

THE DISH

FALL 2022



THE HEARTLAND HAS NEVER BEEN MORE HUNGRY

The rising cost of food is exacerbating hunger across the U.S. and Food Bank for the Heartland is not immune. Skyrocketing prices on food, fuel and rent have made everyday living even harder for families facing hunger, and more challenging for the Food Bank to provide consistent access to food. Inflation has affected every aspect of the Food Bank's operations, including significant cost spikes to purchase, store, and distribute food—creating a perfect storm of challenges for the Food Bank and those we serve.

Several factors have recently added to the increase in food insecurity levels across our service area.

The spike in inflation comes on the heels of pandemic-era programs expiring. Throughout the pandemic, temporary government assistance programs, such as food availability from the USDA, SNAP benefits, tax credits, stimulus payments, unemployment insurance and school lunch programs, were created or expanded to help families afford food. Many of those

programs are sunsetting, or have already expired—creating a gap the Food Bank is struggling to fill.

The inflationary increases are so extreme that people at all income levels are feeling the pinch. However, low-income families feel it disproportionately more as they spend nearly 1/3 of their monthly budget on food.

YOU can make a difference.

Food Bank for the Heartland is doing everything we can to mitigate the effects of inflation, such as putting a renewed focus on sourcing donated food and increasing efficiencies in our USDA-certified Clean Room to distribute more protein,

but we need your help. The time is critical to help our neighbors, and the challenges are in many ways greater than those we faced at the height of the pandemic. We urge you to give back however you can—whether it's signing up to volunteer, hosting a food drive, or making a monetary gift. Just \$1 can provide up to 4 meals for those in need. To learn more about the ways you can get involved and help us combat the historical levels of food insecurity, **visit our website today!**

Click me!
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The Food Bank saw a 40% increase in households served through our Network Partners from May to June 2022.



Low-income households are spending nearly 1/3 of their budget on food due to inflation.



It costs families 10% more to buy groceries this year than last year.



Food Bank's freight costs have increased by 125% since 2020.



SNAP applications across Nebraska and Iowa were up 40% from May to June 2022.

A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

Grit. Perseverance. Strength. Compassion. These are some of the qualities that come to mind when I think of the Heartland, and they are desperately needed right now. We are doing everything possible to respond to the current need, but with costs skyrocketing and resources down—our team has been challenged at every level. You've heard me say before that we've never experienced a hunger crisis like this in our 40-year history—and that was before the recent surge of inflation.



We have a long battle ahead of us, but through the strength and dedication of our communities, we will rise above this challenge, together. I continue to be inspired by the stories of kindness happening across the Heartland. Stories like **Father Wayne**—a priest in Columbus—who has donated more than 1.5 million pounds of fresh food across Nebraska over the last thirty years. Or **two sisters**, who created a trail run in Omaha with the goal of giving 100% of the proceeds back to the Food Bank. Or **Janell**, the Executive Director of the Madison Food Pantry, who has been dedicated to serving her community for the past eight years. That united, community response is helping children, families, seniors, and veterans across the Heartland.

As thousands of neighbors continue to navigate economic hardships and make unthinkable decisions, we urgently need your continued support. We cannot do this without your generosity. From the bottom of my heart, I'm asking you to step up today and help us serve our neighbors in need. I am grateful for your support. Thank you.



Brian Barks
President & CEO

CENTRAL CITY RESIDENT GRATEFUL FOR THE FOOD BANK

Shawna, a resident of Central City, Nebraska, never thought she'd need assistance from a food pantry, but found herself unemployed after an injury and unable to provide for herself. She was falling behind on payments and barely paying her medical bills when she first visited a mobile pantry in Merrick County. Shawna says the Food Bank has been a huge help to her and her family during these unprecedented times.

"Times are really hard right now. With inflation, things like meat and produce have become a delicacy. We don't get to have it very often unless we budget for it ahead of time. I'm so grateful for the Food Bank, and their monthly mobile pantry."

– Shawna



SUPPORT THE FOOD BANK WITH A VIRTUAL FUNDS DRIVE

At Food Bank for the Heartland, the success of our mission depends on the generosity of people like you! Want to make a direct impact on those struggling with food insecurity? A **Virtual Funds Drive** (also known as a Virtual Food Drive) is a great way to give back. Instead of collecting food items, you will collect financial donations online. Gather your friends, family, or co-workers to host a Virtual Funds Drive today. Simple and secure, our interactive online tool makes your donation to the Food Bank go even further. We'll use the funds to purchase most-needed food items, including fruits, vegetables, meat, and dairy products. Through our relationships with food producers and other retail partners, we can purchase food by the truckload and provide more than could otherwise be collected. **Scan the QR code to learn more!**

Click me! →

UPCOMING WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

Shine the Light on Hunger: It's our favorite holiday tradition! For the 16th consecutive year, the Shine the Light on Hunger campaign, championed by Conagra Brands Foundation, will kick off on November 17. This campaign invites the community to help our neighbors in need through December 31. We've set an ambitious goal this year of raising the equivalent of **3 million meals** to support hunger relief efforts. Help the Food Bank make a difference for neighbors in need this holiday season. We look forward to sharing more details soon, including all the ways you and your family can get involved in this exciting campaign.



Giving Tuesday: Mark your calendars! Giving Tuesday—a global day of giving—is coming up on November 29. This is the day to prove the power of giving in our region and give back in any way you can. Support the Food Bank and you'll help provide hope and relief to neighbors in desperate need across Nebraska and western Iowa.



GROWING HEALTHY FOOD FOR THE HEARTLAND

City Sprouts—a nonprofit based in Omaha—is on a mission to use urban agriculture to develop equitable food systems, provide educational opportunities, and build community. Founded in 1995 when community members transformed an overgrown lot near 40th and Seward, the community garden is now the oldest in the city. The North Garden offers 45 raised garden beds, a beehive, chickens, and a geodesic dome greenhouse.

In 2021, City Sprouts partnered with Food Bank for the Heartland to help deliver large quantities of fresh produce to its pantry partners. According to Program and Distribution Manager, Laura Simpson, the partnership was a unique opportunity they couldn't pass up. "We saw this as a chance to bring awareness to the food system and help educate people on where food comes from. Plus, it supports local farmers while providing food pantries with locally grown, quality produce." Currently, City Sprouts provides 400 lbs. of fresh produce every week to Bountiful Harvest, one of the Food Bank's pantry partners. Both organizations are excited to see the program expand.

It's just one of the ways they're combating food insecurity. "This year, we transitioned to a community model where anybody can come to our gardens and pick anything they need." The nonprofit also started Free Fridges & Pantries in 2021 to promote community well-being through equitable access to food, clothing, and basic hygiene items. Laura says the project's vision is much broader. "The goal is to see a network of Free Fridges & Pantries in Omaha, collectively addressing the needs of neighboring communities by modeling mutual aid."

According to City Sprouts, it's clear that community is exactly what Omaha needs right now. "We've been able to meet more of our neighbors who access the free produce. There's also a lot of kids in the area who come over because they just want someone to talk to. It's those small things that make a big difference in someone's day."

City Sprouts is doing just that, planting seeds today—to make a difference tomorrow.



Scan the QR code to read more stories like this on our *40 Faces of 40 Years* page!

FOOD BANK ADDS NEW BOARD MEMBERS

The Food Bank is excited to announce the appointment of six new board members. They include Jill Bazzell-Stenstrom, General Director of Real Estate for Union Pacific Railroad; Missy Beber, VP of Human Resources at Metropolitan Community College; Eric Crawford, Advancement Director for St. Patrick's Catholic Church; Judy Dittmar, Healthy Food Access Specialist with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach; Yesenia Valenzuela, Community Relations Coordinator for the City of Omaha; and Russ Wagner, EVP Chief Information Officer at Farm Credit Services of America.

The Food Bank's board is a dedicated group of 21 community leaders committed to carrying out the mission of eliminating hunger by ensuring consistent access to healthy food to children, families, seniors, and veterans across 93-counties in Nebraska and western Iowa.

"These six individuals are joining our board at a pivotal time. Their expertise, leadership, and knowledge will be invaluable during these unprecedented times," said Food Bank for the Heartland President and CEO Brian Barks. "We are eager to utilize their combined skillset to serve at-risk Heartland neighbors, advocate for those struggling with food insecurity, and strategically increase efficiencies across our organization."



Food Bank Board Members from left to right, top to bottom: Jill Bazzell-Stenstrom, Missy Beber, Eric Crawford, Judy Dittmar, Yesenia Valenzuela, Russ Wagner

CELEBRITY CHEF 2023

Save the date for the 22nd annual Celebrity Chef event. This year's fundraiser will be held on Thursday, March 2, 2023 at the CHI Health Center Arena in Omaha. Stay tuned for details, including the announcement of this year's Celebrity Chef. We can't wait to see you there!



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