

Bucks farm donates 100% of high-quality harvest to people in poverty. Here's how they do it.

Laure Biron, the CEO of Broad Street Ministry in South Philadelphia, which serves people experiencing homelessness, called Carversville “spectacular, clean, the Disneyland of farms.”



Tony D'Orazio, the son of a South Philadelphia carpenter, holds a Tropea onion that he just pulled out of the ground at Carversville Farm Foundation in Bucks County. The nonprofit farm donates 100% of its food to organizations that feed those in poverty in Philadelphia, Camden, and ... [Read more](#)
Allie Ippolito / Staff Photographer

by Alfred Lubrano

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Last winter, chef Altenor Vaval met with people living in poverty to ask a question no one ever had proposed to them before: *What can I cook for you?*

Vaval, who works at [Face to Face](#), a nonprofit that offers services to low-income individuals in Germantown, then met with growers from Carversville Farm Foundation in Mechanicsville, Bucks County.

Come spring, the farmers planted the foods that the Germantown people craved.

And that produce was picked and driven just a few days before to Vaval, who created a meal including just-picked garlic, broccoli, red onions, shiitake mushrooms — not to mention free-range chicken — custom-grown, free of charge, for the very people seated in the Face to Face dining room.



The Philadelphia Inquirer



Chef Altenor Vaval prepares lunch at Face to Face, a nonprofit serving people living in poverty in Germantown. He cooks made-from-scratch meals with top-end produce from the Carversville Farm Foundation, which donates all food. [... Read more](#)
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“Oh, this food is nutritious and good,” said Joe Walker, 62, who said he has been homeless, depressed, plagued by cancer, and unable to work for years. “This is exceptional.”



Volunteer Jodi Bornstein serves lunch - BBQ chicken with a chimichurri marinade and broccoli with roasted red onions - to Joseph White (from left), Aaron "AC" Chambers, and Joe Walker at Face to Face, a nonprofit that helps people in need in Germantown. They serve made-from-s ... [Read more](#)
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While many farms donate portions of their harvests to people in poverty, Carversville — created by Tony D’Orazio, a former Temple University “radical” and son of a South Philadelphia carpenter — gives away 100% of what it grows and raises to nonprofits in Philadelphia, Camden, and Bucks County. It’s believed to be the only large farm in the region that exists solely to produce food for those in need.

“Normally, the poor get secondhand stuff that supermarkets don’t want,” said Vaval, a Haiti-born attorney who pursued a desire to help others by running kitchens in the United States. But, he added, Carversville farm-to-table produce and meats are Whole Foods-quality or better, worthy of being plated at fine-dining restaurants.

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“It’s the best beef I’ve ever had,” said cookbook author Cal Peternell, who, for more than 20 years, was the chef at [Chez Panisse](#), the legendary Berkeley, Calif., restaurant credited with creating the farm-to-table movement. He’s in the process of starting a Frenchtown Italian-Mediterranean eatery in September that uses local produce — but nothing from Carversville, which won’t supply restaurants.

“The Carversville eggs are extra-special, from free-range chickens, with the yolks a stunning orange color. The garlic is super-fresh, and they have a velvety parsley with flavor that really pops. They’re growing food at a level people would pay a premium price for.”



Rebecca Kutys, a volunteer at Carversville Farm Foundation, washes free-range eggs before packing them for delivery. She uses a light to detect cracks. Chefs rave about the eggs, declaring them "spectacular."

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Vaval is delighted he can offer it to nonpaying customers of little means. And, now in July, he noted, it's peak season on the farm, with produce at its freshest and most flavorful. This time of year, much of the food is eaten just two days after it's pulled from the ground.

"This situation is not just rare, it's impossible," Vaval said, praising the Carversville system. "By that I mean, I've never seen it before.

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"This food dignifies every human soul who eats it."

Spending 'disposable income'

D'Orazio, 62, was told at an early age by his father that he needed an advanced degree because the young man with soft hands was awful at woodworking.

He went to Temple, where "there wasn't a political or social protest I didn't attend," he said.

D’Orazio spent much of his time agitating on behalf of oppressed people in Central America. After scotching the idea of becoming a history professor, D’Orazio stopped demonstrating and earned a master’s degree in library and information sciences at Drexel University.

He worked as a corporate librarian in New York, where he grew interested in business. D’Orazio then spent years building Vertical Screen Inc. in Warminster, which does background checks. He also runs a fingerprinting outfit, and other related entities.

Having accumulated wealth, D’Orazio, who has two grown children with his wife, Amy, 61, found himself in possession of “disposable income” that, he said, needed to be put to socially beneficial use.

When he was younger, D’Orazio had spent time working in his uncle’s Tullytown garden, which awakened a love of nature. By 2014, he’d purchased his 300-year-old, 250-acre farm in Bucks County.

The stage was set to find a way to contribute.

“We wanted to do more than write checks,” said D’Orazio, who lives in New Hope and commutes to the farm. “We decided one of the largest needs out there is hunger, and we wanted to do our part along avenues that were a bit different.”

Husband and wife started the farm foundation, each becoming co-director. The idea, both simple and unheard-of, was to supply high-end food to nonprofits who feed people in need.

“And,” D’Orazio added, “we’d send no invoices.”

Under the direction of head farm manager Steve Tomlinson, the farm won’t grow big watermelons because most Philadelphia food pantries are too small to handle them. And Carversville eschews a corn

crop because people experiencing homelessness don't often see dentists, and can't easily eat corn on the cob. Depending on cultural preference, he said, "I'll grow bok choy, ginger, turmeric, Thai peppers, or simple carrots."

The farm operation, with grass-fed cattle, free-range poultry, and numerous outbuildings with ultramodern equipment, is considered state-of-the-art.

"This is no shoddy nonprofit," said Jeremy Montgomery, president and CEO of Philly House in North Philadelphia, the 145-year-old homeless mission formerly called the Sunday Breakfast Mission. "They have 2,500 egg-laying hens that supply us for 150 breakfasts a day," he added.

Laure Biron, the CEO of Broad Street Ministry in South Philadelphia, which serves people experiencing homelessness, called Carversville "spectacular, clean, the Disneyland of farms."

And, she added, "everything that's planted or raised is bespoke for us and other nonprofits. Last year we got [the equivalent of] \$275,000 in food from them."

With assets of around \$5 million, Carversville donates as much as \$2 million in food annually to 11 nonprofits, according to foundation figures. In addition, it distributes custom-grown seedlings to five urban farms in the area.

The foundation also supports culinary job-training programs at Philabundance, the hunger-relief nonprofit, and at Cathedral Kitchen, which serves meals and delivers social services in Camden.

"They are our guardian angels," said senior development director Noreen Flewelling .

Chef Ian Knauer, who has been a recipe developer for the Food Network and Gourmet and Bon Appétit magazines, as well as host of the PBS television show *The Farm*, was hired by Carversville to cook a dinner for farmers and staff. “I had never heard of place like this,” said Knauer, who’s opening a cooking school on a New Hope farm. “They’re very dedicated to their vision. I asked if I could buy from them and they said no — and I’m their friend.”

D’Orazio won’t bend the rules. The old radical inside him doesn’t allow it.

“People who are hurting deserve to eat what the top 1% of this country eats,” he said. “It’s about dignity, health, and respect.

“Food is a human right.”

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