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Arkansas Department of Agriculture joins partnership to support Full Circle FarmCorps Members

LITTLE ROCK, AR – The Arkansas Department of Agriculture recently partnered with the St. Joseph Center of Arkansas to grow the center’s national service program, Full Circle FarmCorps. Full Circle FarmCorps is a state AmeriCorps program that promotes food security and strengthens communities through farming, teaching, and outreach. This summer 20 AmeriCorps members will serve 675 hours each at school and community gardens throughout Pulaski County.

“It was a natural fit for the Arkansas Department of Agriculture to partner with the St. Joseph Center of Arkansas,” said Arkansas Secretary of Agriculture Wes Ward. “Farm to school education is a triple win for our state: our children learn about agriculture and locally grown food, our Arkansas farmers are supported, and our local economy thrives.”

Farm to school programs include some combination of school gardening, local food procurement, and traditional or garden-based education about food, nutrition, agriculture, and/or natural resources. Farm to school improves public health, strengthens the local economy and local communities, improves food access and food abundance for all, and protects the environment.

“St. Joseph Center is excited to see so many pieces of history come full circle for this former orphanage, school, and farm,” said Sandy DeCoursey, Executive Director of St. Joseph Center. “Full Circle FarmCorps carries on this historic mission of planting hope, sowing knowledge, and growing lives in the communities they serve.”

“Since January, Full Circle FarmCorps has harvested nearly 13,000 pounds of produce,” said A.B. Stewart, Program Director of St. Joseph Center. “These summer members have signed on at a critical time to further increase our community response in tackling hunger.”

Joining eight others who began their service term earlier, the 20 new AmeriCorps members will spend 50% of their time at a school and 50% of their time at a community space where they will support gardens, teach nutrition, and engage volunteers.

The AmeriCorps members will be serving at the following sites: Gibbs Magnet International School, Immaculate Conception, Lake Nixon Preschool, Pulaski Heights Elementary, Forest Park Elementary, Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance, Dunbar Community Garden, Ferncliff Camp and Conference Center, Heifer International Urban Farm, North Little Rock Fit 2 Live, Arkansas Children’s Hospital Centennial Garden, Woodruff Community Garden, Arkansas Interfaith Power & Light, and the St. Joseph Center of Arkansas.

At these sites, members will serve on teams to grow gardens, leverage volunteers, educate children through Growing My Plate, a curriculum created by Apple Seeds, the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance, and UAMS.

The Arkansas Department of Agriculture is dedicated to the development and implementation of policies and programs for Arkansas agriculture and forestry to keep its farmers and ranchers competitive in national and international markets while ensuring safe food, fiber, and forest products for the citizens of the state and nation. Visit agriculture.arkansas.gov.

The St. Joseph Center of Arkansas is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit based out of a historic 56,000-square-foot building and resting on 63 acres. Its mission is to preserve and restore the historic property through sustainable farming, food production, education, agri-tourism, and community development. To get involved, visit stjosephcenter.org.

Celebrating its 25th anniversary, AmeriCorps is a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service, the federal agency for volunteering, service, and civic engagement. The Arkansas Service Commission, known as EngageAR, manages state AmeriCorps subgrants, and seeks to empower communities through service. For more information, visit NationalService.gov.