The numbers are in, and it is not pretty.

Recall that River Bend Foodbank has centered our strategic plans around filling the “Meal Gap,” a measure of how many people are missing how many meals in eastern Iowa and western Illinois.

The highest level of food insecurity followed the Great Recession in 2009, when there were 147,280 people who did not have enough food in the 23 counties we serve.

We have been working on that for the past 10 years, and before COVID-19 hit, we were about to announce our community’s food insecurity was finally below pre-recession levels.

However, when COVID-19 hit, that number jumped to nearly 160,000, the highest level of food insecurity ever. That number includes over 55,000 kids, now 1 in 4 children living in our service area ....

Volunteers:
We’ve missed you!

Keeping limits on volunteers in our warehouse and at pantry sites has been challenging this year, but we have innovated and adapted, and now we can welcome you back (with new safety measures in place)!

Find volunteer opportunities: www.riverbendfoodbank.org/donate-time.

Mobile Pantries

We have helped bring food to areas with great need throughout the months with mobile pantries. From July 2019 to June 2020, River Bend Foodbank has distributed nearly 950,000 meals through mobile food pantries.
River Bend Foodbank jumped into action immediately when the drastic impact of COVID-19 became evident in March. The first thing we did was institute precautions for everyone’s safety, including our staff, volunteers, partner agencies, visitors, and the hungry people we serve. We then took advantage of every possible grant opportunity to fund emergency food purchases, as all the shortages in the food supply chain, combined with the huge increase in need, created the very real possibility of running out of food.

These efforts resulted in new meal distribution records set in April, May, June, and July. August likely would have been another record, had it not been for losing a week to the derecho storm. Even with that, it was second only to July. In the fiscal year that ended in June, River Bend Foodbank distributed a record 20 million meals!...

But the response has been unprecedented...

With every action we take, we get one step closer to making hunger a thing of the past.

This summer, River Bend Foodbank got a very special visit from a family whose flower garden turned into multiple donations to help feed our hungry neighbors.

"Around the beginning of May, I heard on the news that many local food banks were facing severe shortages. I talked to the kids about the issue, and suggested we try to help by growing more flowers than originally planned and then selling them," says Sarah Cutler, Muscatine, IA. The family’s flower farm was put to a new use, and annuals planted in nearly 500 square feet of field. Her four children — Arlee (2), Margo (4), Felix (6), and Celia (8), — got to work, patiently tending their garden until they could start to pick flowers to make bouquets. Celia said, “Maybe we can raise $200 to help people get food.”

Each week, the kids spent many hours helping cut flowers, design arrangements, and make deliveries all over Muscatine and the Quad Cities. Over the summer, the Cutlers delivered countless flowers and experienced firsthand the joy that the bouquets brought to so many people. At the end of August, Sarah and the children visited River Bend Foodbank to deliver their most recent donation, which brings their total support to $2,436 (that’s over 12,000 meals)!

Every action counts, and we’re humbled by the Cutlers’ generosity in the community.

SAVE-YOUR-PLATE

Mark your calendar and plan to join us (virtually or in-person, as safety allows) for upcoming events:

Women Fighting Hunger
March 25, 2021 at Rhythm City Casino.

Wine & Dine for a Cause
Sept. 9, 2021, J Bar at Holiday Inn, Bettendorf, IA.

For more information, contact:
Jenny: jbrinkmeyer@riverbendfoodbank.org
or Leslie: lcorlett@riverbendfoodbank.org
Recovering from the Great Recession has given River Bend Foodbank experience in balancing immediate crisis response with the need to maintain a long-term, sustainable plan. No one knows how long this will last, but it will be a marathon, not a sprint. We are beginning to shift our thinking beyond surviving the moment. **Rather than hoping things “go back to normal,” the Foodbank aims to continue meal distribution at this rate in the future.** None of this happens without all of you. Your response has been both astounding and heartwarming. From longtime donors reaching out to make special contributions, to hundreds of people making first-time gifts. Four months of record distributions and a total of 20 million meals have only been possible with your support. Our costs have skyrocketed, and the challenge of the current situation has stretched us to our limits, but we are humbled and encouraged by your commitment to this cause. With your ongoing participation in building sufficient capacity to meet the entire need, we will not only get through this, but will move closer to the ultimate goal of ending hunger in eastern Iowa and western Illinois. Thank you for partnering with us toward that end.

M. P. Miller
President & CEO

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**Client Empowerment**

In River Bend Foodbank’s 38-year history, we have focused on outputs, not outcomes; we know how many meals we distributed and how many people we served, but we haven’t measured the effect those meals have had on people’s lives or what else our guests may have needed to become self-sufficient.

"With these new services, we will be offering our guests the possibility to turn around their lives for good, and this is my strongest hope for this new initiative." - Mohama Tchatagba

In May 2019, River Bend Foodbank launched a secure online client database (Link2Feed) to collect self-reported data from a group of our guests. Early data showed that assistance with evidence-based practices, such as financial security coaching, workforce development, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) enrollment might help guests move towards self-sufficiency and reduce future needs for emergency food relief programs. River Bend Foodbank will be offering limited case management services and SNAP resources in-house and is actively collaborating with experienced community partners to offer referrals for guests in need of financial education and workforce development assistance.

“When a guest comes to us and receives food for their family, we take care of their immediate need,” says Mohama Tchatagba, Service Insights & Client Empowerment Coordinator. “But we can also help the guest regain control of their life circumstances and rebuild their self-esteem.”

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**Find Food**
Find a pantry near you, learn if you qualify for state food assistance programs.

**Volunteer**
See individual and small group opportunities near you, learn how your organization can get members involved.

**Give**
Host a funds drive, find out if your employer matches donations, and support River Bend Foodbank’s mission.

RIVER BEND FOODBANK
4010 Kimmel Drive
Davenport, IA 52802-2404
riverbendfoodbank.org