

Local, State and Federal Partners Provide Food Assistance During COVID-19 Response

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Even in the best of times, getting food on the table is a major concern for families in need. Now, measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 have added to the anxieties of not only those families but those now finding themselves without income. With nonessential businesses ordered to close, followed by rounds of layoffs and furloughs, the previously employed are now swelling the ranks of those requiring food assistance. To meet this need, local, state and federal entities are pitching in to help both directly and by assisting area food banks.

The West Virginia Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHSEM) has secured 300,000 meal kits from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. “Responding to local government requests, the state’s first priority is sending the meals to specific areas with acute needs, such as food pantries and senior service agencies,” said DHSEM Deputy Director Tom Oakley

Once these immediate needs are met, Deputy Director Oakley said, kits will be distributed to state food banks, including Facing Hunger in Huntington and the Mountaineer Food Bank in Gassaway. The aid provides a needed boost, as Facing Hunger reports food distributions are up 40% from last month.

The West Virginia National Guard has been integral to the effort, providing support in packing and distributing family boxes and meals throughout the state for the food banks. To date, the Guard has helped distribute nearly 60,000 meals in the Mountain State.

“This is a clear example of federal, state and local officials working together,” said FEMA Region 3 Regional Administrator MaryAnn Tierney, “we will continue to face many challenges in the days and weeks to come, and we will continue to address them together, focused on helping communities and saving lives.”



In Pennsylvania, there's a multi-agency effort to advance the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank's mission while observing social distancing measures.

The food bank has been working with the Allegheny County Emergency Management Division, the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency and the governor's office to implement a no-touch, drive-thru emergency food distribution center.

In addition to about 50 volunteers, 17 members from the Pennsylvania National Guard have been at work packing and distributing boxes of food and produce.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, the nonprofit has seen a 40 to 50% increase in those seeking assistance. When asked how the public can help, CEO Lisa Scales said she was grateful for the help offered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Emergency Food Assistance Program in providing quality USDA goods.

"Shelf-stable food isn't normally donated and must be purchased," she said. "The public can help financially by donating through our website."

"They can also volunteer at their local food pantries since our online call for volunteers for the drive-ups are quickly filled," she said. Scales also suggested those interested in helping check with their local United Way.

These efforts, from citizen volunteers to nonprofit and government organizations, fill a critical need in helping communities assist those most vulnerable during this public health crisis.

For additional information of the Federal Response to COVID-19 visit www.fema.gov/coronavirus.

For additional information on USDA's nutrition programs visit: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/disaster/pandemic/covid-19>

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