

# SINGING FARMER GIVES BACK

This country crooner fills bellies and lifts spirits.

BY CHRISTINA PFENNING CRAIG



At the age of 11, Laurie Lee Lewis' fate was set with a kiss on the cheek from music legend Loretta Lynn. The two connected backstage at one of Loretta's concerts, and the star told Laurie that she, too, could be a singer. Today, she's the singing farmer of northwest Washington state, and she's driven by altruism.

"I'm a little tater trying to pay it forward," Laurie says.

She tasted a bit of country music fame in the 1990s, once singing a duet with Nashville sound-era pioneer Ferlin Husky at the Tacoma Dome before a crowd of 16,000.

Now Laurie donates the proceeds from her albums to charities. Profits from her 10th album, *The Garden of My Soul*, benefit Northwest Harvest, Washington's statewide hunger relief agency. The Seattle-based organization supplies more than 380 food banks, schools and soup kitchens with more than 34 million pounds of food each year.

Its work is necessary: One in five Washington children lives in a household that is struggling to put food on the table.

Laurie visited the agency's headquarters last July after *The Garden of My Soul* was finished. Once back home, she eagerly grew fresh produce for her local food banks and wrote a new tune: "Who Will Feed The Hungry?"

“Who will feed the hungry?  
Take care of the poor?  
Who will grow the foods?  
Step through that  
giving door?”

—LAURIE LEE LEWIS

"I was in the midst of tilling my fields to plant kale. I go to drop the tiller, and I hear these lyrics in my mind: 'Who will feed the hungry?' I ran into the house and wrote down the song," she says.

Barefoot and clad in overalls, Laurie starred in the song's music video and put it on YouTube.

By August, the video was gaining popularity in her community.

Between farming, drop-offs to local food banks and taking care of her teenage daughter and elderly parents, Laurie planned a September 2016 food drive to benefit Northwest Harvest. Paying it forward paid off—Laurie's drive raised \$350 and 2,329 pounds of donated food.

"With \$350 we can supply 1,500 meals," says Gary Newte, special events manager at Northwest Harvest. "We can provide a meal for 22 cents, and two-thirds of each meal is fruits and vegetables."

At press time, Laurie was planning a second food drive.

"I am going to ask if people would like to come out to help harvest and get their hands dirty in the soil," she says. "I hope to inspire other farmers to use half an acre to grow for food banks."

The hunger-relief network Feeding America has other ideas for how to help your local food bank. Visit: [feedingamerica.org/take-action](http://feedingamerica.org/take-action)