



MIDDLESEX COUNTY IMPROVEMENT AUTHORITY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Middlesex County Food Pantry Goes Bananas

MIDDLESEX COUNTY – It was a fruitful week for Middlesex County’s food pantry as organizers sought out recipients for an unexpected 10,000-pound surplus of imported bananas.

Wednesday afternoon, a 36-foot-by-6-foot wall of boxes flanked the yard at the Middlesex County Food Organization and Outreach Distribution Services’ (MCFOODS) New Brunswick warehouse, where weekly allotments are staged.

Even after carting away a sizeable portion of the “Chiquita” or mini bananas, some 40 visiting agencies couldn’t put a dent in the supply.

“We received the bananas from the Franklin Township Food Pantry,” said Tom Ellison, a MCFOODS representative. “It’s a strong partnership. We trade food back and forth – mass quantities of food in this case.”

Originating from Johannesburg in South Africa, the bananas initially made their way to an Edison distribution site through a type of food reclamation.

“That’s when they take food brought in by vendors that is either damaged or near the expiration date and they donate it or try to repackage and sell it,” Ellison explained.

By the following day, the cache of exotic fruit had departed from MCFOODS, a Middlesex County Improvement Authority operation, and was circulating the region.

As the heat index climbed at the Johnson Park Zoo in Piscataway, the property’s deer could be found feasting in the shade on the newfound treat.

“We sometimes take the surplus from over at the central warehouse,” said Edward Lucid, a supervisor with the Middlesex County Parks and Recreation Department. “Things like cabbage or lettuce, we’ll feed them to the deer, lamas, goats, pigs or horses.”

Around that same time in New Brunswick, the uncanny aroma of bananas wafted down the hallways at Elijah’s Promise, a local nonprofit working to end hunger through workforce development and emergency food services. Staff there had spent the better part of their day doling the fruit out to guests.

But the best was still yet to come, said Kaitlynn Deal, a volunteer and donation coordinator with Elijah’s Promise, an entity that holds true to its “healthy kitchen” reputation, using fresh vegetables and fruits in each meal.

“They’re turning brown on the outside, but the chef said they’re still good on the inside,” she said. “So we’re peeling and freezing them and we’ll use them in smoothies tomorrow morning. Those frozen bananas will go over great in this heat.”

Nearby, The Society of St. Vincent De Paul, a food pantry and well-trafficked area homeless shelter, claimed its share of bananas too.

Although, reserve food is not a common occurrence at MCFOODS, it does happen from time to time, according to Ellison.

“People are funny,” he said. “If those had been full-sized bananas, I imagine they would have been picked up in a heartbeat. Sometimes there are things that people don’t want that we just so happen to have.”

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