



News Release

For Immediate Release

Contact: Lisa Church
573-471-1818, lchurch@semofoodbank.org

FOOD BANK DISTRIBUTES 16.35 MILLION POUNDS OF FOOD IN RESPONSE TO INCREASED NEED DURING PANDEMIC

Sikeston, MO (January 26, 2021) – Southeast Missouri Food Bank distributed a record 16.35 million pounds of food – or 13.6 million meals – during 2020, an increase of more than 3 million pounds over the 12.9 million pounds distributed in 2019.

“If anyone had told us at the start of 2020 that we were going to distribute more than 16 million pounds of food and hold nearly double the number of mobile food distributions, we probably would have said, ‘No way. We don’t have the resources for that,’” said food bank Chief Executive Officer Joseph Keys. “But when the coronavirus pandemic hit, and we started seeing double the number of people needing food assistance because of lost jobs and wages, we rallied quickly and kept up that pace during pretty much the whole year.”

Mobile food distributions, where prepacked boxes of food are distributed in drive-through fashion, were a cornerstone of the food bank’s response to the increased need for food assistance.

“With a mobile we are able to get food quickly into the more remote parts of our service area, including those communities that may not have a brick-and-mortar pantry,” Keys said.

The food bank held 432 mobile distributions in 2020, compared to the 234 held in 2019. The mobiles also were converted to drive-throughs to limit contact that might contribute to spreading COVID-19. Pantries also began doing their distributions via drive-throughs where possible.

Partnerships were key during the heightened response, Keys said.

“Without our network of pantries, our mobile partners, and of course our donors, I don’t know how we would have been to meet the need,” he said. “We saw both grocery and freight prices increase 20 to 40 percent while food donations were dropping. Food banks and grocers everywhere were competing for the same products. It really was a perfect storm for our organization.”

While the number of people needing food assistance doubled in the early days of the pandemic, it has stabilized somewhat. Many of those seeking help had never needed food assistance before. Keys estimates the food bank is serving about 40 percent more families than it did before the pandemic, having gone from serving 63,000 households per month to 85,000-90,000.

“The 16 southeast Missouri counties we cover have some of the highest rates of hunger and poverty in the state,” Keys said. “The need for food assistance has always been high here, and the pandemic only made that worse.”

Other highlights of the past year include:

- Providing monthly boxes of food to 5,350 senior citizens
- Partnering with 32 school districts to provide weekend backpacks of food to 1,167 students during the 36-week school year.
- Distributing 2.57 million pounds of produce, dairy and protein through the federal Farm to Family program created specifically to address the pandemic’s double whammy of increased food insecurity and market losses to food producers.
- Distributing 611,890 pounds of fresh produce donated by local farmers and growers.
- Completing 774 SNAP applications to link people to an important resource to obtain food on a regular basis. Every \$1 of benefits provided in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program generates \$1.70 in economic impact.

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About Southeast Missouri Food Bank

Southeast Missouri Food Bank provides food to 140 food pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters in 16 southeast Missouri counties. They include Bollinger, Butler, Cape Girardeau, Carter, Dunklin, Madison, Mississippi, New Madrid, Pemiscot, Perry, Reynolds, Ripley, Scott, Ste. Genevieve, Stoddard, and Wayne counties. The food bank also provides mobile food distributions, monthly boxes of food to eligible seniors and weekend backpacks of food to more than 1,100 students in 32 school districts. The mission of Southeast Missouri Food Bank is to end hunger and leverage the power of food to build a healthy community. The Food Bank is affiliated with Feeding America, the nation’s largest food bank network, and has received the highest possible rating from Charity Navigator, attesting to its adherence to best practices. Those interested in helping can do so by making a tax-deductible contribution, donating food, or volunteering. Visit SemoFoodBank.org for more information.