

Food Security: Faith Groups & Community Solutions

Models of Food Assistance Programs:

- **Gleaning**
- **Food Banks**
- **Food Pantries**
- **Food Drives**

To put it simply, many farm workers (and others) do not have enough to eat. Government programs (such as SNAP, free/reduced price school lunches, etc.), faith communities, and community charity agencies and programs can help fill the hunger gap.

A special note about assistance programs, from [Farmworker Justice](#):

“When effectively implemented, federal nutrition programs have been effective in reducing food insecurity among some farm worker families. However, farm workers often face a variety of barriers to accessing these food assistance programs, and the programs alone do not adequately address the alarming levels of food insecurity in farm worker communities. Immigration status poses a significant barrier for many farm workers in accessing food assistance. For instance, SNAP identifies eligible categories of immigrants and generally requires that they have been in their qualified status for five years before receiving any cash transfers. Additionally, some farm workers avoid enrolling in any federal nutrition programs because of the belief that participating in public assistance may compromise one’s immigration or residency status. Farm workers also commonly live in rural communities, where resources such as food pantries and soup kitchens can be inaccessible for families without adequate transportation. Farm workers who live in labor camps, motels, various forms of substandard housing or who are homeless also often lack the proper equipment for food preparation and storage. Other barriers include poor translation services, poor quality of food donations, and misinformation on eligibility and availability of resources. These existing food assistance programs are not amenable to the unique needs and harsh living conditions of farm workers.” For more on these barriers, see the “Access” section of the [Food Justice](#) program.

Though meeting the needs of those who are experiencing hunger is essential, we must also continue to advocate for the overall rights of farm workers to ensure the people that help us can live lives free of hunger and food insecurity.

Gleaning

Gleaning is a biblical term from the Hebrew Bible which encourages landowners/farmers to leave the “leftovers” of their harvest for the needy in their community to come and gather. The biblical mandate comes from the Hebrew scriptures in Deuteronomy 24:19: When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all your undertakings. (NRSV)

Produce is shared through food banks, food pantries, and a variety of community food distribution organizations such as congregations and outreach groups. Gleaning can be done in a more formal way or informally through relationships with farmers/grocery stores/restaurants/farmers markets/etc. in your community. The Society of St. Andrew (www.endhunger.org) has been organizing gleaning and food rescue for over 40 years. They have regional offices in a number of states and coordinate gleaning groups through those. If you are not in one of their regions, consider them a resource for developing smaller scale community gleaning in your own area. See more at <https://endhunger.org/volunteer-roles>

Food Banks

A food bank is a non-profit organization that collects and distributes food to hunger-relief charities. Food banks act as food storage and distribution depots for smaller front line agencies such as food pantries and soup kitchens; they usually do not themselves give out food directly to people struggling with hunger although this has changed somewhat during the recent pandemic.

Food banks in the U.S. are very diverse – from small operations serving people spread out across large rural areas to very large facilities that store and distribute many millions of pounds of food each year, and everything in between. A variety of factors impact how food banks work, from the size of the facility to the number of staff members.

One of the largest food bank networks in the US is Feeding America (www.feedingamerica.org). To see their network of food banks where you can volunteer, go to <https://www.feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank>.

Food Pantries

A food pantry is a distribution center where hungry families can receive food. Supplied with food from a food bank and local community collections, pantries can feed hundreds or thousands of people per week. Because every community is different, there are many different types of pantries, including mobile food distribution vans, home deliveries, community refrigerators, and market-style pantries.

Read more:

The Farmworker Assoc. of Florida in Apopka gives away food to struggling families

<https://theapokavoice.com/the-farmworker-assoc-of-florida-in-apopka-gives-away-food-to-struggling-families-tonight-at-5-pm/>

Colorful Community Fridge Brings Hope, Change Together

<https://calexicochronicle.com/2021/04/26/colorful-calexico-fridge-brings-hope/>

Food Drives

A food drive is a call for people to donate food, usually canned and boxed goods, to supply various types of food pantries. One of the most popular efforts started in South Carolina as the “Souper Bowl of Caring” drive to collect cans of soup on Super Bowl Sunday. Very popular with youth, this effort has grown over the years and is now called “[Tackle Hunger](#),” a community project connected to groups around the country. Register to be counted as part of the whole while the food collected by your congregation/group stays in your community. You can also see a map of food distribution organizations around the country at <https://map.tacklehunger.org>

Why immediate “solutions” can also bring challenges:

<https://www.greenamerica.org/building-people-first-economy/who-feeds-farmworkers>

“Immokalee, Florida, is a farming town and, simultaneously, food insecure. When COVID-19 arrived, its economy slowed as people stopped going out to restaurants, which left fields unharvested and farm workers without income.

Cultivate Abundance is a faith-based organization addressing food insecurity in low income, migrant farm worker communities in Immokalee. The local food pantry that Cultivate Abundance partners with, Misión Peniel, serves 300 to 500 clients each week. When that existing food insecurity was compounded by economic shutdown, the USDA Farmers to Families program attempted to alleviate hunger with food boxes filled with fresh produce, meat, dairy, and seafood products.

“Ironically, Immokalee kind of became a food dump area,” says Rick Burnette, technical director of Cultivate Abundance. He notes that the food boxes provided by the program were large enough to occupy the trunk of a car. Unfortunately, most of the food pantry clients come on foot or bike.

“We did an experiment one week with those just to see how it would go...and it went terribly,” he says.

Additionally, the boxes were full of foods that were not culturally appropriate for the Latin American and Haitian populations served. Dairy products, acorn squash, and much more was being tossed aside because the clients did not eat or know how to cook with these ingredients. To serve the needs of these populations, Misión Peniel and Cultivate Abundance worked with local partners to provide food donations and grow produce that was culturally appropriate.

“Since 2018, we have grown, collected, and shared over 17 tons of local foods,” says Burnette. “Assuming that everyone that comes through has at least two other people to feed—we want all of them to have adequate servings of fruits and vegetables for at least that day and beyond—we’ve been able to provide enough to help feed 400 people for two months, if that’s how you want to look at it. That’s a good start, but that’s not enough.”

While Cultivate Abundance works to address the immediate hunger of its farm worker community, the Farmworker Association of Florida is educating people across the state on underlying systemic issues. The association has community gardens spread out among the peninsula as part of its goal to educate and build food sovereignty for farmworkers and the region.”

Should Our Congregation Start a Food Pantry?

Tips for deciding whether to launch this community-wide ministry. By Tyler Charles

From <https://www.churchlawandtax.com/web/2012/may/should-our-church-start-food-pantry.html>

For a congregation that feels compelled or called to do its part to address hunger in its community, establishing a food program *might* be an effective way to make a difference. Before launching a food ministry though, here are some things to consider:

Need

- *Does your community need a food pantry?* Are there other food pantries in the community? If so, could your congregation help by volunteering there? What could your congregation accomplish by creating a new food pantry rather than assisting with an existing pantry? Are there definitely food needs in the community that aren't being met?
- *Who would benefit from your congregation's food pantry?* Would the food go to people within the congregation, others in the community, or both?

Location/Storage

- *Would the food pantry be housed within the congregation or somewhere else?* Is there sufficient storage space on the congregation's property(ies)? Is the space conducive for large-scale food distribution? Is the space equipped to safely store food (protecting it from rodents, insects, spoilage, etc.)?
- *On what days would the food pantry be open?* If the pantry operates within the congregation's facilities, would that interfere with other congregational activities?

Food Sources/Distribution

- *What food sources are available to you? Are there any food banks in the area? Is your congregation committed enough to this ministry to donate food and money to purchase additional food items? Does it have a budget to allow for these expenditures?*
- *Which distribution model is the best fit for you: standardized distribution or client-choice?*

Safety

- *Are you equipped to store refrigerated foods at the proper temperatures? What about frozen foods? Will your pantry distribute any meats, eggs, fruits, vegetables, or other foods that are susceptible to spoilage? If so, how will you ensure that these foods remain safe to eat? Will food pantry volunteers be trained to recognize any unsafe food items?*
- *Do you understand the differences between a "sell by" date, a "use by" date, and a "best if used by" date? Will you train your volunteers about these terms so they know the difference between acceptable and unacceptable donations?*

These are just some of the questions an organization should consider before launching a food program. For those who have the space and the resources, and are equipped to handle these challenges, a food pantry can be a rewarding and beneficial ministry. But the decision to start one should not be made rashly. Before you begin, take time to discuss among your congregation and your community and pray to make sure you can sustain this ministry, and ultimately, make sure it can appropriately do its part to help abate hunger.

Reflection Questions:

1. What kinds of ways can you help your community with food insecurity? What programs already exist? What is missing?
2. Are there opportunities to partner with migrant ministries or other community ministries that can foster relationships with farm workers or with those in the community who are struggling with poverty?
3. Is your congregation/community already aware of food insecurity in your area? If not, check out the statistics at https://map.feedingamerica.org/?_ga=2.192810794.1802912827.1630254031-724618654.1630254031&_gac=1.13764165.1630292862.CjwKCAjw4KyJBhAbEiwAaAQbEx8rPA3W_9DYHfT84dCsfZ2Wg1w82EtUbYJvJNhx4wZ7nA7DxmazNRoCMm8QAvD_BwE
4. Could you identify special collections/days/opportunities to invite folks to donate food?

Learn More:

 Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Ogw1Uyw8P8

Prayer:

Dear God,

You created us to be happy and healthy. You are a God of abundance and joy.

But there are hungry people in our community, in every community, O God. Your love won't allow this. Help us to have the same love. Guide us in exploring opportunities in our area for volunteering, giving, learning, connecting to meet this immediate need. And help us to also commit ourselves to longer term solutions to end hunger and the need for emergency relief. so that everyone will have what they need and we all live in abundance and joy, happiness and health.

By Your grace, amen.