



News Release

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SEMO FOOD BANK RECEIVES GRANT TO IMPROVE EQUITABLE ACCESS AND ASSESS EFFECTIVENESS OF PROGRAMS

Sikeston, MO (Oct. 26, 2020) – Southeast Missouri Food Bank has received a grant from Feeding America to fund increased outreach in communities where the pandemic has had the greatest impact on hunger needs, to study how well the food bank serves diverse populations, and to fund a pilot program aimed at improving health conditions through access to healthy foods.

“This is one of those omnibus types of grants that allows us to examine and improve our services on a variety of different fronts,” said President and Chief Executive Officer Joey Keys. “It’s easy to get caught up in the demands of day-to-day operations and making sure we’re acquiring enough food and distributing it appropriately to meet the needs in each community. Opportunities like this force us to take a step back and really dissect and evaluate our operations to make sure we’re efficient and that we’re providing equitable access to all communities.”

The grant covers the cost of monthly mobile food distributions in Scott, Mississippi, New Madrid, Dunklin, and Pemiscot counties through April 2021. The counties were selected because they have some of the highest rates of hunger in the state. For example, overall food insecurity in Pemiscot County is 26.4 percent compared to 17.6 percent in Cape Girardeau County. Food insecurity among children in Pemiscot County is 35.9 percent compared to 23.4 percent in Cape Girardeau. Another aspect of the grant included focus groups to determine the effectiveness of our programs.

The grant also funds a pilot program between the food bank and SEMO Health Network, a federally qualified health center. Center staff will identify patients in five counties with chronic illnesses, such as diabetes, that can be improved with appropriate diet changes. The food bank will provide these patients with a “prescription” for a monthly box of fresh produce and lean protein. Their weight, blood pressure, and blood glucose levels will be monitored over a six-month period for improvements in health.

“We’ve wanted for quite some time to do a Farmacy program where we’re using food as medicine and tracking results in the same group of people,” Keys said. “This grant gives us that opportunity, and we hope we have good results and are able to replicate the program in other counties with other partners going forward.”

“It’s hard for people on a fixed income to afford fresh produce and lean protein on a regular basis. It’s expensive for the food bank to acquire too, so we certainly wouldn’t be able to do this without a funding source.”

The food bank also has hired Neisha Ivory to fill the new position of Equity and Programs Coordinator to oversee projects related to the grant. In the role, Ivory will develop and maintain relationships with community groups in health care and social services, provide case management to Farmacy program participants, and help ensure food bank services are inclusive and delivered equitably among diverse populations. Ivory, of Jackson, will complete a bachelor’s degree in Human Resources/Organizational Business in December. She formerly was a benefits coordinator at SoutheastHEALTH in Cape Girardeau.

Southeast Missouri Food Bank is an affiliate of Feeding America, a nationwide network of more than 200 food banks that feed nearly 50 million people through food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, and other community-based agencies. More information about the food bank and its programs can be found online at semofoodbank.org.

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About Southeast Missouri Food Bank

Southeast Missouri Food Bank provides food to 140 member agencies including food pantries, soup kitchens, domestic violence and homeless shelters, senior citizen programs, children’s programs, and non-profit rehabilitation facilities in Southeast Missouri. The food bank’s 16-county coverage area includes Bollinger, Butler, Cape Girardeau, Carter, Dunklin, Madison, Mississippi, New Madrid, Pemiscot, Perry, Reynolds, Ripley, Scott, Ste. Genevieve, Stoddard, and Wayne counties. The mission of Southeast Missouri Food Bank is to end hunger and leverage the power of food to build a healthy community. Those interested in helping can do so by making a tax-deductible contribution, donating food, or scheduling a time to volunteer. Visit SemoFoodBank.org for more information.