

(Translation)

8000 families to get free seeds

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The Hungarian Red Cross and two American Foundations are donating seeds to 8000 families in need in two counties in order to encourage them to create their own vegetable gardens and start self-sufficient farming – representatives of the three organization said in Jászkisér on Saturday.

Richard Field, president of the American House Foundation, said their organization made it possible for the Hungarian Red Cross to hand out more than 200 tons of food donations to those in need last year. This year they are planning to provide three times that amount, adding, however, that this cannot be considered a long term solution, only a symptomatic treatment.

“As long as the countryside does not get back on its feet and things are not put in order, doing away with extreme poverty is an impossible mission,” he said. This is why the present initiative sets out to revive the traditions of self-sufficient vegetable gardening, providing a total of 8000 families in 91 towns in Borsod- Abaúj-Zemplén and Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok counties with enough high quality Hungarian seeds to plant a vegetable garden of at least 40 square meters.

The package contains seeds of vegetables easy to grow for even amateur gardeners: spring onion, green pea, bean, corn, cucumber, squash, reddish, parsley, carrot and lettuce seeds, he said, and added if the pilot program is successful, they would like to increase the number of participants tenfold, thus expanding the program to cover the whole country. László Hajdú, the mayor of Jászkisér, believes that it was the agriculture of the countryside that helped Hungary emerge from poverty after the World Wars and during the times of economic crises. Today, contrary to this, foreign-owned supermarket chains are the breadbasket of towns and cities, making people completely defenseless.

This situation is unsustainable in Jászkisér as well, where unemployment, at 15%, is higher than the national average, and due to the lack of a

sufficient number of jobs, the town has limited ability to generate income, said the mayor, who added, it was this insight that made them launch a similar, first-of-its-kind program for the local citizens in the spring of 2010. At that time 80 families took part, among them 38 Roma families, most of whom had not kept a vegetable garden before. Rainfalls and ground water made their work extremely difficult, at times impossible. Even so, more than half of the participants were successful in growing their vegetables.

László Hajdú said this year more than a hundred families have signaled interest in the program. Most of them are retired citizens, but about 15 percent are unemployed. "There is no special selection, we try to give everyone who is willing to take part a chance," he said. Ildikó Ágnes Nagy, Director of the Hungarian Red Cross in Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok county said at the kick-off ceremony that two non-government organizations, the American House Foundation and the Americans for Hungarians Foundation provided a total of HUF 16 million worth of support for the implementation of the program. The work done by the families involved will yield a four- to five-fold return on this investment, on the basis of the market value of the vegetables to be grown.

Expert mentors are going to monitor the work of the mostly amateur gardeners, evaluating and documenting the effectiveness of seed usage and gardening of each garden three times during the program. The two thousand most successful participants will each receive a special prize: 10 baby chicks in the spring of 2012.