

Feeding the Gulf Coast fights hunger through community partnerships and programs by creating access to nutritious food and resources for people and families facing crisis, poverty, or disaster. Feeding the Gulf Coast has earned a four-star rating from Charity Navigator for its commitment to excellence and efficiency. With over 97% of every donated dollar directly supporting its mission, it ranks among the most efficient nonprofits in the nation. Feeding the Gulf Coast was founded and incorporated in 1981. In 1988, the food bank became a Feeding America partner food bank, the nation's largest hunger-relief organization. Since its founding, the food bank has distributed more than 500 million pounds of food across the 24 counties it serves, including nine counties in South Alabama, eight in South Mississippi, and seven in the Florida Panhandle. In 2025, the food bank distributed 37 million meals through its network of more than 800 community partners, including child nutrition sites, church pantries, soup kitchens, and other nonprofit organizations.

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

Advocacy

Feeding the Gulf Coast operates through a network of community partners to provide food to people facing food insecurity. However, to address the root causes of hunger, it is also necessary to strengthen food assistance programs and invest in anti-hunger policies that help ensure people have consistent access to the food they need. Feeding the Gulf Coast operates several federal nutrition programs that help maximize available resources in the fight against hunger. These programs are critical to expanding the capacity of community partners to serve their communities. In addition, the food bank works at the federal, state, and local levels to amplify community voices, engage policymakers, and strengthen policies that advance long-term progress toward ending hunger.

Benefits Enrollment Outreach Program

The Benefits Enrollment Outreach Program began in 2010 by conducting Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly the Food Stamp Program) outreach on behalf of the Alabama Department of Human Resources throughout Alabama. Four years later, the food bank expanded SNAP outreach to Mississippi through the Mississippi Department of Human Services. In 2016, thanks to funding from the National Council on Aging, the food bank established the Benefits Enrollment Center to assist households with applying for SNAP, the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, Medicare Savings Programs, Farmers Market Vouchers, and other benefits that help stabilize household budgets.

In addition to serving low-income households, the Benefits Enrollment Outreach Program assists seniors, rural communities, and formerly incarcerated individuals re-entering the community. The food bank currently provides SNAP outreach in every county in Alabama and Mississippi, as well as in the seven Florida counties within its service area. In 2025, the Benefits Enrollment Outreach team helped more than 8,142 individuals apply for benefits, creating the potential for more than 8 million meals.

Child Nutrition Programs

Afterschool Meals Program (CACFP)

The Afterschool Meals Program is funded through the federal Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). Through this program, Feeding the Gulf Coast provides snacks and meals to afterschool enrichment programs serving children in underserved communities. The children who attend these programs receive free meals that meet federal nutrition guidelines. This program is essential because hunger can limit children's growth and affect their ability to thrive both physically and academically.

Teachers consistently report connections between hunger and behavioral, disciplinary, and academic challenges when students do not have enough to eat. In 2025, the food bank served 432,569 snacks and meals to nearly 9,500 children through the Afterschool Meals Program.

Backpack Program

The Backpack Program, which began in 2004, meets the needs of children facing chronic hunger by providing nutritious, easy-to-prepare food to take home on weekends and breaks when school meals are unavailable. The Backpack Program operates in schools with high levels of economic hardship, where school staff identify students who would benefit from program participation. School counselors identify children who exhibit signs of hunger in the classroom and discreetly place the food in each child's backpack on Friday afternoons. Each backpack provides children with six meals and two snacks. In 2025, the food bank distributed 97,096 backpacks (582,576 meals and snacks) to nearly 4,500 children.

School Pantry Program

The School Pantry Program provides students with easy access to nutritious, nonperishable, easy-to-prepare food and other essential items. Built around dignity, privacy, and autonomy, the program provides students a discreet and supportive way to choose the food and personal care items they and their families need. Teachers, counselors, and school nurses identify students who may be experiencing hunger at school. Students can visit the pantry weekly to select food and toiletries for personal use. In 2024, the food bank distributed nearly 101,340 meals to 7,171 children at 75 schools.

Summer Meals Program (SFSP)

Nationally, nearly 30 million children participate in the USDA's school breakfast and lunch programs on an average school day. When school is out for summer, many children lose access to these healthy meals, placing them at greater risk of hunger and making it harder to get the nutrition they need to learn and grow. To help ensure children in the region have access to free, nutritious meals during the summer months, Feeding the Gulf Coast administers the Summer Meals Program across the central Gulf Coast. Sites in this program serve two meals daily, such as breakfast and lunch, or meals and snacks, to children in their communities. In 2025, the food bank distributed 451,561 snacks and meals to nearly 11,102 children.

Community Health & Nutrition

For people facing food insecurity, the challenge of adequate diet and nutrition, doctor visits, and medication is often unmanageable, creating a cycle of tough choices that results in otherwise manageable diseases becoming a health crisis. As part of our work to address this, Feeding the Gulf Coast established a new Community Health and Nutrition department in 2023 to ensure every community has access to a balanced, nutritious diet.

Healthcare Partnerships

Feeding the Gulf Coast is strengthening partnerships with healthcare providers to address food insecurity as a social determinant of health. By expanding its "Food as Medicine" efforts, the food bank is working to improve health outcomes by increasing access to nutritious food and meaningful nutrition education.

For individuals and households facing food insecurity, balancing the cost of nutritious food, medical care, and prescription medications can be overwhelming, creating a cycle of tough choices. These trade-offs often turn otherwise manageable diseases into a health crisis. Feeding the Gulf Coast recognizes that proper nutrition is a critical part of health and well-being. To advance this work, the food bank established its Community Health and Nutrition department in 2023 to expand access to balanced, nutritious food and nutrition education throughout the communities it serves.

Mobile Market Program (Millie)

The Mobile Market program (Millie) provides highly subsidized produce to households that would otherwise not have easily accessible, nutritious food. These produce items are offered at a minimum of 20% below area market cost. Additionally, Millie will soon be able to accept SNAP benefits and participate in the Fresh Access Bucks program, allowing households to maximize their SNAP benefits. In 2025, Millie sold local produce at nearly 90 events throughout our Florida Service Area.

Nutrition Education

These science-backed classes provide practical, attainable steps that participants can use to make informed diet and meal-planning choices. Nutrition specialists offer in-person nutrition education classes, indirect education activities, and other educational tools to help families better understand the role nutrition plays in their health outcomes. In 2025, nutrition educators taught over 100 classes, reaching more than 1,600 participants. The team reached an additional 3,806 individuals through indirect education activities and more than 142,000 neighbors through Policy, Systems, and Environment (PSE) changes.

Disaster Response, Relief and Recovery

Feeding the Gulf Coast is also a disaster relief organization. It swiftly shifts into disaster response mode when storms or other emergencies impact the community while continuing to provide food assistance and support in unaffected areas. Through coordinated efforts with local, state, and federal emergency management agencies and Feeding America, the food bank serves as a first responder, providing emergency food and water relief immediately following a disaster. Support continues long after initial response efforts have ended through agency and community partners, ensuring sustained assistance throughout the recovery period. The Theodore and Milton facilities are prepared for emergencies with backup generators and emergency supplies, including food and water. Over the past several years, the food bank has responded to multiple storms affecting its service area and neighboring food banks, helping move more than 15 million pounds of food into communities recovering from devastation.

Military & Veteran Hunger

According to the U.S. Department of Defense, in 2020, nearly a quarter (24%) of active-duty service members experienced food insecurity. Among Veteran households, 1 in 9 is food insecure. Service members often face distinct challenges that make it difficult to access the food they need to thrive. Some of the factors that make it hard for our military members to afford sufficient food for themselves and their families are the low salaries of enlisted members, high rates of unemployment for military spouses due to the transitory nature of the military, the high cost of living near many military bases across the country, and the high cost of child care.

Feeding the Gulf Coast partners with the eleven military installations across our Gulf Coast service area and with partner organizations near military bases to combat food insecurity for active-duty, retired, and Veteran military personnel. Through these partnerships last year, the food bank provided more than 115,800 meals to military families and Veterans in our community.

Mobile Pantry Program

The Mobile Pantry Program brings nutritious food directly to communities where families face barriers to consistent food access, including rural areas, places with limited local pantry capacity, and areas impacted by disasters. At each event, Feeding the Gulf Coast provides approximately 5,000 pounds of food, including produce, meat, dairy, and bakery items, enough to help feed 100 families for about one week. The food bank partners with local organizations in communities experiencing higher rates of hunger and limited access to reliable food assistance. These partners help promote each event and recruit volunteers to prepare the food for households receiving support. On the day of the event, Feeding the Gulf Coast transports the food by refrigerated truck to the site for immediate distribution.

This approach is especially important in rural communities without regular food distribution sites, in areas where partners have limited storage capacity, and during disasters when rapid response is essential. In 2025, Feeding the Gulf Coast distributed more than 7.1 million meals through over 700 mobile pantries across its service area.

Senior Hunger Programs

Older adults are a priority population in Feeding the Gulf Coast's efforts to address hunger. Many seniors live on fixed incomes and must make difficult choices between purchasing food, medication, and other basic necessities. To help ease that burden, Feeding the Gulf Coast operates programs designed to meet the unique nutritional needs of older adults while expanding access to foods that support health and well-being. Together, these programs reflect a food-as-medicine approach that helps address chronic health conditions commonly associated with food insecurity among older adults. In 2025, Feeding the Gulf Coast distributed more than 7,300 boxes each month to seniors facing food insecurity.

Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)

The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) is a discretionary program funded annually through the federal appropriations process, so it can serve only as many eligible participants as federal funding allows. Through CSFP, seniors receive a monthly box of nutritious nonperishable staple foods that help supplement their diets and stretch limited budgets.

Nutrition Equals Seniors Thriving (NEST)

To help address gaps left by limited federal funding, Feeding the Gulf Coast also operates a privately funded initiative called NEST, or Nutrition Equals Seniors Thriving, expanding support to more older adults facing food insecurity. NEST provides food boxes tailored to the dietary needs of older adults, including low-sodium vegetables and beans, whole grains, proteins, and fresh produce.

Store Donation Program

The Store Donation Program strengthens Feeding the Gulf Coast's ability to recover and distribute nutritious food by partnering with local grocery stores to access a wide range of products, including produce, dairy, meat, and bread. Through this program, stores donate wholesome but unsellable food that can be redirected quickly to people facing hunger. In some communities, Feeding the Gulf Coast trains and certifies select partner agencies to collect donations directly from retail locations and distribute them through their own feeding programs. This model increases the speed and efficiency of distribution, expands community access to fresh food, and allows the food bank to dedicate trucks, staff time, and financial resources to other priority areas. In 2025, nearly 280 retail store donor partners donated more than 14 million pounds of food, 83% of which was fresh produce.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

The Emergency Food Assistance Program is a federal nutrition program that Feeding the Gulf Coast administers throughout its service area in Alabama and Florida. The program provides essential food commodities that supplement the diets of low-income individuals through free emergency food assistance. Through TEFAP, the USDA purchases a variety of nutritious, high-quality foods and allocates them to State Distributing Agencies based on the number of unemployed individuals and people living below the poverty level. States provide the food to selected local organizations, most often food banks, which distribute it through community partners such as soup kitchens and food pantries that serve the public directly. By administering this program, Feeding the Gulf Coast helps connect federal food resources to local distribution, expanding access to nutritious food across the region.