

Year Five Report to the Community

We celebrate Thanksgiving on Thursday, but it will be a holiday unlike any we've celebrated in living memory because of the ongoing novel coronavirus pandemic. As we mourn those we have lost to COVID-19 and continue to work hard to protect and provide for our families, the members of Hunger-Free Lancaster County want to update you on our ongoing work to ensure sustainable access to three healthy meals a day for all Lancasterians.

In the Beginning

Since the pandemic's outbreak, the charitable food network in Lancaster has been in overdrive, distributing well more than 1.5 million pounds of emergency food resources. The good news is that Lancasterians have had uninterrupted access to free, healthy, and plentiful meals when they needed them.

Early efforts focused on securing adequate food supplies for thousands of additional people so suddenly in need of food support. Overnight, families had to replace the meals their children normally got at school and seniors from their food delivery or community programs. Thousands of people lost their jobs; many visited food banks for the first time in their lives, a milestone no family wants to reach. But because of the strong food security network and the quick response from our agricultural, retail, government, philanthropic, and nonprofit partners, Lancaster County rose to the unprecedented occasion.

We quickly learned about some unfamiliar and new acronyms:



CRBs - the 30-pound crisis response boxes packed and distributed by the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank at no cost to its 1,000 agency partners across its 27-county service territory, filled with staple dry goods like peanut butter, pasta and sauce, canned meats, vegetable, and fruits. At distributions, families also generally receive fresh milk, meats, cheese, eggs, cereal, produce, fruit, and bread. More than 26,000 of these boxes have been distributed in Lancaster County.

Farmers to Families Boxes - the pre-packed boxes provided by the federal government and filled with wholesome vegetables and fruits, lean meats, dairy products, and grains sourced from local farmers. Nearly 31,000 of these boxes have been distributed to Lancasterians in need.





Better Together

As a result of effective advocacy from HLFC partners and many others, some of the most familiar food security public assistance programs were quickly reinforced and streamlined to ensure that food and funds moved quickly to meet the escalating need:

SNAP – The federal supplemental nutrition assistance program was beefed up – the maximum benefit increased, the number of families eligible expanded, and eligible students in all of Lancaster’s school districts became eligible for two rounds of additional cash assistance. Perhaps most importantly, the sometimes complicated requirements to enroll and access this program were waived to make it safer and faster for families to get the help they need.

WIC – Similar changes were made to the program for pregnant women and those with infants and young children, making it safer and easier for them to access the extra money they need for food and formula during the pandemic.

School Meals – Almost immediately after the schools closed in the spring, federal rules were changed to allow schools to continue providing free meals for their students. Schools established contact-free pickups, many of which continue to this day for districts that remain closed or for students learning from home. The USDA recently waived the many regulations around school meals until the end of the current school year, ensuring that all school districts in Lancaster County school can provide free lunch and often breakfast, snacks, and family meals to every eligible child, regardless of whether they are in school or at home.



Gratitude to those on Lancaster's front lines

The critical work of making sure that healthy food is available for all who need it is done primarily by eight social service hubs located strategically throughout Lancaster County. Despite the new pressures and safety challenges, the hubs continue to do what they do best: effectively engaging in community-based poverty elimination and health improvement strategies that work.

The Lancaster County hubs are:

- » **Factory Ministries Hub (Pequea Valley)**
- » **Crossnet Ministries Hub (Elanco School District)**
- » **Northern Lancaster Hub**
- » **Elizabethtown Area Hub**
- » **Solanco Family Life Network**
- » **Columbia Life Network**
- » **Lancaster County Food Hub**
- » **Community Action Partnership of Lancaster County**

During the pandemic, the hubs have outdone themselves with their rapid response to rising needs in their communities. Some notable accomplishments include:

Community Action Partnership of Lancaster County's newly established collaborations with several low-income housing developments in Adamstown, Lampeter Township and on South Duke Street in Lancaster City. These sites now host socially distanced food pantries and facilitate the continued distribution of the USDA food boxes, which are scheduled to end in December, 2020. Central Pennsylvania Food Bank is currently working with produce suppliers in an effort to provide privately-funded produce boxes to replace the USDA boxes.

The Northern Lancaster Hub has also expanded its footprint, adding a satellite food distribution site to an identified "food desert" in Reinholds near the border of Lebanon and Berks counties. Established in partnership with the Swamp Evangelical Lutheran Church, this pantry is open twice a month, offering contact-free, drive-through distribution; pre-boxed food supplies are placed directly into the clients' trunks.

The Central Pennsylvania Food Bank, which is the source of much of the charitable food in Lancaster County and a backbone member of Hunger-Free Lancaster County, has been working diligently to source and provide the fresh products as well as the shelf stable favorites that its agency partners' customers want. One thing that has been in short supply has been canned green beans, a favorite of many families. This harvest season, the food bank was able to partner with Hanover Foods to pack green beans grown at longtime food bank partner **First Fruits Farm** in northern Maryland for distribution in holiday boxes throughout its footprint.

Lancaster County Food Hub has seen an increase in new families utilizing its contact-free services. The Emergency Women's Winter Shelter is scheduled to open on December 7.

Water Street Mission continues to hold its three-time-a-week food distribution and started Reset, an onsite, all-day program for students from the School District of Lancaster providing meals and help with homework. Reset is a program of Teen Haven, Water Street's neighborhood youth center.

Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health continues to partner with the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank, Salem UCC, Columbia Life Network and Community Action Partnership of Lancaster County to bring the Fresh Express Columbia program on the 4th Friday of the month. During the pandemic, this meal program has served more than 300 households a month (up from 175) as a contactless drive through and is available to anyone regardless of income or address. This program offers dog and cat food, as well, thanks to Spike's Pet Pantry of Humane Pennsylvania.





Spanish American Civic Association converted its onsite community meal program to a hot, grab-and-go format and has reopened on a limited or appointment basis other programs, including behavioral health, drug and alcohol outpatient, workforce development, case management and human services, and its senior center.

Tabor Community Services partnered with the County Redevelopment Authority on the implementation of the state's Rent Relief Program, which phased out on November 4th, and actively works with Lancaster County tenants and landlords to prevent eviction as lead agency of the Eviction Prevention Network.

Other partners that also continue to make a difference include the **United Way of Lancaster County, Power Packs Project, Meals on Wheels of Lancaster, Inc., the City of Lancaster, Lancaster County, Salvation Army of Lancaster PA and Jewish Family Service of Lancaster, among many others.**

A complete list of HFLC partners can be found on our website.

Community generosity and government grants

During the pandemic, individuals, businesses, foundations, churches and other organizations have contributed generously to Lancaster County's charitable food network. In addition, more than \$1 million of donated funds were provided through **Lancaster CARES**, an initiative of the United Way of Lancaster County and the **Lancaster County Community Foundation**, which is helping to strengthen the resources and resiliency of the charitable food network throughout Lancaster County. Hunger-Free Lancaster County wants to take this opportunity to thank the United Way and the LCCF for its leadership and its stewardship of these vital funds.

Our most vulnerable

Of particular concern these past months have been Lancaster's seniors and school age children. Under the leadership of the Lancaster County Aging Office, 1,800 seniors continue to get Meals on Wheels each week and some community meal programs have even reopened in recent months, serving more than 500 lunches daily. Another first in Lancaster is a **virtual senior center**, which offers virtual programs to Lancaster County residents age 55 and older. Classes include exercise, games, informational classes, ukulele, and art. All classes are free, and supplies are available to complete the classes.

Hunger-Free Lancaster County members continue to be concerned about child nutrition and hunger. COVID-19 has greatly challenged our schools, which prior to the pandemic were responsible for serving millions of meals to Lancaster's children, including breakfast, lunch, snacks, after school meals, and family pantries. The Power Packs Project which has consistently provided healthy meals to families through school distributions reports lower-than-average rates of food going home to families in Lancaster County, despite its work to make sign up and pick up contact free. The Central Pennsylvania Food Bank, which has a dedicated youth meals program reports similar trends. Both of these organizations, and many of the other Hunger-Free Lancaster County partners, are working closely with all 16 county school districts, including facilitating the distribution of both Crisis Response Boxes and Farmers to Families boxes at school to district families that need them.

Working with the school districts and Lancaster families with school-age children is a top priority for Hunger-Free Lancaster County.





Where to find food resource information

Hunger-Free Lancaster County wants to thank **Pennsylvania 2-1-1 East**, part of a free, statewide service for finding health and human services offered by the United Way of Pennsylvania, for maintaining its online database and 24-hour telephone service during the pandemic, capturing all of the changes and updates that have been and will be made as our partners respond to changing needs during this crisis.

In addition, during the COVID-19 crisis, the **Lancaster Community Meal Program**, a grassroots network of churches and organizations providing free daily meals in Lancaster City and County, launched **OurCommunityMeals.org**, an up-to-date list of free community meals in Lancaster City and County maintained by the **Parish Resource Center**.

How you can help

As we face a mounting number of COVID-19 cases, continued high rates of unemployment and under-employment, and the cold winter months, the need for food assistance continues. You can help in ways that include:

- United Way of Lancaster County's Volunteer Center is hard at work on their **Holiday Giving Guide 2020**. These are opportunities like donation and gift card drives, adopt-a-family and serving or delivering holiday meals.
- Drivers are still needed on Saturday, December 19 for the Annual Christmas Food Box Distribution, Lancaster County Project for the Needy, on Saturday, December 19th starting at 8:00 am from Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church, 64 Hershey Avenue, Lancaster. This year, the LCPFN plans to distribute 1,800 boxes with holiday meal fixings by car instead of at its usual in-person event at Clipper Stadium. The United Way has information on its website or anyone who wants to volunteer can reach out to Tom Fasnacht from Fulton Bank who is coordinating this event. His contact information is: **TFasnacht@fult.com** and (717) 291-2670.
- Donate to one of your favorite Hunger-Free Lancaster County member organizations.

Yours in service,

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