



Feeding Our Hungry Neighbors

WWW.SOLVEHUNGERTODAY.ORG

For Immediate Release

Contact: Jennifer Clark

jennifer.clark@northernillfoodbank.org

630-443-6910 ext. 142

Photos available

1 Year Later, Covid-19 Still Devastating Communities in N. Illinois

(GENEVA, Ill., March 16, 2021) – One year after the pandemic was declared, Northern Illinois Food Bank is helping tens of thousands families each month get free, nutritious food. The demand is not waning.

- The Food Bank has distributed over 100 million meals since March 2020, a 34% increase compared to the previous year.
- At food distribution drive-throughs throughout the Chicago suburbs and Northern Illinois communities, long lines of cars wait in the parking lots of community colleges, local retailers, commuter stations, and food pantries as volunteers load boxes of food into trunks and truck beds. In the past year, the Food Bank's 871 mobile pantries and pop-up markets have served 243,000 households.
- Members of the Food Bank's network of 900 food pantries and service agencies report they are unable to meet the increased need. They have received \$1.7 million in grants from the Food Bank to build their capacity for food storage and distribution.

"This year has been devastating for our neighbors. Northern Illinois has seen a 62% increase in food insecurity, and 1 in 6 children are hungry," said Julie Yurko, CEO & President of Northern Illinois Food Bank. "Food insecurity isn't just a big city issue. Hunger affects rural communities, small towns, mid-sized cities like Joliet and Rockford, and the Chicago suburbs too. Layoffs, furloughs, hour cuts and pay cuts are creating havoc for our neighbors, some who were already living paycheck to paycheck before the pandemic hit. With little, if any, savings, they are having to choose between paying their bills or buying groceries. That's a decision no one should need to make."

Since the pandemic struck, the Food Bank has been operating in crisis response mode: first, ensuring the wellness and safety of its 160 employees and then extending the safety net to the nearly 1,000 volunteers who help evaluate, repack and distribute food on a weekly basis. Once that was achieved, the Food Bank team and its supporters have been working tirelessly to secure food and distribute it en masse.

"Not only has the Food Bank team been relentless in meeting the increased demand for our services, but they have been innovative and thoughtful in solving the problems of hunger that the pandemic has intensified," Yurko said. "I feel so much gratitude and, frankly, awe at what the Food Bank team together with our partners and supporters have been able to achieve in the past year."

Besides organizing the pop-ups and mobile food distributions, the Food Bank has handled 64 million pounds of food donations, processed 32,000 food orders through its online service My Pantry Express (a discreet, convenient and easy way to access free groceries), helped 2,500 applicants receive SNAP benefits, and

delivered 56,000 backpacks and 786,000 meals to children who did not have access to school meals while schools were closed. Additionally, the Food Bank welcomed 126,556 volunteer hours and 20,000 new donors.

“Going forward, even with the economic stimulus package, it’s important for our communities to spread the word that their neighbors don’t have to worry about scraping together money for groceries. Everyone should have the food they need to thrive,” Yurko said.

Here’s how you can get help or give help:

- If a neighbor, friend, co-worker, or family member is struggling to make ends meet, encourage them to go to their local food pantry or visit one of the Food Bank’s mobile or pop-up food distributions. Groceries are free, and you don’t need an ID, proof of address or income to receive them. Use the Food Bank’s interactive map to find a nearby distribution location. Go to [SolveHungerToday.org/GetHelp](https://solvehunger.org/GetHelp).
- Volunteer with the Food Bank. There are 35 volunteer opportunities each week. Go to <https://solvehunger.org/ways-to-give/give-time/>.
- Contribute to the Food Bank, which relies on community support to fund its operations. Every \$1 donated helps provide \$8 worth of groceries. That means a \$100 donation can feed a family for a month. Donate at <https://solvehunger.org/ways-to-give/give-funds/>.
- Call the Food Bank’s SNAP hotline at **(844) 600-SNAP (7627)** to learn more about public benefits and other resources that may be available to those who need help.

###

About Northern Illinois Food Bank

Our vision at [Northern Illinois Food Bank](https://solvehunger.org) is for everyone in Northern Illinois to have the food they need to thrive. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and proud member of [Feeding America](https://feedingamerica.org), we serve our neighbors in 13 counties with dignity, equity and convenience, providing 250,000 meals a day. We bring together manufacturers, local and corporate grocers, area farmers, corporations, foundations, and individuals who donate food and funding, and each week nearly 1,000 volunteers help us evaluate, repack, and distribute food. We also proudly partner with more than 900 food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, and youth and senior feeding programs to provide nutritious food and resources. Our distribution centers are located in Geneva, Park City, Rockford and Joliet. Find out how you can [get help](https://solvehunger.org/GetHelp), [volunteer](https://solvehunger.org/ways-to-give/give-time/), [donate](https://solvehunger.org/ways-to-give/give-funds/) or [get involved](https://solvehunger.org/ways-to-give/give-time/) at [SolveHungerToday.org](https://solvehunger.org), or follow us on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/northernillinoisfoodbank), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/northernillinoisfoodbank), [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/northernillinoisfoodbank) and [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/northernillinoisfoodbank).