



Mangali Ghishing harvests vegetables at the farm. Photo by Michelle Gabel | Central Current

PEOPLE

Deaf New Americans Advocacy to expand Asha Laaya 'Farm of Hope'

Asha Laaya helps create community for Deaf New American farmers while helping support them.

 by Yolanda Stewart
November 27, 2023

Deaf New Americans Advocacy will expand the Asha Laaya “Farm of Hope” in 2024 with more than nine additional acres of land in Kirksville, said Monu Chhetri, who founded the farm.

“Recently, we learned how to develop a farm, and now transferring over to a larger plot of land, that’s going to help us to grow and expand,” said Monu Chhetri, the founder of Asha Laaya. “We’re starting to blossom and flourish, because of the new land, we can set up many new programs to help many more people.”

Chhetri created Asha Laaya to help Deaf New Americans, many of whom fled Bhutan, build community. On the farm, Deaf New Americans plant crops that they then sell at the CNY Regional Market or to local Asian food markets. Some of the crops are put in “blessing boxes” to help refugees who are food insecure.

The farm started operations in October 2022 and has been running for just over one year. Twelve Deaf New American farmers and some permanent employees have **helped run what has so far been a 1-acre farm**. The addition will expand the farm to 10.5 acres. The farmers are largely refugees born in Bhutan who are Deaf or have a Deaf relative.

The new plot of land will accommodate more than a dozen additional Deaf New American farmers to have their own individual plots, Chhetri said. It will allow the farmers to increase the variety of fruits, vegetables and herbs they plant, according to Chhetri. In addition, the group plans to provide access for farmers to have better structures for planting like greenhouses and tunnels.

Chhetri and Asha Laaya will be able to hire two more full-time staff members and three part-time support staff. Chhetri said the funding for the expansion would come from grants but declined to say which organizations provided the grants.

Deaf New Americans find community at Asha Laaya 'Farm of Hope'



The farm, created last year, is run by Deaf New Americans.

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Chhetri said that daily operations are expected to remain the same. Farmers will now work five days each week instead of four, but the farm will maintain its rest day.

For Chhetri the expansion of Asha Laaya extends beyond the farm itself. Some of the future plans Chhetri and her team have include increased help for the Deaf New American community.

“More land, means more programs, which means more support for the Deaf New Americans. It’ll give us the opportunity to expand the work that we do, and accomplish new things in the future,” Chhetri said.

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by **Yolanda Stewart**

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December 11, 2023

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