



**Blue Grass Farms Charities Reaching Beyond the Racetrack  
Wednesday, February 19, 2014 (TCA Charity of the Month)**

*Each week, Wade Haga (Outreach Director, BGFC) delivers between 400 and 700 pounds of fresh fruits, vegetables and bread to Keeneland and the Thoroughbred Training Center.*

Employment at a horse farm in Central Kentucky isn't a job - it's a lifestyle. Blue Grass Farms Charities (BGFC) recognizes the unique set of challenges. Founded in 2003 by people in the horse industry who saw the need, BGFC now serves over 2,000 horsemen and their families annually through health clinics, education, sports, chaplaincy, and financial aid.

"Our goal is to bring stability and a sense of well-being to workers who find themselves in a vulnerable situation," said Mary Lee-Butte, President and CEO of BGFC. Industry workers who show legitimate needs (extreme illness, family crisis situation, etc.) are supported in the way of rent, utilities, and food. BGFC also grants aid to people without healthcare through support from the University of Kentucky healthcare system and Bluegrass Community Health Center. In one case, a man with pneumonia walked five miles from the racetrack to reach the BGFC offices. BGFC sent the man to the doctor for his pneumonia while the visit resulted in a lung cancer diagnosis (which has since turned to brain cancer). BGFC has been at his side talking to doctors, overseeing his care and even assisting with his utility bills. While horsemen work seven days a week for the industry, BGFC gives just as much care back to the horsemen.

The open hearts at BGFC also extend to the children of the horse industry with over 700 children attending BGFC's Festival of Christmas annually. At the Festival of Christmas, children receive toys, winter clothing, candy and all the trimmings expected from a Christmas party. BGFC's also provides a summer camp where a selection of the neediest children participate in field trips to area locations such as the zoo and planetarium. Lee-Butte recalls a touching story in which, after a summer camp lunch at McDonalds, a young boy saved his happy meal box. After being told he could throw it away, the boy explained his desire to show his dad because he was so proud of his first trip to a restaurant.

The children also benefit from the BGFC's newest program, a food delivery program to Keeneland Racecourse and the Thoroughbred Training Center. With donations from Costco and Whole Foods Market, this unique food drop provides fresh produce and bread twice a week to industry workers, unlike many food banks which can only provide non-perishable items. Director of Outreach, Wade Haga, coordinates the drops and recognizes the importance of fresh fruit to the diets of men and women who work long hours in all types of weather. Not only is the food a health benefit, but a welcome supplement for the whole family.

BGFC also knows how important cross culture training is to the hundreds of Hispanic workers benefiting from BGFC programs each year. They have recently expanded their services by offering a new cross cultural training class to Hispanic workers new to the United States. Haga leads the program, currently in the pilot stage, and said, referring to the the goal of the program, "we want to build a bridge of better understanding." The training includes ESL classes and classes on cultural awareness. These classes are intended to smooth the transition between cultures and create less stress on the employees and employers.

BGFC also hosts an annual horse farm soccer tournament bringing a bit of cross culture to Kentucky with between eight and 10 teams (a collection of 200-240 players) competing on the field. Lee-Butte noted the farm owners play right alongside the employees, with the employees often serving a leading role on the field. It's a unique opportunity for someone to show and develop leadership skills by leading a soccer team to victory.

The BGFC certainly fills their plate with a wide variety of services from soccer tournaments to healthcare for the chronically ill with the largest funding gap in financial aid and food for people serviced by the program. TCA's grants assist in filling the gap and we are proud to support both existing initiatives like the Festival of Christmas and new innovative programs such as BGFC's cross cultural training.