

# NOURISHING NEWS

## FROM HELPING HARVEST

Spring 2023

### Need increases with reduction of SNAP benefits

In March 2020, Congress increased monthly SNAP (food stamps) benefits with emergency allotments to help low-income families. The intention of this increase in benefits was to help these already struggling families as they coped with the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. On a statewide average, these additional benefits averaged \$181 per household. Locally, more than 85,000 individuals in Berks and Schuylkill counties receive monthly support through SNAP. The extra benefits these individuals were receiving became even more impactful as inflation sent costs skyrocketing beginning in early 2022 and wreaked havoc on the budgets of our neighbors in need.

Unfortunately, these emergency allotments ended in March 2023, and the drastic reduction in benefits has had a devastating impact on local families and seniors who were relying on this support to afford food. Many of these families and individuals are now in the dire situation of choosing to spend money on food, rent, medical bills or other essential expenses. To get help with the food assistance they need, many more have turned to the programs supported by Helping Harvest over the past couple months. We have seen the number of families and individuals waiting in line for food grow as much as 35% at some of our program sites.

In 2022, Helping Harvest distributed nearly \$15 million worth of food (in comparison that number was \$8.8 million in 2019). With the current rise in need, we once again expect to supply at least \$15 million in 2023.

However, we are not daunted. We are profoundly grateful for the support from our community: the dedicated network of partner agencies, amazing volunteers, and supporters and friends like you. Together, with your help, we can provide food for our hungry neighbors - the families, children, and seniors in need - now and in the times ahead. On behalf of those we serve, thank you for joining in the fight against hunger.



Cars line up for Muhlenberg Mobile Market

If you or someone you know is in need of food assistance, please call us at 610-926-5802 ext. 206. Our staff will guide you to the programs close to you.



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## From the President

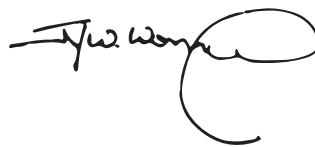
As many of you will already know, the past six months have been very difficult ones for the seniors, families and children we serve at Helping Harvest. Not only has the price of food, gas and housing continued to rise for our clients, but the end of the supplemental food-stamp benefit that most of them have been using to help cover some of those costs over the past few years has made their challenges even more severe.

The result? Our neighbors in Berks and Schuylkill Counties are coming to Helping Harvest with a greater level of need than ever before. We distributed \$8.5 million in food to clients through our agency partners over the past six months, a staggering increase of 47% when compared to the same period a year earlier. We remain in an historic crisis of food insecurity, and Helping Harvest needs your support to provide the food assistance that children, seniors and families need right now.

All that being said, the level of support we have received from supporters like you gives us hope that we will continue to work together to make sure that no one goes to bed hungry in Berks and Schuylkill Counties. Thank you so much for your dedication to the work of feeding the poor—whether as a volunteer, a financial contributor, or a food donor. It is simple to say that Helping Harvest would not be able to provide our help without your support. It is also the simple truth.

Thanks again for your support.

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.



## Schuylkill Sampler

On April 20, we held our first Schuylkill County-based fundraising event, the Schuylkill Sampler, to benefit our growing Weekender Program. More than 125 guests savored creations generously provided by TRES Restaurant, The Brickhouse and Hess Catering. Delicious treats were provided by our friends at Sweet Street Desserts. Those in attendance also enjoyed an evening of acoustic music by Steve and Tom of The Boys Upstairs. Our President, Jay Worrall, thanked the crowd for their support of the Weekender Program (photo) and Mandy Fitzpatrick, Executive Director of Schuylkill County's VISION, provided a testimonial of the program's impact (photo).



We appreciate the strong outpouring of support for our Weekender Program, which is now serving more than 1,500 in-need Schuylkill County children at 23 schools and learning centers each week. This is more than a 20% increase in program enrollment over last school year, an expansion that would not be possible without the support of our donors.

Many thanks to the event's Lead Sponsor, Mrs. T's Pierogies, and all of the other sponsors who helped make this event a success. We are grateful to be part of this generous community.

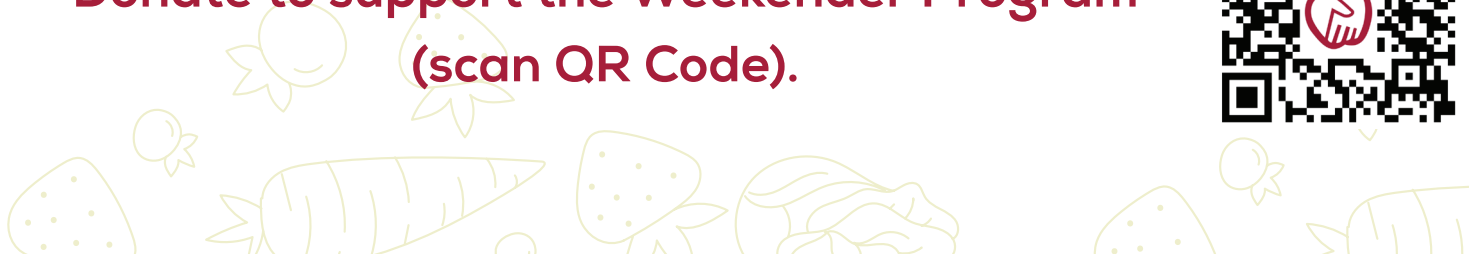
2023 marks the 40th Anniversary of Helping Harvest and we cannot wait to celebrate this milestone with you at a special event planned for October 12. We hope you will join us for the occasion - stay tuned for details!



**Thank You to  
The Event's Lead Sponsor!**



**Donate to support the Weekender Program  
(scan QR Code).**



## Senior Food Box Program expands

This March, our Pennsylvania Senior Food Box Program enrollment grew to include more than 2,000 older adults in Berks and Schuylkill counties – our highest participant number to date. We are so grateful for our volunteers, like Jim (pictured), who help pack and/or distribute the monthly boxes, and for those who assist at the 101 partner sites throughout our two counties where the boxes are distributed. We could not serve our seniors in need without you!

What is the Senior Food Box Program? The Senior Food Box Program works to improve the health of low-income seniors by supplementing their diets with nutritious foods. Helping Harvest receives the food each month for this federally-supported program through the USDA. Once received at Helping Harvest, as many as 40 volunteers help us pack the food into the 2,000+ boxes. The boxes are delivered by Helping Harvest drivers over the following weeks to our partner sites for distribution to the enrolled seniors. The intention of the Senior Food Box is to provide foods of high nutritional value to help bolster the health of the enrolled low-income seniors and to offset the costs of their limited food budgets.



## Helping Harvest awarded Nonprofit of the Year by Schuylkill Chamber

Helping Harvest was proud to accept the 2023 Nonprofit of the Year Award from the Schuylkill Chamber of Commerce on May 5 at Mountain Valley Golf Course. This award is a recognition of our organization's hard work to increase food distribution to better serve our neighbors in need in Schuylkill County.

Prior to 2020, Helping Harvest distributed approximately 1 million pounds of food annually to about 100 programs in Schuylkill County, including pantries, Weekender Program school sites, senior housing facilities (for the PA Senior Food Box Program and Produce Plus) and Mobile Markets. In 2022, we distributed 2.4 million pounds of food to 137 charitable food assistance programs. Food provided by Helping Harvest nourishes more than 29,000 low-income residents of Schuylkill County each year.

We are so very grateful and humbled the Schuylkill Chamber has recognized our efforts to go above and beyond in addressing food insecurity in Schuylkill County.



Helping Harvest volunteer, Gerry, helps a client at the Girardville Mobile Market



## Thank You Volunteers!

April was Volunteer Appreciation Month, and we have so many amazing people to be grateful for! Last year, 14,560 volunteer and community service hours (equivalent to 9 full time Helping Harvest staff) were worked by 1,780 volunteers. Each volunteer, whether they help once a year or several times each week, is an integral part of fighting hunger in Berks and Schuylkill counties.



### Without our volunteers, we would be unable to:

- Provide nearly 5,000 children with Weekender bags each Friday
- Pack and deliver more than 2,000 Senior Food Boxes each month to our most vulnerable neighbors
- Distribute food at 23 Mobile Markets each month
- Bundle fresh produce to distribute through area pantries, our Mobile Markets and Healthy Sprouts
- Pick up food donations from local retailers
- Perform many necessary office tasks



With their help, and the support of our donors, we are able to maintain our existing programs and expand our offerings to best serve our neighbors in need. Thank you for being part of the effort to fight hunger in Berks and Schuylkill counties. Together, we are building a stronger and healthier community.



If you would like to learn more about becoming a volunteer, please visit [HelpingHarvest.org/Volunteer](https://HelpingHarvest.org/Volunteer), or call 610-926-5802 ext 220.



## Students "can" help feed the hungry!

The 6th Annual Canstructure Contest was an undisputed success! More than 100 students from 10 teams across Berks County participated, creating structures in this year's theme - Welcome to the Jungle. After the event, all of the cans used in the structures were donated to Helping Harvest - totaling nearly 11,000 pounds of food to share with our agency partners!

The Overall Winner was The Hunger Fighters team from Wilson School District. In addition to their impressive Canstructure, they collected \$2,500 to donate to Helping Harvest! Other teams that were recognized were:

1st Place, Beginner Division: 2nd Street Learning Center

1st Place, Intermediate Division: West Reading Elementary Center

Congratulations to all the teams for their hard work and success in collecting food and creating such amazing structures. Thank you to our friends at Youth Volunteer Corps for organizing this wonderful event. We appreciate your support in feeding our hungry neighbors!



## Hospital food drive supports Weekender Program

Employees at Reading Hospital - Tower Health put a different spin on their annual food drive to benefit Helping Harvest. This year's food drive was renamed the Piece Per Person Challenge and the goal was to collect at least one food item for each of the Hospital's 6,000+ employees. Also new for this year, all items collected were specifically intended for use in our Weekender Program.

This year's drive proved to be a huge success, bringing in 10,089 pounds of food - 1,000 pounds more than last year!

We appreciate the continued support of our friends at Tower Health and are grateful for their help in the fight against hunger.



## Helping Harvest

117 Morgan Drive  
Reading, PA 19608

T: (610) 926-5802

F: (610) 926-7638

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

## About Our Organization . . .

**Helping Harvest** established in 1983, collects, purchases, stores, and distributes over ten million pounds of food annually to the more than 350 programs which feed the hungry in Berks & Schuylkill counties.

