



Perry County Food Bank
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January brings the snow, makes our feet and fingers glow. ~Sara Coleridge

January is the start of a brand new year and, with it, many of us take time to reflect on where we've come from and where we are headed in the future. Last year saw a lot of new faces at the food bank—both customers and volunteers. Although our overall numbers have remained about the same as the year before, the numbers of people coming in to shop at our New Bloomfield facility have risen dramatically. Some of this can be attributed to the ability to pick-and-choose their groceries, and also the ability to get milk, eggs, and meats which, because of refrigeration, cannot be included in the monthly distributions at the eight sites around the county on the third weekend of the month.

Last year also saw a rise in new people coming to use the food bank for the first time. We think this happens because circumstances have changed within the household. In some cases there is the loss of a job; in some, a breakup of a family or relationship leaving a person with no means of support; in some it can be the death of a spouse with a corresponding drop in income. In the last instance, it can be an elderly couple who were just making it with both their Social Security checks and now one of those checks is gone leaving the remaining partner in poverty. Whatever the reason, we try to at least meet their needs for food in the midst of the turmoil going on in their lives.

Last year also saw the start of our Backpack program in the elementary schools in West Perry, Greenwood, and Newport School Districts. Christina Voorhees coordinates and runs the program here in the county with all of the elementary schools participating except for Susquenita (we will again try to contact someone there to try and get the program started). The program initially started with about 50 students involved and rapidly grew to over 150 by the end of the school year. In September they were packing 325 backpacks every week during the school year. This program sends a bag of food home with students each weekend. Included in the pack are kid-friendly foods for two breakfasts, two lunches, two snacks, and two dinners for the weekend. This gives the students food to keep them charged up for the weekend so that they can return to school on Monday morning ready to learn rather than starving, thinking only of getting to the cafeteria so that they can get something to eat. This program, run entirely with volunteers, has been enthusiastically received in all of the schools.

As we look to the coming year, we are discussing the possibility of opening our New Bloomfield facility one Saturday morning, or perhaps an evening, each month for people who work during the day and cannot make it in to the food bank. Many of these people are working in jobs that pay minimum wages and the size of their families qualify them for help from the food bank. (Qualifications are income for the household at 150% of poverty or less, and residents of Perry County). We are especially anxious to help and encourage these people who want to work and have found jobs. Perhaps they are just starting in the job and are working their way up but have not gotten to the point where they can make it on their own. We see some of these people now who get started working and then we don't see them anymore because they have become self-sufficient. We think that their desire to work and become self-sufficient is wonderful and that there should be help available to get them get started until they can stand on their own. We also think that there may be many more out there like this who cannot take advantage of the food bank during the week but might be able to come in on a weekend.

As we start a New Year together, we want to thank you all for standing with us and we wish everyone a happy, healthy, and prosperous New Year!

Linda Bates & John Kiner
Co-directors, Perry County Food Bank