

For Immediate Release

**FIFTEEN LOCAL HIGH SCHOOLS PARTNER WITH FUTURE FARMERS OF AMERICA,
OPERATION BLESSING INTERNATIONAL, AND SALINE COUNTY OFFICE OF
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT TO CLEAN UP LOCAL FARMLAND ON
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 7**

HARRISBURG, IL (March 6, 2012) – Student volunteers from fifteen local high schools will converge on Saline County's farmland on Wednesday to remove debris left in the wake of last week's tornadoes.

Upwards of 350 students will meet on Wednesday morning (8:30am) at the Operation Blessing Intl. mobile command center, located at "The Foundation Building" at the Southeastern Illinois College Foundation Center (corner of Commercial Drive & Seright Street).

Representatives from the humanitarian organization Operation Blessing Intl., which is coordinating local volunteer efforts in cooperation with the Saline County Office of Emergency Management, will divide the students in groups and manage the day-long effort.

"With the spring season approaching, it's critical that the farmer's fields be ready for planting," says Jody Herrington-Gettys, director of U.S. disaster relief for Operation Blessing International. "While we are also focusing on helping residents who have lost or damaged homes, we want the farmers to know they also have our support and we'll do whatever we can to assist them."

Students will be traveling around the county in school buses, stopping to assist farmers in multiple locations.

The students attend fifteen local high schools at take part in the Future Farmers of America (FFA) program. Some of the FFA schools involved include Harrisburg, Eldorado, Galatin County, Albion, West Richland, Nashville, Galatia, Hamilton, Ohley, Greyville, Sparta, Woodlawn, Cisne and West Frank.

Operation Blessing Intl. was a first responder to the tornadoes, deploying its U.S. disaster relief team to Harrisburg within hours of the storm. Working in cooperation with Saline County Emergency Management, the humanitarian organization has coordinated more than 1,800 volunteers since Saturday removing debris, cleaning homes and preparing thousands of meals for local residents.

ABOUT OPERATION BLESSING INTERNATIONAL: Operation Blessing International (OBI) is one of the largest charities in America, providing strategic disaster relief, medical aid, hunger relief, clean water and community development in 23 countries around the world on a daily basis. OBI was awarded Charity Navigator's coveted 4 star rating for sound fiscal management for the 7th year in a row (2011), a feat that only 2% of rated charities have ever achieved. In November 2010, Forbes named OBI as the 6th most efficient charity in America. Additionally, the Chronicle of Philanthropy currently ranks OBI as the 23rd largest charity and the 6th largest international charity. Founded in 1978, Operation Blessing International has touched the lives of more than 235 million people in more than 105 countries and 50 states, providing goods and services valued at over \$2.7 billion to date.

For more information please log on to www.ob.org

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