

Foodbank Focus

A publication of the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank
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MAIN CAMPUS

350 Opportunity Pkwy
Akron, OH 44307

STARK COUNTY CAMPUS

1365 Cherry Ave. NE
Canton, OH 44714

SERVING 8 COUNTIES

Carroll, Holmes,
Medina, Portage, Stark,
Summit, Tuscarawas &
Wayne Counties



PARTNER
FOOD BANK OF
**FEEDING
AMERICA**



Every meal has a story. Meet Chelsea.

Chelsea is a devoted mother supporting her two children — a five-year-old son and a nine-year-old daughter. After recently moving to Akron, she has been adjusting to a new city while navigating a period of unemployment.

To help stretch her budget, Chelsea visits food pantries 2-3 times per month. While she receives food benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), they don't always last until the end of the month.

“It helps to be able to get eggs, milk and even hygiene items, so I can save money on those things,” Chelsea said. “It always helps.”

The support she receives makes it possible for her to provide consistent meals for her children without worrying about running out of groceries.

“I am able to provide for them without having a shortage at the end of the month,” she said. “You can really make a lot out of what is provided from the pantries.”

For Chelsea, the Foodbank has offered her more than just groceries. Being new to the area, she has found guidance and support through the Foodbank’s resource room, which helps neighbors connect with services beyond food throughout the community.

Chelsea says the experience has also changed the way she thinks about giving back. When she has extra items her family doesn't use, she donates them to local food drives in the community.

Thank you for helping neighbors like Chelsea and her family.



DID YOU KNOW?

On average, the Foodbank distributes enough food for 141,000 meals every day.

Congratulations, 2025 Volunteer of the Year winners!

Foodbank volunteers are amazing. Their gift of service is invaluable; we truly could not do this work without them. Each year during National Volunteer Month, we recognize our volunteers' compassion, dedication and contributions. Below are this year's award recipients. Thank you, friends!

MAIN CAMPUS

Individual Volunteer of the Year
Thomas Lindenberger



“

I believe it's important to remember that any one of us, at any time, could find ourselves in need of assistance due to misfortune or a sudden change in personal circumstances.”

Corporate Volunteer Group
LyondellBasell



“

Seeing how our efforts advance good in our community is deeply fulfilling. The real reward is the fulfillment that comes from helping someone else.”

Organization Volunteer Group
Cuyahoga Valley Ski Club



“

Our most memorable moments have been when we are asked to work in the pantry, interacting with the people who visit the Foodbank. It reminds us of the tremendous needs in our community.”

STARK COUNTY CAMPUS

Individual Volunteer of the Year
Marilyn Poulos



“

I donate monthly, but volunteering makes it feel like you are more involved in the cause.”

Corporate Volunteer Group
Gervasi Vineyard Resort & Spa



“

Volunteering allows our team to make a tangible impact together. It builds camaraderie while reinforcing a culture of compassion and servant leadership.”

Organization Volunteer Group
Faith Family Church



“

We love serving with the Foodbank because they share our heart to meet needs in the community and lift others up. We appreciate the spirit of excellence they bring to everything they do.”

The Salvation Army helps feed Summit County neighbors and offers compassionate care

At The Salvation Army Summit County, the doors open each day with a simple mission: make sure no one in the community goes without food. The Salvation Army has operated a food pantry in Summit County since 1971 and was one of the first hunger-relief partners of the Foodbank.

Staff at The Salvation Army stay busy. They serve hot lunches on weekdays at multiple locations, host a monthly drive-thru food distribution, and, in partnership with The University of Akron, offer a monthly walk-up distribution for students and community members. Neighbors can access food pantries once per month by appointment in Akron and Barberton and emergency food boxes are also available.

In addition to shelf-stable groceries, families can receive hygiene packages, diapers and even pet food. The program serves more than 900 individuals per week through its pantry, meal sites and other food programs.



Shawna and Tracey fill grocery carts for neighbors in the pantry.

college students are seeking assistance, and parents are forced to choose between paying bills and buying healthy food.

“There are families who just can’t put a full meal on the table,” she says. “The healthy stuff is expensive. If we can provide that, and it means kids can have a snack after school, that matters.”

For Shawna, the work is deeply personal. She experienced food insecurity as a child, growing up in a household that relied on food stamps, pantries and church support.

“We were surviving off pantries and agencies,” she recalls. “So now, if I can help one person who’s struggling like I was, that means everything.”

Supporting this work is a long-standing partnership with the Foodbank — a relationship Shawna calls essential. Without it, Shawna says, their ability to serve the community would look very different.

“We wouldn’t be able to support people the way we are now without the Foodbank,” she says. “Being able to go to one central place to get what we need is a tremendous help, especially since we don’t always have the staff capacity.”

For Shawna, the motivation is simple. “The need is always going to be there,” she says. “I don’t want other families or kids to suffer the way I did. If we can ease that burden, even a little, it’s worth it.”



Jason picks up groceries and delivers them to neighbors at his clinic in Akron.

“Hunger is a real thing people struggle with every day,” says Shawna, social services ministries coordinator.

“People who have never had to ask for help before are coming through our doors. The economy is hard right now, and we just want people to know we’re here.”

Shawna has witnessed how rising costs and stagnant wages are reshaping hunger in the community. More working families are struggling to afford groceries,

A lifetime of service – and a commitment that continues

More than 40 years ago, when conversations first began about bringing a food bank to our community, Rita Kelly Madick was in the room.

Although she signed the Foodbank's original articles of incorporation in 1982, she is quick to describe herself not as a founder, but as a "foot soldier." At the time, she helped convene local leaders to find common ground and imagine what a united hunger-relief network could look like. "We all agreed people needed to be fed," she recalls.

That belief – that access to food is fundamental – reflects something that has guided Rita her entire life: a deep commitment to social justice.

From volunteering as a young teen to advocating for accessibility laws in Akron, Rita has always believed in acting locally.



Rita helps stock the pantry shelves.

"If you try to solve the world's problems, you feel powerless," she explains. "But here, in our own community, we can see the impact. Hunger isn't abstract. It's real. You can stand at a pantry and see it."

Rita's commitment to service began long before the Foodbank. Raised in a close-knit Italian and Lebanese family, she grew up believing that feeding people is simply what you do.

"My dad would invite the mailman in for a sandwich," she says. "Feeding people was our love language."

In recent years, Rita has returned to volunteering regularly at the Foodbank, working in the pantry and helping with neighbor registration.



Rita enjoys greeting neighbors at The Venarge Family Food Pantry at the Main Campus in Akron.

"You see people you know in line sometimes," she says. "That's when it really hits you. Hunger is here. It's present. And it could happen to any of us."

Today, Rita supports the Foodbank not only with her time, but through consistent monthly giving as a member of the Sustainer Circle.

Rita compares monthly giving to contributing to a retirement account: build it into your budget and make it automatic.

After decades of volunteering, advocating and giving, Rita remains clear about one thing: hunger should never be ignored.

"When funding is cut, we're talking about hungry children," she says. "That's something we should never allow. And luckily, in our community, we don't have to – because we have the Foodbank and the network behind it."

Through her steady support as a Sustainer Circle member, Rita continues the work she helped begin more than four decades ago – ensuring neighbors have access to food not just in moments of crisis, but every single day.

Becoming a member of the Sustainer Circle program provides a reliable stream of revenue to help your Foodbank plan for and maintain its operations.

To join the Sustainer Circle, please contact Bridget Jones at 330.535.6900 or visit akroncantonfoodbank.org/Donate-Monthly.

Community support delivered 97 truckloads of food

As we move further into the year, the Foodbank continues to navigate the lasting impacts of the unprecedented challenges of 2025. With ongoing funding uncertainties, sustained elevated demand and changes to work requirements for food benefits, your support makes a meaningful difference for our neighbors.

Because federal and state government food support declined by more than 30% last year, we made the critical decision to purchase additional food to help fill the gap. In 2025, 18% of the food we distributed was purchased — a 135% increase from the previous year. Your generosity allowed us not only to respond in the moment, but to sustain that response well into this year.

In total, we secured 97 truckloads of food, distributing the equivalent of 2.9 million meals to families across our region.

Importantly, 44% of the food we purchased came from local vendors, strengthening our regional economy while keeping shelves stocked for neighbors facing food insecurity.



The community was extremely generous to the Foodbank in 2025, donating food and funds to help fill the gaps caused by the government cuts.

Our purchasing strategy prioritized fresh, nourishing options. Of the foods purchased:

- 73% was fresh produce
- 10% was protein
- 17% was shelf-stable items

Your support made this possible. Because you stepped up, we were able to meet increased demand, stabilize our network and continue serving our community when it mattered most. Thank you for standing with us!

Foods Purchased To Fill Gaps Caused By Government Cuts



73%
fresh produce



17%
shelf-stable items



10%
protein

Help the Harvest for Hunger Campaign finish strong



The Harvest for Hunger Campaign concludes at the end of May. You can help us reach our goal of providing 4.8 million meals for our local community by donating today!

Visit akroncantonfoodbank.org/harvest or scan the QR code to make an impact. Thank you!



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Sustainability in action at your Foodbank

The Foodbank is an active partner in local sustainability efforts, ensuring nourishing food reaches people — not landfills. Through food rescue partnerships and connecting food donors with hunger-relief programs, we helped rescue 9.6 million pounds of food in 2025.

Last year, the Foodbank strengthened its commitment to sustainability by launching an employee-led committee that identified composting as a meaningful step toward reducing waste and responsibly stewarding food and resources.

Every day, we receive thousands of pounds of fresh produce, dairy and bakery items from our retail partners. These nourishing items have a short shelf life and must be distributed quickly or disposed of.

Last summer, the Foodbank piloted a composting program, utilizing staff and volunteers to compost these items through Rubber City Reuse. Thanks to the generous Starbucks FoodShare Capacity grant, composting now takes place full time at the Main Campus in Akron and a pilot launched at the Stark County Campus in Canton.

With the help of staff and volunteers, the Foodbank also recycles stretch wrap plastic with its new stretch-wrap baler, thanks to the generous support of LyondellBasell.

Other sustainability efforts include paper, cardboard, pallet and plastic recycling across our two campuses and the use of electrical power equipment.

To learn more about Foodbank programs and efforts around sustainability, visit akroncantonfoodbank.org/sustainability.

Have you considered your lasting impact?

Our Legacy Circle honors caring individuals who have chosen to support the Foodbank through a planned gift — no matter the size. By sharing your intentions with us, you help ensure your generosity is celebrated and your impact is felt for years to come.

Legacy Circle benefits include:

- ✓ Legacy Circle recognition
- ✓ Special invitations to events and programs
- ✓ Confidence that your wishes will be honored

Explore legacy giving opportunities at akroncantonfoodbank.org/legacy or contact Debra Hagarty, CFRE, at 330.535.6900.

