

# NOURISHING NEWS

## FROM HELPING HARVEST

Fall 2020

### From the President

Hello Friends!

In October I wrapped up my first year working at Helping Harvest Fresh Food Bank—and what a year it has been! Never could I have imagined that we would be faced with such a challenge as the one that began for us all this Spring. And though I should have known how supportive Berks and Schuylkill Counties would be in helping us meet a crisis like this one, nonetheless I have been overwhelmed by the magnitude of the support and positive energy that has come to us from our community. We really do live in a special place, and I am so very honored to be able to work with so many fine, caring and courageous individuals who work and volunteer here at Helping Harvest.

The sometimes unsung heroes of this year's food emergency are the pantries, homeless shelters and soup kitchens on the front lines of the charitable food system. Though we here at Helping Harvest do sometimes hand food directly to folks—mainly Mobile Markets or drive-thru distributions—the majority of the \$1.4 million in food distributed monthly by Helping Harvest is put in the hands of our neighbors by volunteers working through our 300+ church and nonprofit food distribution sites. These volunteers put their own health at risk to serve those in need in their community, and they are deserving of all the thanks we can give them. Kudos to all of you who serve in this way!

As many of you are already aware, the need in Berks and Schuylkill Counties for supplemental food from Helping Harvest and our partners has increased exponentially this year, and we expect the next two months to be our busiest ever. One good way to demonstrate this increase is by the scale on which



we are purchasing food right now. When we set our annual 2020 budget last December, we expected to purchase \$384,000 worth of food over the course of the year. As of the end of October we had purchased \$3 million in food this year—with much more to come over the course of November and December.

None of this would be possible without the exceptional support we have been given by community leaders, local corporations, and kind folks like YOU! Please consider continuing to help us feed the hungry in Berks and Schuylkill Counties—our neighbors need your help now more than ever. Thanks so much, for everything. We will get through this together!

Your Friend,  
Jay Worrall  
President, Helping Harvest

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Jay Worrall". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned to the right of the typed name.



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If you have any comments or questions,  
please contact the editor.

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## Thank You to All of Our Agency Partners!

- The COVID-19 crisis not only swelled the lines with families and individuals seeking help, many for the first time, it also drastically affected the traditional distribution methods Helping Harvest and our agencies have successfully used for years.

Social distancing requirements made indoor distributions impossible. Also, our preference for a "client choice" model, where those we are helping are allowed to pick and choose through food offerings, was also unsafe. Instead, at a moment's notice in March, all distributions had to be moved outside. All perishable and nonperishable foods that were distributed were pre-packed by Helping Harvest staff at our facility before being transported to our agencies.

We would like to extend our most heartfelt **THANK YOU** to all of our member agencies in Berks and Schuylkill counties who demonstrated an amazing flexibility and resilience to make sure our neighbors in need were being served during these very difficult times. The volunteers who operate our food pantries, whether at a church, community center, or other social service agency, are an amazing and caring group of people who are absolutely critical to our mission.



**A special thank you** goes out to our newest food pantry partners who joined our network since March: Frackville Area Food Pantry; Hampden Heights Seventh-day Adventist Church (in partnership with the Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks); Orwigsburg Area Food Pantry; Reading Area Community College's Raven's Pantry; Rehoboth Seventh-day Adventist Church, Reading; and St. Thomas Church, Bernville.

A copy of the official registration and financial information of Helping Harvest may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free within Pennsylvania **1-800-732-0999**. Registration does not imply endorsement.

## Welcome Brenna!

Helping Harvest is extremely excited about what one of our newest staff members will “bring to the table” for our neighbors in need. Brenna Ricci recently joined us in the newly created role of Nutrition Educator. This position was generously underwritten for a three-year period through a state Healthy Pantry Initiative grant (administered by Feeding Pennsylvania – of which Helping Harvest is a member food bank). Brenna’s focus will be looking at our nutrition policies and procedures as a food bank. She will work with our food pantry network to make sure they are best using available resources to promote nutritious foods (provided by Helping Harvest) and healthy eating habits to the clients they serve. In her first year, Brenna will pilot these initiatives with 10 of our food pantries and expand her outreach in subsequent years. We are so grateful for this opportunity to better serve the hungry of Berks and Schuylkill counties.



## We Love Our Volunteers!

This year has only further proven to Helping Harvest what a generous and caring community of supporters we have – most especially our volunteers! With the onset of the COVID crisis in March, we made the difficult, but necessary, decision to temporarily halt the use of volunteers in our facility. Typically, more than 1,500 individuals will volunteer in our warehouse and offices throughout the year. Early on, to ensure food boxes were being packed to meet the escalating need, our staff and a small crew of temporary workers stepped up to the challenge.

However, a core group of dedicated volunteers were critical in our efforts to feed our neighbors in need through our Mobile Market distributions. Weathering everything from cold spring rains to extreme summer heat, volunteers helped us sustain and expand our Mobile Market sites across both Berks and Schuylkill counties. Only because of their help were we able to serve nourishing foods to thousands of families each month.

Fortunately, as we adapted our operations and put into place strict safety and social distancing practices, we were able to also start using small groups of volunteers within our building this summer. Volunteers are accomplishing critical duties each and every day: packing non-perishable food boxes and perishable food bags; filling the boxes distributed to area low-income senior citizens; preparing the special Thanksgiving and holiday meal boxes we have been distributing the past month; amongst many other efforts that have allowed us to keep up with the community’s need.

Thank you to **ALL** the volunteers that have helped us this year! For those we haven’t seen this year – we sincerely miss you and so look forward to working with you again in 2021.

If you would like to join us as a volunteer in the new year, please visit the Volunteer page on our website: [HelpingHarvest.org](https://www.HelpingHarvest.org).





## Mobile Markets Grow to Better Serve the Community

Nearly five years ago, Helping Harvest launched our Mobile Market program. With two initial pilot sites, the program's goal was to directly serve fresh and frozen, healthy, perishable foods (primarily produce, meats and dairy) to local families in need. The Markets were set up outside, in a farmer's market style, and operated by our staff and volunteers. The program proved to be a wonderful addition for the work of our mission and we gradually expanded it to seven sites scattered across Berks and Schuylkill counties.

As the COVID crisis hit our communities in March, and demand escalated, our Mobile Markets became an even more crucial resource in our ability to serve the swelling lines of families in need. As our Markets are set up outside, they easily fit into the new requirements for social distancing and safety procedures. Pre-packed boxes and bags of food were easily loaded by our volunteers and staff into waiting family's vehicles.

Mobile Markets also allowed us the flexibility to add sites to better serve families in high-need, or underserved communities. *Because of the generosity of friends like you*, we have more than doubled our roster of Mobile Market sites to fifteen! New sites in Berks County include: Topton; Glenside Homes, Reading; Oley; the parking lot of the Fairgrounds Farmers Market; the parking lot of First Energy Stadium; and Hampden Blvd., Reading. The latter two sites distribute twice monthly. The two new sites in Schuylkill County are located in Pottsville and Girardville.

Because of these new sites, thousands of families are receiving the nourishing foods they so desperately need. *With your continued support*, we plan to open even more new Mobile Market sites to help see our neighbors in need through these difficult times.



Helping Harvest's new Program & Outreach Coordinator, Melissa Beltran Del Rio, loads a client's vehicle

## Scouting for Food

A HUGE thank you goes out to the Hawk Mountain Council of the Boy Scouts of America for their VERY successful Scouting for Food campaign. Each fall, Boy Scout troops across Berks County – and across the nation – promote their food drive to area neighborhoods and return at a later date to collect the donations for their local food banks. This food helps keep food banks like Helping Harvest stocked going into the winter months – a time we typically see increased need. In this far from typical year, the food collected by troops is more appreciated than ever. In total, 50,000 pounds of food, and \$8,000, was collected by area Boy Scouts to help feed our hungry neighbors. **THANK YOU, SCOUTS!**



# Happy Holidays

## Holiday Meal Boxes Delivered!

In this year that has been so terribly difficult for many of our neighbors in need, Helping Harvest wanted to make sure thousands of local struggling families had a wonderful holiday meal to place on their tables. To make this happen, we delivered 5,000 Thanksgiving meal boxes that included all the fixings for a traditional festive meal. Each family also received a turkey and pumpkin pie! 5,000 more boxes (accompanied by a ham and pecan pie) are being delivered this month to celebrate the December holidays! All of the boxes were distributed through our extensive network of Berks and Schuylkill County food pantries. We are so grateful that *with the help of you*, our supporters, we were able to brighten the holidays for so many local families. **Thank you!**



## Cranksgiving Wheels in the Food Once Again!

Adhering to social distancing and new protocols was no roadblock for the **7th Annual Cranksgiving Berks County!** On Halloween, 83 riders set out for area grocery stores and collected a whopping



4,400 pounds of food during the bicycling event. Generous event sponsors contributed an additional \$7,000. Thank you to the organizers, participants and donors of this year's Cranksgiving - we truly appreciate your considerable efforts in the fight against hunger!



## Our Fleet Expands!

Thanks to the generosity of a nearly \$200,000 grant awarded through the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, Helping Harvest was able to purchase a refrigerated CDL box truck and transit van to add to our fleet of vehicles that roll out food for our hungry neighbors. The intention of the grant was to help food banks and other food assistance agencies acquire, store and distribute more fresh and frozen perishable food items to those in need in our communities. A CDL truck has a significantly

higher payload than the non-CDL trucks Helping Harvest has traditionally used. This truck will allow us to accept and transport much larger perishable donation offers from our local food distribution centers. It will also enable us to deliver much more nourishing food products to the agencies we serve. The transit van will be used to make more frequent, smaller, deliveries of perishable products to our agencies – most notably our Mobile Direct program that serves low-income senior housing facilities.



A special congrats and thank you to our driver, Phil Demeo (in photo with the new truck), who passed the written and driving test to acquire his CDL Class B license to drive our new truck!

## CROP Walk Marches On!

Many events have been cancelled in 2020, but the annual CROP Walk was not one of them, thanks to the hard work and dedication of the Reading-Berks CROP Walk planning committee. More than 30 churches participated in this year's virtual CROP Walk, generating an impressive **\$25,000 in donations**. As always, 25% of the proceeds will benefit our local efforts and the remainder will help Church World Service's international humanitarian work. Thank you to West Berks Mission District and the CROP Walk committee; your support through the years has been nothing short of **AMAZING!**



### Helping Harvest

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### About Our Organization . . .

Helping Harvest established in 1983, collects, purchases, stores, and distributes over seven million pounds of food annually to the more than 320 programs which feed the hungry in Berks & Schuylkill counties.

