

# FOOD *for* THOUGHT

*The Healthy Way Forward*

SUMMER 2021 NEWSLETTER

RIVERBENDFOODBANK.ORG



## NOT GOING "BACK TO NORMAL"



**Michael P. Miller**  
President & CEO

Along with most of you, the River Bend Food Bank team has been through the most challenging year of our lives. As of this writing, we just yesterday lifted our mask mandate for vaccinated employees. It feels great to be able to see the computer screen without my glasses fogging up!

As most of you know, the need for charitable food assistance

jumped significantly during the pandemic and, though substantially improved, is still higher than before COVID. The recovery will take longer for those most vulnerable — children, seniors, minorities, and single parents.

As I have said before, River Bend Food Bank does not want things to "go back to normal." We want to sustain the record food distribution that you have made possible over the past year and continue to grow, because that is what it will take to end hunger in eastern Iowa and western Illinois.

Having achieved the goal of tripling meal distribution by 2025, our next goals are as follows:

- **Meeting the entire need in every community we serve.** We measure the need by county, zip code, school district, and census tract, and while the Meal Gap is close to being filled in some counties, it is barely half filled in others.
- **Improving nutrition.** We track the nutritional quality of the food we distribute, running about 70% "Foods to Encourage."

The ultimate goal is to meet the entire need in every community only counting the nutritious food.

In this newsletter, you will learn more about our plans to open our third location, in Galesburg, Illinois, to serve the southern quadrant of our service area, where many of the underserved counties are located. You will read about how much more fresh produce we are distributing, the healthiest food available, with more news to come about future growth.

That growth would not be possible without your support, helping more people than ever during COVID. On their behalf, you have our sincere thanks.



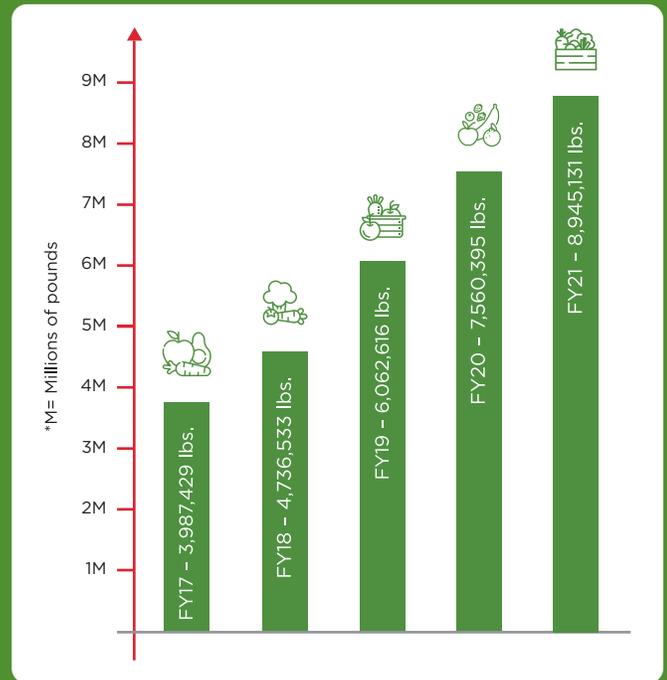
RIVER BEND  
FOOD BANK

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# "FOODS TO ENCOURAGE"

River Bend Food Bank distributes more than just dry goods and canned food. One of our top priorities is to increase people's access to the healthiest foods available (fresh produce, proteins, and dairy products) — Feeding America labels these foods "foods to encourage." In the Food Bank's 60,000 square foot warehouse, **10,000 sq. ft.** is dedicated to storage for these items. Distributing over eight million pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables is no easy feat.

As you know from your refrigerator at home, these foods require specific storage temperatures and have a much shorter shelf-life than dry and canned goods — sometimes only days from when they are donated to us. River Bend Food Bank tracks how many pounds of food distributed each year are "foods to encourage." The graph to the right shows the fresh produce distribution over the past five years. In that time, the Food Bank has more than doubled the amount of fresh, healthy produce going out to the 23 counties we serve! In 2021, fresh produce is 1/3 of the food distributed, helping build healthy, productive communities that thrive.



## IN THEIR WORDS:

### New Space, New Opportunities for FISH Food Pantry of Galesburg

FISH of Galesburg food pantry has served Knox County since 1970. In the beginning, it was a phone number a person could call if they needed help mowing their lawn, picking up medication, running errands, or getting food. Started by a group of individuals who wanted to help meet the needs of the community, they realized food was a top need and what they could do best. Diane Copeland has been with FISH for around 12 years and sat down to talk with River Bend Food Bank about the past, present, and future of the pantry as it prepares to co-locate with the Food Bank's soon-to-be-opened Galesburg Branch.

#### How did you first get involved with FISH?

I have never really figured that out, Diane chuckles. It just happened. She pauses. Really, FISH found me. Two days before I retired in 2007, my mother passed away. The following January, I lost my son ... I thought, 'I can't retire; I need to go back to work.' So, I took a part-time job and worked there for a couple of years. I was searching for something that would fill a void in my life, but that part-time job just didn't do it. I resigned. Then I got a phone call. It was a volunteer with FISH, asking if I'd like to help out.



THAT was much more rewarding, and it's true — **if you're out there helping other people, you're helping yourself.** It's been a blessing to me. It's my passion.

#### How have you seen FISH's work impact the Knox County community?

We strive to be there when we're needed — we're here to serve the hungry residents of Knox County five days a week. People know they can count on us. It is our hope that we can provide some stability in the lives of our friends and neighbors by being there to give them a nutritious food supply, making for a healthier, stronger community. People know they can count on us — no one is turned away. People tell us 'I don't know what we would've done without you this week.' We serve most guests once every 30 days, with some coming 12 times a year. Our dedicated volunteers are amazing. Volunteers have good hearts, and ours have the biggest.



### What impact do you see the move to co-locate with River Bend Food Bank having on FISH and the community?

We have worked on this for a very long time, and FISH has needed a new home for a long time to better serve the community. Our current space is ... cozy. We don't have much room for fresh foods, and we have to do parking lot giveaways when the River Bend truck delivers on the third Wednesday because we just don't have the space to store all the food our community needs. [In the new location] we will have access to abundant freezer/cooler space and the pantry will be more centrally located, allowing for easier accessibility — especially by those persons relying on public transportation since the nearest bus stop to our current pantry is a couple

blocks away. We're so thankful to be able to now offer more fresh, nutritious food. It's truly a community-changing opportunity.

### What does a hunger-free community look like to you?

Wouldn't it be nice if everyone had access to affordable, healthy food? Everyone needs to have sufficient resources in order to have sufficient nutrition. People shouldn't have to think about how they'll find their next meal. With resources like the food pantries and River Bend Food Bank available to those who need them, when they need them, our whole community's health will improve for generation after generation.

*The Galesburg Branch will open to area food pantries for distribution in early 2022.*

## SALES TAX EXEMPTION “WIN” FOR FOOD BANKS ACROSS IOWA

In June of 2021, the Iowa legislature passed a bill which included an exemption on sales tax for Iowa food banks. Previously, four of the six food banks that serve Iowa's 99 counties paid sales tax on all eligible purchases made. That meant around \$200,000 was not able to be used for the programs and services food banks provide to those in need.

Signed by Governor Reynolds on June 16, 2021, the new food bank exemption in the bill means those sales tax dollars will instead go directly into mission-based activities. This means an extra 1 million meals will go to families in our community during a time when it's needed most.

## STUDENT HUNGER DRIVE IS BACK!

We are thrilled to share that the Student Hunger Drive is back this fall! This six-week, friendly competition among area high schools raises food and funds for the Food Bank and involves high schoolers in philanthropy and community involvement. Each year, students amaze us with their creative approaches to fundraising and collecting food items to benefit people experiencing hunger throughout eastern Iowa and western Illinois. The Student Hunger Drive is rooted in tradition — over 30 years strong — and concludes with students packaging the collected food and delivering it to River Bend Food Bank's warehouse. We're so thankful to have students for this year's event — watch our social media and local news between October 4 and November 11 to see the next generation digging into the important work of ending hunger!



# Save-the-Date:

## HUNGER ACTION MONTH

Did you know that September is Hunger Action Month? Feeding America and food banks across the country recognize this month-long campaign to raise awareness about hunger in our communities and encourage everyone to get involved in the effort to end hunger. This year, we encourage all our readers to join us — educate, advocate, volunteer, and give to make sure no one goes hungry. Visit [feedingamerica.org/take-action/hunger-action-month](https://feedingamerica.org/take-action/hunger-action-month) to learn how you can get involved!



## SHARE YOUR STORY

In 2022, River Bend Food Bank and St. Stephen's Food Bank will celebrate our 40th anniversaries. Since 1982, we've worked with volunteers, partner pantries, and people in need, and we want to hear from you! Tell us how the Food Banks have been part of your life — we'll share stories from all over our service area throughout the year and archive them for future generations. Visit [riverbendfoodbank.org/sharestory](https://riverbendfoodbank.org/sharestory) to send us your memories!

*"I was driving down the street and there was a long line of people at the pantry. They were getting food, so I stopped, and we got food and then I went back to my neighborhood and picked up everyone I thought needed food and got them to the pantry. I used to say I was 'Granny's Taxi Cab' 'cause I would pick up anyone who needed to get food."*

*- Janice Craddieth, volunteer at St. Stephen's Food Bank*

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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 Food Bank mission.



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FOOD BANK**

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