

SUMMER 2026

THE INSIDE SCOOP

SECOND HARVEST
FOODBANK
OF SOUTHERN WISCONSIN

IN THIS EDITION

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Culturally Responsive Food



FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK: **HOW IS SECOND HARVEST DOING?**

When I'm out in the community at meetings or events with other community leaders, people often ask me, **"How is Second Harvest doing?"**

In my answer, I highlight our ongoing efforts to support the community and the fact that we are on track to break another record for annual food distribution—**double the amount we distributed at the height of the pandemic**. I also share the challenges we face, such as:

- The rising costs of moving food throughout our 16 counties
- Purchasing items to supplement what's being donated
- The impact of global socioeconomic factors

Finally, I honor the fact that none of our work would be possible without the generosity of our community. Their support—YOUR support—powers every meal we share and every life we touch.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK HOW IS SECOND HARVEST DOING?, CONT.

But what I think people are truly asking about are those in our community who face hunger every day. The reality is that families working hard to make ends meet are turning to our network of assistance providers in record numbers, many for the first time. **Their incomes aren't keeping up with the cost of gas to get to work, household food budgets, or essential items they depend on to stay healthy.**

Times are challenging in so many ways, yet generosity and care continue to shine through. I'd like you to be part of the conversation. Please reach out to me at michelle.orge@secondharvestsw.org and tell me what keeps you hopeful.

What inspires you to continue supporting your neighbors in need?

Thank you for all that you do and for being the reason Second Harvest is able to make a difference.

Michelle Orge
President & Executive Director

FARMERS AND FOOD BANKS PARTNERSHIPS WITH A PURPOSE

Nearly 700,000 people in Wisconsin experience food insecurity, relying on six regional food banks like Second Harvest Foodbank of Southern Wisconsin, and hundreds of local pantries and programs, for vital nutritional support. **Over time, a strong partnership has developed between farmers and food banks, united by a shared belief that everyone deserves access to healthy, nourishing food.**

Traditionally, farmers have supported food banks through generous donations of unsold produce, dairy, and eggs. While these contributions help fight hunger and reflect farmers' goodwill, they also present challenges for farmers, who often absorb the cost of growing food that doesn't sell, despite already operating on tight margins.

Recognizing this, Second Harvest has worked to create a more equitable relationship with local farmers. While donated food remains critical, **Second Harvest now purchases an increasing share of fresh products from providers such as Sassy Cow Creamery, Alsum Farms & Produce, and Elderberry Hill Farm.** This approach helps support both families facing hunger and Wisconsin farm families.

Through our Farm to Foodbank initiative, donors of all sizes help the food bank buy locally grown products. This initiative not only supplies the freshest produce, dairy, and eggs to those facing hunger but also strengthens the local agricultural community. **Second Harvest also purchases unsold produce directly from vendors at local farmers' markets, delivering it to pantries within hours and ensuring families receive food at peak freshness.**

Recently, Second Harvest has deepened its collaboration with farmers by working together during crop planning—before any seeds are planted. These arrangements secure commitments on the type, timing, and price of produce, and in some cases, Second Harvest purchases seeds in advance. This reduces uncertainty for both sides: farmers are assured

their crops will have buyers, and we can guarantee a steady supply of local, nutritious food to our partner pantries. One participating farmer shared, "The upfront payment made it possible for us to buy packaging supplies and prepare for deliveries; it alleviates financial struggles. As a small-scale farmer, most of the time we use personal funds for business expenses and usually don't get reimbursed until we receive payment. **The upfront payment made it possible for the farm to fund its own expenses.**"

The evolving relationship between farmers and food banks has become a mutually beneficial partnership, with families and individuals facing hunger as the ultimate beneficiaries. It's a testament to shared values, hard work, and a commitment to ensuring that no harvest, or neighbor, is left behind. **When healthy, locally grown food reaches a family's table, everyone wins.**

JOURNEY OF A CAN THROUGH VOLUNTEER HANDS

A single can of food might seem small, but in our food bank, it begins a journey powered almost entirely by volunteers!

It starts at the donation desk in our Distribution Center, where a volunteer warmly receives a bag of groceries donated by a community member. Inside the bag may be a single can of vegetables—**one small item that soon becomes part of something much bigger!**

After inspection by one of our Distribution Center volunteers to ensure it is safe for consumption, the can is placed in a box with other similar items. **The box is now ready to be ordered by one of our nearly 300 food pantry partners.**

Once an order has been placed, volunteers assemble the food the pantry has chosen onto a pallet, preparing it for delivery. Finally, the pallet is loaded onto a truck, which may also be driven by a volunteer, and transported to the local pantry that ordered it. **Soon, that same can of vegetables is placed on a shelf where neighbors can choose it for their next meal.**

From the moment it's donated to the moment it reaches a pantry shelf, volunteers help move food through every step of the journey. **Interested in joining our volunteer team that makes all of this possible?** Consider joining us in one of the roles mentioned above! Learn more at our website: secondharvestsw.org/volunteer.



For those struggling with hunger, milk can be difficult to get because it is rarely donated to the food banks and food pantries they rely on to meet their food needs.

During June Dairy Month, you can provide milk to those facing hunger when you Adopt a Dairy Cow. Your "adoption" provides funds that we will use to purchase milk from local dairy producers. It's easy: visit GiveDairy.com, choose a cow, and pick how much milk you'd like to provide. You'll even receive an adoption certificate—a fun way to share your new bovine friend!



Thanks to the Werndli Charitable Fund and our generous sponsors, every dollar raised in June—up to \$100,000—will be matched, doubling your impact!

DIGNITY AT THE TABLE

WHY CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE FOOD MATTERS

For many years, food banks measured success largely by the amount of food distributed. While that metric still matters, we have learned that it is not enough simply to provide food. **We need to offer food that people can and want to use, which is why we are committed to offering culturally responsive food to our network of partner pantries.**

Food assistance is most effective when it reflects the communities it supports. Our region is diverse and home to families from many cultural backgrounds and food traditions. When the food available at a pantry aligns with those traditions, the experience changes—guests are not just receiving food; they feel recognized and respected. **Food should not just be available—it should feel familiar, useful, and worth bringing home.**

Providing culturally responsive food can also help reduce the stigma some people feel when seeking assistance. When guests see ingredients that reflect the meals they prepare at home, visiting a pantry can feel more like accessing a supportive community resource.

This work is shaped by the voices of the people closest to the experience: our partner food pantries and the neighbors they support.

Through surveys and conversations led by our Community Voice team, we regularly ask guests about foods that are important to their family's traditions, identity, and culture. Partners also share what they are hearing directly from their communities. That insight helps guide how we source and distribute food across our network. As a result, we have begun intentionally adding more culturally responsive foods to our inventory. Some items arrive through generous

donations, which are always incredibly impactful. **In other cases, we strategically purchase foods to fill gaps when donations alone cannot meet the need.**

Today, items such as masa harina—a staple ingredient for many families—are part of our core inventory and consistently available to partner agencies. **Other culturally responsive foods we work to source include Hmong sausage, soy sauce, red beans, daikon radishes, Scotch bonnet peppers, and West African garden eggs (similar to the eggplant!).** These ingredients help pantries better support communities with Caribbean, African, Hmong, Latino, and other culinary traditions.

Our partners have made it clear: this work matters. **They tell us that culturally responsive foods help build trust with guests and make food assistance more welcoming and respectful.**

For Second Harvest, culturally responsive food is not a side project. It is part of a broader shift in how we think about the support we provide. Success is not just measured in pounds of food distributed, but in whether the food system we are building is more responsive, equitable, and effective. This work is ongoing, and it will continue to evolve as we listen, learn, and adapt.

With the support of donors like you, we are building a food system that does more than move food—it ensures that every neighbor has access to nutritious food that feels like it belongs on their table.



THE IMPORTANCE OF RECURRING GIVING

Hunger is not a short-term problem. Your monthly support helps us plan ahead and meet more of the need. A gift of \$40 per month—**just \$1.32 per day**—will help fill empty plates throughout southwestern Wisconsin.

"I wish we had started monthly giving sooner. It's important to us to give back, and food security is such an important issue. The work done by Second Harvest is improving the lives of so many children, parents, and people in need."

- Brett & Kathy, monthly donors

