

Nourishing Hope

in Calhoun, Dougherty, Lee, and Terrell Counties

Hunger is a problem. A problem for everyone. It impacts communities. And it is up to **all of us** to face the challenge and take a bold stance to solve it.

In the fall of 2019, we expanded our services into four southwest Georgia counties – some of which have the highest food insecurity rates in the state. Our trucks started making daily trips to Calhoun, Dougherty, Lee, and Terrell counties. We found a vacant grocery store to be our temporary home in Albany, GA. We met the local community leaders and started building relationships with churches and non-profit organizations. The community embraced and welcomed us.

And then came COVID-19, a national shutdown, and a global pandemic. Albany was one of the first hot spots in the country and was thrust into the national spotlight, with cases skyrocketing for weeks.

We had to be nimble and adjust our operations and programs while adhering to new, strict safety protocols. We were challenged by the greatest food insecurity crisis since the Great Depression. Eighteen counties counted on us to provide food for so many more families that needed help. Families who never needed help before. Every food bank in the country was in disaster relief mode.

We quickly learned that collaboration and partnerships were part of the tapestry of this community. They knew how to band together and react rapidly. We are proud to work beside them. And we are proud to serve them as their new community food bank.

(Read about our exciting plans on page 3.)

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Food for Thought

By the time this newsletter reaches your mailbox, we will be preparing for a grand opening of our new warehouse in Albany, GA. It has been challenging and exciting at the same time to see this come to fruition. With unused funds left from the Rescue Plan and the Cares Act, Georgia Governor Brian Kemp reallocated funds to be available for food bank capital projects. With this grant and a generous donation from a national foundation, we have the resources to make a significant impact on families in need.

What a wonderful gift!

There is no question that this funding opportunity will be a game-changer for our service area. These funds will be used to add cold and frozen storage to our new warehouse facility in Albany and also allow us to expand our warehouse in Columbus, GA. The new Albany warehouse will also help us enhance our services in Clay and Randolph Counties. Five of the counties we serve in rural Georgia rank in the highest tier of food insecurity in the state.

"We see the need for food increasing in all of our counties, which confirms the necessity to expand our services."

Food insecurity

County	Population 2019	Food Insecure Persons 2019	Feeding America Food Insecurity Percentage	Square Miles	Food Insecurity State Ranking
Clay	3,024	829	27.4%	195.38	1
Dougherty	91,522	23,338	25.5%	328.00	2
Randolph	7,206	1,794	24.9%	428.24	3
Terrell	8,978	2,227	24.8%	335.00	4
Calhoun	6,503	1,457	22.4%	280.0	6

We have a lot of work to do.

The long-term impact of COVID-19 is still unknown. Variants and surges continue, and this makes our job challenging. The pandemic has also exposed disparities throughout our service area, and 2021 brought a new wave of economic hardship to thousands of people. We see the need for food increasing in all of our counties, which confirms the necessity to expand our services. With the continued support of our donors, partner agencies, volunteers, team members, and the guidance of our Board of Directors, we are excited about our plans and are committed to making sure that children receive meals, seniors are served, veterans are helped, and families don't have to worry about where their next meal comes from. No one should ever be hungry.

It takes a valley to end hunger.

Frank Sheppard
President & CEO



Going the Extra Mile to Solve Hunger

"We were able to gift a 26-foot refrigerated truck."

Nourishing Hope

(continued from cover)



In October 2019, we expanded our operations to include Calhoun, Dougherty, Lee, and Terrell counties and established a temporary distribution center in a vacant Save-A-Lot grocery store in Albany. When the pandemic began, we went into full disaster relief mode and worked through this small facility to serve these communities.

Through a partnership with Lineage Logistics, we have been able to store food off-site in their warehouses. This has helped us with efficiencies, but with a high food insecurity rate of more than 25% in this region, we know we must be able to do much more to distribute food into these communities.

In late 2020, we learned that we were one of 384 non-profit organizations in the U.S. to receive a generous one-time gift from a national philanthropic foundation. This gift enabled us to purchase a building that is perfectly designed for our needs. All we need to add is cold and frozen storage.

We look forward to a grand opening in March 2022. As we continue to grow our name in the community, we will be able to enhance our services and outreach and change lives for families that need help. Cheryl Maddox, our Site Manager, has been engaged in the community since we opened our doors in 2019. We are so proud to become part of this community and look forward to a future of collaboration and strong partnerships.



About the Albany Warehouse:

- Our new warehouse is on 3.5 acres which offer future expansion opportunity.
- 35,000 sq. ft. with 28' ceilings, ample parking, and warehouse space that will allow for a five-level racking design to provide a storage capacity of over 3 million pounds of food product
- Once we build in the refrigeration and freezer space, there will be more than 300 pallet spots that will provide increased capacity for fresh produce and meats.
- Plenty of paved parking for our Partner Agencies and volunteers
- Covered loading/receiving docks on the side and back of the building for easy access
- Volunteer service center to help us pack food boxes for those in need
- Generous office and administrative service space

Every donation counts and **YOU** can help!
Donate at **feedingthevalley.org**

By mail: Feeding the Valley / P.O. Box 8904
Columbus, GA., 31908

For more information, email us!
fsheppard@feedingthevalley.org

Partnering with The Food Mill Columbus, we were able to gift a retired 26-foot refrigerated truck from our fleet that will allow them to keep produce from local farms fresh. The produce will be for sale in selected *food desert* neighborhoods and senior communities where transportation is an obstacle.

Through Wholesome Wave's program, *Fresh for Less*, customers will be able to double their SNAP benefits. Free supplemental food boxes from Feeding the Valley containing canned and dry foods will also be distributed.

This project is in collaboration with the city's Health Task Force and will be in the pilot stage with hopes to expand to many more neighborhoods in Muscogee County.

It's meaningful partnerships like this that showcase how collaboration plays an important role in making sure programs are successful and sustainable for long-term change to occur. Food insecurity has multiple layers that need to be addressed, and it takes all of us working together in order to see food justice occur.



Broad Street Blessings

The “Dagwood sandwich” lives on at a beautiful, old, Tudor-style church on Broad Street in LaGrange, Georgia. Dagwood would be very impressed with the Sandwich Ministry that Broad Street Church of Christ started. It was serendipity that this ministry came to life because of a major tornado that struck neighboring Alabama in 2019. Sending sandwiches was practical to those impacted. Using the bread bag for sandwiches (about a dozen) was genius, and it continues today to help provide weekend meals for the homeless. Every week, several churches on Broad Street collaborate and each provides a meal on a different day of the week.

Every Friday, LaGrange College Servant Scholars take over at Broad Street Church and utilize the amazing kitchen at the church for their outreach ministry, *Our Daily Bread*. They make a hot meal and distribute these along with the sandwiches. Before the pandemic, people were able to enter the Church's big gymnasium, sit at a table, and have their meal. But it's take-out style for now.

Will Roberts, a senior from the Scholars Program, shared that in the past, the scholars would be able to sit, share a meal, and enjoy fellowship with the people they were serving. One person he is reminded of is a man that became homeless because of a brain injury. He wasn't able to pay for his medical care and ended up homeless. “He comes in once in a while to get a hot meal,” says Will, **“At Scholars, our main goal is that we are trying to give the man the fish, and teach them how to fish at the same time.”**

There are more blessings for people in need at this special place. *The Blessing Box*, just like a *Little Library*, is outside in front of the church and is for anyone who needs food. Canned goods from Feeding the Valley are made available – along with a can opener. The sign on the Blessing Box reads, **“Take what you need, and/or leave what you can. Above all, be blessed.”**

“Feeding the Valley is a blessing”, says Broad Street Church’s Minister Evan Kirby. **“It has been the best resource for all of our outreach ministries.”**



Gobble...
Gobble...

We brought The Big Gobble back for Thanksgiving in 2021! We gave our meal sealing equipment a workout and successfully prepared and delivered more than 1,700 Thanksgiving meals for homebound and disabled seniors and families in need in the community with the help of many volunteers.

