

# NOURISHING NEWS

## FROM HELPING HARVEST

Fall 2021

### A Fresher Future

Providing the freshest, healthiest, most nourishing foods to those we serve has long been an essential focus of the work of Helping Harvest.

When we moved into our facility in 2014, the 500 pallet spots of freezer and refrigerator storage we built was 2.5 times larger than our previous building. With this increased storage, we were able to significantly increase the perishable donations (produce, meats and dairy) we accepted as well as the purchases of these foods. By early 2020, perishable foods represented 60% of the food we were distributing to our network of charitable food programs. At that time, our cold storage operated, on average, at 85-90% capacity.

The COVID pandemic severely escalated the demand on our services and pushed our cold storage to its maximum capacity. Because of the limited cold storage, prized perishable donations had to be unfortunately declined, or stored offsite – an expensive and inefficient option.



As food distributions are forecasted to remain high, we have expanded our programs to continue to best serve those in need. To accomplish this, our Board and leadership made the necessary decision to expand our onsite cold storage.



This summer, construction began on two new cold storage units. Each unit will be able to serve as a freezer or a refrigerator – depending on the products we need to store. In total, the new units can hold up to 250 pallets of food, increasing our storage capacity by 50%. Most importantly, it will mean we can store up to, at any given time, 250,000 more pounds of the healthiest foods to distribute for the plates of our hungry neighbors.

This project was made possible by a \$450,000 Impact Grant from the United Way of Berks County, a matching gift from an anonymous local donor, as well as the generosity of many other local individuals, companies and foundations.

Thank you all for helping us insure a fresher future for our community.



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

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## From the President

Dear Friends of Helping Harvest,

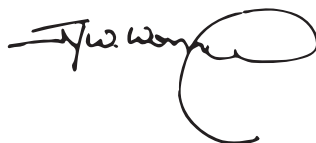
Having just completed my second year here at Helping Harvest I am struck by how grateful I am to have been chosen for this job, and as we approach Thanksgiving I realize I have much to be thankful for.

First, it is hard for me to find the words to express my admiration and appreciation for the volunteers, my fellow staff members, and the board of directors of this special organization. To be able to work side-by-side with people who give so much of their time in service to others is a remarkable gift and one for which I am extremely grateful.

Secondly, I am thankful to be a part of the mission of Helping Harvest, which is to feed the hungry in Berks and Schuylkill Counties. Over the past 12 months, we have supplied over \$12.3 million in food to those in need in our community, either directly through our Mobile Markets or our 200+ distribution partners. I simply cannot imagine a more fulfilling place to work.

Finally, I want to express my thanks to the board and staff for investing their time and energy in completing a new strategic plan for our work. Over the next few months, you will hear from us about several exciting new initiatives which will help us better meet the food needs of our community. Many of these initiatives will require new resources and partners to bring them to reality. To those of you who have helped us meet the need of low-income individuals and families in Berks and Schuylkill Counties, and to those of you who will continue to help us - **THANK YOU, and HAPPY HOLIDAYS!**

Your Friend,



**Jay Worrall, President**



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.



## Helping with SNAP

Since coming onboard in October 2020, Melissa Beltran Del Rio has been a key player in managing our rapidly growing Mobile Market program. When asked her favorite part of working at Helping Harvest, Melissa replied, "I love the connection with people, hearing their stories and seeing firsthand how we're helping them."

Recently, Melissa has been spending less time overseeing Mobile Markets due to her transition to a newly added position at Helping Harvest, SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) Coordinator. She is enjoying this new role, which has

her working directly with local families and seniors, providing assistance in the often difficult SNAP (food stamp) application process for those in need.

First year related costs for the new SNAP Coordinator position were largely funded by a capacity-building grant from the Walmart Foundation. Helping Harvest is proud to be able to offer this service to residents in Berks and Schuylkill counties.



## Welcome new partner agencies!

We deeply appreciate all of our partner agencies who are working harder than ever during this time of heightened need. The staff and volunteers of all local program sites are making a difference to our hungry neighbors each day, helping to put food on the tables of many local seniors and families. Thank you to everyone who has a part in fighting hunger throughout Berks and Schuylkill counties.

Since March, we have welcomed seven new pantries, two shelters, two meal programs, and three Senior Food Box sites. We are truly grateful these agencies have chosen to initiate programs at this critical time:

### Pantries

- Alvernia University – Clare's Cupboard
- Coaldale Area Food Pantry
- Exeter Bible Fellowship Church
- Life Church Reading
- Pine Grove Wesleyan Church
- Reading Recreation Commission
- Road to Damascus



### Meal & Snack Programs

- Communities in Schools of Eastern Pennsylvania
- Road to Damascus

### Shelters

- Goodknight The Clubhouse Inc.
- Hannah's Hope Ministries

### PA Senior Food Box

- Barley Square Apartments
- Coaldale Area Food Pantry
- Zion Blue Mountain UCC

Happy Holidays



## Introducing our intern - Corey!

If you've visited Helping Harvest, you may have seen our intern, Corey, hard at work. Corey is part of the Wilson Honors Internship Program, which provides students with an introduction to the professional work environment through businesses and organizations in the community. Students participate in a workplace experience and in semester presentations.

As a seasoned volunteer, Corey was already familiar with some of the procedures here at the food bank, and has been a wonderful addition to our team. Always friendly and willing to help with whatever tasks are at hand, she has quickly progressed to working independently on essential duties such as client management, statistics and data tracking. In addition, Corey has excelled at assisting SNAP & Outreach Coordinator, Melissa, with outreach efforts.

Aside from being a busy high school senior and Helping Harvest intern, Corey is also a member of both the Wilson High School swim team and the Beast of the East Tournament champion water polo team.



## CROP Walk

Happy 40th anniversary to the Reading-Berks CROP Walk! More than 30 churches participated in this year's CROP Walk, generating more than \$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. Through the years, more than \$1,000,000 has been raised to support our causes. Thank you to West Berks Mission District and the CROP Walk committee; your dedication is so much appreciated!



## Helping Harvest

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[HelpingHarvest.org](http://HelpingHarvest.org)

## About Our Organization . . .

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





## A "Giant" help in feeding the hungry

The holiday season is the busiest time of year for food banks, and the GIANT Company is supporting these efforts with their initiative to donate 10,000 turkeys in their service area. As part of this initiative, Helping Harvest was presented with 1,000 turkeys by Giant's regional Director of Operations (and Helping Harvest Board member), Dave Liptok. After presenting the turkeys, a large group of Giant's employees spent part of their day volunteering in the warehouse - as they often do.

Giant's support in the fight against hunger is evident throughout the year. In addition to food and monetary donations, customers are invited to round up their purchase at checkout to benefit their local food bank, or purchase reusable bags to benefit Feeding America food banks, including Helping Harvest. We are deeply appreciative of the enduring support of Giant, and the donation of turkeys, which will have an impact on so many local families in need this holiday season.



## Cranksgiving rolls on!

Riders from all over took part in the 8th Annual Cranksgiving food drive on October 30. This is one of our favorite events of the year, a food drive done almost entirely by bicycle, with many of the participants in costume! Once again, it was an undisputed success, bringing in 4,237 pounds of food - including many frozen turkeys for Thanksgiving - and \$9,415 in donations. Over the past 8 years, Cranksgiving has contributed more than 23,000 pounds - nearly 12 tons of food - to Helping Harvest.

Many thanks to the organizers, sponsors and participants of Cranksgiving. We appreciate not only your support, but also your enthusiasm in helping others. Your efforts truly help to make the holidays brighter for your neighbors in need!



## Thank you Boy Scouts!



The 35th annual Scouting for Food was a huge success! On Saturday, November 6, the Hawk Mountain Council, Boy Scouts of America, distributed door hangers to area homes requesting food donations. The following Saturday, they returned and gathered 63,735 pounds of food and \$2,680 in donations for Helping Harvest. Thank you to the hundreds of Scouts, their families and the Scout leaders who dedicated two Saturdays to this drive. The need for food assistance is always greater during the holiday season, and Scouting for Food for many years has helped us meet this critical need.



## Programs grow to meet the need

To provide better access to food assistance for local families, children and seniors, we at Helping Harvest have had to adapt quickly to the increased needs of the community. Over the past 20 months, that has meant aggressively expanding our direct service programs. Pre-COVID, our Mobile Market program had 7 sites, of which 2 sites served year-round. We now proudly serve year-round at 19 sites (two distributing twice monthly) throughout Berks and Schuylkill counties. All of the new sites have been well received by the communities they serve, with many attendees expressing overwhelming gratitude for the food given.

Our Weekender Program is also rapidly expanding. This program provides participating children with a bag of nourishing, yet easy to prepare food, to sustain them through the weekend. Handed out after school every Friday during the school year, each Weekender bag contains assorted meal options, as well as kid-friendly snacks. In the 2019-2020 school year, there were 18 schools enrolled in the Weekender Program. COVID severely limited the program during the 2020-21 school year; however, due to the hard work and dedication of our Programs Department, we currently have 34 schools in 14 school districts now participating, with more than 1,800 students enrolled!



Produce 4 Kids is a program specifically for elementary students in the Reading School District. At dismissal, every child receives a bag of nourishing snacks such as fruits, veggies or dairy items. The goal of this program is to give kids an extra nutritive boost to their diets, and introduce some new foods as well. It is our hope that these small steps help to build healthy habits, and bring a positive association with fresh foods. P4K previously distributed at one school per week. As of this fall, we now provide these healthy treats at Reading elementary schools 2-3 times each week.



Serving the most vulnerable of our neighbors is the Senior Food Box Program, which has grown to provide nourishing supplemental food to 1,815 local seniors each month.

Keeping up with the increased demand for food assistance has brought unforeseen challenges, but we have faced them with your help. Expanding our programs is a necessary step in our continuing goal of making nourishing foods accessible to all. Improving the physical and mental health of our hungry neighbors is imperative to rebuilding our community, and we are grateful for the support that enables us to provide this to our neighbors in need and the agencies that serve them. Your kindness helps provide food to families and seniors right here in our community, and we thank you.