

NOURISHING NEWS

FROM HELPING HARVEST Spring 2021

Mobile Markets Open Up to Fill the Need

Since March 2020, our Mobile Markets have served (quite literally) as the cornerstone in our response to the surge in the need for food assistance. Pre-pandemic, we operated 7 monthly Mobile Market sites (5 in Berks County and 2 in Schuylkill County). The focus of the Mobile Market program is to supply fresh and nourishing foods (primarily produce, meats and dairy) to our neighbors in need in under served and high-need communities.

COVID totally challenged the ways we successfully provided food assistance for nearly four decades. No longer could distributions be held inside community centers and church social halls. Several of our long-term partner food pantries, at least initially, went on hiatus as they figured out how to serve their neighbors in a safe and effective way. Our client-choice model, in which those we served got to choose amongst the foods they received, had to also be abandoned.



Fortunately, our Mobile Market program, which offers a farmers market-style distribution set up in a large parking lot, was easily adaptable to the restrictions brought on by COVID. Families and individuals receive their bags and boxes of pre-packed nourishing foods in a socially-distanced, drive through

(or walk through) fashion. Small teams of Helping Harvest volunteers and staff load the food packages directly into clients' cars or carts.

To fill the need, Helping Harvest began opening additional Mobile Market sites within weeks of the pandemic's arrival. As the opportunity and resources allowed, new sites have steadily been added since. Today, we are operating 18 Mobile Markets in our two counties (12 in Berks and 6 in Schuylkill). Our two newest locations, Shenandoah and Tamaqua (both in Schuylkill County), held their first distributions in May.

In the past 12 months, our Mobile Markets have distributed a staggering 1,739,598 pounds of food to nourish our hungry neighbors.

We could not have expanded so rapidly, and fed so many more community members, without the generous and thoughtful support of our volunteers, partner host sites, and our food and financial donors. With your continued support, our Mobile Markets will be able to continue to thrive and grow to best respond to the need throughout Berks and Schuylkill.



Helping Harvest Board Member, Jeanne Porter, and Board Chair, John Flickinger, assisting at Shenandoah's first distribution



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

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From the President

Hello Friends!

Hard to believe that it has now been a full year and a half since I was hired here at Helping Harvest—honestly I still feel like the new guy. I cannot adequately express what a great privilege working here has been. Never have I felt my work has had such an impact, and never have I felt so welcomed—not only by our volunteers and supporters but by my truly outstanding and exceptional colleagues, many of whom have been here far longer than I.

Since the pandemic began, Helping Harvest has been feeding more of our hungry neighbors than ever before, which makes working here very rewarding, but in some ways challenging. We are working with the assumption that the folks who were receiving food from us for the first time in 2020 will continue to seek help from us for the next few years, so we have to make some changes to our facility in order to keep up this volume for the foreseeable future. Aside from food, currently our most substantial need is for additional cold storage, so this summer we will break ground on a 3,000 square foot flexible cold storage addition at a cost of close to \$750,000. We also have been adding outdoor storage for non-food products so we have more space inside for food, and will soon be looking at adding space to accommodate our increased workforce as well.

None of this would be possible without your support. Thank you so much for your kindness. TOGETHER we can continue to ensure that children, adults and seniors in Berks and Schuylkill Counties do not go to bed hungry!

Humbly yours,



Jay Worrall, President

Jay Worrall Receives "Hero" Award

Helping Harvest president, Jay Worrall, has been honored as a 2021 American Red Cross Hero. Under his leadership, we have been able to expand and adapt our operations to serve our neighbors under extraordinary circumstances. Special thanks to the American Red Cross for this distinct recognition, and the Berks County Community Foundation for their nomination.



Congratulations, Jay – this recognition is well deserved!

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.

Met Ed Hosts 20th Harvest for Hunger Campaign

This year, we celebrate Met Ed, a First Energy Company's, 20th annual Harvest for Hunger campaign, which benefits the work of Helping Harvest's mission.

The campaign, held throughout the month of March each year, typically consists of daily fundraising events at Met Ed's Pottsville Pike offices, as well as at remote locations. Popular events in the past included: taco lunches, candy sales, ice cream socials and talent shows. However, for the past two years, safety restrictions due to COVID made these activities not possible.

Thanks to the truly dedicated team at Met Ed for finding new and creative ways

to keep raising money to help us feed our neighbors in need! A series of online auctions and restaurant fundraisers helped make the 20th annual Harvest for Hunger campaign another success. Throughout the campaign's history, an amazing \$450,000 has been raised! We also are looking forward to the return of the annual golf tournament to be held this September.

If your company would like to also hold a fundraiser to benefit Helping Harvest, please reach out to our Director of Development, Doug Long, at **610-926-5802 ext. 212**.

Agency Feature – Jewish Family Service

For nearly 25 years, Jewish Family Service, the social service arm of the Jewish Federation of Reading and Berks County, has been an engaged and valued partner of Helping Harvest in the fight against hunger.

Taking over for a small food pantry started by the late Rabbi Alan Weitzman (a founding Board member of Helping Harvest) at Temple Oheb Shalom, Jewish Family Service has operated their very active monthly food pantry at various host sites since 1997. For approximately the past six years, their pantry has served our community from the Olivet Boys and Girls Club's Pendorra Park location.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, a small crew of approximately 10 volunteers have worked hard to make sure they are providing much-needed food to their client families each month during these difficult times. On average, 185 families, representing 675 individuals, receive food assistance monthly at this pantry. Helping Harvest provides as much 15,000 pounds of food for each distribution.

Hoping to further help feed our hungry neighbors, Jewish Federation president, Bill Franklin, connected with the leadership of Hampden Heights Seventh Day Adventist Church in 2020 to partner in an additional food pantry in an area of high-need.

The church, located on Old Pricetown Road, Temple, had previously hosted a pantry but was struggling to provide volunteers and bi-lingual assistance for clients. With the assistance of Jewish Family Service, the new pantry started in October and has been thriving since. Approximately 80 families, representing 275 individuals, go home with food assistance packages each month. Helping Harvest is proud to supply more than 5,000 pounds of food to this partnership's monthly distribution.

Helping Harvest could never achieve the work of its mission without the tremendous efforts put in by our member agencies. We are very fortunate to have Jewish Family Service as a cherished partner for the past nearly quarter-century.



Volunteers Hit 2,000 Hour Milestone!

In February, Sandy Brown became our first volunteer to reach 2,000 service hours! Since then, longtime helpers, Gerry Thompson and John Prann, have also reached this amazing milestone. The past year has been the busiest in our history and we continue to be humbled by their commitment to helping feed our hungry neighbors.

Volunteers are the backbone of Helping Harvest and we could not operate without the generous donation of their skills and time. We are truly fortunate to work with such dedicated people!

If you have the time and desire to join our team of volunteers, we'd love to work with you! Please register on our Volunteer page at [HelpingHarvest.org/Volunteer](https://www.HelpingHarvest.org/Volunteer), or call our Volunteer & Senior Services Manager, Lori Lowery, at **610-926-5802 ext. 203** for more information.

Gerry Thompson



John Prann



Sandy Brown



Canstructure Builds On!

The 4th Annual Canstructure Competition was a great success, with 172 students from 14 teams participating. The Canstructure competition, organized by VOICEup Berks, involves teams of Berks County youth competing in a contest to build structures made from cans of food. Each team is responsible for holding its own food drive to collect the cans for its structure and all canned items are donated to Helping Harvest following the competition. Each structure was unique and creative, and we are so proud of all the teams.

Congratulations to best overall winners, the Hunger Fighters teams from Wilson School District! Their winning structure was a 7 foot-tall "Mario & Luigi" Stronger Together build (pictured). Through their efforts, the Hunger Fighters also raised more than \$1,000 to donate to Helping Harvest. In total, more than 20,000 pounds of food is expected to be donated from this year's structures.

Thank you to all the sponsors, organizers, advisors and students for their hard work and support of Helping Harvest!



New Program Off to a Healthy Start

Contributed by: Brenna Ricci, Nutrition Educator-Healthy Pantry Initiative

Our communities need access to healthy, nutrient-dense foods to be able to feed themselves and their families. This is one of the biggest goals of the Healthy Pantry Initiative (HPI). This past October, I was hired to support a community health program with Helping Harvest and pilot it at nine of our food pantry agencies. This important program is happening at food banks across the state, focused on nutrition and finding ways to share chronic disease information and resources with client households.

HPI is a project of Feeding Pennsylvania in partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Health. The long-term goal is to reduce the burden of disease and increase the quality of life for Pennsylvanians who use food support systems. The initiative begins with a pantry coordinator who wants to adopt nutrition education and environmental pantry changes. The program becomes sustainable when the food pantry volunteers and staff buy-in and recognize they are helping to have a real impact in our community's health.

We are so grateful for the enthusiastic and meaningful participation of our agencies. One site, First Unitarian Universalist Church Food Pantry, Reading, has been using colorful, bi-lingual signage to promote nutrition and health messages.

Friend, Inc., Kutztown, has a literature rack and will also be getting two wooden displays on wheels for moving produce closer into the hands of household clients when they get back to their pantry choice model.

Hopewell Love, in Birdsboro, has been offering a partial choice, with the implementation of a small menu for their pantry clients two times a month. It allows clients to feel heard about what their selections are while waiting in their cars for their turn to receive food.

The Exeter Area Food Pantry will be giving seedling plants to their household clients. This initiative came from the kindness of Dina Schock, who reached out to Helping Harvest in October with her idea. I worked with my nine sites to find the best match for her plants to be donated this spring.

Samantha Mauer has been a wonderful addition as an intern as she works to complete her community nutrition hours for her Sodexo Dietetic Internship. All the time Samantha is putting into her weekly trips to Preston's Pantry, Boyertown, and our Senior Food Tote (CSFP) program, are centered on community nutrition. This month Samantha and I will be making and videoing one of the senior box recipes to share with everyone.

Myself, and the rest of the Helping Harvest staff, are so excited for the impact the Healthy Pantry Initiative will continue to have on those we serve.



GIANT Delivers Easter Hams

Our friends at GIANT believe that strong families equal a strong community. In keeping with that belief, GIANT has been incredibly supportive of Helping Harvest by donating food, funds, and volunteer hours throughout the pandemic crisis.

Dave Liptok, Helping Harvest board member and Director of Operations for GIANT, is pictured with our president, Jay Worrall, during GIANT's generous donation of 250 hams, which made Easter dinner complete for many local families in need. This contribution was part of GIANT's initiative to donate a total of 3,000 hams to 13 partner food banks this spring in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia to ensure all families were able to celebrate the holiday with a fulfilling meal.



Daffodils Brighten Our Warehouse

When our friends at the local chapter of the American Cancer Society were in need of cold storage and a distribution site for their annual Daffodil Days campaign, we were happy to share our space with their friendly team of volunteers. Helping Harvest is proud to have partnered with ACS, which works so diligently in aiding cancer research, education, advocacy and patient/family services.



Helping Harvest

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About Our Organization . . .

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

