National Guard Members Bolster Food Bank Operations During COVID-19

A police officer. A marketing professional. A full-time student. Members of the Nebraska National Guard hold diverse civilian professions, but they came together to help their fellow Nebraskans during this pandemic. On April 21, Governor Pete Ricketts deployed 69 personnel from the Nebraska National Guard to Food Bank for the Heartland and Food Bank of Lincoln to assist with operations.

At Food Bank for the Heartland, 15 soldiers and airmen worked together with staff members and volunteers to pack thousands of pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables and assemble community packs of shelf-stable items that were distributed to individuals and families in need through the Mobile Pantry program and our network of pantry partners and emergency meal providers. On average, Nebraska National Guard members and volunteers packed 5,000 community packs each week.

“"We are proud to assist our neighbors in need," said Nebraska National Guard Adjutant General, Major General Daryl Bohac. “In many different ways, COVID-19 has impacted every community across our state.”

Guardsmen also helped distribute 984 community packs and fresh produce at a monthly mobile pantry in Grand Island in May. It was the largest single-day distribution in Food Bank history.

The Iowa National Guard joined the support effort on May 7, transporting emergency food among Food Bank of Iowa, Food Bank of Siouxland, and Food Bank for the Heartland to ensure successful redistribution to those in need across Iowa.

“Our National Guard members came from counties across the two states to serve their own communities, ensuring our neighbors continued to receive food during COVID-19,” said Brian Barks, President and Chief Executive Officer of Food Bank for the Heartland. “We appreciate their dedication and support.”

New Monthly Donor Match Challenge

For the first 75 new monthly gifts made to Food Bank for the Heartland, Amy and John Dempsey have generously committed to match the first month’s gift with an additional $100 per gift to fuel our emergency response efforts.

If you can, please start a monthly gift to help the Food Bank today!

Monthly giving is the best way to help our neighbors and our community during this pandemic. During these uncertain times, monthly donors give us the dependable base of support that we need when it is difficult to know what the future will hold. We appreciate your consideration.
Mobile Pantry Program

Largest single-day distribution

On May 9, 2020, members of the Nebraska National Guard and local volunteers from the Loaves and Fishes Ministry distributed 984 community packs and 19,182 pounds of produce during a drive-up mobile pantry at Grand Island’s Fonner Park. It was the largest one-day distribution in the Food Bank’s history.

The Loaves and Fishes crew in Grand Island is an amazing, dedicated group of volunteers. We completely changed how we distribute the food provided by Food Bank of the Heartland at our mobile pantry each month. We miss the personal, face-to-face contact with clients; however, the bottom line is getting the food to them in a timely, safe manner.

Deb Brummund, General Coordinator for the Loaves and Fishes Food Distribution in Grand Island

Mobile BackPack Program

The Mobile BackPack program is serving approximately 26,000 children’s meals each week across 13 sites in Omaha and Council Bluffs.

When the Mobile BackPack program launched, we were serving 200 children in 35 minutes at each site. I had a mother pull up with her three children in the car to receive meals. She told me she has an additional child at home who is immunocompromised. Her husband had been laid off at work, and she was picking up extra hours at Family Dollar to help offset the growing grocery bills. But at the same time, she was putting herself and family at risk due to COVID-19. She needed assistance.

Megan Burton, Food Bank for the Heartland Network Compliance & Child Hunger Programs Manager

SNAP Assistance

The Food Bank’s SNAP team processed a record high number of applications in April 2020, with 1,220 applications in Nebraska and 1,001 applications in Iowa. This equates to 1.7 million meals served or $4 million in benefits received.

I helped an elderly woman apply for benefits for the first time since 2005. Her husband is blind and had a stroke earlier this year, and she is his caretaker. Her daughter is working extra hours so she also sometimes cares for her grandchildren. She is thankful for the help from SNAP. During this time of great uncertainty, SNAP brings hope to individuals, families, and seniors who are unsure of how they will put food on the table.

Jake Kampschneider, Food Bank for the Heartland SNAP Partnership and Rural Outreach Coordinator

Network Partners

Food Bank for the Heartland relies on our nearly 600 partners — pantries, shelters, meal providers, schools, and other non-profit organizations — to distribute food to those in need.

At Together, we responded quickly to the growing need for help. From March 16 to May 16, we served 31,472 individuals. That’s more than we served last year total. We continue to serve participants who suffer from food insecurity and are using a drive-up pantry style to keep everyone safe.

Stephanie Strode, Together Operations Manager, Food Bank for the Heartland Partner Agency

OUR COVID-19 RESPONSE

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all of us. But thousands of our food-insecure neighbors do not have regular access to meals. Children, families, seniors, and veterans are finding themselves in the unexpected position of needing emergency food assistance for the first time.

The need for meals is more critical than ever.

Last year, we worked relentlessly to help Nebraskans and Iowans devastated by the historic flooding across the Heartland. We distributed more food than ever before — until now. In April 2019, we purchased 400,000 pounds of food. In April 2020, we purchased 1 million pounds of food — more than double during last year’s flood relief efforts.

From March 15, 2020, to May 15, 2020, the Food Bank distributed an astounding 3,974,012 meals. And, we will continue working with our partners to provide urgent meals in the months to come.

During this unprecedented time, I am grateful to the community for its extraordinary support. Thank you to our donors, volunteers, pantry partners, and Food Bank staff. You are making a difference for our neighbors who are struggling. It is our business to help, but we couldn’t do it without you.

Brian Barks
President & CEO

I love being a Nebraskan. We’re tough people. I want to do what I can to help my own because they deserve it. They have been put in a spot they didn’t ask for. It is our business to help.

I help my kids feed their kids. They can’t do it right now because they both lost their jobs. This food makes a difference in all our lives. Thank you.

Client at Grand Island mobile pantry

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Food Bank for the Heartland has been working swiftly to distribute critical meals to our neighbors in need across 93 counties in Nebraska and western Iowa through our programs and our network of pantries and emergency meal providers.

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Letter from the President & CEO

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Food Bank for the Heartland’s service area spans 93 counties and 78,000 square-miles across two states. Last year, our transportation team traveled 240,413 miles delivering perishable and nonperishable food to network partners and mobile pantries and picking up donated products.

Regan Heaton is our latest addition to the transportation team, but she is not new to the Food Bank. Regan worked as a site monitor for the Kids Cruisin’ Kitchen program for two summers starting in 2017 before being hired full-time in September 2018 as a network compliance coordinator assisting our partner organizations.

The transportation department was in dire need of a driver with a Class A Commercial Driver’s License (CDL). We had a job posting for more than a year, but there is a truck driver shortage across the country, and the position went unfilled.

“Becoming a driver is an idea that I have thrown around for years,” said Regan. “I believe in the mission of the Food Bank, and I thought completing the CDL course was the best way to continue offering support to our pantries and the community.”

Regan completed her CDL course in January 2020 and received additional on-the-job training from other drivers in the department to learn about the equipment, routes, and how we assist pantries at the time of delivery. Now she is on the road picking up and delivering critical meals across our service area during this unprecedented time.

“Regan joining the transportation team with a Class A license has been instrumental in our ability to execute the increased volume during the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Tim Smiley, warehouse and transportation manager.

“Everyone has been so grateful for the assistance they are receiving from Food Bank for the Heartland,” said Regan. “I am proud to be a part of this wonderful team.”

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**Heaton and Transportation Team Critical to Food Bank’s Operations**

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**Foodies Welcome New Officers**

Food Bank for the Heartland’s Friends — the Foodies — is an integral part of the Food Bank’s community of supporters through volunteerism, fundraising, and the promotion of community awareness. Last year, the organization’s membership generously donated time, financial gifts, and food to help our hungry neighbors across Nebraska and western Iowa.

Here are the 2020-2021 officers:

- **President**: Gabby Mormino
- **Pres-Elect**: Jennie Warren
- **Treasurer**: Christine Stevens
- **Secretary**: Stacy Wilson
- **Advisor**: Kathy Neary
- **Staff Liaison**: Joani Mullin

The 2020-2021 Foodies membership drive is underway. We need your support now more than ever. You may complete the membership form online at FoodBankHeartland.org under the Volunteer tab.