

By John McKenna

LITCHFIELD – Another large donation of whole milk from Guida’s Dairy was distributed out of the Litchfield Community Center on Monday, bound for 24 food pantries across Litchfield County that are facing a high demand because of the economic toll the COVID-19 pandemic is taking.

The second distribution effort involving milk donated by Guida’s was organized by Bill Davenport of Litchfield, the coordinator of the Litchfield 4-H program and an educator at the UConn Extension in Torrington.

Youngsters in the 4-H program, their parents and other volunteers transported the milk to the food pantries after unloading it in the community center parking lot. The 1,900 half-gallons arrived in a truck donated by Tony and Sons Seafood of Oakville.

In all, the New Britain-based Guida’s donated 7,200 half-gallons of milk that in addition to Litchfield County were distributed by 4-H families from across the state in Hartford, Tolland, Windham, New London and Fairfield counties.

The donation that arrived in Litchfield came so late in the day that 15 boxes of milk containers had to be stored last night in the cooler at Bunnell Farm. Rick Bunnell, the farm’s owner, made the cooler available upon the request of his neighbor, Andrea Markavich, whose daughter, Lily, 10 is in the 4-H program.

Milk stored at the farm will be distributed to food pantries today.

Guida’s is stuck with a glut of milk because the schools, restaurants and institutions making up 30 percent of its market are closed. As a result, the price paid to dairy farmers for their milk has dropped from \$19 per hundred pounds to \$13, resulting in economic distress for farmers.

Davenport credited Lisa Hageman, director of the Community Soup Kitchen in Torrington, Berta Andrulis Mette, executive director of the community center, and Kathy Minck, site director for Food Rescue U.S. of Northwest Connecticut for their assistance in making Monday’s distribution possible. Bunnell Farm, he added, was generous in donating its cooler.

The distribution also marked the establishment of the “Litchfield County Dairy Fund,” which is accepting donations that will help support weekly delivery of milk to families in need in Litchfield. The community center is operating a food pantry during the COVID outbreak. “

“Our goal is to raise money through this fund in order to purchase fresh whole milk directly from Guida’s at the wholesale price so that the dairy farmers are able to be paid the same amount they receive when their milk is sold to a store, which will help our local farms stay in business during this pandemic,” Davenport said.

Food pantries, Davenport said, are “begging” for milk. It is one of the hardest commodities, he said, for food pantries to secure, store and distribute.

“The Litchfield County 4-H members, leaders and volunteers will continue to help distribute the milk to the food pantries across Litchfield County for as long as we have the funds to purchase the milk in the future,” Davenport said.

For more information on the Litchfield County Dairy Fund, go to thecommunitycenter.org.

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