

Meeting the Protein Needs of Vulnerable Families in Langlade County

Feeding people facing food-insecurity is more than simply providing food. It's about providing food for wellness, nourishment, and strength (feedingamerica.org). An important goal of the Antigo Community Food Pantry (ACFP) is to positively impact the health of the community through the food it stocks and offers. All programs at ACFP including Weekend Backpack, Emergency Food Packages, and biweekly Pantry shopping opportunities focus on offering healthy food to recipients, including healthy protein options.

Bonnie Hessedal, Diabetes Educator for Aspirus Antigo Clinic and ACFP Board Member, emphasizes the importance of protein, "Protein is essential for good nutrition. Adequate intake of protein helps promote healthy muscle mass and also keeps the immune system healthy, which certainly is necessary during the cold and flu season."

The Pantry relies on the community to help meet the challenge of providing healthy protein options to food-insecure individuals in the community; the community responds generously to this need. Mike Haugen from Covenant Farms has donated processed meat to food pantries for over 10 years. He says, "My family lives in a world of plenty, and we want to share this abundance with those in need of help at the Pantry."

Donations of meat from Feeding America partners, Walmart and Kwik Trip, come in weekly. Twice a week volunteers pick up donated pizzas from Little Caesars. Pizza Hut also helps the Pantry and is holding their annual Pizza with Santa event to raise funds for the Pantry on Saturday, December 8.

All Saints Catholic School recently held a food drive to help stock the Pantry with canned meat, and prior to Thanksgiving, Waukesha Bearings and other community members donated turkey. "Turkey," Hessedal states, "a staple of a holiday meal, provides a good source of protein. Enjoy the white meat of turkey for a lower fat option."

Each week, Pete's Distributing generously donates a variety of dairy products to the Pantry. In addition, many local community members who raise chickens donate eggs providing additional protein options.

During Hunger Awareness Month in October, Melanie Lucht headed up efforts with the Langlade County Dairy Promotion Committee to collect dairy products for the Pantry through a Donate Dairy Challenge. Many pounds of dairy products were donated by local farmers and the Antigo FFA Club. Cash donations of over \$2000 were contributed to the Pantry by farmers and 4-H clubs to be used for purchase of additional dairy product. A significant donation was received from Dan Wickersheim at Spring Breeze Dairy.

Since the Deer Donation Program began in 2000, deer hunters have donated over 90,000 deer which were processed into over 3.6 million pounds of ground venison served to food-insecure households. Hunters can donate any legally harvested deer from Wisconsin by dropping it off at

a participating processor by February 2, 2019. More information on this program can be found on the Wisconsin DNR website.

The community also supports the Pantry's holiday meat voucher program which provides families with the opportunity to purchase meat at a local grocer. The voucher program has been funded through organizations like the Mission Committee at Aspirus Langlade Hospital and the Antigo Junior Woman's Club. Monetary donations collected at the Community Christmas Dinner were also used to fund meat vouchers for Pantry clients.

The families who visit the Pantry are considerably grateful to donors and express their thankfulness for protein options on each distribution day. It is truly the community coming together in a variety of ways to help families meet the challenge of securing healthy proteins. Through these efforts, the community builds strong and healthy families, families that play a key and active role in society.

Pictures: Dick Majewski and Dale Goffin unload a donation from Pete's Distributing. Donna Ruf and Peg Schroepfer help clients choose from a variety of meat selections.