

NAPERVILLE SUN

\$360k grant to Naperville's Conservation Foundation to bolster its farm-to-pantry program



Loaves & Fishes Community Services picks up produce grown through the Conservation Foundation's farm-to-pantry program for the Compass Church Food Pantry in Bolingbrook. (The Conservation Foundation)

UPDATED: February 28, 2025 at 4:58 PM CST

A \$360,000 grant to the Conservation Foundation will allow the Naperville nonprofit to invest in new equipment and grow more for produce for local food pantries.

Thanks to the funding awarded by Endeavor Health, the nonprofit will make much-needed upgrades at McDonald Farm off Knoch Knolls Road, where its farm-to-pantry program is based, said Jennifer Hammer, the foundation's vice president of land and watershed programs.

"Having the right equipment for the work that we do is going to make growing the food easier," Hammer said.

The money was awarded through Endeavor's Community Investment Fund (CIF). Founded in 2022, CIF distributes grant dollars to community organizations and initiatives with the intent of addressing social drivers of health and removing barriers to care, according to a news release announcing the 2025 grant recipients.



This year, Endeavor awarded \$8.8 million in CIF dollars to 44 organizations and partnerships across the Chicago area. In addition to the Conservation Foundation, other Naperville-area awardees included 360 Youth Services, Alive Center, Haymarket Center, Indian Prairie School District 204, KidsMatter, Loaves & Fishes, NAMI DuPage and Naperville Education Foundation.

The health system's goal in conceiving CIF three years ago was for it "to be a true catalyst for change by putting our talent, our unique capabilities and our resources to work for the benefit of our communities, especially those who are underserved and economically disadvantaged," Jeff Zakem, Endeavor's system program director of community impact and equity, said in an emailed statement.



Since 2002, McDonald Farm has been producing organic vegetables, though the operation has evolved over the years.

Farm property, which totals some 60 acres, was donated to the Conservation Foundation in 1992. The organization officially made the site its home in 1997.

At that point, it was contracting out the land to farmers, Hammer said. But in the early 2000s, longtime foundation member Steve Tiwald proposed starting a community-supported agriculture program out of the farm. Foundation officials agreed, and the Green Earth Institute was born.

For 16 years, the institute operated as a separate 501(c)3 charitable organization at the McDonald Farm. It was essentially a shareholder program, where people would buy “shares” of McDonald farmland in exchange for a season of crops. By 2018, though, Tiwald took a step back from the institute and the foundation absorbed the venture into its own programming.

It rebranded the initiative as the Green Earth Harvest organic vegetable farming program. More than a name change, the organization also expanded the venture to supply fresh organic produce to the community through both a “farmshare subscription” service and partnerships with area food pantries.



The Conservation Foundation was founded in 1972. The Naperville-based organization officially made McDonald Farm off Knoch Knolls Road its home in 1997. (The Conservation Foundation)

With subscriptions, patrons sign up to receive a weekly — or biweekly — batch of vegetables. Subscriptions are offered on a seasonal basis. There are three to choose from: a four-week spring season, a 20-week main season and a four-week fall season. The foundation serves about 800 families through subscriptions, according to Hammer.

As for its farm-to-pantry initiative, the organization for the past two years has supplied produce to six different food pantries, including one in Will County and five in DuPage. Annually, they provide about 20,000 pounds of produce to pantries, Hammer said.

With the funding from Endeavor, the Conservation Foundation hopes to address food insecurity to an even greater extent. The idea is that with the new, modern equipment, farming will be streamlined, increasing crop yields and lowering production costs. That, in turn, will allow the foundation to do more with available resources, Hammer said.

Currently, they rely on grant money to finance the farm-to-pantry program, which can be a challenge to secure, she said.



The Conservation Foundation in Naperville has been awarded a \$360,000 grant from Endeavor Health to help fund infrastructure, equipment and capacity improvements that will support future growth of the organization's farm-to-pantry program. (The Conservation Foundation)

Equipment purchased through Endeavor's award will make pantry dollars "go farther in the future," Hammer said, noting that some existing equipment is "as old as the program (itself)."

"The more efficient we can be with how we get things done," she said, "the more we're going to be able to get done with the same number of people. ... That's going to help us, again, make more use of the funds that we have available for the farm-to-pantry program."

Equipment the foundation plans to purchase includes a new tractor and rotavator, a cultivating tractor for mechanized weeding, a compost/mulch spreader, a utility vehicle to help move crops around the farm, and new tools for washing and storing harvested vegetables.

The organization has been unable to replace aging equipment because in recent years it has prioritized investing in its staff “getting a better, more livable rate of pay,” Hammer said. Doing so, however, “hasn’t left us a whole lot of room to invest in equipment,” she said.



Jennifer Hammer, vice president of land and watershed programs for the Conservation Foundation, displays a poster for the Naperville-based nonprofit's Green Earth Harvest organic vegetable farming program. (Tess Kenny/Naperville Sun)

Alongside new equipment, the foundation will also be using a portion of the Endeavor funding to devise a fundraising and marketing plan to help identify more reliable funding streams in years to come, Hammer said. One of the options the organization is considering is an endowment fund for its farm-to-pantry program.

“I think that’s going to be the only sustainable way to be able to grow for the pantries where we’re not scrambling every year to know that we have the

Addressing food insecurity is important, Zakem said, speaking to Endeavor's interest in partnering with the organization.

"There is not enough food to go around to help those who need it," Zakem said. "The Conservation Foundation is helping address this food supply need, growing fresh, healthy (organic) food right here in our community."

tkenny@chicagotribune.com

Originally Published: February 28, 2025 at 2:14 PM CST

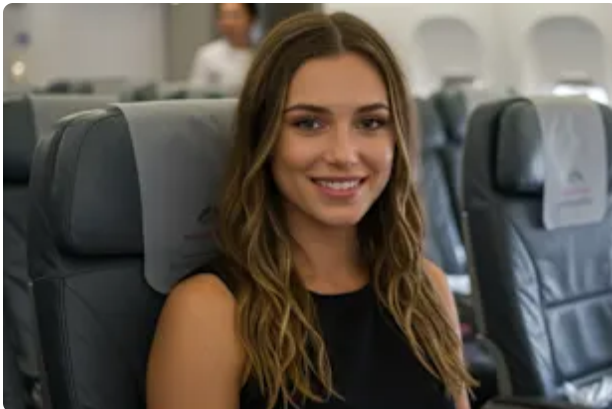
Around the Web

REVCONTENT



Here's The Estimated Cost of a 1-day Walk-in Shower Upgrade

HomeBuddy



Flight Attendant Reveals How to Fly Business Class for The Price of Economy



Cardiologists: 1/2 Cup Before Bed Burns Belly Fat Like Crazy! Try This Recipe!

Health Headlines



Walmart Shoppers Are Obsessed With These Budget Hearing Aids

Oricle Hearing



A Pair of Reading Glasses That Can Look Far and Near. Smart Zoom



Ringed Ears? Doctor: When Tinnitus Won't Stop, Do This (It Worked So Well)

NeuroQuiet



This Hummingbird Feeder is Taking Illinois by Storm

Dotmall

Experts Reveal: What Happens When You Take Olive Oil Before Bed is

Taylor Swift's Mansion Shocks The Whole World, The Proof in Pics

One Daily

Neuropathy is Not From Low Vitamin B (Meet The Real Enemy)

NeuropathyGuide

What Causes Tardive Dyskinesia? The Secret That Could Change Lives Forever!

**Gynecologists Are Recommending
This Anti-sag, Comfortable, Seamless
Bra!**

Ribili

**Take A Look At Willie Nelson's
Disgusting Home**

Health Trition

**Exclusive Eagle Whiskey - Limited
Bottles Available!**

**Print Directly Onto Cookies,
Macarons, Candy, Marshmallows,
Doughnuts And More**

Primera Technology, Inc.

**Caitlin Clark Steps Out With Her New
Partner And Stuns Fans**

Reporter Center

**Discover The Guitar Robot Desk Lamp
Everyone's Talking About!**

What to Know About Taltz for Psoriatic Arthritis

GoodRx

2025's Most Realistic Bunny Toy

Yifare

A Professional Engineer Designed This Nail Clipper for Seniors All Over

Spray WD-40 Up Your Faucets, Here's Why

WG Life Hacks

You'll Be Like Walking on a Cloud in These Shoes

Libiyi

Puppy Refuses to Leave Railway Police Bursts Into Tears When They Discover Why

Plastic Surgeon Tells: If You Have Wrinkles, Do This Immediately (It's Genius!)

Beverly Hills MD

Dermatologist: Throw Away Your Pillowcase - Here's Why

Blissy

How To: Move Your IRA/401k Out of Stocks - Tax Free

Fighting Diabetes? This Discovery Leaves Doctors Speechless!

Viva Nura

Don't Be Fooled, These Are the Most Dangerous Creatures on Earth

popcornnews.com

5 Companies That Send People Money When They're Asked Nicely

The Penny Hoarder

1 Simple Trick to Cut Your Electric Bill (Try Tonight)

LunovX

Illinois Launches New Policy for Cars Used Less Than 50 Miles/day

Finance Advisors

The Truth About Costco's Kirkland Meat

learnitwise

Remember Nancy Mckeon? Take A Deep Breath Before You See Her Now

Medical Matters

Diabetes is Not from Sweets! Meet the Main Enemy of Diabetes

Health-Review24



Crystalize Your Pet in a Stunning, Custom 3D Crystal Keepsake!

ArtPix 3D

Warning! 15 Breakfast Foods You Should Never Eat

HEALTHNATURAL

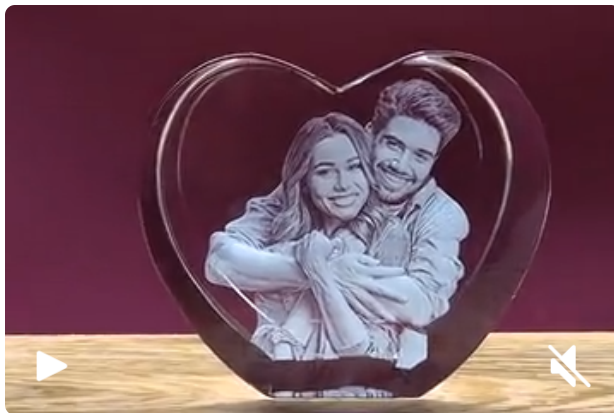
A New \$59 Smartwatch That Can Test Blood Sugar Painlessly Just in a Few Seconds

Ribili

**Get Your Home's Current Value -
Enter Your Postcode!**

24 Foods You Didn't Know Could Be Harmful

Health Natural



Transform Your Favorite Pics into Breathtaking 3D Crystals

ArtPix 3D

If Your Dog Follows You Everywhere, Here's What It Means

articlestone

Wheaton: Modern 2-bed Senior Apartments - Don't Miss The Amazing Inside View!

Senior Living

Coast Guard Intercepts Strange Blue Boat. Then They Take a Look Inside

cleverst

6 Things Frugal People Never Spend Money on

Put a Ziplock Bag Over Your Car Mirror, Here's Why

Sogoodly

2025 > February > 28