

As a member of Feeding America, and a United Way Member Agency, Feeding the Gulf Coast works through member organizations and special programs to provide nutritious food to meet the challenge of feeding people who are hungry as a result of systemic poverty, personal crisis or disaster. Feeding the Gulf Coast also educates the public regarding domestic hunger, proper nutrition and other related issues.

Feeding the Gulf Coast, Inc. was founded and incorporated in 1981. In 1988, the food bank became a member of Feeding America, the nation's largest hunger relief organization. Since its founding, the organization has distributed more than 280 million pounds of food to charitable feeding organizations across the 24 counties it serves—including nine counties in lower Alabama, eight counties in lower Mississippi, and seven counties across the panhandle of Florida. In 2019, the food bank distributed over 29 million pounds of food through our network of over 400 community partners, consisting of child nutrition sites, church pantries, soup kitchens and other non-profit organizations. On average, our partners served nearly 114,000 people each month in 2019.

To assist in its mission to increase food access and provide educational opportunities, the food bank operates the following programs:

Retail Store Level Pickup Program (RSLPP)

RSLPP gives the food bank and its agencies access to all food types, including produce, dairy, meat and bread. The program, created on the national level by Feeding America, partners retail grocery chains with local food banks. Through the program, stores donate their wholesome but unsaleable food to their local food banks to feed people in need and reduce food loss. In 2019, 190 stores along the Central Gulf Coast donated over 13.4 million pounds of food to the food bank through this program. In some areas, Feeding the Gulf Coast trains and certifies select agencies to pick up food directly from these stores and distribute the donations to their clients through their feeding programs. Not only does this get food into the hands of the hungry faster, it enables the food bank to use resources like trucks, employees, and monetary donations in other places.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

TEFAP is a federal program that helps supplement the diets of low-income Americans by providing them with emergency food assistance at no cost. Through TEFAP, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) purchases a variety of nutritious, high-quality USDA foods, and makes those foods available to State Distributing Agencies based on the number of unemployed persons and the number of people with incomes below the poverty level in each state. States provide the food to local agencies they have selected, usually food banks, which in turn distribute the food to local organizations, such as soup kitchens and food pantries directly serving the public. Feeding the Gulf Coast is responsible for administering TEFAP in its service area for Alabama and Florida.

Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)

Many of the clients our partners serve are aging seniors. These are older adults who find themselves struggling with the choice between spending limited funds on necessary medicines or food. Food is often the item they choose to sacrifice first. To help alleviate this choice between basic necessities, we operate the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) in a few of our Alabama and Florida counties. CSFP is a discretionary program funded each year through the federal appropriations process, so the program may only serve as many eligible participants as federal funding allows. CSFP provides food and administrative funds to states, which in turn store and transport the food to local partners for distribution to low-income clients. Seniors enrolled in the program receive a box each month containing nutritious essentials to supplement their diet and stretch their limited food budgets. In 2019, we provided nearly 197,950 pounds to nearly 850 seniors through this program.

Produce Procurement Program (PPP)

PPP focuses on rescuing fresh produce directly from farms or other fresh distribution sites. Nationwide, the largest growth market for food banks to acquire food at a low cost is the fresh produce industry, and most of the time the excess food is left on the farm. Through the program, farms and distributors donate their wholesome but unsaleable produce to food banks to feed people in need and reduce food loss on the farm level. In 2019, 50 farms and distributors donated over 1.5 million pounds of food to the food bank through this program.

Mobile Pantry Program

The Mobile Pantry Program exists to provide nutritious food to families in rural communities and areas impacted by disaster. For each mobile pantry distribution, Feeding the Gulf Coast delivers approximately 5,000 pounds of an assortment of nutritious essentials—produce, meats, dairy, and bakery items—to provide 100 families with enough food for approximately one week. The food bank connects with partners in low-income neighborhoods to schedule and execute mobile pantries. A partner agency agrees to promote the mobile pantry and recruit enough volunteers to bag or box the food that will be distributed to the community. On the day of the mobile pantry, the food bank loads the food onto a refrigerated truck and drives it to the site, where the partner agency distributes the food immediately. The program is especially important in rural areas lacking regular food distribution sites or where our partners have limited storage capacity, as well as in times of disaster to quickly address the needs of the community. In 2019, Feeding the Gulf Coast distributed over 2 million meals to nearly 50,000 families through over 300 mobile pantries across Alabama, Mississippi and Florida. Additionally, through produce distributions, we gave away over 315,700 pounds of produce to communities with limited food access.

Benefits Enrollment Outreach Program

The Benefits Enrollment Outreach Program began in 2010 with the signing of a contract to conduct Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP, formerly the Food Stamp Program) outreach on behalf of the Alabama Department of Human Resources throughout Alabama. In 2014, the food bank expanded SNAP outreach work by contracting with the Mississippi Department of Human Services. Thanks to funding from the National Council on Aging, the food bank opened the Benefits Enrollment Center to assist households with applying for SNAP, Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, Medicare Savings Program, Farmers Market Vouchers, and other budget-relieving benefits. In addition to serving low-income households, the Benefits Enrollment Outreach Program seeks to assist seniors, rural communities, and formerly incarcerated individuals re-entering the community. The food bank currently provides outreach to every county in Alabama and Mississippi. Both state programs cover 50% of the expenses needed to perform outreach. In 2019, the Benefits Enrollment Outreach team helped more than 4,500 families gain access to benefits, equaling nearly 5 million meals.

Backpack Program

The Backpack Program, which began in 2004, meets the needs of chronically hungry children by providing them with nutritious and easy-to-prepare food to take home on weekends and school vacations, when school meals are not available. The Backpack Program is located at schools with a high incidence of children in need. School counselors identify which children are in need and discreetly place the food in each child's backpack on Friday afternoon. In 2019, the food bank distributed 82,308 backpacks to 5,411 children.

Summer Meals Program

The Summer Meals Program is a federal program that provides snacks and meals to chronically hungry children when school is out for the summer. Of the nearly 21 million children nationally who receive lunch assistance during the school year, less than 19% receive a meal on a typical summer day. To ensure children in our region have access to free, nutritious meals, the food bank administers this program along the Central Gulf Coast. In 2019, the food bank distributed over 432,440 snacks and meals to over 13,400 children.

Afterschool Meals Program

The Afterschool Meals Program is funded through the federal Child and Adult Care Feeding Program. Through this program, Feeding the Gulf Coast provides snacks and meals to afterschool enrichment programs in low-income areas to serve children who are at risk of going hungry. The children who attend these programs receive free meals which meet federal guidelines for nutrition. This program is important because hunger limits children's growth potential both physically and academically. When surveyed for the Hunger in Our Schools report, 80% of teachers reported children who do not have enough to eat have difficulty concentrating in class, while 62% of teachers reported behavioral and discipline problems when their students did not have enough to eat (No Kid Hungry, 2017). Children who are not nourished every day of the week will struggle to excel in school. In 2019, the food bank served over 745,000 snacks and meals to over 12,000 children.

Volunteers

Volunteers are the heart of Feeding the Gulf Coast, enabling the food bank to achieve its mission. Feeding the Gulf Coast has a robust volunteer program, offering opportunities for ages 5 and up at our Theodore and Milton facilities. Volunteers may also assist with special events such as our annual fundraiser Chef Challenge.

There are a variety of volunteer shifts offered to individuals and groups seeking service hours, including weekdays, weeknights and Saturday mornings. The food bank also hosts large service days for groups with up to 100 participants. In just a few hours, volunteers are able to make a huge impact: a group of volunteers can sort up to 1,500 pounds of food in one hour. In 2019, nearly 20,000 volunteers contributed nearly 210,300 service hours to the food bank, saving an estimated \$2 million of paid staff and operation time.

Food Drives

Sponsored by various community organizations and businesses, food drives play a critical role in fighting hunger on a local scale by keeping the food bank stocked year round with shelf stable items. Anyone can start a food drive to help support our hunger relief efforts. In 2019, food drives brought in over 304,210 pounds of food and over \$51,000 in funds, which provided over 510,800 meals.

Disaster Relief

In addition to being a hunger relief organization, the food bank is also a disaster relief organization. Our Theodore and Milton facilities are prepared for emergencies with backup generators and emergency supplies such as food and water. In addition, our Theodore facility has an industrial-sized kitchen which can be utilized for serving meals to the community. Anytime a disaster strikes in our service area, truckloads of food and supplies are sent from Feeding America and other corporations. The food bank then works to get those supplies to the affected communities as quickly as possible. Feeding the Gulf Coast coordinates its disaster response with Feeding America and local emergency management agencies to ensure the most efficient and timely relief possible.

Since Hurricane Michael's landfall in October 2018, Feeding the Gulf Coast has distributed over 9 million pounds of food and nonfood care items, making nearly 1,000 deliveries into areas impacted by the Category 5 storm.

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