



FY 2025 BACKPACK PROGRAM REPORT

JULY 1, 2024–JUNE 30, 2025



Grateful for You

Food Bank for the Heartland is grateful for the outpouring of support from our community to combat childhood hunger. It is only through this compassion that our Backpack Program delivered 1,216,304 meals to children in Nebraska and western Iowa during the '24-'25 school year. On behalf of our team and the children we serve, thank you! We could not do this life changing work without you.



It helps my mom not to go to the store to buy me stuff. And it helps me not being hungry all the time.

— Student from Omaha Public Schools, NE

Program History

For nearly 20 years, Food Bank for the Heartland has partnered with dedicated educators in schools across Nebraska and western Iowa to provide children with nutritious food throughout the academic school year. The Backpack Program launched in 2006 with just three schools. Thanks to the investment of our community and Woodhouse Auto Family, 244 schools in 110 districts participated in FY 2025, distributing **more than 1.2 million meals** to children struggling with food insecurity.

Each pack contains four meals, consisting of easy-to-prepare or ready-to-eat food. During the 2024-2025 school year, a typical pack included two breakfast items, two entrees, a fruit pouch, one juice, one milk carton, and one shelf-stable yogurt. These items help nourish children over the weekend and enable them to thrive in school and better reach developmental milestones.

The Backpack Program is one of the many programs the Food Bank supports to fight childhood hunger, providing weekend

meals for children with limited or no parental supervision. In portions of the Food Bank's rural service area, this program could be the only food assistance option to which families have access.



Making a Direct Impact

1 IN 5 CHILDREN

IN OUR SERVICE AREA IS FACING HUNGER. THAT'S 87,860 CHILDREN.

8,002 CHILDREN

RECEIVED BACKPACKS WEEKLY DURING THE 2024-2025 SCHOOL YEAR.

1,216,304 MEALS

DISTRIBUTED TO CHILDREN DURING THE 2024-2025 SCHOOL YEAR.

244 SCHOOLS

IN 110 SCHOOL DISTRICTS SERVED.

\$164

THE COST TO SPONSOR ONE CHILD FOR THE 2024-2025 SCHOOL YEAR.

60 COUNTIES

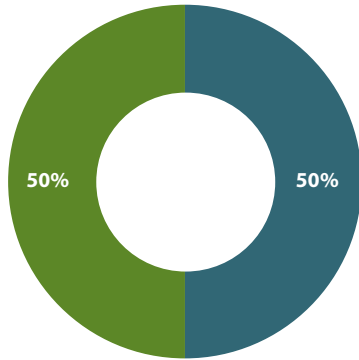
THROUGHOUT NEBRASKA AND WESTERN IOWA PARTICIPATE IN THE BACKPACK PROGRAM.

\$1,189,027

TOTAL COST OF THE PROGRAM IN FY 2025.

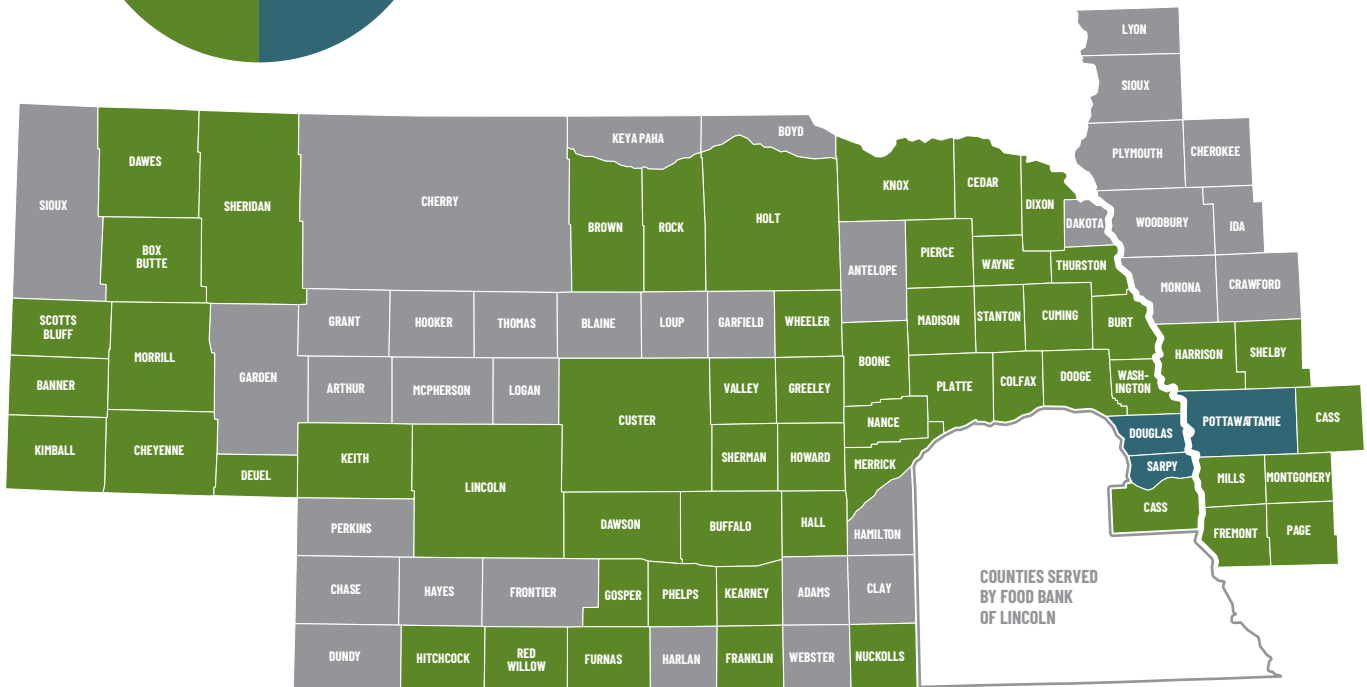
How the Program Works

More than 8,002 elementary children facing hunger in 60 counties take nutritious food home each weekend throughout the school year. The Food Bank staff works with each school district to determine the number of BackPacks they need. Based on which students are receiving free or reduced-priced breakfast and lunch, school staff determine which children need assistance through weekend Backpack meals. The program is designed to be respectful for distribution—the food packs are discreetly placed into students' back packs on a designated day while students are in class.



BACKPACK DISTRIBUTION

- BackPacks distributed across the Omaha metro (Douglas, Sarpy and Pottawattamie counties)
- BackPacks distributed across greater Nebraska and western Iowa



The Impact of Food Insecurity on Children

Providing consistent access to nutritious food is vital for children's well-being. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, hunger's effect on the body directly impacts school performance. Research shows children from families who are not sure where their next meal is coming from are more likely to have lower math scores and repeat a grade, among other challenges.

According to the USDA, there is also a strong connection between hunger and chronic diseases like high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes. The more meals children miss, the more severe hunger affects their minds and bodies. Through your support, the Food Bank remains committed to providing healthy meals to food insecure children across the Heartland so they can focus on what matters most—learning, growing, and having fun.



We know that if our body is fueled, our brain is primed for learning. The Lewis Central community really values having the Backpack Program, as it helps students have food for the weekend when their families may not be able to provide as much.

—Maggie Miller, Special Education Teacher, Lewis Central Schools, IA

Woodhouse Drives Backpack Program Forward

Woodhouse Auto Family has partnered with Food Bank for the Heartland for the last 14 years to fight childhood hunger. Their partnership has been instrumental to the success of the Backpack Program. To support Heartland students and incentivize the community, Woodhouse has recently stepped up with a unique matching opportunity—doubling all gifts made to the program, up to \$500,000. Through their commitment, Woodhouse is helping thousands of children across the Heartland access healthy food.



At Woodhouse, we are honored to continue the tradition as a grateful partner of the Backpack Program...and also humbled to see, hear, and know the impact it makes, and has made, to thousands of children and their families each and every year across our communities.

— Jason Kruse, Chief Financial Officer at Woodhouse Auto Family



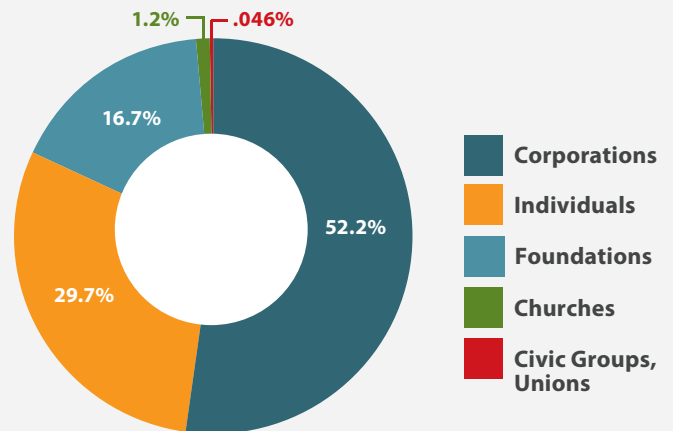
How Your Support Makes a Difference

It cost \$164 to sponsor a child and provide him or her with Backpack meals throughout the 2024–2025 school year. There are no expenses for schools or families to participate. To ensure quality, consistency and safety, 100% of the food for the Backpack Program is purchased by Food Bank for the Heartland. While the program receives support from a broad base of individuals, corporations, and foundations each year, it is the most expensive program at the Food Bank. The ready-to-eat nature of the food provided in each Backpack contributes to the cost of the program, which was \$1,189,027 in FY 2025.



Michelle Schaeffer, 1st Grade Teacher, Krefth Primary School, IA

BACKPACK PROGRAM FY 2025 FINANCIAL SOURCES



For kids who are missing meals, they come to school not ready to learn. They don't have the energy they need to sustain themselves throughout the day. It's hard to concentrate on an empty stomach. The food they get through the Backpack Program helps by providing them with meals. Kids have told me that they eat it for breakfast, some eat it for a snack, and it gets them ready for the day.

— Michelle Schaeffer, 1st Grade Teacher, Krefth Primary School, IA

A Helping Hand

Food Bank for the Heartland volunteers play a critical role in the Backpack Program, preparing each bag for distribution to participating schools. In FY 2025, individuals, corporations, and civic groups packed nearly 302,856 bags in our Volunteer Center for the Backpack Program.

We are beyond grateful to every volunteer for donating their gifts of time and talent in the fight against childhood hunger.



I suffered with food insecurity as a child, so I know how important the impact is in our area.

— Food Bank volunteer



Food Bank volunteers assemble Backpack meals



Food Bank volunteers assemble Backpack meals



Artwork drawn by student who received Backpack meals



Conclusion

Thanks to you, the Backpack Program meets an important need across Food Bank for the Heartland's 93-county service area. 1 in 5 children across the Food Bank's two-state service area may not know where their next meal is coming from. These children represent the future and—with support from our community—we're making progress in improving the mental and physical health of Heartland children.



Before 2/2/26 | After 2/2/26
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