



Feeding Our Communities
Partners

Ending hunger locally

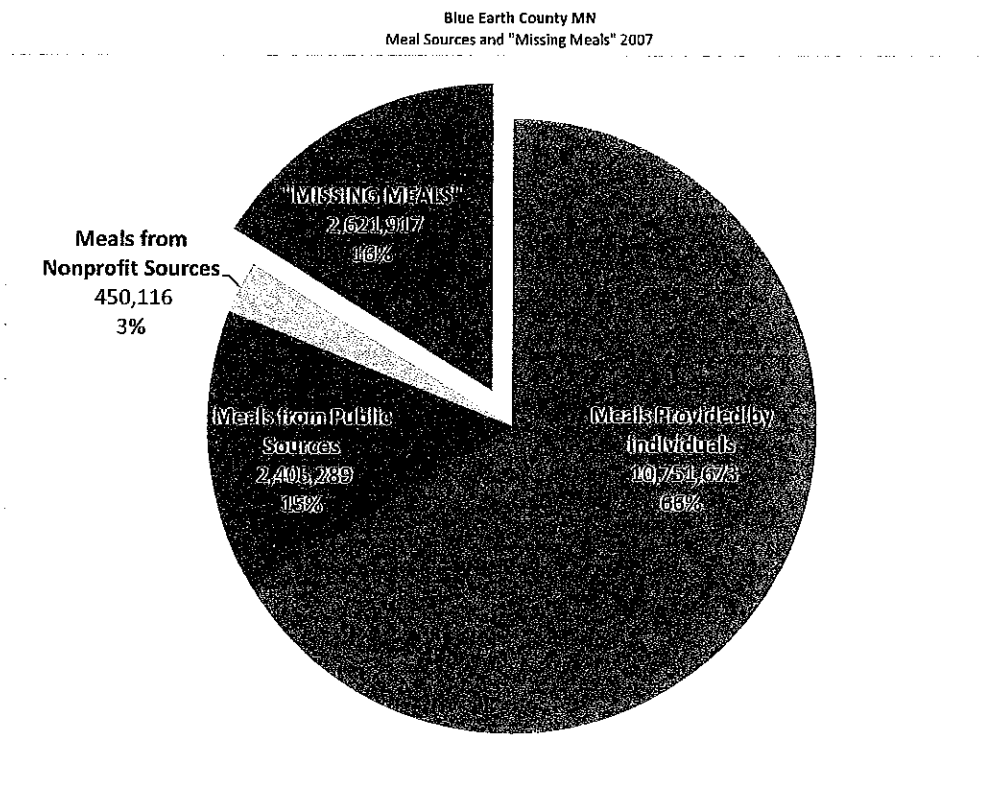
The mission of Feeding Our Communities Partners is to create access and build personal resources to eliminate hunger in Blue Earth County, Minnesota.

Vision Statement: The members of Feeding Our Communities Partners envision a day when no resident of Blue Earth County must experience hunger. By building networks and opening communications, we can utilize and maximize our local food resources to make up for missing meals in Blue Earth County, in turn improving the health and self-reliance of our residents. We *advocate* for sustainable solutions to hunger, *demonstrate* the public value of an end to hunger, and *strive* to eliminate the stigma and apathy connected to hunger.

Food Insecurity in Blue Earth County

The Data

Second Harvest Heartland, a Twin Cities-based regional food bank, conducted a study of food security in Minnesota. The Missing Meals Report concluded that low-income residents in Blue Earth County are providing 66% of their own meals and 18% are being provided through public and non-profit sources, leaving 16% missing or unaccounted for (approximately 2.62 million meals per year). There are approximately 14,800 low-income residents in Blue Earth County. Low-income is defined as living at or below 185% of the federal poverty line (for example, that equates to \$33,800 or less for a household of three).



Prepared by Second Harvest Heartland
2/25/2009

Second Harvest Heartland presented the data to the Blue Earth County Commissioners in the summer of 2008. The commissioners were interested in finding a solution and Colleen Landkamer, then a Blue Earth County Commissioner, agreed to assemble a meeting of community stakeholders to determine interest in starting an anti-hunger coalition. A broad spectrum of business leaders, non-profit representatives, state and local policy makers, and social service partners attended the first meeting of the proposed coalition in November 2008.

The Start of a Grass-Roots Effort

A core group of attendees offered to steer a leadership committee and set the coalition in motion. The Leadership Committee named the coalition Feeding Our Communities Partners (FOCP) -- choosing "Communities" intentionally to reflect the inclusion of all communities located in Blue Earth County.

Strategies to Eliminate Hunger

Defining the Path

The mission of FOCP is to close the missing meals gap between available food assistance programs and the unmet needs of low-income residents of Blue Earth County. To accomplish this, the Partners have agreed to take action through a series of initiatives, developing strategies that bring together individuals and organizations to accomplish the following five overall goals:

Goal 1: Leverage community resources to support available food assistance programs.

- Objectives:**
1. Identify programs and their unmet needs.
 2. Identify organizations and what they can provide (resources).
 3. Network/match resources to needs.
 4. Acknowledge partners.

Goal 2: Increase participation in food assistance programs.

- Objectives:**
1. Identify specific populations & barriers.
 2. Develop method/tools to reach out.
 3. Facilitate assistance with enrollment.

Goal 3: Increase food rescue and distribution programs.

- Objectives:**
1. Identify wasted food resources.
 2. Build relationships with the resources.
 3. Effect corporate policy.
 4. Obtain safe donations.
 5. Establish effective distribution methods.

Goal 4: Advocate for public policy to end hunger.

- Objectives:**
1. Keep our policy makers informed and engaged.
 2. Keep up to date on hunger issues and policies.
 3. Impact public policy and give hunger a voice.

Goal 5: Expand community awareness of hunger.

- Objectives:**
1. Create clear and consistent message about hunger.
 2. Communicate message.
 3. Provide opportunities to participate.

Taking Action

The first initiative proposed and accepted by the Partners is the Backpack Food Program, which provides immediate access to food resources for children in our community. The Backpack Food Program will provide FOCP with opportunities to partner with other food assistance programs, to increase enrollment in available food assistance programs by distributing outreach information, to increase food rescue and distribution possibilities with food producers, and to expand community awareness of hunger. In addition, the Backpack Food Program will increase FOCP name recognition and trust in the community, laying the foundation for future support of additional hunger related initiatives.

The First Initiative: The Backpack Food Program

Feeding Children When School is Out

Through the BackPack Food Program, FOCP will ensure that children who live in food-insecure households are eligible to receive child-friendly, nutritious food in their backpacks prior to weekends or school breaks as well as nutrition education and outreach information. This will be done in a way that is discreet and confidential so children will not be stigmatized by taking food home. In 2008, nearly **1 out of 3** children in the Mankato Public School District received Free or Reduced Price Lunch (30%). The Partners believe that the BackPack Food Program will help ensure a better opportunity for children to succeed at school and in every area of their life.

The BackPack Food Program is starting with a pilot at Franklin Elementary in Mankato, where nearly 50% of students are enrolled in the Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program. The first phase of the pilot will include kindergarten through third grade, from March 5 through the end of the 2009-2010 school year. The pilot program will be closely monitored and evaluated to learn what works well, what parents and children like or dislike about the program, and how it can be improved. If the results are positive, FOCP will seek funding for a second pilot phase to add fourth through sixth grade at Franklin Elementary in the fall of 2010. If the results of the second pilot phase at Franklin are positive, it is the intention of FOCP to seek funding and expand the BackPack Food Program to all Mankato/North Mankato grade schools and eventually all Blue Earth County grade schools.



Funding for the first phase of the pilot has been donated by Greater Mankato Area United Way, the Mankato Clinic Foundation, and Immanuel St. Joseph's - Mayo Health System.

Four teams for the BackPack Food Program have been established. The teams include volunteer professionals and school personnel with a passion for making a difference. Building on the experience of other BackPack Food Programs, the teams have quickly developed the program from concept to reality.

Nutrition Team

Kelly Kunkel	U of M Extension	Educator-Health and Nutrition
Erin Gonzales	Mankato Clinic	Registered Dietician
Ron Schirmers	Mankato Public Schools	Food Service Director

Evaluation Team

Sarah Sifers, Ph.D	Minnesota State University	Associate Professor, Psychology
Marnie Werner	Center for Rural Policy & Develop.	Research Manager
Jeremy Husfeldt	Minnesota State University	Graduate Student
Les Koppendrayer	Franklin Elementary	Principal
Amanda Schaffer	Franklin Elementary	First Grade Teacher
Jeanne Baker	Franklin Elementary	Sixth Grade Teacher

Background and Status Report

Marketing Team

Gina Conlon	Ridley, Inc.	Graphic Designer
DeeDra Vosburg	HickoryTech	Sr. Marketing Manager-Advertising

Implementation Team

Katie Boone	Greater Mankato Area United Way	Community Impact Director
Wilbur Neushwander-Frink	The Arc of Minnesota Southwest	Regional Manager
Melinda Wedzina	Feeding Our Communities Partners	Board Secretary, Leadership Comm. Chair
Jeanne Baker	Franklin Elementary	Sixth Grade Teacher
JoAnna Bequette	Franklin Elementary	Kindergarten Teacher
Amber Blasl	Franklin Elementary	Second Grade Teacher
DeAnn Boney	Blue Earth County	Financial Assistance Supervisor
Laura Bowman	Greater Mankato Area United Way	President
Gina Conlon	Ridley, Inc.	Graphic Designer
Karen Hosier	Franklin Elementary	Fifth Grade Teacher
Les Koppendrayer	Franklin Elementary	Principal
Kelly Kunkel	U of M Extension	Educator-Health and Nutrition
Pam Serdar	Centenary United Methodist Church	Pastor
Sarah Sifers, Ph.D	Minnesota State University	Associate Professor, Psychology
Mandi Stangl	Franklin Elementary	First Grade Teacher
DeeDra Vosburg	HickoryTech	Sr. Marketing Manager-Advertising

The FOCP Collaboration

Current Status of FOCP

While progress on the Backpack Food Program continues, the organizational structure of FOCP is beginning to formalize. In late 2009, the Leadership Committee sent invitations to serve on the initial FOCP Board of Directors to a strategic group of community leaders. The first board meeting was held in December 2009 and nine individuals are currently seated on the board. The board is moving forward with the process of obtaining 501(c)(3) charitable organization status from the IRS; general business protocols and a strategic plan are being developed. The Leadership Committee is continuing to work closely with the board on the facilitation and development of Backpack Food Program and future initiatives.

Future Status of FOCP

FOCP is the first county-based coalition of its kind in Minnesota. Second Harvest Heartland is observing the progress of FOCP and is sharing the experience with several other Minnesota counties identified for potential coalitions. The work that goes into the planning and execution of FOCP's mission will continue to be documented and evaluated for its impact.

FOCP has the potential to become Blue Earth County's central food resource organization -- creating a network thoroughly routed throughout the county to create access to food and build personal resources.

Background and Status Report

In addition to the BackPack Food Program, several other initiatives have been identified by the coalition. They include:

- Creating better access and education through a wider community gardens program
- Creating a community kitchen for education and community involvement
- Creating a community cafeteria and a community cannery in conjunction with the kitchen to utilize and distribute the food resources of the area
- Creating a "Glean Team" of volunteers to harvest and donate fruit and other foods from area growers
- Creating a professional luncheon series for food assistance program personnel to enhance communication and collaboration
- Developing a clearinghouse publication of food resources and donation avenues to simplify the process for Blue Earth County residents

Community Involvement

Board of Directors

Chris Schull, <i>Chair</i>	Ridley, Inc.
Kristin Weeks-Duncanson, <i>Vice Chair</i>	Duncanson Farms
Greg Tholkes, <i>Treasurer</i>	HickoryTech
Melinda Wedzina, <i>Secretary</i>	Feeding Our Communities Partners
Katie Boone	Greater Mankato Area United Way
Tom Borowski	Immanuel St. Joseph's-Mayo Health System
Sarah Person	Exclusively Diamonds
Pam Serdar	Centenary United Methodist Church
Beth Serrill	Blethen, Gage & Krause

Leadership Committee

Melinda Wedzina, <i>Chair</i>	Feeding Our Communities Partners
Jessica Beyer	Blue Earth County
DeAnn Boney	Blue Earth County
Katie Boone	Greater Mankato Area United Way
Richard Chambers	ECHO Food Shelf
Pam Determan	VINE Faith in Action
Denise Billington-Just	Campus Kitchen
Kate Hengy-Gretz	MVAC
Kathy Kliver	SMILES CIL
Kelly Kunkel	U of M Extension
Marilyn Lott	MSU Office of Community Engagement
Diana Madsen (advisor)	Second Harvest Heartland
Wilbur Neushwander-Frink	The Arc of Minnesota Southwest
Newell Searle (advisor)	Second Harvest Heartland
Pam Serdar	Centenary United Methodist Church
Amber Statz	Lutheran Social Services
Marnie Werner	Center for Rural Policy & Development

Background and Status Report

Partners

Andrews Family Chiropractic
Area Agency on Aging
Blue Earth County Government
Campus Kitchen
Centenary United Methodist Church
Center for Earth Spirituality & Rural Ministry
Center for Rural Policy & Development
Common Good RSVP
Crossview Covenant Church
Cub Foods
ECHO Food Shelf
Greater Mankato Area United Way
Greater Mankato Growth
HickoryTech
Hosanna Lutheran Church
Immanuel St. Joseph's - Mayo Health System
Katy Wortel
Kids Against Hunger
Lutheran Social Services
Mankato Clinic
Mankato Downtown Kiwanis
Mankato Farmers' Market
Mankato Public Schools (ISD #77)
MVAC
MSU Office of Community Engagement
MSU Dining Services
MN Council for Nonprofits
Minnesota Pork Producers
PACT Action Ministries
Rep. Kathy Brynaert
Ridley, Inc.
Sen. Kathy Sheran
SMILES CIL
St. John the Baptist Catholic Church
St. John's Episcopal Church
Target
The Arc of Minnesota Southwest
Three Rivers Resource Conservation & Development
Two Fish Studios
U of M Extension Service
Unitarian Universalist Social Action Committee
VINE Faith in Action

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