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### Teen Girl Scout aims to help farmworkers with soup kitchen

By **John Sullivan**  
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Warwick — They are not often seen, the people who plant and harvest the vegetables under the white-hot sun in the Black Dirt — unless of course you're someone like Victoria Garloch, who grew up here.

Having worked the fields some herself, and having gotten to know the families who barely speak English, Garloch, 15, has come to appreciate the farmworkers and their contribution to her community. Noticing their absence on the Black Dirt after the floods in August and September prompted her to act.

"I wanted to do something for them, for all they've done for us," the Warwick Valley High School student said of the laborers, many of whom have been out of work for months. "If there were no workers, there would be no food for us to eat."

Garloch, with the help of her family, has launched Pine Island's first soup kitchen aimed at helping the families that work the Black Dirt fields. The exact number of these workers — most of them Hispanic immigrants — and their family members remain uncounted, but officials from the Alamo Farm Workers Community

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Garloch, with the help of her family, has launched Pine Island's first soup kitchen aimed at helping the families that work the Black Dirt fields. The exact number of these workers — most of them Hispanic immigrants — and their family members remain uncounted, but officials from the Alamo Farm Workers Community Center food pantry on Pulaski Highway estimate it to be in the hundreds.

Work has always been plentiful during the harvest season, but Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee wiped out nearly 80 percent of the season's onion crop, leaving many of the workers unprepared to deal with a long winter without food or money. The Alamo has received donations to help out, and a fundraiser by Sugar Loaf artists will take place Dec. 10. But more needs to be done.

Garloch's soup kitchen at the old Pine Island Elementary School opened Nov. 18, with 30 volunteers and 51 people served. She launched the initiative as part of a Girl Scout Gold Award project to build leadership, as well as out of a belief in helping her community, she said. (The Gold Award is the highest achievement in Girl Scouts.)

Garloch hopes to increase the soup kitchen's hours from once to twice per month. The community's businesses, schools, churches and other nonprofits and schools, especially the Pine Island Chamber of Commerce, have all supported her so far.

The next meal will be served Dec. 23, with a toy drive to collect presents for the children and a Christmas service by the pastor of Vision Community Church, which also meets in the school and is helping the soup kitchen. Garloch hopes the families who came to the first dinner will help spread the word.

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**Newburgh won't close schools**  

