

Help some hungry people this summer

Feds, Farmers and Friends Feed Families Food Drive helps local folks in need

By: Corine Burgess

This summer, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is participating in the third annual government-wide Feds Feed Families Food Drive. This effort started on June 1st and continues through August 31st. Each USDA office is collecting non-perishable, nutritious food and sharing it with food banks to help feed families in local communities who are depending on this assistance through these tough economic times.

The food drive began as a response to President Obama's United We Serve Act, a call to Americans to contribute to the nation's economic recovery by serving in their communities. The United We Serve Act, signed in June 2009, encouraged a summer dedicated to volunteerism and community service focused on four key areas: education, health, energy and the environment and community renewal. The USDA has taken the opportunity the food drive presents to tie in its own goals of promoting nutrition and healthy families.

Last year folks got together and donated 465,000 pounds of food. This year's goal is to raise the donation amount up to 500,000 pounds of food. This food helps Americans who are struggling to put food on the table. Record numbers of people are seeking help. Many of these folks are first time visitors, which is tough because in these economic times, donations to charitable organizations are diminishing. Unfortunately with the shortage of jobs and income, many families, especially those with children, are going hungry.

Donations go directly to families and children in need in our community, which is important because for many children the only hot meal they get is supplied by the school's lunch programs. During the summer months, these children don't receive the hot breakfast or lunch and often go without.

To donate non-perishable food items, please bring them to the Sebring Field Office located at the Bert J. Harris Agriculture Center at 4505 George Blvd. in Sebring Florida. Your donations will be taken to the Heartland Food Bank and will be distributed to those in need in Highlands County. If you need more information or directions, please call (863) 402-6545.

Most Wanted Items:

1. Canned fruits in light syrup or its own juices
2. Canned vegetables – low sodium, no salt added
3. Multigrain Cereal – Cheerios, Cornflakes, Grape-nuts, Raisin Bran
4. Grains – brown & white rice, oatmeal, bulgar, quinoa, couscous, pasta, macaroni & cheese
5. Canned proteins – tuna, salmon, chicken, peanut butter, beans
6. Soups – beef stew, chili, chicken noodle, turkey rice
7. 100% juice – all sizes, including juice boxes
8. Condiments – tomato based sauces, light soy sauce, ketchup, mustard, salad dressing, oils
9. Snacks – individually packed snacks, crackers, trail mix, dried fruit, granola/cereal bars, pretzels, sandwich crackers
10. Paper products & household items – paper towels, napkins, cleaning supplies
11. Hygiene items – diapers, deodorants for men & women, feminine products, toilet paper, tissues, soap, toothpaste, shampoo

Poverty Statistics

- In 2009, 43.6 million people (14.3 percent) were in poverty.
- In 2009, 8.8 (11.1% percent) million families were in poverty.
- In 2009, 24.7 million (12.9 percent) of people aged 18-64 were in poverty.
- In 2009, 15.5 million (20.7 percent) children under the age of 18 were in poverty.
- In 2009, 3.4 million (8.9 percent) seniors 65 and older were in poverty.

Hunger Statistics on Food Insecurity and Very Low Food Security

- In 2009, 50.2 million Americans lived in food insecure households, 33 million adults and 17.2 million children
- In 2009, 14.7 percent of households (17.4 million households) were food insecure.
- In 2009, 5.7 percent of households (6.8 million households) experienced very low food security.
- In 2009, households with children reported food insecurity at almost double the rate for those without children, 21.3 percent compared to 11.4 percent.
- In 2009, households that had higher rates of food insecurity than the national average included households with children (21.3 percent), especially households with children headed by single women (36.6 percent) or single men (27.8 percent), Black non-Hispanic households (24.9 percent) and Hispanic households (26.9 percent).
- In 2009, 7.8 percent of seniors living alone (884,000 households) were food insecure.

Hunger Statistics on the use of Emergency Food Assistance and Federal Food Assistance Programs

- In 2009, 4.8 percent of all U.S. households (5.6 million households) accessed emergency food from a food pantry one or more times.
- In 2009, 57 percent of food-insecure households participated in at least one of the three major Federal food assistance programs –Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly Food Stamp Program), The National School Lunch Program, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children. Feeding America provides emergency food assistance to an estimated 37 million low-income people annually, a 46 percent increase from 25 million since *Hunger In America 2006*
- Feeding America provides emergency food assistance to approximately 5.7 million different people per week.
- Among members of Feeding America, 74 percent of pantries, 65 percent of kitchens, and 54 percent of shelters reported that there had been an increase since 2006 in the number of clients who come to their emergency food program sites. (U.S. Census Bureau)