FOOD BANK’S CLEAN ROOM A KEY INGREDIENT IN NEW FOOD SOURCING PLAN

In January 2021, Food Bank for the Heartland converted a 600 square-foot section of its Volunteer Center in Omaha into a regional USDA-certified “clean room.” Named for its stringent adherence to food-processing safety standards, this state-of-the-art facility allows the Food Bank to properly handle bulk quantities of food — specifically animal-based protein.

The clean room was built through the support of a grant from Cargill and Feeding America, who, along with other suppliers such as Conagra Brands and Smithfield, donate high-protein items like chicken, turkey, beef, sausage, and eggs. Clean room staff then sort and portion these items into smaller packages which are distributed to families in need through the Food Bank’s network partners.

The clean room is one component of a broader comprehensive food sourcing plan being developed at the Food Bank, with the aim of providing fresh, healthy food in greater capacity and with increased efficiency.

Ensuring the Food Bank can offer a steady supply of protein-rich foods is of particular importance. Protein is more filling than fats and carbs, increases muscle strength, promotes bone health, boosts metabolism, and provides many other dietary benefits. Unfortunately, the high cost and perishable nature of many foods high in protein mean they are donated less frequently. Amber DeVries, a clean room specialist, is proud of the role the team plays in addressing this challenge. “We’re filling a big need in the community in a way that was not possible before this facility was set up.”

Clean room staff currently process between 750 and 1,000 pounds of product each day, and the Food Bank hopes to increase this capacity through a future expansion.

“With additional space and staff, we can make an even bigger impact,” says DeVries.
As we head into fall in the Heartland, I remain in awe of the power of our community to come together and serve our neighbors in need. Together, we’ve weathered years of literal and figurative storms. And though we’ve shared heartbreak, devastation, and uncertainty, we’ve met these challenges with compassion, grit, and an outpouring of generosity.

The lessons we’ve learned along the way have led to stronger partnerships and impactful innovation. A striking example of this is an initiative launched earlier this year. With support from our friends at Cargill and Feeding America, we built a regional USDA-certified “clean room.” This facility allows us to safely process large protein donations from Cargill and others — and prepare it for distribution across our network.

Our clean room helps us address a significant need for those facing hunger. Items rich in protein, particularly meat products, provide key nutrition and often serve as the main ingredient in popular dishes, but they’re generally more expensive and less frequently donated than other foods. The ability to accept bulk protein and portion it into family-friendly packages allows us to distribute high-quality, healthy food for more families in need. Since its launch, more than 126,558 pounds of protein have been repacked through our clean room!

As we look to expand the footprint, staffing, and capacity of our clean room in FY 2021-2022, we continue to pursue other opportunities to serve more people in more ways, an endeavor only made possible through the support of our donors, volunteers, and partners. Together, we are a powerful and growing force for good, filling families with hope and their tables with healthy food. Thank you for being a part of it.

Brian Barks
President & CEO

In this issue, we’re featuring a network partner that makes a large impact within a smaller community. Located in Holt County, Nebraska and about 200 miles northwest of Omaha, West Holt Health Ministries serves the areas surrounding Atkinson and Stuart.

Twice a month, the Atkinson-Stuart pantry distributes canned food, meats, dairy items, and cereal out of a former dentist’s office. During a recent distribution, the pantry served 180 families in just three hours. “This shows that many people throughout the Heartland continue to struggle,” says Jake Kampschneider, Food Bank for the Heartland’s community and partner support representative. “Some may think that food insecurity is just an urban problem, or that it disappeared along with the pandemic. But with rising food and gas prices, many families still find it difficult to make ends meet.”

Linda Nekuda, the pantry’s volunteer director, says that she sees this large level of need — and an equal amount of gratitude — at each distribution. “People are appreciative. They tell me, ‘Thank you. This really helps.’”

West Holt Health Ministries is one of 589 network partners located throughout the 93 Nebraska and Iowa counties served by Food Bank for the Heartland.
Thank You for Supporting the Food Bank!

We are humbled and grateful for your continued gifts of time, talents, and treasures, which make a difference in the lives of thousands of children, seniors, and families each year. Breaking the cycle of food insecurity and poverty can begin with a single meal, providing the basic ingredients for a focused day at school or a successful job interview. Because of your generosity, we provided an average of more than 100,000 meals every day to those facing food insecurity throughout the pandemic. The need remains great, and we appreciate your continued support. Thank you!

2ND ANNUAL FOOD FROM THE BAR CAMPAIGN OBJECTS TO HUNGER

Taking place from October 1–31 and coinciding with the start of the Supreme Court’s term, this friendly competition brings together Omaha-area law firms, judges, and other legal-focused organizations to provide critical meals to our neighbors in need. Anyone can join in the proceedings by making a financial donation to the Food Bank through a participating organization.

Please visit FoodBankHeartland.org to learn more.

“HONORING THE HEARTLAND” TOUR VISITS OMAHA

On July 26th, Smithfield’s Farmland Brand team visited Food Bank for the Heartland as part of its “Honoring the Heartland” tour. The visit featured a donation of 40,000 pounds of protein to the Food Bank’s clean room, and a Farmland food truck served lunch to Food Bank volunteers, staff, and their families in recognition of their efforts in the fight against hunger during the pandemic. As part of the Midwest tour, a $5,000 donation was also made to the Nebraska FFA Association for its contributions in making a positive difference in the lives of its students and on the farming industry.
On November 4, 2021, Food Bank for the Heartland will celebrate its 40th anniversary! Started in 1981 at a warehouse at 50th and Hamilton in Omaha, the Food Bank distributed 38,800 pounds of food through 21 partners in its first year. Our network has since grown to 589 partners and we provided more than 44 million pounds of food (including food distributed through SNAP) in FY 2021!

This tremendous milestone is a testament to the support of our community and will be commemorated through special activities and projects. Stay tuned!