FOODBANK FOR THE HEARTLAND

FY 2026 BACKPACK PROGRAM REPORT

JULY 1, 2025–JUNE 30, 2026



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 1,139,088 meals to children in Nebraska and western Iowa during the 2025–2026 school year. Your generosity is greatly appreciated. Childhood hunger has increased by 76% over the past three years across our service area, with 1 in 5 children now experiencing food insecurity. On behalf of our team and the children we serve, thank you! We could not do this life changing work without you.

> **I love getting the BackPacks. Thank you!**
>
> **— Student, Gordon Elementary, Gordon, NE**

Program History

For 20 years, Food Bank for the Heartland has partnered with dedicated educators in Nebraska and western Iowa to provide children with nutritious food throughout the academic school year. Thanks to the investment of our community and Woodhouse Auto Family, 236 schools in 102 districts participated in FY 2026, distributing **more than 1.1 million meals** to children facing hunger.

Each pack contains four meals, consisting of easy-to-prepare or ready-to-eat food. During the 2025-2026 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 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 Food Bank programs that help alleviate childhood hunger, providing weekend meals for children with limited or no parental supervision. In portions of our rural service area, this program may 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.

7,494 CHILDREN
RECEIVED BACKPACKS WEEKLY DURING THE 2025–2026 SCHOOL YEAR.

1,139,088 MEALS
DISTRIBUTED TO CHILDREN DURING THE 2025–2026 SCHOOL YEAR.

236 SCHOOLS
IN 102 SCHOOL DISTRICTS SERVED.

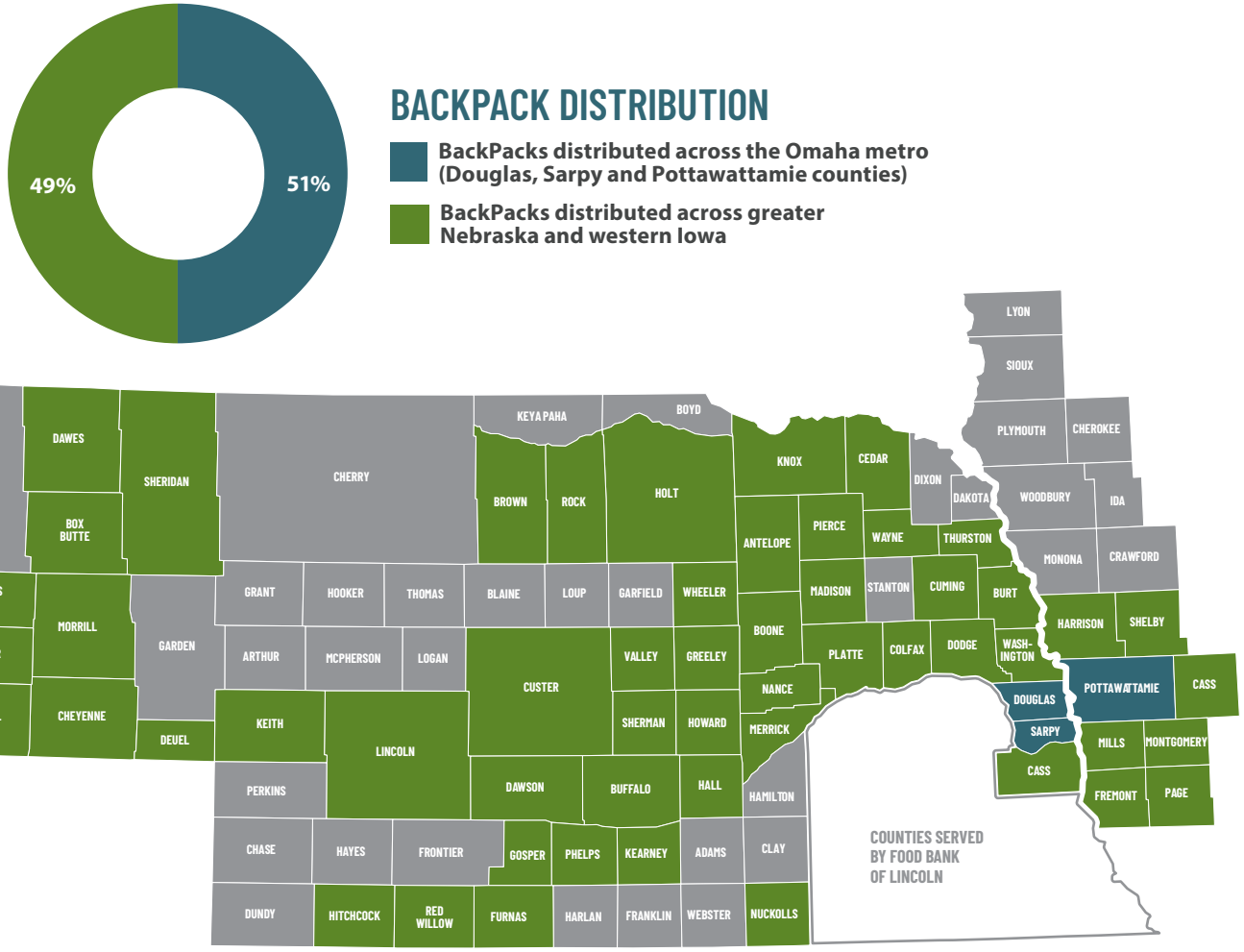
$185
THE COST TO SPONSOR ONE CHILD FOR THE 2025–2026 SCHOOL YEAR.

57 COUNTIES
THROUGHOUT NEBRASKA AND WESTERN IOWA PARTICIPATE IN THE BACKPACK PROGRAM.

$1,178,753
TOTAL COST OF THE PROGRAM IN FY 2026.

How the Program Works

Nearly 7,500 elementary school children facing hunger in 57 counties take nutritious food home each weekend throughout the academic year. The Food Bank staff works with each school district to determine the number of BackPacks needed. 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.



The Impact of Food Insecurity on Children

Consistent access to healthy food is vital to a child's well-being. Right now across the Heartland, 20% of children are waking up every day lacking access to the foods they need to thrive.

Food insecurity in children can have a lasting impact on their physical, social, and mental well being. Some common effects include poor academic performance, increased health problems such as anemia and asthma, and developmental differences affecting their thinking, learning, and behavior. 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 17 years to fight childhood hunger. Their critical support has provided more than **7.4 million BackPack Meals**! To nourish 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

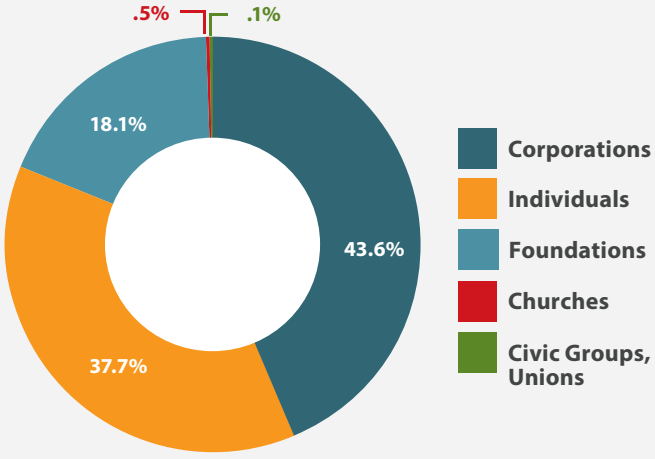
How Your Support Makes a Difference

It cost $185 to sponsor a child and provide him or her with BackPack meals throughout the 2025–2026 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 $1,178,753 in FY 2026.



Michelle Schaeffer, 1st Grade Teacher, Kreft Primary School, IA, BackPack Program Participant

BACKPACK PROGRAM FY 2026 FINANCIAL SOURCES



We would not be able to provide the number of BackPacks needed on our own. We appreciate all this program does for our students! It is such a blessing to so many kids and their families. The teachers feel relieved to know the kids have something to eat at home. Thank you so much for all you do!

— Teacher, Sumner-Eddyville-Miller School, Sumner, NE

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 2026, individuals, corporations, and civic groups packed 279,064 bags in our Volunteer Center for the BackPack Program.

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









Food Bank volunteers assemble BackPack meals

> **We have a family that really appreciates the food bags this year. The mother lost her job, and the father is the only one working, so it has really helped them to have these for their two children in our program. I also have a single parent who is working three jobs right now to support his children, and this is really helping him get through this time. We appreciate our partnership with the Food Bank in supporting our needy families.**
>
> **— Teacher, Dodge County Head Start, Fremont, NE**

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.

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