Foodbank Focus

A publication of the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank

Fall 2026

AKRON-CANTON REGIONAL FOOD BANK

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330.535.6900
akroncantonfoodbank.org

MAIN CAMPUS
350 Opportunity Pkwy
Akron, OH 44307

STARK COUNTY CAMPUS
1365 Cherry Ave. NE
Canton, OH 44714

WAYNE COUNTY CAMPUS
333 Wadsworth Rd
Orrville, OH 44667

SERVING 8 COUNTIES
Carroll, Holmes, Medina, Portage, Stark, Summit, Tuscarawas & Wayne Counties

PARTNER FOOD BANK OF FEEDING AMERICA



Every meal has a story. Meet Amy.

When Amy began looking for ways to stretch her budget, she discovered the Foodbank could offer more than food. Now she visits for groceries and volunteers her time, finding support and a sense of purpose along the way.

Amy, who lives in Akron, has been out of work because of health challenges and is transitioning to a fixed income. After applying for SNAP benefits, she found the additional support from the Foodbank made a meaningful difference.

"I pick up food at the Foodbank and then also, I am now using food stamps, which is a huge [help] because I'm on a fixed income," Amy shared. "So this is a real blessing."



When Amy learned she needed to complete work or volunteer hours to maintain her SNAP benefits, she began volunteering at the Foodbank and quickly became a regular.

"Everybody at the Foodbank is so friendly and polite," Amy said.

Amy especially enjoys volunteering at the front desk, welcoming neighbors and helping them access the food they need. She also appreciates the variety of groceries available, particularly fresh produce.

"I love, love, love the fact that they always have fruits and vegetables," Amy said. "I think it's a great thing."

For Amy, the Foodbank has become both a source of support and an opportunity to give back.

"I'm really blessed and very thankful," she said.

Thank you for supporting your Foodbank, our hunger-relief partners and neighbors like Amy.

An important announcement from our President & CEO

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Twenty-five years ago, I accepted the privilege of leading the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank, never imagining how profoundly it would shape my life. Today, I'm writing to you for the last time as President & CEO.

When I arrived, I was a hard charger with big aspirations for the leader I wanted to be, what the Foodbank could become and the legacy I might leave behind.

Early on, I remember looking at the Foodbank's financial statement and realizing I hadn't raised a single dollar of it. Everything around me had been built by people who came before me. Sitting in that chair, I made a quiet promise to leave the organization stronger than I found it.

Together, we accomplished more than I ever imagined. We expanded our reach, strengthened our mission and served countless families throughout our region. None of it would have been possible without donors, volunteers, staff, partners and friends like you. Whenever my spirit became tired, your faithfulness renewed it.

Over time, I came to believe the deeper purpose of our work is not simply to solve problems, but to help one another become more compassionate, generous and hopeful. While we were building the Foodbank together, the Foodbank was building me.

I loved this job so much that I never gave much thought to a finish line until the pandemic. Then my Dad passed away, my kids started heading off to college and I began thinking about a future that did not carry the responsibility of an entire organization. Like Forrest Gump said after running thousands of miles, "my feet hurt."

As I prepare to retire at the end of the year, I do so with complete confidence in the Foodbank's future. Katie Carver Reed is prepared to take the baton, and a new strategic plan is ready to launch. I know she will move the mission forward with passion and that the Foodbank will continue to thrive under her leadership.

Serving as President & CEO has been the greatest honor of my professional life. As scripture tells us, "a tree is known by its fruit." If the fruit we have grown together has made this community more compassionate, generous and hopeful, I can imagine no greater satisfaction.

To continue that growth, Holly and I, with the support of the Foodbank's board of directors, have established The Dan & Holly Flowers Family Fund in the Foodbank's Endowment to support this mission in perpetuity.

I gave this work everything I had. And somehow, along the way, it helped me become the person I once hoped I would be.

Thank you for your friendship, trust, partnership and support.



With heartfelt gratitude,

Daniel R. Flowers

Daniel R. Flowers
President & CEO

P.S. If no one has told you they love you today, I want you to know that the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank loves you.



KATIE CARVER REED TO BECOME THE FOODBANK'S THIRD PRESIDENT & CEO

To learn more about Katie and this leadership transition, scan the QR code or visit **akroncantonfoodbank.org/ceo**.

Creating access to food where kids learn



Leaders began Feed Kids First to ensure food and basic needs are accessible for all children.

For children facing food insecurity, having access to nutritious food can make a meaningful difference in their ability to learn and thrive.

Feed Kids First is working to make that access easier by bringing food directly into schools, where students and families already feel comfortable and supported.

Feed Kids First began in 2020 when two school administrators and two nurses came together after seeing the impact of food insecurity on children in their community. What started with one school pantry in Canton has grown to 18 school pantry partnerships serving students and families in Canton and Massillon.

The organization's school-based model is intentional. Rather than asking families to travel somewhere unfamiliar to receive food, Feed Kids First works directly with schools to create access points where families already know and trust the people around them.

"We want students and families to be able to access food and the support they need in the place that they know best and trust, which is at school," said Stephanie Zuech, co-founder and president of Feed Kids First. "We never want food insecurity to be a barrier to learning."

Each school's needs are different. Some have larger food pantries with cold storage for perishable foods, including frozen meat and dairy, while others provide emergency food or snacks to students throughout the school day. Feed Kids First provides food, funding, training and program oversight, while school staff work directly with families to distribute food.

Last year, Feed Kids First served more than 6,000 students and families through its network of school pantries. The organization also provided 1,500 seasonal meal boxes and nearly 257,000 snacks. Twice a year, volunteers come together to pack 30- to 40-pound boxes of food for families before summer and winter breaks.

The Foodbank has been a partner since Feed Kids First began its school pantry program.

"Our partnership with the Foodbank is truly the heart of our program," Zuech said. "The Foodbank has always just been willing to help us find new and better ways to do things and to grow and to add on to our program."



Feed Kids First hosts a Pop-up Pantry in the summer.

During the summer months, Feed Kids First and the Foodbank also partnered to bring a Pop-up Pantry to the southeast side of Canton, helping fill the gap while schools and school-based pantries were closed for summer break.

"Being able to have that resource right here and serving these kids right here in our neighborhoods, in our backyards and our schools is tremendous," Zuech said.

For Zuech, the work is rooted in a simple belief — children should have the food they need to learn, grow and succeed.

"We are just so driven by this mission," she said. "No child should ever have to struggle or wonder where their next meal is coming from."

From local farms to neighbors' tables

Fresh fruits and vegetables are an important part of a healthy diet, and the Foodbank's Local Produce program helps families enjoy fresh, locally grown food throughout the growing season. Through this program, families receive a variety of fresh produce delivered directly to their homes, bringing nutritious ingredients from local farms to tables across our community.

The Foodbank partners with Produce Perks Midwest and three local farms — Let's Grow Akron, Baker's Fresh Produce and Front 9 Farm — to provide families with fresh produce delivered directly to their homes every other week.

This season, 260 families are participating in the 16-week program, with 2,130 deliveries expected by the end of the season.



Bob and Jimmy unload fresh produce at the Foodbank.

For local farmers like Bob Baker of Baker's Fresh Produce and Jimmy Myers of Front 9 Farm, being part of the program is an opportunity to share the food they grow with families who may not otherwise have access to fresh, locally grown produce.



Local farms partner with the Foodbank to deliver fresh produce directly to neighbors' homes.

"It's a really great program," Myers says. "It's great fresh produce, and the Foodbank is giving it to the people who need it most."

The farmers hope families enjoy the fresh produce and have the opportunity to try something new. Recipe cards are included with the boxes to give families ideas for preparing the fruits and vegetables they receive.

"I hope they get excited about what they get," Myers says. "I hope they learn to use stuff that they don't normally use."

For Baker and Myers, making fresh produce more accessible is an important part of why they do this work. By partnering with local farmers, the Foodbank is helping connect families with fresh, nutritious food while supporting the farmers who grow it.

> "Our family enjoyed everything about it. The wonderful vegetables, the variety, the mystery of what was coming in the box and trying new vegetables. We really appreciate this program and the local farms that participated. We thank you all so much!"

> "I got to try veggies I had never even heard of, plus some new recipes. I lost my job in April, and this program was a lifesaver."

> "I'm a single father raising my daughter without family. She's 10 years old, and she enjoyed everything that you guys sent!"

> "We are so, so grateful for this experience and to have been able to be delivered fresh produce we can't always afford every week, especially since our home garden hasn't been successful. Thank you, thank you a million times over!"

New Wayne County Campus opens





Guests gathered in The J.M. Smucker Co. Community Hall.

The Foodbank officially opened its new Wayne County Campus in Orrville on Aug. 31, marking a new chapter in its 44 years of service in Wayne County. Made possible by a historic gift from The J.M. Smucker Co., the campus brings Foodbank resources closer to neighbors and hunger-relief partners.

Friendship Meals, a 100% volunteer-run organization, was the first Foodbank partner to pick up food from the new location. For Beth Haislip, president and director, the difference was immediate.

"Being able to pick up food in Orrville has really shifted the way we access the Foodbank," Haislip said. Previously, traveling to Canton or Akron meant setting aside a half day.



Andrew assists Beth with her food order.

"Having the Orrville location of the Foodbank here is, and will continue to be, a huge blessing to us and the people we serve!" Haislip said.

Since opening, the campus has welcomed volunteers, hosted partner food pickups and accepted food donations. Volunteers have also packed boxes for the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), which provides nourishing food to eligible older adults.



Volunteers pack boxes of food for older adults.

The campus includes a 19,000-square-foot building, pollinator garden and more than 30 acres donated by Smucker. The company also partnered with the Wayne County Community Foundation to establish a fund and committed $1 million to support new and expanded services. Long-term uses for the property continue to be explored with input from the community.

Last year, the Foodbank and nearly 40 Wayne County partners helped provide 1.7 million pounds of food in the county. The new campus will strengthen those partnerships and bring hunger-relief resources closer to the neighbors who need them.



Guests receive a tour of the new Wayne County Campus.

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The holidays are a time for gathering, sharing meals, creating memories and celebrating traditions with the people we love. But for many of our neighbors, having enough food can be especially challenging this time of year.

This holiday season, you can help ensure hope finds its way to tables across our community. Join us in delivering hope, one meal at a time.

Donate Meals
Make a financial gift. $1 = 3 meals!

Coordinate a virtual or traditional food & funds drive
Create an online fundraising page to share and/or collect food and funds.

Double Dollar Day
Your gift can be matched on Nov. 30. Make double the impact!

MERRY meals MIXER

DECEMBER 2, 2026
6PM-8:30PM
OHIO CHRISTMAS FACTORY
4125 MAHONING ROAD NE, CANTON

For tickets and more information, visit **MerryMealsMixer.com.**

SAVE THESE DATES

Dec. 19, 2026
Selfless Elf 5k

Feb. 26, 2027
Harvest for Hunger Campaign Kick-off