

THE DISH

WINTER 2026



GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN WORSENS FOOD INSECURITY ACROSS THE HEARTLAND

At the time this article was written, our country had just emerged from a 44-day government shutdown—the longest in our history. Thousands of Nebraskans and western lowans suddenly found their access to food disrupted, and although the government has reopened, the damage is clear.

Between October 1 and November 1, some partners experienced a staggering spike in need, with households served **rising anywhere from 68% to 200%**—at a time when our charitable food network was already stretched to historic limits.

To understand what our neighbors were facing, a group of Food Bank staff, including our CEO, visited three communities in western Iowa. At every stop, we heard the same message: families we serve need more access to protein, such as chicken, beef, and pork. Protein-rich items are often the first items cut from a family's budget, due to high cost.

We saw this need reflected in the stories from our neighbors. Julie, a mother of two boys, lost her SNAP benefits in November and turned to her local pantry for help.

"We eat a lot of meat, and there's only so much the pantry can provide," Julie told us. "I usually use my SNAP benefits for meat to help us make full meals. We're going through our freezer and getting down to nothing. It's getting tough."

Stories like Julie's demonstrate the importance of SNAP. When federal programs are disrupted—even briefly—the ripple effects are immediate and profound.

Families experience overwhelming stress, and many face a risk of malnutrition when resources suddenly disappear.

This is why your compassion is desperately needed. Although the shutdown ended, we will continue to see impacts on families who were already facing impossible choices.

Together, we can help our communities begin to heal from a crisis, the impact of which will be felt long after the headlines fade.



*Pictured on the left — Julie, Pantry Recipient, Griswold Food Pantry
Top right — Woodbine Community Food Pantry
Bottom Right — Pantry Recipient, Mills County Storehouse*

DONATE TODAY!

Scan the QR code or visit
FoodBankHeartland.org/Donate
to help Heartland neighbors.



The Food Bank has a new address as of February 2, 2026!

4645 S. 84th Street, Omaha, NE 68127 — same mission, new location to better serve our community.

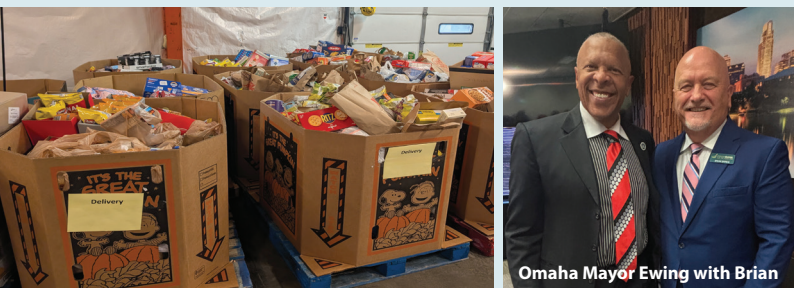
A NOTE FROM OUR PRESIDENT & CEO

Our food bank has been operating in crisis mode for more than six years. In truth, we have not experienced a “normal” year since 2018. First came the devastating floods of 2019, followed by the pandemic and historic inflation. As families continue to feel the strain of rising costs, we are also facing federal funding cuts—on top of the longest government shutdown in history.

To call these past several years “challenging” would be a profound understatement. We are navigating one of the most turbulent periods in our organization’s history.

And yet, I remain hopeful. Time and again, our communities have shown extraordinary courage and compassion. You have stepped up when it mattered most, becoming a beacon of hope for neighbors who need it now, more than ever.

One exceptional example is how the Omaha Mayor’s office stepped in—collaborating with our team and community leaders to launch a city-wide food drive. In one week, this effort brought in more than **52,000 pounds of food**—the equivalent of **over 43,000 meals**. This is what community looks like. And it’s what makes the Heartland such a remarkable place.



Omaha Mayor Ewing with Brian

I am deeply moved by the kindness I continue to see across our region. Whether you hosted a food drive, made a financial gift, volunteered, or advocated for neighbors, thank you.

Because of you, we continue to move forward. And because of you, thousands of our neighbors feel seen, supported, and cared for.

Brian Barks
President & CEO

FOOD DONORS PROVIDE SIGNIFICANT SUPPORT

A huge “thank you” to the food retailers and manufacturers who collectively donated **9,887,017 meals** at a value of **\$22,542,400** to the Food Bank in FY 25. That represents more than one-third of all meals we distributed last year!

For a comprehensive list of our incredible 42 top food donors, please visit FoodBankHeartland.org.



ADVOCACY UPDATE

The start of the new year marks the beginning of the state legislative session in both Nebraska and Iowa. Both states are in a short session year, with the legislatures in session from January to April.

One item we are following in both states is each legislatures’ work on their state budgets. Nebraska and Iowa are entering 2026 with budget deficits and will need to consider ways to balance their budgets.

Among the factors affecting this process will be changes at the federal level to public benefit programs, including SNAP and Medicaid, that could result in lower amounts of federal funding for these critical programs. These changes resulted from the budget reconciliation bill, the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act,” which passed last summer.

Our organization will continue to work closely with food banks, coalitions, and network partners to closely monitor activities at the state level and advocate on behalf of Heartland neighbors in need.

Visit FoodBankHeartland.org/Advocacy for the latest updates on the new legislative sessions in Nebraska and Iowa.



BACKPACK MEAL CHALLENGE: DOUBLE YOUR IMPACT!

Right now, **1 in 5 children** in Nebraska and western Iowa doesn't know where their next meal will come from. No child in the Heartland should experience food insecurity—and you can help change that.

Last school year, the **BackPack Program** provided more than 1.2 million weekend meals for children facing hunger. Thanks to the **Woodhouse Auto Family**, every gift made to our Backpack Program will be **matched, up to \$500,000**. That means your generosity goes twice as far to ensure kids have the nutritious food they need to thrive.

The Backpack Program provides more than meals—it's a lifeline. Heartland educators see every day how hunger affects a child's ability to learn, focus, and simply be a kid. Your support today fuels a child's future tomorrow.



We know that if our body is fueled, our brain is primed for learning. We really value 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



Help us alleviate childhood hunger today. Scan the QR code or visit FoodBankHeartland.org/BackPack to support the Backpack Program.

THE FOOD BANK'S NEW FACILITY NEARS COMPLETION!

Our teams are gearing up for one of the most exciting moments in our history—moving into our brand-new facility at **4645 South 84th Street** in Omaha! After more than four years of dreaming, planning, and building, we're thrilled to see this project come to life so we can serve our neighbors more efficiently and more effectively.

We expect to be **fully operational by Monday, February 2, and volunteers are slated to join us for the very first shift on Monday, February 9!** As with any major construction project, these dates could shift, and we truly appreciate your patience and flexibility.

Keep an eye on **FoodBankHeartland.org** for the latest updates. We can't wait to welcome you into our new home!





An Evening with

AARÓN SÁNCHEZ AND OMAHA'S TOP CHEFS

Thursday, February 19, 2026 · 5:30 – 9:00 p.m.
CHI Health Center · 455 N 10th St, Omaha, NE 68102



HELP PROVIDE 2.8 MILLION MEALS!

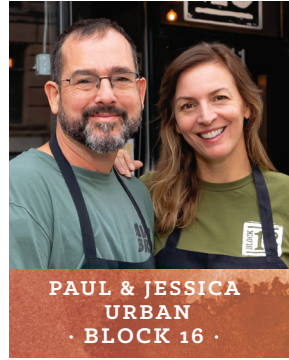
Get your tickets and tables for the Food Bank's 25th Annual **Celebrity Chef Fundraiser** today! The event features national celebrity chef, **Aarón Sánchez**, and a *Culinary Cook-Off* between some of Omaha's finest chefs!



JOEL HASSANALI
· SALTED EDGE ·
· PIVOT PRIME ·



BEN MAIDES
· AU COURANT ·
· FLAGSHIP RESTAURANT
GROUP ·



PAUL & JESSICA
URBAN
· BLOCK 16 ·

Our local Cook-Off chefs include **Joel Hassanali**—Chef Partner of Lucky Eleven Hospitality Group, consisting of Salted EDGE and PIVOT Prime, **Ben Maides**—Executive Chef and Owner of Au Courant, Culinary Director of Flagship Restaurant Group and a James Beard Award semifinalist for Best Chef: Midwest, and **Paul and Jessica Urban**—Chefs and Co-Owners of Block 16, and James Beard Award semifinalists for Best Chef: Midwest.

New to our judge lineup, is Husker Volleyball Coach **Dani Busboom Kelly!** She will be joined by **Matthew Brown**, Advanced Sommelier and General Manager of V. Mertz, **Tim Nicholson** of Boiler Room, and **David Utterback** of Yoshitomo and Koji.

Your support will help us raise the equivalent of **2.8 million meals!** Get your tickets or table today, or donate to support the fundraiser at **FoodBankHeartland.org/CelebrityChef**. You don't want to miss it!



Give monthly. Nourish daily.

GIVE MONTHLY SUPPORT!

From October 1 through November 24, over **190 individuals** became Meal Makers! This number speaks to the generosity and compassion in our communities. This year, join our exclusive group of donors and be part of something bigger.

Your monthly gift doesn't just provide food—it offers hope, stability, and a sense of security to neighbors like Shelagh.

"It's been hard with the extreme expense of everything. This pantry has been a blessing. They give you just about everything you need. And they make sure no one is left behind."

– Shelagh, Pantry Recipient

Thank you for showing Shelagh—and countless neighbors—that you care. Become part of this powerful movement in the new year!

Visit FoodBankHeartland.org/MealMakers or scan the QR code below.

