: David Jones, Annie Cheatham, Pat Thayer

From: Charlotte and Sam Perkins, Bug Hill Farm

Date: December 2, 2025

Overview

2025 marked the third full season of production at the Food Pantry Garden. We planted all 14 beds in the main garden area, as well as the equivalent of 2 beds in one of the farm greenhouses and delivered approximately 2500 pounds of vegetables between mid-June and late October.

Cultivation and Production

We have made significant progress in improving the quality of the soil - through mineral amendments, double-digging, compost, cover cropping and drenches that promote biologic activity. Although the garden is not certified organic, all materials and activities are in accordance with organic practices and protocols. The garden has reached a point where it requires much less early season work than it did initially: Beds have been sufficiently double-dug/turned over to break up heavy clay and mix in compost, and we are focusing more attention on end-of-season bed preparation - using cover crops, weed suppression fabric and mulch (hay, leaves and plant debris) to significantly reduce weeds and enable spring planting with minimal tilling. Our goal is transition as much as possible to no-till practices and to use cover crops such as Dutch white clover as living mulches during growing season.

Item Delivered	Total Lbs
Beans	77
Beets	23
Winter Squash	280
Cabbage	622
Chard	219
Collards	18
Cucumbers	264
Eggplants	8
Lettuce	675
Peppers	68
Tomatoes	260
Raspberries	26
Flowers	10
Grand Total	2550

We reduced the number of crops in recognition that the Food Pantry can fairly easily obtain and store large quantities of root vegetables (potatoes, onions, and carrots) and that we can add the most value by maximizing the cultivation of green vegetables. (Small quantities of some vegetables on the list were surplus from our own garden - i.e. not grown for the food pantry.) Most crops did well this year other than a late-planted bed of Armenian melons (aka cucumbers) that produced only a handful of tasteless cukes. We lost a dozen heads of lettuce to predation by a suspected porcupine but succeeded in preventing further damage by installing a porcupine deterrent device (PDD, pictured below) on the gate, which was determined to be the weak link in the perimeter security system. (Believe it or not, early morning the day after

installation Sam walked down to the garden and witnessed a giant porcupine staring at the PDD, its body clearly emanating intense frustration at being denied its anticipated breakfast.)

Volunteers and Student Engagement

As in 2024, we had some encouraging responses at the start of the season but did not have much volunteer help other than for harvesting. In spite of our good intentions, it proved difficult to set regular work days/times which might have facilitated volunteers being able to fit the Pantry Garden into their schedules. With the reduced need for labor at the start of the season, going forward we are planning to solicit volunteer help only for harvesting on Monday afternoons or Tuesday mornings.

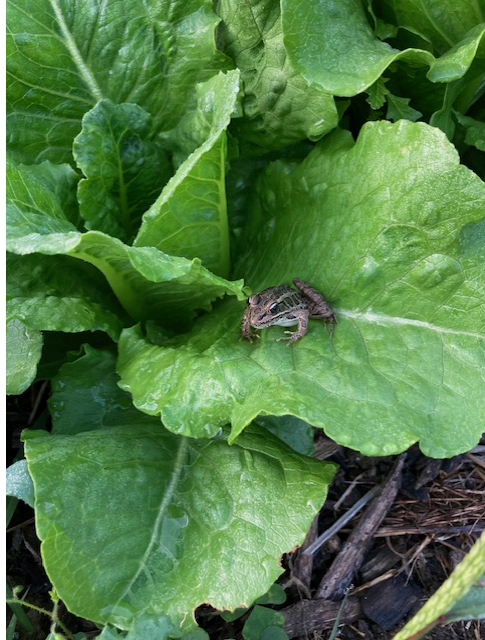
Last winter, Sam reached out to several teachers at the Mohawk Trail Regional High School in an attempt to develop a student project focused on sustainable agriculture - or, more broadly, on sustainability and the role that agriculture can play in mitigating climate change. The idea was for a couple of students to spend 2-3 hours a week at the farm from mid-April to mid-June learning about such topics as soil health, carbon sequestration, role of cover cropping etc. along with some hands-on work in the garden. He did not get a response but is going to try again this year.

Looking Forward to 2026

The garden is in great shape for next season - all beds tucked in for the winter. We planted close to 200 asparagus crowns last spring and hope to start off 2026 with some fresh asparagus in late May. Also in 2026 we are going to start a practice of leaving $\frac{1}{4}$ of the beds (specifically three of twelve, with two beds now dedicated to asparagus) fallow - planted only with a cover crop cocktail. Accordingly we will reduce our projected yield to 2000 lbs. This practice will ensure the long-term enhancement of the soil and will adjust the work load to better fit our labor capacity. We have funds in the FPG account to take care of seeds, seed starting supplies, fertilizer and other needs for at least the next several years. .



Porcupine Deterrent Device



Tiny Happy Frog (one of many)



Cabbages and Lettuce Seedlings



Butternut Squash Overtaking Asparagus