

Foodbank Focus

A publication of the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank

Summer 2026



AKRON-CANTON REGIONAL
**FOOD
BANK**

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350 Opportunity Pkwy
Akron, OH 44307

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1365 Cherry Ave. NE
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SERVING 8 COUNTIES

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Wayne Counties



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Every meal has a story. Meet Judy.

Judy is a generous and resourceful neighbor who finds meaningful ways to care for her community through food. She has been receiving food boxes through the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), and they've become an essential part of how she cares for herself and others. CSFP works to improve the health of income-eligible older adults by supplementing their diets with nutritious USDA foods — enough food to create 25 meals each month.

"It's a godsend to be able to receive this food," she shared. "Especially with how expensive food is nowadays."

Judy lives with diabetes and appreciates the fresh fruits and vegetables she receives. With rising grocery costs and reduced food benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance

Program (SNAP), making ends meet has become difficult. Still, she has learned to get creative in the kitchen and stretch what she has.

"If there's something I can't use, I'm not going to let it go to waste," Judy said. "There's not much I can do, but cooking for other people is what I enjoy."

Judy shares any extra food with her 80-year-old neighbor and others nearby. Even as she faces her own challenges, including navigating daily life in a wheelchair, she continues to show up for her community in the ways she can.

"It helps all of us tremendously," she said. "It is such a blessing to have."

Thank you to community members and Foodbank supporters for caring for neighbors like Judy.



DID YOU KNOW?

57% of families within our 8-county service area do NOT qualify for federal nutrition programs and may turn to the Foodbank for help.

Student-led backpack program helps fill weekend hunger gap in Minerva

At Minerva Mission, supporting students extends far beyond the classroom. Ten years ago, Monica, Director of Mentoring at Minerva Mission, founded the Minerva Local School District's Backpack Program to help ensure children have reliable access to food when school meals are unavailable.

As the family support specialist at the Minerva Elementary School, Monica works closely with volunteers, school staff and the Foodbank to keep the program running each week.

Every Thursday or Friday, students across the district receive backpacks filled with two breakfasts, two lunches, two snacks and two fruits to take home for the weekend.

The program now distributes 130 food bags each week, serving about 650 students each month from preschool through 12th grade.

The program has grown into a community-wide effort powered by students and volunteers. Fifth graders help pack bags as part of a service project, and middle school students in the district's special education program assist with organizing and packing food, too. Three retired community members also volunteer every other week.

In Minerva's rural community, transportation is one of the biggest barriers families face in accessing food programs and other services. During longer school breaks, the program sends home larger bags filled with additional food that students can still carry themselves.

"Our food program is to come alongside families and help them when they are in a difficult season," Monica says.



Monica (center) joins students as they pack food bags for the Minerva Local School District Backpack Program.

For Monica, seeing students excited to receive their backpacks is what keeps her motivated and reminds her why the program matters. "The kids are so happy to see me," she says. "They really look forward to it."



Monica says the partnership with the Foodbank is essential. Without it, the district would have to limit how many students it could serve. Instead, the program remains open to every family in the district who needs assistance.

"I'm really proud that the program is student driven," Monica says. "I'm proud it can run on its own even if I'm not there."



SAVE THESE DATES

MERRY
meals
MIXER

Dec. 2, 2026
Merry Meals Mixer

Self
less
Elf

Dec. 19, 2026
Selfless Elf 5k

HARVEST
FOR HUNGER

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



Investing in the future of hunger relief

As neighbors continue to struggle to make ends meet, strengthening the resilience of our hunger-relief network is a top priority for the Foodbank.

Approximately 70% of the 620 programs in our network are run entirely by volunteers, and many have not yet identified their next generation of leaders – putting long-term stability at risk.

To address this, the Foodbank developed Rise: A Recipe for Our Future, a biennial leadership initiative designed to equip partners with tools for continuity and growth. The six-month program helps organizations build stronger, more sustainable operations.

The second cohort gathered earlier this year, representing pantries, meal sites and a backpack program across four counties.

“The Foodbank’s commitment to education and resources to support me in this unique leadership role as a local network partner is an encouragement,” said Kelly,

food pantry coordinator for Riverwood Community Chapel. “The exchange of ideas with other network partners has been invaluable and will help me in our food pantry’s outreach to our community.”

Participants learned from leaders in our community, including executives from The J.M. Smucker Co., JumpStart Inc., the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, our Foodbank and others. Topics included fundraising and budgeting, succession planning, volunteer management, advocacy and strategic planning, alongside opportunities for peer learning and collaboration.

“The strength and stability of our hunger-relief network are essential to ensuring neighbors have reliable access to the nutritious food they need,” said David, the partnership development specialist at the Foodbank.

“Rise was created to give our partners the opportunity to develop their programs and prepare for growth and future success. It gives them a chance to take a step back from the grind of day-to-day operations and think more strategically about their work. By taking this time, our hope is that they walk away with new tools, insights and connections to support their work.”

Rise has gained attention from Feeding America, with staff sharing their learnings at a national conference, offering a model for strengthening hunger-relief networks across the country.



Your support helps the pop-up pantry deliver food and hope

Rain, snow or shine, the Foodbank's mobile pop-up pantry is ready to serve neighbors in communities with limited access to food. Currently operating in six counties, approximately 10 pop-ups are offered each month.

Pop-up sites appear in school parking lots, city spaces and community hubs. Each location tells a slightly different story, but the mission remains the same – closing access gaps caused by transportation barriers or a lack of nearby pantries.



“I like to say that the pop-up is at the intersection of high need and low accessibility,” says Todd, the program outreach coordinator.

It's a phrase that may sound technical, but in action, it's

simple: a line of cars in a parking lot, volunteers preparing grocery items and neighbors connecting with one another.

The pop-up continues to evolve as community needs arise. Over summer break, the Foodbank collaborates with five sites to specifically bridge the gap over the months that kids are not in school.

As community relationships have grown, so have the services offered at a distribution. For example, the Portage County Health District, a pop-up partner, invites nearly a dozen social service agencies to host information tables for neighbors.

A newer partner, Stow City Hall, brings together volunteers from city offices, the police and fire departments and even the mayor, who regularly rolls up his sleeves to help. The local Salvation Army also attends each pop-up, managing the hospitality station.

“They create a really positive vibe,” says Todd. “There’s music and people can enjoy coffee and donuts together. Asking for help with basic needs can feel shameful for some, but we’re able to make it encouraging and life-giving. This is a way to help restore dignity and respect for people.”

Sponsor a pop-up and strengthen a community

Sponsor a distribution for \$3,000 and make a difference in our community! Contact the fund development department at 330.535.6900 to learn more.



Hunger doesn't take a summer break

By August, the back-to-school season is just around the corner — but for many families, the strain of summer is still being felt.

When the school year ends, families lose access to free or reduced-price breakfast and lunch programs that help stretch their budgets.

For parents already juggling rising expenses like rent, utilities and childcare, summer can be especially difficult. After months of providing extra meals at home, grocery costs have added up. What may have started as a manageable adjustment in June can become a significant financial burden by summer's end.

Childcare challenges also persist throughout the summer months, as working parents continue to balance job responsibilities with the need for safe, affordable care. Every added expense makes it harder to stay ahead.

Community programs like summer meal sites and food distributions help bridge the gap, providing children with nourishing meals while school is out.

But even with this support, the need remains high as summer stretches on. Thankfully, families can visit pantries and meal sites within the Foodbank's service area for additional help.

As families prepare for the return to school and the costs that come with it, many are already feeling the effects of months of financial strain because hunger doesn't take a summer break.

Thank you for supporting local hunger relief and families working hard to make ends meet.

Thank you, Foodbank Major Partners!

Major Partners have each contributed more than 30,000 meals through product donations, financial contributions or a combination of both. Thank you, Major Partners, for continuing to make a difference. To learn more about the Major Partner Program, please visit akroncantonfoodbank.org/partners.

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Closing the distance between hunger and home

For many neighbors, getting to a food pantry isn't as simple as hopping in the car. It's a question the Foodbank starts with: can you reliably access a pantry? For people who can't because of health and transportation barriers, the home delivery program helps fill a critical gap.



The Foodbank partners with more than 40 nonprofits for referrals to its home delivery program. Households receive two 20-30-pound deliveries each month, including shelf-stable items and fresh produce. Approximately 2,000 boxes are delivered monthly across five counties.

The beauty of this program is the community collaboration that makes it possible. Behind the scenes, 16 hunger-relief partners and dedicated volunteers keep everything moving. Partners pack boxes using food from the Foodbank, while the Foodbank coordinates delivery routes and drivers.

More than 50 volunteers use their own vehicles to deliver boxes, and grant funding supports drivers from carriers.

"The food I receive every month is very helpful," says Pam, 77, a home delivery recipient. "I only receive \$60 in SNAP. With the higher prices on groceries, I don't think I would make it each month without help from the Foodbank and members of the church who deliver it."

Local Produce Delivery Program

In partnership with Produce Perks Midwest and three local farmers, the Foodbank also delivers fresh produce to 260 eligible families from June-September.

Commodity Supplemental Food Program

450 deliveries are made each month to income-eligible adults ages 60+.

NEW! The Foodbank launched home delivery in Wayne County in partnership with the Wayne County Health Department and Wayne Metropolitan Housing Authority.

From packing boxes to completing deliveries, the Foodbank's home delivery program is a complex system built on shared effort and coordination, removing barriers so neighbors can access the food they need – delivered with care, consistency and dignity.



Your support in action in the 2025 annual report

Last year was filled with unexpected challenges. Thanks to you, the Foodbank met the moment with strength and compassion — providing more meals than ever before. Read more about your impact in our 2025 annual report at akroncantonfoodbank.org/resources.