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## **The Ohio Association of Foodbanks Urges Action for Funding to Address Food Insecurity in 2026-2027 State Budget**

Ohio foodbanks, partner farms and community leaders gather at the statehouse to advocate for critical hunger relief

**COLUMBUS, OHIO** – With foodbanks across Ohio serving more pantry visitors in the last six months than at any point in their nearly 35-year history, the Ohio Association of Foodbanks is calling for urgent action to secure funding in the 2026-2027 state budget.

On February 12, the Ohio Association of Foodbanks hosted its “*Friends of the Foodbanks Day*” at the Ohio Statehouse, bringing together food pantry leaders, partner farms, faith leaders and other hunger relief advocates for a day of advocacy and action. The event highlighted the increased demand for food assistance and the essential role of state funding in ensuring families in all 88 Ohio counties have access to nutritious food.

The program began with a networking session, followed by compelling remarks from Joree Novotny, executive director of the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, who addressed the growing strain on the state’s hunger relief network and the recently proposed decrease in funds.

Through her remarks, Novotny expressed the need for continued state funding for vital programs such as the [Ohio Food Program and the Ohio Agricultural Clearance Program](#), which partner with dozens of farmers, growers, producers, and vendors across the state to provide nutritious, quality food to families across Ohio.

“Not only does the State of Ohio’s investment in these programs meet basic food needs today,” said Novotny. “[These programs] also help people attain better educational outcomes, employment outcomes, health outcomes, and aging outcomes, and serve as a meaningful economic engine for Ohio farmers and producers growing and making food on narrowing margins...it is a win-win-win investment.”

The Ohio Food Program provides shelf-stable and center-of-the-plate foods, while the Ohio Agricultural Clearance Program rescues surplus agricultural products from local Ohio farmers and producers, [creating and maintaining nearly 300 jobs](#) in the state’s food supply chain and agricultural industry.

Following opening remarks, a panel discussion explored the urgent funding needs of hunger relief programs. Moderated by Novotny, the panelists included: Manoj Kumar of Sherwin Williams, Alex Buck of Fresh Forward Farms & Fruit Growers Marketing Association, Pete Dorley of Keystone Meats and Pastor Susan Roark of the Faith Fellowship.

Each panelist highlighted their organization's role in combating hunger and the direct impact of the state-funded programs on their organizations, as well as the positive impact they have witnessed in the community.

"These programs need to be funded continually so that the foodbanks can do what they do best," Kumar said.

Following the panel, representatives from the Ohio Association of Foodbanks participated in legislative meetings with state officials to advocate for funding in the 2026-2027 state budget. The call for funding comes as **Ohio foodbanks report a staggering 58% increase in children and a 90% increase in older adults seeking assistance in 2024 compared to 2017.**

Unfortunately, despite record levels of need, funding for their state-funded food programs were cut by \$7.5 million per year in Governor DeWine's executive budget, for total remaining funding of \$24.55 million per year. The association is seeking restoration of this cut and additional funding to account for inflation and pressure on their charitable hunger-relief system, to prevent food hardship and nutrition shortfalls.

For more information, or to learn how to support this cause, visit [www.OhioFoodbanks.org](http://www.OhioFoodbanks.org). To access the "Friends of the Foodbanks Day" video click [here](#), and to view other materials, [click here](#).

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#### *About the Ohio Association of Foodbanks*

*The Ohio Association of Foodbanks is Ohio's largest charitable response to hunger, representing Ohio's 12 Feeding America foodbanks and 3,600 member charities including food pantries, hot meals, and other hunger relief programs. In SFY 2024, the association and its member foodbanks were able to acquire and distribute more than 292 million pounds of food and grocery items. Follow the association on Twitter, stay connected on Facebook and visit them on the web at [www.ohiofoodbanks.org](http://www.ohiofoodbanks.org).*

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