



FY 2024 BACKPACK PROGRAM REPORT

JULY 1, 2023–JUNE 30, 2024



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 1,277,408 meals to at-risk children in Nebraska and western Iowa during the '23-'24 school year. On behalf of our team and the children we serve, thank you! We could not do this life changing work without you.



More than 70% of our students receive free and reduced lunch, and many don't speak English. How can we expect them to hit developmental milestones if they are facing hunger? This program is critical.

—Elementary School Principal with Columbus School District, NE

Program History

For nearly 19 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, 245 schools in 110 districts participated in FY 2024, 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 2023-2024 school year, a typical pack included two breakfast items, two entrees, a fruit pouch, one juice, and two milk cartons. 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.



This program helps a student remove the concern of worrying if they'll have food over the weekend to eat. A student that knows they will go home with extra food provided by this program will be a more focused student in the classroom.

—Teacher with Ponca Public Schools, NE

Making a Direct Impact

1 IN 5 CHILDREN

IN OUR SERVICE AREA IS FACING HUNGER.
THAT'S 85,470 CHILDREN.

8,404 CHILDREN

RECEIVED BACKPACKS WEEKLY DURING
THE 2023-2024 SCHOOL YEAR.

1,277,408 MEALS

DISTRIBUTED TO CHILDREN DURING
THE 2023-2024 SCHOOL YEAR.

245 SCHOOLS

IN 110 SCHOOL DISTRICTS SERVED.

\$164

THE COST TO SPONSOR ONE CHILD
FOR THE SCHOOL YEAR.

60 COUNTIES

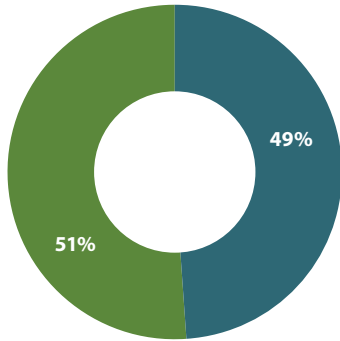
THROUGHOUT NEBRASKA AND
WESTERN IOWA PARTICIPATE IN
THE BACKPACK PROGRAM.

\$1,305,279

TOTAL COST OF THE PROGRAM IN FY 2024.

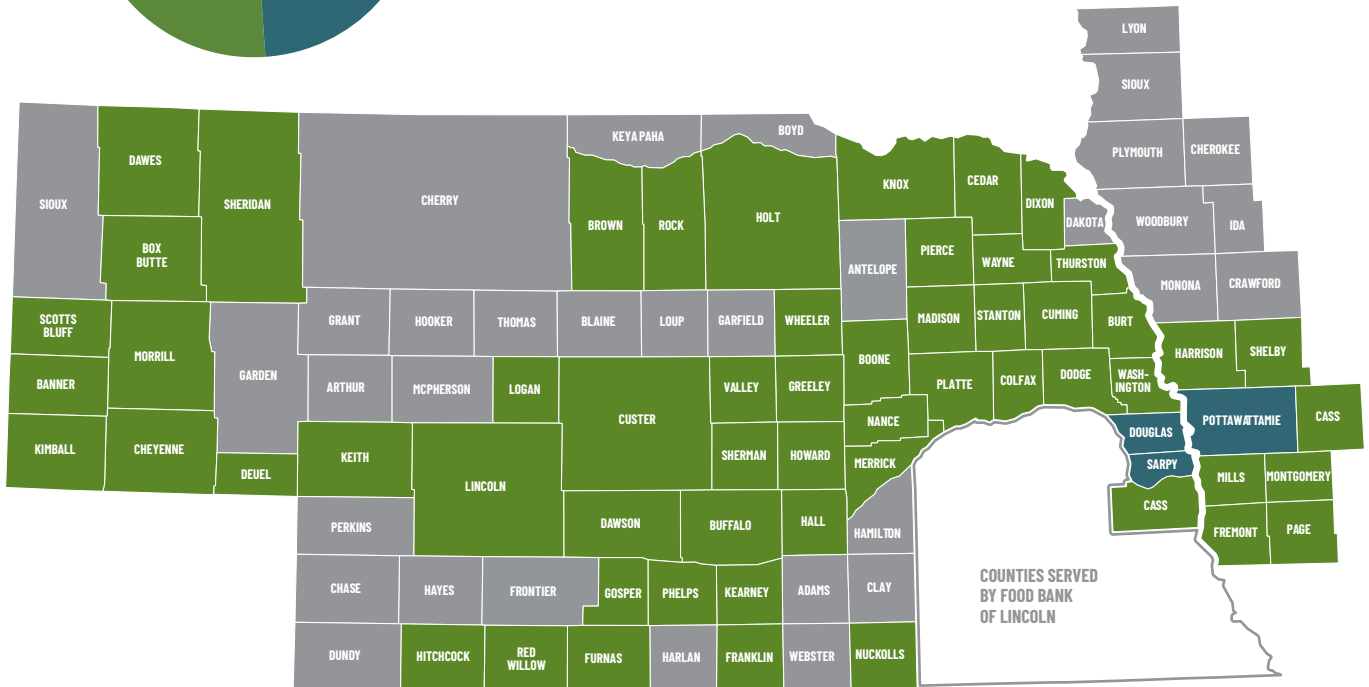
How the Program Works

More than 8,400 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 at-risk children across the Heartland so they can focus on what matters most—learning, growing, and having fun.



There’s a direct effect with food insecurity and the ability for them to do the work we’re asking of students each day. If they don’t have those basic needs met, and they don’t have that fuel for their day, it’s very hard to expect students to focus on their schoolwork, sit still or stay awake.

— School Counselor at Wakonda Elementary, Omaha, NE

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. Through their commitment, Woodhouse is helping thousands of children across the Heartland access healthy food.



Examples of items found in a typical Backpack



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

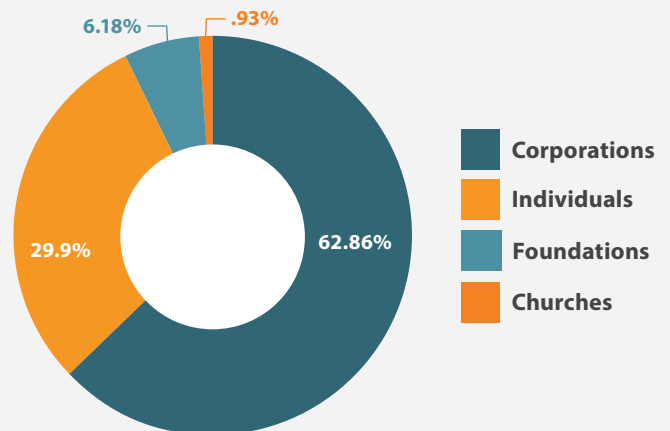
How Your Support Makes a Difference

It costs \$164 to sponsor a child and provide him or her with Backpack meals throughout the academic 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 \$1,305,279 in FY 2024.



Artwork drawn by students who receive Backpack meals

BACKPACK PROGRAM FY 2024 FINANCIAL SOURCES



The backpacks help me get more healthy, and my family too. Thank you.

— 3rd grader at Jefferson North Platte, NE



I spoke with a parent who is so happy she requested the support of this program. The children really enjoy the items and it has made a difference for her family.

— Educator with DC West Community Schools

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 2024, individuals, corporations, and civic groups packed nearly 268,504 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.

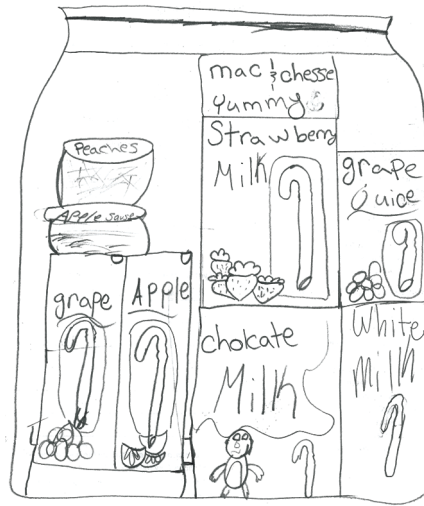


I have two kids of my own. I've seen the Backpack Program at work in their schools, and it's invaluable.

— Jenifer, Food Bank Volunteer



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.



This program has helped us when we were struggling to make it through, living paycheck to paycheck. There have been times that we would not have been able to eat anything if it was not for this program.

— Parent of a child recipient of the Backpack Program



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