Ohio Association of Foodbanks Seeking $25 Million in Emergency State Funding to Prevent Hunger During COVID-19 Outbreak

Request for Immediate Support for the Critical Procurement and Distribution of Food and Other Essential Items for Food Insecure Ohioans

Ohio’s foodbanks traditionally depend on a variety of food and funding sources to meet the need for help with food. Many of those sources - especially privately purchased foods and donated foods - have quickly dried up due to loss of fundraising revenue and pressure on food retailers, food manufacturers, and the food supply chain.

Donated Foods: Last year, donated foods from retailers and manufacturers and community-based and corporate food drives made up 43.9% of all food distributed by foodbanks. Much of this food is now unavailable due to pressure on the food supply chain.

Purchased Foods: Foodbanks normally purchase additional foods to fill a 10% gap in the products needed to meet demand. Those costs have increased exponentially since mid-March.

OFPACP Foods: Nearly all of the SFY2020 allocation of $25 million for our state-funded food programs was already spent prior to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Federal Foods: H.R. 6201 and S.B. 3548 authorized additional purchases through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). However, these foods are not likely to make it to foodbank warehouses for 30 to 90 days, and Ohio’s share will be inadequate.

In 2019, before the COVID-19 outbreak, Ohio’s foodbanks provided take-home groceries to more than 1.6 million different Ohioans, in addition to serving more than 15 million meals through hot meal programs. Those individuals remain food insecure, and are likely far more food insecure than they were prior to the COVID-19 outbreak and its related economic impact. Additionally, the nearly 200,000 or more newly displaced workers across Ohio and their families are visiting Ohio’s foodbanks and partner agencies due to their inability to afford household expenses.

Foodbanks are incurring exponentially high operating costs to keep warehouse workers and truck drivers working long hours to move and deliver food, to procure supplies for and pack emergency food boxes and to-go meals to limit person-to-person contact, and more. At the same time, traditional fundraising events that generate critical operating support and funds to purchase food have been cancelled due to social distancing measures, and donated food sources are drying up as retailers and manufacturers find products and goods in overwhelmingly high demand.

The Ohio Association of Foodbanks and its 12 member foodbanks are requesting $25 million in immediate funding to meet the hunger relief network’s critical emergency needs. With the cost of food and essential non-food items like soap, hand sanitizer, toilet paper, infant formula, infant and adults diapers, and more rising as supply struggles to keep up with demand, and with pressure on the supply chain limiting availability of staple products, foodbanks need immediate relief to keep up with extraordinary demand for help from its network. Procuring, transporting, packing, and distributing food and non-food items is expensive and essential during this crisis.

Current as of March 30, 2020. Subject to change as situation develops. Check ohiofoodbanks.org/coronavirus for up-to-date request.
What Can $25 Million in Emergency State Funding Buy to Prevent Hunger in Ohio During this Crisis?

As foodbanks experience increases of 100 to 500 percent or more in demand for their help, they are already being forced to ration food and limit services to serve all Ohioans in need. This funding is desperately needed to replenish foodbank inventories and ensure Ohioans are not left without food on their tables during this emergency. Product is going to be more and more difficult to procure with every day that passes, and food insecure families will be the ones left without access.

The Ohio Association of Foodbanks can normally procure a dozen small eggs at $0.50 per dozen. That price has risen to $1.49 per dozen over the past two weeks. The cost of procurement alone to distribute one dozen eggs to each individual seeking help from foodbanks over the next 30 days would be roughly $1,640,000.

Ohio’s foodbanks are competing in a market with more widespread limitations in supply than we have experienced in more than three decades. Staple products like peanut butter, canned stew, and canned meats are hard to impossible to come by. Manufacturers and vendors are cancelling foodbank orders, presumably as they receive higher prices from bidders and struggle to produce and distribute food at adequate quantities to meet demand.

The association will purchase truckloads of products as they are available, and costs are only expected to rise as pressure continues to mount on the supply chain. The cost of purchasing just one, 5 oz. can of tuna and one, 12 oz. box of cereal for each individual seeking help from foodbanks over the next 30 days would be roughly $2,300,000. It will cost another $650,000 just to purchase 1 million cardboard boxes to pre-pack food items for no-touch distributions.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits do not pay for non-food items like bar soap, toothpaste, toilet paper, and other essential personal care and personal hygiene items. It would cost the Ohio Association of Foodbanks roughly $250,000 just to purchase one, 3 oz. bar of soap for each individual seeking help from foodbanks over the next 30 days.

Ohio’s foodbanks will eventually receive some commodities through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), which received emergency appropriations as part of federal COVID-19 emergency response packages. However, those commodities will not be procured and delivered to foodbank warehouses for at least 30 days, but likely closer to 60 to 90 days. The USDA also pays market rates for commodities, so those appropriations will not go nearly as far to purchase foods as they would have prior to this pandemic.

With immediate need rising exponentially and given the inability and inflexibility of the federal nutrition safety net to respond quickly enough during this crisis, the Ohio Association of Foodbanks respectfully and urgently requests this emergency funding from the State of Ohio to purchase critical food to maintain inventory in foodbank warehouses, as well as essential non-food items like personal care and personal hygiene products and equipment and supplies like additional boxes for packing food, additional off-site warehouse space to store food, and additional trucking to haul food.