

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 nearly 380 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 2022, the food bank distributed nearly 29 million meals through our network of more than 800 community partners, consisting of child nutrition sites, church pantries, soup kitchens, and other non-profit organizations.

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 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, but it also 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.

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 food distribution and recruit enough volunteers to bag or box the food that will be distributed to the community. On the day of the distribution, 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.

Benefits Enrollment Outreach Program (Alabama & Mississippi)

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. In 2016, 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.

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 2022, the food bank distributed 89,014 backpacks to more than 5,000 children.

School Pantry Program

The newest addition to the food bank's Child Nutrition Programs, the School Pantry Program provides students with easy access to nutritious, nonperishable, and easily consumed food and other necessities. The program allows children dignity, privacy, and comfort in selecting food and other items which the student and their family need. Teachers, counselors, and school nurses identify students based on their level of need and as they demonstrate signs of hunger in the classroom. Students can visit the school pantry weekly to select nutritious, easy to prepare food, as well as toiletries for personal use. In 2022, the food bank distributed more than 13,000 meals to 522 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 2022, the food bank served more than 490,300 snacks and meals to more than 4,500 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 2021, the food bank distributed 287,218 snacks and meals to nearly 10,300 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 or mobile food distributions. 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 2022, more than 22,100 volunteers contributed 208,346 service hours to the food bank, saving an estimated \$3 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 2022, food drives brought in nearly 364,300 pounds of food and more than \$108,400 in funds, which together provided more than 845,600 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 that 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 10 million pounds of food and nonfood care items, making nearly 1,000 deliveries into areas impacted by the Category 5 storm. In 2020, the food bank responded to both Hurricane Sally and Zeta by distributing 3,153,379 pounds of food into affected communities. The food bank also assists during times of disaster brought on by calamities outside of natural disasters such as the Government Shutdown in 2019 and the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, the food bank distributed 36% more meals during the pandemic to address the increased need. In 2021, the food bank responded to various disasters by distributing 843,406 pounds of food, water, and emergency supplies through our network and sister food banks.

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 2022, the food bank distributed nearly 3,050 boxes on a monthly basis to seniors in need.

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