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## Helping Hands

There is a farm in Franklin Township where I have many memories of joy, work, and fun. When I first went to the farm on Pittstown Road, I was very young, and my mom said I would pet and feed the cow, goats, and sheep they had. We also would buy fruits and vegetables at the farm stand. At some point, they got rid of the animals and the farm stand. I was, of course, sad and missed going to see all the familiar faces of my furry friends. Then I found out it was for a good reason and I knew that was the moment everything changed. America's Grow-A-Row was now the name of our simple little farm we loved to visit! What we learned was that they were going to grow food to share with people who needed it. They were asking for volunteers to pick food and they would send it off to people in need.

My family and I volunteered in the early years and continue to this day. We've picked everything from zucchini to corn to peppers, peaches, and apples. We even picked apples from the ground that nobody wants. We have learned this is called gleaning and it is a very important part of not wasting food. Last fall, it made me so happy that we, along with other volunteers, picked up over 20,000 servings of apples that would have otherwise gone to waste. It was so great to save all those apples!

One of the things I really love about Grow-A-Row is how they explain to the volunteers before harvesting all about food insecurity, food deserts, and how they can affect a person's everyday life. Food insecurity is a lack of healthy food because the person may not have enough money or access to fresh food. Many of these food deserts are in cities. Grow-A-Row has volunteers that drive the food to cities and set up free markets for people to shop. I think that this has really helped and impacted people. I have heard that many have tried these fresh fruits and vegetables for the very first time and are amazed at how good they taste. I haven't had the experience of delivering the produce to the markets yet, but I hope to do that with my family someday. I would love to see how this fresh food that volunteers have picked helps people eat better and feel better.

It feels great when I see so many people come together for an important cause right in our little community of Franklin Township. I always enjoy volunteering and I look forward to more years of helping and growing stronger in my community. I am very proud to be a part of this incredible group who are helping to make people happier and healthier...one apple at a time.