Gathering Ground Grows 16,000 Pounds of Food in 2026 and Launches $21,000 Year-End Matching Gift Drive

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE November 25, 2026

Media Contact: Alessandra Rolffs, Gathering Ground, alessandra@gatheringgroundwi.org | www.gatheringgroundwi.org

Washington Island nonprofit farm reports record harvest, expanded internships, and growing food pantry partnerships; donations through December 31 will be doubled.

WASHINGTON ISLAND, Wis. – Gathering Ground, a nonprofit farm and community organization on Washington Island, announced the results of its 2026 growing season and a year-end matching gift campaign. Through December 31, every donation will be matched dollar for dollar, up to $21,000, thanks to five anonymous donors excited by the organizations growth..

The 2026 harvest was the farm's largest to date under its Planting for the Future campaign:

- **16,000 pounds of food grown** for the community, 30 percent of which went to partners at the Door County Food Pantry Coalition, helping residents across the county access fresh, healthy produce.
- **Nearly 5,000 pounds of vegetables delivered to Coalition pantries**, up from 2,000 pounds the year before.
- **More than 500 meals served** at the farm's Spaghetti Dinners, which began when interns pioneered a way to use the farm's abundance of tomatoes. The farm-fresh meals welcome everyone on the Island for intergenerational connection.
- **A successful expansion of the Ground School internship program** from 10 weeks to six months, giving interns the chance to experience a full growing season.

"I am taking so much from Ground School, especially confidence," said Ava, a 2026 intern, at the end of her internship. Fellow intern Christina said, "I've been given clarity on the direction I want to take my life and the impact I want to have on my community."

Growing Partnerships Beyond the Island

The farm's expanding food pantry work traces back to a 2023 community discussion of Ken Meter's *Building Community Food Webs*, which describes a healthy food system as one that builds health, wealth, connection, and capacity in a community. The discussion inspired Dan Westbrook, co-manager of the Washington Island Community Health Program Food Pantry, and the pantry began buying produce from Island farms that summer.

"When you get passionate people together, great things happen," Westbrook said. "The farmers on the Island are so passionate about growing food for their neighbors. When Russell came to me saying he wanted to grow more for the pantries, that's when we started to think bigger. What can we do beyond the Island?"

The Door County Food Pantry Coalition plans to open a cold, frozen, and dry storage facility in Sturgeon Bay next year, which will allow pantries to accept more fresh vegetables throughout the season rather than only storage crops. Gathering Ground's goal is to grow 8,000 pounds of produce for the pantries in 2027.

Campaign Progress and Year-End Match

Since launching the Planting for the Future campaign last year, Gathering Ground has raised more than $950,000 in gifts and pledges toward its $1.1 million goal. In 2027, the organization aims to increase the amount of produce grown for food pantries, offer internships to more young people, and expand sustainable agriculture practices on its farmland.

Donations received between now and December 31 will be matched, up to $21,000. Gifts can be made online at www.gatheringgroundwi.org or by check to Gathering Ground, PO Box 276, Washington Island, WI 54246. Both one-time and recurring gifts qualify.

Upcoming Events and Opportunities

- **Ground School applications are open** for six-month interns (April–October) and 10-week interns (June–August). Applications are available at https://www.gatheringgroundwi.org/ground-school/
- **Black Friday Sale:** Saturday, Nov. 28, 10 a.m.–2 p.m., at the Mosling Rec Center. The farm will sell the last harvest of the season, along with burlap holiday stockings filled with garlic and shallots. Proceeds support the farm's partnership with the Door County Food Pantry Coalition. Stockings will also be available to order online.
- **Tree Lighting and Hot Chocolate:** Saturday, Dec. 5, 4 p.m. Attendees are asked to bring their own mugs.

About Gathering Ground

Gathering Ground is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit farm and community organization on Washington Island, Wisconsin. Through sustainable farming, the Ground School internship program, community meals and classes, and partnerships with food pantries, it works to grow healthy food, community, and confidence. All gifts are tax-deductible (EIN 81-4217805). Learn more at www.gatheringgroundwi.org.

Photos below:



Christina Eisenman, 6-month intern, helps harvest sustainably-raised grapes on Washington Island.



Russell Rolffs (right) helps unload storage crops with volunteers for Door County Food Pantry Coalition.