

Feed What Matters

Fall 2024 North Country Food Bank Newsletter

www.northcountryfoodbank.org



In This Issue

**From the
Director's Desk**

PAGE 2

Fresh Produce!!!

PAGE 3

**Hunger Is Our Largest
Solvable Problem!**

PAGE 3

**Food is an Essential
School Supply**

PAGE 4





North Country Food Bank is working to end hunger across communities through leadership and collaboration.

Supporting this community since 1983.

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Remember North Country Food Bank

Please let us know if you've included North Country Food Bank in your will and estate plans. We would like to add you to our Legacy Society. To learn more about our Legacy Society, contact scott@northcountryfoodbank.org.



From the Director's Desk



North Country Food Bank just set a record, and it's not the good kind! This has been the busiest year on record for North Country! So far this year, we have provided food for over 6 million meals across northwest and west central Minnesota, and most of our agency partners saw visits by hungry neighbors increase anywhere from 30-50%. Right now, there is no end in sight to the increased number of neighbors needing help.

We are doing everything we can to source and distribute food to our network of food shelves and food distribution program partners. The extremely high demand, along with extremely high food costs, make it difficult to acquire enough food to meet the ever-increasing demand.

You may not really notice or see it, but nearly 40,000 of our neighbors in northwest and west central Minnesota, including 1 in 5 children, face hunger every day. With food prices off the charts, rising utility rates, and the overall rise in the cost of living, too many local families are struggling to afford the basics — including putting meals on the table.

In our line of work, we see first-hand the challenges our neighbors face every day, and we intend to do something about it. We are prepared to meet the ever-rising demand for help in all communities across northwest and west central Minnesota. And, we are prepared to make sure all of our struggling neighbors have access to the food they need when they need it.

Fortunately, with your help, North Country is well-positioned to do the work necessary to meet the need. We provide a great deal of value and experience in the emergency food arena and are able to make a meaningful and substantial positive impact in the communities across our service area. We know our agency partners and struggling neighbors are relying on us more than ever.

With your support, we will rise to the challenge and make sure our family, friends, and neighbors don't have to wonder where they will find their next meal. Your support makes all the difference to those facing hunger every day — especially during these extremely challenging times. **Thanks to your generosity, more of our neighbors will experience the security of a stocked fridge, a warm meal, and the support of their community. We could not be more grateful for the help you provide and the work it allows us to do. Every dollar counts. Every person who helps makes a difference, and every person we help matters.**

With gratitude,

Susie Novak Boelter
Executive Director



Fresh Produce!!!

Every year, fields in Minnesota overflow with fresh, ripe produce such as sweet corn, potatoes, cabbage, and squash.

However, when farmers can't find buyers for all of those nutritious fruits and veggies, they run the risk of going to waste. This is when they call North Country, and we can partner to get this nutritious, fresh produce into the hands of neighbors in need. **With the generous support of our community, it is our goal to source nearly half a million pounds of Minnesota-grown fruits and vegetables and deliver them to families facing hunger.**

Our partnerships with local farmers across Minnesota have expanded over recent years, allowing this program to continue to grow. While fresh produce is a healthy, highly desired food product, it is also a big undertaking for North Country. It needs to be picked, transported, and distributed to food shelves before it goes bad. This takes considerable time, effort, and resources!

Thanks to the farmers who donate crops, our dedicated volunteers, and supporters like you, we are on pace to reach our goal this year. Your continued support will help us get as much fresh, nutritious food as possible to our neighbors this harvest season. To learn more, please visit www.northcountryfoodbank.org.



Welcome to the Team!

North Country is excited to introduce you to Rick Wolf, a new member of our warehouse team! Rick began working as a Warehouse Associate in February 2024. He is involved in picking food orders for agency partners, as well as many other inventory and warehouse responsibilities. Rick's work directly impacts the distribution and flow of food out of the warehouse. Rick helps complete a staff that is dedicated and fully committed to serving individuals struggling with hunger across the region. **We are fortunate to have him on board and working with us to make sure our family, friends, and neighbors have enough to eat every single day.**



Hunger Is Our Largest Solvable Problem!

It is up to us to make it a priority!

Far too many of our neighbors are one unexpected bill away from being unable to afford groceries. Far too many children know what it is like to leave school and not get to eat again until they arrive back at school the next day. And far too many seniors know how it feels to make impossible choices between buying medication or food for the fridge.

Friends like you have been our greatest defense against hunger across the communities we serve. **Together, we've provided over 6 million meals so far this year — but our work isn't done. Inflation and rapidly rising food prices have hit our communities hard, and the current need for food is critical.**

With so many families forced to choose between paying the rent or buying groceries, putting food on the table is a daily challenge. **Visit www.northcountryfoodbank.org today to learn how you can get involved and help solve the hunger problem!**



Stories From the Road

The face of hunger is not what you would expect. It is your young neighbors with young children struggling to make ends meet. It's a senior who has lived in your community her whole life and is now on a fixed budget in these difficult economic times. We sometimes wish you could see the face of hunger through our eyes here at North Country. It may change your perspective and would most definitely melt your heart. **The staff and volunteers at North Country are so fortunate to witness the immense kindness, appreciation, gratefulness, and generosity of those who live in our communities on a regular basis.**

North Country typically conducts 4-5 mobile food distributions each month in different communities across the region. During each of these mobile distributions, long lines tend to form with people struggling to put food on the table. Everyone at these distributions needs help or is trying to help someone else. They all have compelling stories that touch the hearts of all those involved.



You Have Helped Bring Our Community Together!

At a recent mobile food distribution, a worker was managing the line of cars and stopped to answer a question. **The gentleman in line got out of his car and said he wanted to make sure North Country knew what a positive impact the food distribution had on the community — and not just because of the food.** He said his church had provided information about the food distribution, so he shared the information with some of his neighbors he knew needed help.

They formed a text group to provide reminders and updates about the food distributions. He said this text group has turned into so much more. They now use it to check in on each other or to reach out when they need help. **He said it has helped create a sense of community and belonging he hasn't felt in years, and that he could not remember the last time he had people he could count on like this.**

He asked the worker to make sure North Country was aware of the positive impact its work has on the community.



Food is an Essential School Supply!



Imagine you are nine years old, getting off the bus and running home from school. You drop your backpack at the door and rush to the fridge for a snack. But, the fridge is empty and the cupboards are bare. You sigh and head to your room disappointed with your tummy growling. **You realize you likely won't get anything to eat again until you arrive at school the next day. Unfortunately, this is a reality for one in five children in our region.**

Ask any teacher how difficult it is to teach a hungry child. The issue of hunger must be addressed before learning can begin. Children who don't have adequate access to food are at a disadvantage. They struggle with behavior issues and health issues to name a few. At North Country, making sure our children have the food they need to succeed is one of our top priorities, and our Backpack Program was created to help address this issue.

As summer winds down and the school year begins, programs like our Backpack Program will begin providing nearly 15,000 bags of food to hungry children each month in more than 36 communities throughout northwest and west central Minnesota. **Thanks to you, the Backpack Program supplies children with kid-friendly, nutritious food on evenings and weekends when they typically struggle with hunger the most, because they don't have access to school breakfast and lunch.**

The Backpack Program, like all of our programs, depends on the generosity of people like you to successfully feed children in need. So many students just need a little help to boost their chances at success. You can help provide that boost! If you'd like to donate or volunteer your time to provide bags of food for children in our region, contact us today for more information.

35,540 of our neighbors face hunger. A \$1 donation provides 4 meals for a neighbor in need.



CONTACT US

North Country Food Bank, Inc.
1011 11th Avenue NE
East Grand Forks, MN 56721

Phone 218.399.7356
Toll Free 1.877.281.3272
Fax 218.281.7374

To learn more or to make a donation to North Country Food Bank, visit www.northcountryfoodbank.org.

