



For more information please contact:
Cory Berkenes, Executive Director
(515) 288-3234
cberkenes@iowafba.org

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IOWANS' ACCESS TO FOOD ASSISTANCE IMPROVED WITH HOTLINE Thousands of Families Continue to Struggle with Hunger

Omaha, NE (January 8, 2016) – Hunger impacts children, working adults, seniors and persons with disabilities across Iowa. More than 389,000 Iowans are struggling with hunger. Many may be eligible for Iowa Food Assistance Program benefits but have not applied.

Results of a study supported by the ConAgra Foods Foundation, the Howard G. Buffett Foundation and the Nielsen Company show approximately 12.8 percent, or 1,760 people, in Cass County are at-risk for hunger. Map the Meal Gap 2015 is a study from Feeding America, the nation's largest domestic hunger relief organization, which provides data on a county level.

The Iowa Food Bank Association is committed to making the Food Assistance application process easier. On October 5, 2015, the Iowa Food Bank Association Hotline launched. Those inquiring about benefits are able to speak with a specialist who can provide answers about eligibility and help in completing the lengthy application. Since the Hotline's launch, specialists have assisted completing and submitting over 190 applications.

"The establishment of the Iowa Food Bank Association Hotline is providing a big boost to our efforts to connect potentially eligible Iowans with the assistance they need," said Cory Berkenes, executive director for Iowa Food Bank Association. "The hotline is supporting our outreach coordinators who already travel the state throughout the year assisting Iowans with the Food Assistance application."

The Iowa Food Bank Association Hotline, 855-944-FOOD (3663), is staffed 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday with additional assistance provided after hours on high-volume call days. The Hotline is a part of the Iowa Food Bank Association Outreach program and is made possible through grant funding from the Walmart Foundation, Feeding America and the United States Department of Agriculture through an ongoing partnership with the Iowa Department of Human Services.

The Iowa Food Assistance Program is funded through the USDA's Food and Nutrition Services program. Food Assistance benefits help to prevent hunger, improve nutrition and provide economic gains to farmers, food producers and grocers. They are available to citizens and some qualified documented immigrants who meet eligibility requirements. Iowa Food Assistance benefits are utilized through an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card that looks like any other debit card.

About Iowa Food Bank Association

The Iowa Food Bank Association (IFBA) is a collaboration of the eight Feeding America food banks that serve all of Iowa's 99 counties. Together, the food banks serve over 1,000 non-profit organizations serving individuals in need. These organizations include food pantries, emergency meal sites, congregate meal sites, emergency shelters, and other sites that provide food to clients. The mission of IFBA is to coordinate efforts to alleviate hunger by supporting the Feeding America food banks that serve the state. Collaborative efforts will allow the food banks to become more efficient and effective in serving hungry Iowans.