

## Our Farm Annual Report, 2025

**Vision:** A community where everyone belongs and participates

**Mission:** Together with our community, KW Habilitation inspires abilities to enrich the lives of children, youth, adults and families.

**Our Farm Mission:** Connecting people to the land, food, and each other through sustainable agriculture.



**Photos from left to right:** Definity Volunteer Group completing trail maintenance; Market pickup by a group from one of our Inclusive Living homes; Stock flower grown at Our Farm; Soirée Sista's refreshing the Our Farm logo on the storage container.

### Overview and Impact

Our Farm connects land, food, and people through sustainable agriculture. By growing fresh, healthy food, we strengthen community connections, support inclusive opportunities, and promote responsible land use. We work alongside people with disabilities to create meaningful ways for people of all abilities to contribute, learn, and grow.

In 2025, Our Farm celebrated its **13th growing season**, which was our longest and most productive season to date. We expanded food production, completed critical infrastructure projects, welcomed new community partnerships, and deepened our impact across Waterloo Region. A walk-in cooler purchased in 2024 proved invaluable, allowing us to extend the season and maintain the quality and freshness of field crops for market and community distribution.

As food prices continued to rise, demand for affordable fresh produce increased. Our weekly markets and pickup options helped reduce grocery costs for people supported by KW Habilitation. Inclusive Living Home pickups increased significantly, and we introduced a new monthly egg offering that was warmly received.

Weather conditions created challenges this season. A cool, wet May was followed by an exceptionally hot summer, with approximately **34 days above 30°C**. These conditions increased pest pressure and led to bolting and transplant stress. Despite this, Our Farm continued to thrive.

We hosted multiple corporate volunteer groups, hired four interns through the Canada Summer Jobs program, and expanded production while continuing to donate food and resources to the community. Interns also gained learning opportunities at other farms, building skills and exposure to diverse farming practices.

Professional development remained a priority. Our Farm Coordinator, Jenny, and Agricultural Farmer, Laura, attended the Ecological Farmers of Ontario Conference. Laura also attended the Guelph Organic Conference, and Jenny participated in the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Convention. These learning opportunities support continuous improvement and innovation at Our Farm.

## Growing Sites

### 115 University Avenue Site

Soil health and crop diversity continued to improve at the 115 University Avenue site. This season, approximately **25 yards of compost** were added, supporting strong succession plantings of lettuce, radishes, and flowers. All of our herbs are grown at this location, allowing us to offer fresh bundles at market and prepare more than **250 bags of dehydrated herbs**.

Key highlights included:

- Strong parsley production, our most popular herb
- Successful early carrot and parsnip crops
- Excellent tomato yields
- New trials with cucumbers and loofahs

Beans and ground cherries experienced pressure from rabbits, voles, and raccoons despite protective coverings.

Extreme heat affected lettuce later in the season, resulting in bolting and smaller heads. Approximately **450 heads** were harvested overall. To adapt, we continued offering a

popular salad mix using mustard greens, kale, arugula, napa cabbage, and lettuce. This ensured quality, consistency, and delicious salads.

Ongoing challenges include shade and competition from tree roots. The site hosted weekly Tuesday evening Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) pickups and Wednesday Inclusive Living markets. We were pleased to welcome Cooper back to 115 for his fourth season as a Canada Summer Jobs intern.

A major improvement this season was the installation of a new wash station for processing vegetables. This investment significantly improved efficiency and working conditions.

### DFR Site

Production at the DFR site increased substantially due to succession planting and new growing beds established in 2024. Approximately **75 yards of compost** were applied, greatly improving soil quality.

Crops that performed particularly well included:

- Onions
- Kale and cabbage
- Carrots
- Squash
- Arugula
- Tomatoes
- Raspberries

| Selected Crop Totals |              |
|----------------------|--------------|
| Crop                 | Total        |
| Slicer tomatoes      | 1,194 pounds |
| Raspberries          | 580 pints    |
| Zucchini             | 895 pounds   |
| Carrots              | 1,192 pounds |
| Potatoes             | 688 pounds   |

Heat and pest pressure affected some yields. Challenges were managed through close monitoring, approved organic treatments, and hand removal of pests.

Three Canada Summer Jobs interns supported this site:

- Aidan, returning for his third season
- Evangeline, returning for her fourth season
- Dylan, joining the team this year

A new wash and pack station was constructed following land leveling and gravel installation. This replaced a folding table setup and significantly improved safety, comfort, and efficiency.

Additional improvements included:

- Installation of **300 pollinator plants**
- Ongoing trail maintenance
- Launch of the community garden, welcoming four gardeners
- Continued land management of invasive garlic mustard

These improvements contributed directly to increased productivity and long-term site health.

## Production, Markets, and Pickups

| Activity                             | Total                   |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Produce value grown                  | \$59,327.04             |
| Increase over 2024                   | \$12,577.04             |
| CSA pickups                          | 18 shares over 17 weeks |
| KW Habilitation community markets    | 31 Wednesdays           |
| Inclusive Living pickups             | 616                     |
| Supported Independent Living pickups | 149                     |

## Completed Projects and Infrastructure Improvements

- Wash and pack station at 115 University Avenue including soaking tank and worktable
- Wash and pack station at DFR including large wire-mesh table
- Pollinator strips at DFR, 100 feet with 300 plants
- Annual Jam and Salsa Sale

## Donations from Our Farm to the Community

Giving back is an essential part of Our Farm's work. Through partnerships and food donations, we support food security and wellbeing across Waterloo Region.

### Recipient organizations included:

- Soup Sisters
- House of Friendship
- Humane Society, with weekly vegetable trimmings and herbs
- 108 Sydney Apartment Building weekly giving basket

**Total value donated:** \$5,667.95

## Community Garden

With support from a Region of Waterloo Environmental Grant, community garden plots opened in 2025. Preparation work completed in 2024 included soil opening, tilling, cover cropping, and compost application. Four community members participated and will all return in 2026.

## Community Use of DFR Garden Space

- **Seeds of Diversity**  
Bob Wilfong returned to plant garlic for seed production. He reported his strongest production to date and expressed appreciation for the quality of the site.
- **Bee Blessed Beekeeping**  
Mark Frey continued managing hives at DFR. This year brought strong honey production, with donated honey supporting the Jam and Salsa Sale.

## Bird Habitat at DFR

Bird populations thrived at DFR throughout the season, with sightings of bluebirds, swallows, and chickadees. Long-time partner Fraser Gibson visited to support monitoring and education. Crew members learned about nesting habits, egg identification, and invasive species management. His ongoing support and knowledge continue to strengthen habitat stewardship.

## Our Farm Trail

The farm trail continues to grow and change alongside trees and gardens. Maintaining the trail is labour intensive. In 2025, corporate volunteers supported extensive weed management.

Environmental Grant funding allowed the purchase of a drag harrow, flame weeder, and tarping. Despite these efforts, trail use remains low. A scavenger hunt was introduced to encourage engagement. In 2026, trail promotion will continue to increase community use.

## Volunteers

Volunteers are essential to the success of Our Farm, supporting planting, harvesting, infrastructure improvements, trail maintenance, and special projects. In 2025, volunteer participation increased by more than 75 percent, building on the 342 volunteer hours pledged in 2024.

### Volunteer Participation

| Corporate Groups  | Individual Volunteers   |
|---|---|
| Definity Insurance<br>Ann Bilodeau and Friends<br>AVP Corporate Communication<br>Soirée Sista's<br>Equitable<br>University of Waterloo Men's Hockey Team<br>KW Habilitation Board Members<br>OTIP | Jeff at DFR<br>Cooper at 115<br>Pike Family at 115<br>Bernie B at DFR<br>Soralia at DFR<br>Navneet at DFR<br>Matthew at DFR<br>Scott at 115 |

**Total volunteer hours pledged: 600.75**

## Donations to Our Farm

Donations enable Our Farm to grow, innovate, and continue offering affordable, quality food to the community. Every contribution plays a role.

### 2025 donors included:

- Barb and Jenny Lehman
- Bernie Bredschneider
- Gwen Graper

- Irrigation Plus
- Kathy Hergott
- Mark Frey, honey donation
- Perth Waterloo Egg Board
- Relish Cooking Studio
- Seeds of Diversity
- Steed and Evans
- Vernon Burkhardt
- Tufx-Fort Manufacturing
- Tyler Bredschneider

## Looking Ahead

2025 was a year of strong growth, collaboration, and achievement. Despite extreme weather, the team completed planned projects, expanded production, and strengthened community connections. People supported by KW Habilitation benefited from increased access to fresh food during a year of rising grocery costs.

Community donations remained a priority, and Our Farm is proud to support regional partners.

Planning for 2026 is well underway, with seed orders complete, crop plans in development, and new projects on the horizon. We look forward to another season of learning, growing, and connecting.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to a successful 2025 season.

Respectfully submitted,

Jenny Weickert  
Our Farm Coordinator

