The Mid-Ohio Foodbank is closing its Clarfield Farm on Aug. 2 because it can’t secure a new land lease with the owners of the property.

The 5-acre farm, at 3220 Groveport Road on the South Side, generated 42,000 pounds of produce in 2017, including potatoes, tomatoes, lettuce, peppers and kale, said Matt Habash, the food bank’s president and CEO. Much of that went to the South Side Roots Cafe, Market and Kitchen in the Reeb Avenue Center, or was sold to 15 local restaurants.

It is one of two urban farms the Grove City-based food bank operates; the other is the 5-acre Wheatland Farm on the Hilltop. The Clarfield Farm sits on property owned by charter-school operator Accel, which runs the South Columbus Preparatory Academy there. Global School Properties Ohio LLC, of McLean, Virginia, which is related to Accel, acquired the property in May 2017 from Columbus City Schools, which had owned the land since 1925.

Jamie Callender, a lawyer representing South Columbus Preparatory Academy, said the food bank has been operating the farm without a lease since Global School Properties acquired the property. The food bank also has been using city utilities, including water, costing the property owner thousands of dollars.

“They’ve been, in essence, squatters,” Callender said of the food bank.

“Without a lease, the school can’t subsidize it, unless there was something in place to consider the cost of utilities,” Callender said. He said the charter school’s lawyers have been talking to the food bank since February trying to work something out.

Urban Farms of Central Ohio, a food bank initiative, has operated the Clarfield
Farm in the city's Marion-Franklin neighborhood for six years. Habash said the food bank paid the utility bills when Columbus City Schools owned the land.

After the charter-school company bought the property, “we had never received a bill,” Habash said. He also said the food bank initiated the lease conversations.

Habash said the charter school company wanted too much money. The food bank offered $4,800 to $5,000 a year to lease the 5 acres.

Habash said the food supply at the Roots Cafe, Market and Kitchen will not be affected since it also comes from other sources.

The food bank is looking for a new location for a farm. It has used three 30-by-96-foot unheated plastic greenhouses to extend the growing season on the farm. Those will be taken down. Crews will dismantle the farm, including the irrigation system and greenhouses, and plan to leave the site by Aug. 2.

mferench@dispatch.com

@MarkFerendik