

# FIGHTING HUNGER FEEDING HOPE

WINTER 2024 NEWSLETTER

WE ARE HACAP – HAWKEYE AREA COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM

## Celebrating Community

Recently, the Cedar Rapids community was the focus of a “Thank You” celebration from Iowa’s pig farmers for the support shown to those who work in bringing food from farm to table. During a kickoff event, local pig farmer Trish Cook told Cedar Rapids-area residents why she is thankful to be part of the community.

“Your support helps us do what we do — raise pigs and produce high-quality, delicious pork,” said Cook, who lives near Winthrop and is president of the Iowa Pork Producers Association (IPPA).

“We understand that being welcomed and appreciated by our communities is a privilege that must be earned and maintained,” she continued. “We’re grateful for this opportunity, and we want to say thanks by giving back.”

**As part of the “Thank You” event, Iowa pork producers teamed with Tyson Fresh Meats to donate nearly 1,200 5-pound pork loins, equal to about 24,000 pork meals, to the Cedar Rapids community.**

Half of the pork loins were given to the Hawkeye Area Community Action Program (HACAP), a nonprofit whose Hiawatha-based Food Reservoir serves more than 35,000 food-insecure individuals in a seven-county area. The pork producers also provided pork coupons and educational materials to local grocery stores.



**That need continues to rise locally and across the state, according to Kim Guardado, director of HACAP’s Food Reservoir. Currently, about 12.8 percent of the population HACAP serves is facing food insecurity.**



## FEED

Provide our neighbors facing food insecurity with reliable access to enough food.

And with increased food prices, “what we’re seeing right now is actually higher than what we saw at the height of the pandemic.” Statewide, food insecurity is the highest it’s been since 2008. Guardado added that protein can be tough to come by.

Later in the day, the remaining half of the pork loins were distributed to area residents during a pork giveaway at the Noelridge Aquatic Center parking lot. Anyone was invited to pick up a pork loin to share with their own families or a neighbor in need.

This is the 10th “Thank You” stop hosted by the state’s pork producers since 2021.



# Rural Hunger

Living in a rural community comes with unique challenges that make affording food more difficult, including lack of transportation, jobs that pay low wages, and underemployment.

**HACAP's Food Reservoir is committed to reaching everyone who faces hunger regardless of where they live by:**

- Operating Mobile Food Pantries that bring healthy and nutritious food to rural communities so our neighbors do not need to travel to food pantries that can be hours away.
- Educating community members about SNAP, WIC, and other federal programs.
- Offering programs that increase access to food for children, such as the Backpack and School Food Pantry Programs.

When we think about the issue of hunger, we often imagine an urban setting. But the truth is that hunger is common, and sometimes even more so, in rural areas or small towns — including some of the very communities where much of our food is grown.



# Serving Seniors



HACAP's Fourth Street Diner in Vinton has been serving up meals at its current location since 1987. There are a few things that make the Fourth Street Diner different than other meal sites. You don't have to call to make a reservation, it's all you can eat, and they have an ice cream machine.

**While seniors are the most common crowd, it's open to everyone. "We sometimes serve people under the age of one, and we have people who are almost 100 who come and eat here," said site supervisor Linda Lough.**

To help reduce senior hunger, HACAP Food Reservoir, in partnership with Heritage Area on Aging, started setting up Encore Essentials in 2021. HACAP Encore Essentials provides a wide array of fruits and vegetables for seniors

to choose from. The Encore Essentials also include a few dairy options as well as a select meat option. In addition to food provided at Encore Essentials, HACAP also provides resource sheets, recipes, and information on SNAP benefits.

A recent study by Feeding America found that food insecurity has negative effects for individuals across the age spectrum. However, for seniors and older adults, these effects can be particularly problematic given the unique health, economic, mobility and nutritional challenges that can come with aging. Fourth Street Diner provides seniors



with a variety of foods from various food groups, which can help reduce the risk of developing diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease.

By 2050, it is projected that the senior population

Why do so many people that live in rural neighborhoods often face hunger at higher rates? **There are two unique challenges that living in rural or farm communities presents:**

**1** Food Deserts. Remote or hard-to-reach towns can be hours away from their nearest grocery store or food bank. When communities rely solely on one grocery store for their pantry staples and fresh foods, if that store closes, families are faced with the risk of not having access to food.

**2** Higher rates of unemployment or underemployment. Many higher-paying jobs are in larger cities. Long commutes and a lack of reliable transportation leave many families left to look for available work within their own communities. In communities with fewer jobs and lower high school completion rates, there are higher rates of unemployment or underemployment and budgets stretched to the limit.

**We are committed to helping everybody facing hunger in the counties we serve.**



## NOURISH

Support neighbors in making healthy choices and improving diet quality.



will be around 104 million people aged 60 and older. If the current rate of food insecurity among seniors does not change, this would equate to more than 7 million seniors experiencing food insecurity. With food insecurity impacting a variety of factors such as health and nutrition, and as the senior population continues to grow, food insecurity is likely to remain a public health challenge for years to come.



## Partnering to Address Food Insecurity

The HACAP Food Reservoir holds many unique partnerships within the community, including those with healthcare clinics and hospital systems. Through these Healthcare Partnerships, patients attending a doctor's visit have an additional point of access to address food insecurity.

Our Healthcare Partners, including Virginia Gay Hospitals and Clinics located in Benton County, IA, provide those who have screened positive for food insecurity with a box of healthy, nutrient dense, shelf-stable food. Included with this box of food is a referral sheet that provides information regarding how to enroll in SNAP benefits, WIC benefits, and how to access information about pantries and meal sites in their local communities.

Unique to the Virginia Gay partnership is their referral process. With consent from their patients, Virginia Gay provides the HACAP Food Reservoir with contact information so a trained Food Reservoir staff member can then follow up with identified patients to discuss additional barriers they may be facing. From there, referrals are made to the appropriate programs that address the identified barriers.

HACAP Food Reservoir received a \$125,000 grant from the Amerigroup Foundation, a philanthropic arm of Elevance Health Foundation, to continue the 'Food as Medicine' program. The grant funding will support HACAP Food Reservoir as it collaborates with Mercy Cedar Rapids and other health care programs to screen patients for food insecurity during health care visits. The health care partner will then connect patients who screen positive for food insecurity to food assistance resources onsite at health care facilities and at community-based food pantries and meal programs.



## EMPOWER

Connect neighbors with community resources to address the root causes of food insecurity.



## Why We Can't Lose Sight of the Farm Bill

**The farm bill is the largest piece of federal legislation for food and farming. It impacts access to nutritious food for the millions of people facing hunger.** As grocery prices rise and supply chain disruptions continue, lawmakers must come together to support a bipartisan Farm Bill that supports food banks and the people they serve.

**Food security is national security, and America's public investment in agriculture through farm bill programs helps strengthen and secure our domestic food supply.**

From national food security and nutritional assistance to conservation advancements and risk management, positive impacts of the farm bill extend from urban centers to rural communities. A strong farm bill delivers value to all Americans; we urge Congress not to forget the significance of a long-term farm bill and make the commitment to end food insecurity and improve sustainability.

As Congress has voted to extend the farm bill with programs impacting all Americans, we are reminded that food is the moral right of all who are born into this world. With this moved to next year, now is the time to talk to your Federal Elected Officials about the importance of the farm bill.



### UNITE

Inspire people and partners to take action to advance food security in Iowa.

### CONTACT

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