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Wow, how COVID-19 has turned our lives upside down. I hope this newsletter finds you safe, healthy, and finding some way to grow and thrive rather than just getting by during these crazy times.

This newsletter is the story of COVID-19, from the perspective of River Bend Foodbank. From the onset, the Foodbank faced a perfect storm of three major issues:

- **Significantly increased demand** – There are about 40,000 more people in our service area who do not have enough food because of COVID.

- **Seriously interrupted supply chain** – If the stores are out, then there is nothing left to donate. We have increased our purchased food budget by about 50% to meet the increased need. Some foods we cannot even buy, lead times are extended, and pricing is very unstable.

- **Significantly inhibited operational methods** – We recognized early on that if we had an outbreak here, we would not be able to help people. While we normally have hundreds of partners and volunteers in this building on any given day, we shut that down immediately, for the safety of everyone involved.

I am delighted to report that in spite of all this, River Bend Foodbank has distributed more food than ever before, up about 1/3 compared to the previous 12 months. And we are doing this safely, through no-contact, drive-through, curbside food distributions.

I am so proud of our staff, who are carrying a much heavier burden without the 4,000 volunteers we normally have. I am thankful to our partner agencies, 95% of whom have stayed open throughout. This is hard work, but it would have been so much harder without their help. And I am humbled by the community response, so many reaching out to help, including hundreds of first-time donors, because there are more people now even more in need because of the pandemic.

The challenge is that no one knows how long this will last, so we must balance spending to meet the increased need against stretching this out over the long haul. Helping us sustain this effort would be very much appreciated. If I may offer a word of encouragement, our current response is about what it would take to end hunger in eastern Iowa and western Illinois during normal times, so we will be making every effort to continue at this level to end the everyday disaster of hunger.

**Thank you for being an essential part of this story.**

*Together We Can Solve Hunger™*

Michael P. Miller
President & CEO
The response from our partner agencies and programs volunteers has been nothing short of amazing. Their creativity, dedication and positivity during this crisis have been awe-inspiring. When COVID-19 hit, our normal operations came to a screeching halt. Volunteers were prohibited from entering the warehouse, the “shopping area” in the warehouse closed, and the process for agencies to pick up their food orders changed dramatically. There was real concern that our 300 partners would all have to shut down. We were so grateful that it was only 17 that temporarily closed. Those that remained opened embraced the new normal and have been excellent allies in distributing food to our guests safely and efficiently. Since school buildings are closed, many school pantries are being creative. Many school pantries are continuing to serve by having the food delivery go to a church and the volunteers are doing either a drive-through distribution or delivering the food boxes directly to families’ homes.

“Each Thursday at Aledo United Methodist Church we distribute food for those in need during this time of crisis. Five weeks ago, we provided 45 bags/week, and now we are giving out 130 bags/week. We mostly use food provided by River Bend Foodbank giving frozen homemade casseroles and another bag of fresh produce and canned goods. Each bag is enough for four meals.”

“We have food pantries in Warren and Henderson counties. On average we serve 100 to 200 different families per month in each center. We have seen higher numbers in times of troubles but NEVER to the extreme we have now. On March 16, 2020, alone, we served over 800 families. Without the generosity of RBFB this could not have happened. The emails, phone calls, and text messages we have received have been overwhelming; the stories emphasize just how much the need for food assistance is growing. The line of cars lasted for 7 hours; special thanks to our volunteers who ensured everyone was served.”
The USDA’s Farmers to Families Food Box Program has been a significant, yet challenging aspect of the nation’s response to COVID-19. To help workers in the ailing produce, dairy, and meat industries, Congress authorized $3 billion to purchase these foods and make them available to people in need. Given the supply chain issues mentioned earlier, this has been a welcome relief.

The challenge is twofold: While this was rolled out as a “truck-to-trunk” program, which would imply delivery by the contractor to the final point of distribution, the suppliers are delivering to the Foodbank, leaving us responsible for last-mile distribution, and only the contractors are being paid. Furthermore, this is all fresh, perishable product, super healthy, but challenging the constraints of our limited cooler/freezer space.

We are accepting as many of these boxes as we possibly can, 4-1/2 semitrucks every week, because it helps people in need. If you could help us offset these costs, that would be much appreciated.

If you could consider a larger gift to help us expand our cooler/freezer, please contact the Foodbank.