

# UCOM COMMUNICATOR

Fall 2021



James helps pack fruits and veggies for the Farm Stand on the Road

# Meet Some of Your Partners in Ministry



*Greg in the fields at Blackbird Farms*

## **Blackbird Farms**

The first farmer Greg ever met was his grandfather. He and Greg's grandmother lived on a seventy-acre

farm in northeastern Ohio. Growing up, he spent a great deal of time there, and even now that farm remains vivid in his mind's eye. His grandfather's name was Merle, which means "blackbird," so, in a way, the farm is named after him.

"Our calling is to care for green, growing things in a manner that generates health in the soil, in the environment, in human bodies.... We strive to do this work with a sense of hospitality, delight, and gratitude," Greg says.

Blackbird is one of the local farms from which UCOM purchases high quality food for the Farm Stand. Your donations support sustainable local family farming while providing affordable access to the best in fresh seasonal food for your neighbors.

## **New City Farm**

"New City Farm grows delicious food, but its purpose is more than just feeding people. For almost a decade, New City Neighbors (the Farm's parent organization) has been working hard in the Northeast side of Grand Rapids to positively impact our community. The farm's main objective is to provide job and life skills to high school youth in our neighborhood. Each summer we employ and train 10-12 high school students. Student employees learn all aspects of the hard work of organic vegetable growing. Student employees also participate in curriculum around job skills, food justice, anti-racism and food & faith.

"We grow all our food 100% naturally! This means we grow our produce in nutrient dense compost enriched soil, supplemented with certified organic fertilizers. Our produce feeds 250 families through our CSA program, and we are one of the only farms in West Michigan that accepts EBT payment for our farm shares, and with Double Up Food Bucks, EBT customers get 50% off our retail price and pay weekly. In addition, in partnership with Access of West Michigan, 25% of our produce goes to partner pantries like NECM, UCOM, Green Apple Pantry, Baxter Community Center and the Other Way."



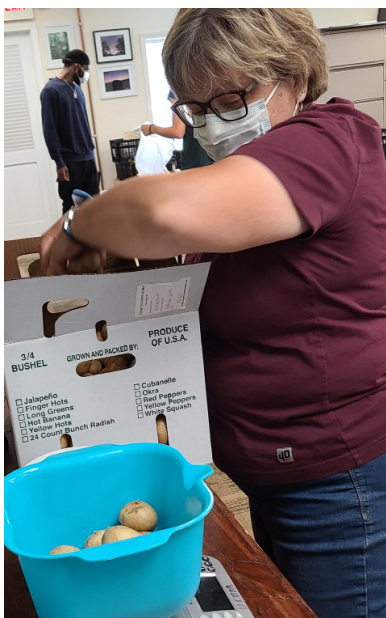
*New City Neighbors Executive Director Ricardo at the farm*

# Bringing abundance to your Neighbors

In the past year and a half COVID-19 has forced UCOM to make many programmatic changes. Some programs have been put on hold, some have grown or been added, and almost all have been modified. One program that has changed for the better is the Farm Stand on the Road.

Prior to the pandemic, Farm Stand on the Road was a chance for UCOM to bring fresh and local produce to our neighbors at two nearby apartment complexes that struggle with transportation. Once a month during the summer growing season the week's farm stand produce would be packed into a vehicle and taken to our partners for an hour or two of onsite shopping.

When COVID-19 forced us to reexamine the safety of being with larger groups in enclosed spaces, UCOM did what UCOM does best and adapted to fit the need. Instead of bringing *ALL* of the produce to our neighbors, we gave them a list ahead of time and allowed them to order and get what they needed while also limiting in person contact.



Nancy weighs out potatoes to go

This brought all sorts of new challenges. Who would organize the produce? When would it be packed? Who exactly was going to do that packing? Thankfully UCOM was up to

the task and our volunteers were ready and willing to meet the need.



Katie packs peaches for a Farm Stand on the Road order

On a recent Farm Stand on the Road packing day UCOM's tables overflowed with fruits and vegetables like tomatoes, melons, potatoes, broccoli, peaches, lettuce and so much more. The volunteers were especially moved by the bounty they packed and Katie's stories of the gratefulness and excitement of our neighbors upon receiving their orders.

This work is only possible because of the support you and others like you give to our neighbors. You make the Farm Stand on the Road a reality just like you make all of UCOM's programs a reality. Whether you're a donor, a volunteer, a vocal cheerleader, or all of the above, UCOM exists because of you. In sharing your abundance with UCOM, you are sharing with your neighbors and for that we are tremendously grateful.





**HOSTED BY  
CATHERINE  
BEHRENDT  
AND  
GABRIELLA  
DE LA VEGA**

MUSIC, DANCE,  
NEIGHBOR TESTIMONIALS  
AND MORE

# **NEIGHBORS 4 NEIGHBORS**

A VIRTUAL EVENT

**OCT 28 @ 7PM**

**REGISTER ONLINE AT  
[WWW.UCOMGR.ORG](http://WWW.UCOMGR.ORG)**

# YOU CAN HELP!

1. Join our recurring donors in supporting UCOM each month!
2. Attend UCOM's Fall Virtual Fundraiser, Neighbors4Neighbors!
3. Donate warm clothes for winter.
4. Share this newsletter with a friend!
- 5.

**LOVE  
YOUR  
NEIGHBOR.  
GET  
VACCINATED.**



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