

THE DISH

WINTER 2025



CHILDHOOD HUNGER RATES ARE ON THE RISE

Members of the Food Bank's executive team, including President and CEO, Brian Barks, recently traveled to northeastern Nebraska to meet with our partners, gain a deeper understanding of how hunger is affecting the region, and discuss how to collectively best serve our communities during this critical time.

The team had the opportunity to meet with partners deploying various programs and services in Platte, Madison, and Knox counties. The Platte County visit included a meeting with Robert Hausmann, Principal of North Park Elementary School in Columbus. Robert expressed his gratitude for the Food Bank's Backpack Program, as he sees how hunger affects his students.

"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."

According to Feeding America's 2024 "Map the Meal Gap" report (based 2022 data), Platte County saw a more than **50% increase** in the number of individuals experiencing food insecurity and a staggering **68% increase** in the number of children facing hunger over the previous year.

This increase places extra demand on the Food Bank's programs. During the '23-24 academic year, the Food Bank's **BackPack Program** distributed more than 1.2 million nutritious weekend meals across 245 schools.

Due to the rising trend in childhood hunger, the Food Bank recently expanded the program. This academic year, **more than 1.3 million meals** will be distributed through the program, with **8,700 students** across the



Calib Miller, VP of Community Impact, Kelly Ptacek, VP of External Affairs, and Brian Barks, President & CEO, meet with Principal Hausmann

Heartland receiving Backpack meals each week (up from 8,400 last year). In addition, Backpack items have been updated to include more brand-name foods and more appetizing items for children.

Feedback from students and parents, as well as insightful conversations with educators like Robert, led to these strategic program enhancements. Thanks to community support, more students are now receiving greater access to healthy food. As food insecurity levels remain high, so does the need for additional support.

We are beyond grateful to our Network Partners, community volunteers, and everyone who contributes to the Backpack Program. Thank you for empowering neighbors, supporting children and families, and building stronger, more resilient communities every day.

Scan the QR code or visit FoodBankHeartland.org/BackPack to make a gift today and provide food and hope to families in need.



OUR MISSION

To eliminate hunger in the Heartland by ensuring consistent access to healthy foods through community partnerships.

A NOTE FROM OUR PRESIDENT & CEO

As you saw on the front cover, I recently had the privilege of meeting with several Network Partners in northeastern Nebraska. For me, this visit was a powerful reminder of the tenacity and generosity of our Heartland communities. Through your support, our Network Partners are not just ensuring neighbors receive food—they're ensuring neighbors receive connection, community, and security—key components to one's well-being.



Brian Barks meets with partners in Norfolk and Bloomfield, Nebraska

As I conversed with partners, one constant remained: they need additional resources to keep up with the growing levels of hunger. While I wish I could snap my fingers and solve this problem today, the Food Bank is working on a long-term, sustainable response as we build our new facility.

Our new home at 84th & L Street will provide an increase of more than 60% in cooler and freezer space—resulting in larger quantities of protein and fresh foods for our Network Partners and more nutritious items for families, children, seniors, and veterans.

Our partners—and the neighbors we serve—are why this new facility is critical in the fight against hunger. We are committed to providing consistent access to healthy foods through community partnerships, and our new facility will allow us to do this more equitably and efficiently.

I look forward to more insightful conversations with our partners in 2025 as we continue our collaborative efforts in the fight against hunger. As always, I am grateful for your continued support of our vital mission.

Brian Barks
President & CEO

THANK YOU FOR SHINING THE LIGHT ON HUNGER!

Your generosity is changing lives! The 18th annual Shine the Light on Hunger campaign was a huge success. We set an ambitious goal to raise five million meals. To help support this goal, Conagra Brands Foundation, Farm Credit Services of America, and Baker's stepped up with a generous matching gift of \$170,000.

Stay tuned to our website, where we'll share the final results later this month.

Thank you!



FOOD DONORS PROVIDE SIGNIFICANT SUPPORT

A huge "thank you" to the food retailers and manufacturers listed below, who collectively donated **8,386,415 meals** to the Food Bank in FY 24. That represents more than **one-third** of all meals we distributed last year! These donations allow us to offset the cost of purchased food and are a critical component of our Comprehensive Food Sourcing Plan.

Looking ahead, the Food Bank will strengthen relationships with these and other related businesses—particularly in communities outside of Omaha—to increase donations and provide more equitable food distribution across our service area.

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|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Aldi | Grand Prairie Foods Inc. |
| Amazon | Hormel Foods |
| Baker's | Hy-Vee |
| Bimbo Bakery | Jack Link's |
| Borden/LALA | Kemps Dairy |
| Capital City Fruit | Mondelēz |
| Cargill | Omaha Steaks |
| Coca-Cola | Performance Foodservice |
| Conagra Brands | Rotella's Italian Bakery |
| Costco | Safeway |
| Country Hearth | Sam's Club |
| Curly's Foods | Smithfield |
| Dari LLC | Target |
| Dollar General | Trader Joe's |
| Fareway | Tyson Foods |
| General Mills | Walmart |

DOUBLE THE IMPACT FOR HEARTLAND CHILDREN

1 in 5 children in Nebraska and western Iowa are experiencing food insecurity. That's up from 1 in 9 in the previous year's report from Feeding America. Right now, you have the power to make a difference. Thanks to **Woodhouse Auto Family**, all gifts made to the Food Bank's Backpack Program will be matched, up to **\$500,000**. **A gift of \$164 will be doubled and sponsor TWO children for an entire school year!**

The Backpack Program—which is projected to cost more than \$1.4 million in FY 25—is essential to providing children with the nutritious meals needed to thrive in school. Educators across Nebraska and western Iowa have seen first-hand the dire effects hunger has on their students.



Give 2X
the Backpacks



POWERED BY
WOODHOUSE



The Backpack Program at our school is so important. We see students who you know haven't had a meal since the day prior. The excitement we see in their eyes when they get that backpack full of food, they don't care what's in it, they just know they're not going to be hungry. A five-year-old shouldn't have to stress about where their next meal comes from, but it's a very real problem here in our local community.

—Educator in Weeping Water, Nebraska

Help us alleviate childhood hunger today by donating to the Backpack Program. Scan the QR code or visit FoodBankHeartland.org/BackPack to make a gift.



MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

The Food Bank has made significant progress in our efforts to evolve our advocacy program and become a catalyst for change in the public arena. Part of those efforts include robust changes to the advocacy section of our website, with new resources and a fresh look.

The site also provides new opportunities for you to become a Food Bank advocate! Your voice is critical as the Food Bank builds a broader movement to end hunger. Receive updated information on how you can create change and combat hunger in your community.

With the new legislative session underway, stay tuned to the Food Bank's website for the latest information, and educational resources.

To learn more, visit FoodBankHeartland.org/Advocacy or scan the QR code to the right.

UPCOMING ADVOCACY EVENTS

- **Iowa Food Bank Association's (IFBA's) Day on the Hill: February 25—Des Moines**
 - The Food Bank will join hunger advocates across Iowa to advocate legislative priorities and provide educational opportunities for elected officials.

- **Feeding America D.C. Spring Fly-In: March 4 & 5—Washington D.C.**

- Feeding America, members of our team, and food bank partners will congregate in the nation's capital to advocate on the hill for policies to promote food security that could directly impact meeting the growing need across the Heartland.





An Evening with
TOM COLICCHIO
AND OMAHA'S TOP CHEFS

Thursday, March 6, 2025 · 5:30 – 9:00 p.m.
CHI Health Center · 455 N 10th St, Omaha, NE 68102

GET YOUR TICKETS TODAY!

Tickets for the Food Bank's 24th Annual **Celebrity Chef Fundraiser**—featuring national celebrity chef, **Tom Colicchio**, and a **Culinary Cook-Off** between some of Omaha's top chefs—are going fast! Be part of this unforgettable event on Thursday, March 6 at CHI Health Center.



Our local chefs include **Tim Nicholson**—executive chef of Boiler Room and four-time James Beard nominee, and a 2024 finalist for Best Chef: Midwest, **Nick Strawhecker**—chef and owner of Dante, Omaha's first restaurant specializing in Neapolitan pizza, and **David Utterback**—chef and owner of Yoshitomo, Koji, and a James Beard Award first finalist (and previous three-time semifinalist) for Best Chef: Midwest. Yoshitomo was also a 2024 national semifinalist for Outstanding Restaurant.

The evening will also feature guest judges including long-time food reporter **Sarah Baker Hansen** and advanced sommelier and general manager of V. Mertz, **Matthew Brown**.

Your support will help us raise the equivalent of **2.1 million meals!** Get your tickets today or donate to support the fundraiser at FoodBankHeartland.org/CelebrityChef. You don't want to miss it!



PROVIDE HOPE ALL YEAR!

Hunger knows no season, ethnicity, or age. From an unexpected medical bill or job loss, to high prices for everyday essentials, our neighbors need your help.

Thanks to a generous donor, all new Meal Makers will have their gifts matched for the next 12 months—up to \$18,000!

By becoming a Monthly Meal Maker, you'll join a community of supporters dedicated to helping neighbors receive consistent access to nutritious food—providing security and stability to thousands of Heartland neighbors.

Make an impact in the new year by giving back every month! Visit FoodBankHeartland.org/MealMakers or scan the QR code below.



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