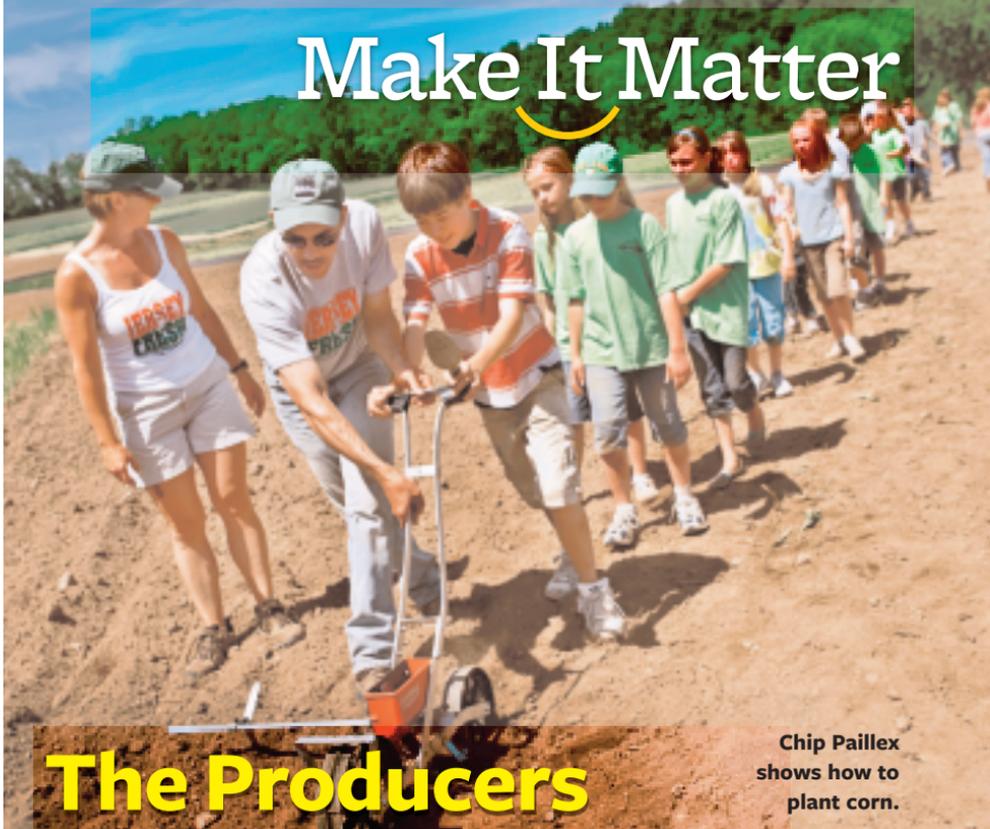


Make It Matter



The Producers

Chip Paillex shows how to plant corn.

Chip Paillex's garden yielded bumper crops—and a way for hundreds of people to give back

BY MARTHA FAY

A mortgage banker, Chip Paillex had never planted so much as a window box until he moved to rural Pittstown, New Jersey, seven years ago. Surrounded by working farms, he quickly caught the grow-it-yourself bug and leased a 30-by-30-foot plot. One weekend, he planted tomatoes, zucchini, cucumbers, and eggplant—

enough to feed his family of four for the summer, or so he thought.

He ended up with so much produce, he couldn't give it away. But he found a local food pantry, and by the time he delivered his last harvest, he had donated 120 pounds of fresh vegetables.

The following year, with a handful of volunteers from his church, some

Are You Making It Matter?

Inspired by Chip Paillex's story, the Reader's Digest Foundation will award \$100,000 to Feeding America. Each year, the charity serves more than 25 million low-income people through a wide network of food banks.



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donated land, and a memorable name—America's Grow-a-Row—Paillex planted, tended, and harvested 1,500 pounds of fresh vegetables, all of which he donated to area food banks. Soon Paillex had a hundred volunteers and needed more acreage. He contacted Meredith and Jeremy Compton, who farm Peaceful Valley Orchards in Pittstown. Could he work their land?

"I guess we were feeling benevolent," says Meredith. Not only do the Comptons welcome Grow-a-Row volunteers—close to 1,000 this year—they also plow and fertilize the land and donate seeds, seedlings, and equipment for spring planting.

What began with the loan of a few empty fields has blossomed into a nonprofit community farm—supported by the Comptons, Paillex's fellow church members, and volunteers—that runs from spring planting through late October. This year, Grow-a-Row will deliver an estimated 250,000 pounds

of fresh produce to food banks.

Their secret for getting all of this done? Family power. "Each week, a couple of families 'own' the garden," says Paillex. "They weed, water, pick, prune, and deliver, then hand it off on Sunday night to the next group of families."

Paillex also welcomes local schoolkids. On a cloudless Friday morning in May, 40 third and fifth graders from nearby Crossroads Christian Academy trooped on a freshly plowed field, each armed with a spade. Squatting or kneeling in teams of two, they loosened the dirt, then carefully positioned pint-size pepper plants so their sneaker-clad classmates could tamp them down. Nobody whined. Nobody tossed dirt. Several rows later, they eagerly lined up to seed corn under a blazing midmorning sun. It's a far cry from taking canned peaches to school for a food drive. "We're growing it," one fifth grader said proudly.

"The program exposes kids to the idea that there are people in need," says Paillex, "and it plants the seed for giving back. When these kids become tomorrow's leaders, they'll be much more likely to encourage their coworkers or employees to get involved in something like this."

"Chip makes people want to help," says Colleen Duerr, a mother of two who has signed on as an unpaid Grow-a-Row staffer. "And families love this. Chip has given us a way to raise our kids with a giving heart." ■