

Press Release

For Immediate Release

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**Feeding the Gulf Coast and Mississippi Public Health Institute
Partner to Provide Fresh Produce to Families in Need in Biloxi, MS**
*500 Families from across the Tri-county area receive fresh fruits and vegetables
at food distribution at First Baptist Church of Biloxi*

Biloxi, Ms. (August 5, 2019)—Feeding the Gulf Coast, The Mississippi Public Health Institute (MSPHI), Society of St. Andrew, Rouse’s Supermarket, and other local partners distributed fresh fruits and vegetables to approximately 500 families at a produce drop event held at First Baptist Church of Biloxi on Saturday, August 3, 2019. The produce drop is part of collaborative efforts of Feeding the Gulf Coast, MSPHI, and several organizations across the Mississippi Gulf Coast to support the development of healthier families.

“Through conversations with food pantries and partners, we learned the capacity to provide fresh produce to communities was limited,” said Tennille Collins, program manager for the MSPHI Gulf Coast Families, Mothers, and Babies Initiative. “Access to healthy food is a key to improving overall health, and we believe events like this produce drop will increase access in communities across these three counties.”

One in five Mississippians struggles with hunger, and the Mississippi food insecurity rate has been the highest in the country for eight consecutive years, according to data from Feeding America, the nation’s largest domestic hunger-relief organization. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food insecurity as a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life and limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate food. The food insecurity rate in each of Mississippi’s Gulf Coast counties is higher than the national average. Feeding the Gulf Coast has been working with farmers and other partners to directly address this issue.

“We’ve been working with farmers to source a lot of local produce. In the past, food assistance agencies have been limited to only supplying shelf-stable food,” said Stefanie Bencsath, grants manager at Feeding the Gulf Coast. “Activities like the produce drop make it easier for families to sustain and support dietary quality.”

Feeding the Gulf Coast helps connect those in need to local resources and food assistance. Anyone looking for food assistance can visit www.feedingthegulfcoast.org to find a local pantry or call (888) 704-FOOD.

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About Feeding the Gulf Coast

Feeding the Gulf Coast, formerly Bay Area Food Bank, serves a 24-county area spanning the Florida panhandle, south Alabama, and south Mississippi. In 2018, the food bank distributed over 22 million meals to over 400 church pantries, soup kitchens, and other nonprofit organizations throughout its service area. The food bank also operates multiple hunger-relief and nutrition programs, including Summer Meals, Afterschool Meal, Backpack, Disaster Relief, Mobile Pantry and Produce Drop Distributions and Nutrition Education. Feeding the Gulf Coast is a United Way member agency and a member of Feeding America. For more information, visit www.feedingthegulfcoast.org.

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About the Mississippi Public Health Institute

MSPHI is a nonprofit entity established in 2011 to protect and improve the health and well-being of Mississippians, serving as a partner and convener to promote health, improve outcomes, and encourage innovations in health systems. We cultivate partnerships aimed at program innovation, health resources, education, applied research, and policy development.