



**Nevada Council on Food Security**  
*COVID-19 Response Efforts Update*  
6/30/2020

**Food Bank of Northern Nevada Report**

**Response Summary**

The COVID-19 response from the Food Bank needed to be immediate and safe, with little time to prepare. The Food Bank of Northern Nevada is quite versed in distributing food to large groups of people, efficiently, safely, and in short order. COVID changed the rules about people being able to stand in line, choose their own food and receive assistance via our regular methods. The Food Bank's mission is to address food security, and with COVID-19, our mission did not change, our method did. We were serving 91,000 people per month prior to COVID-19, so food security has been a serious concern for many Northern Nevadans and Northern California's. We had to quickly find a way to shift our model to address what we knew would be a rapidly rising need for food as job loss impacted so many and continues to be a primary driving force in increased need. Many of these community members who have experienced job loss may not have considered themselves to be food insecure prior to the pandemic, however are now facing the uncertainty of not knowing when and if they may go back to work. This rising need, coupled with the supply chain challenges and many stores struggling to keep food on their shelves, we saw rapid increases in need from the end of March, through April. We have seen some declines in need through May and June, but we anticipate high rates beginning in August.

We converted to a drive through model right away for mobile harvest, which came with a variety of its own issues. We needed larger parking lots, pre-packed bags and boxes of food, gloves for everyone and longer distributions. Since so many businesses were not operating, we leveraged relationships with those who already support us to use their parking lots and allow us to set up off site packing sessions. After we decided how we would distribute food, we faced how to manage outreach to a number of new people who hadn't needed our help before and tried to plan for significant increases in people needing food assistance. In the month of April, the average monthly number of people we served through our direct distributions and through partner agencies jumped 35% to more than 123,000 people. In a few short months of children being out of schools, we served well over 300,000 meals, which rivaled our usual yearly distribution figure. As businesses reopen, the shuffle for distribution sites starts again, as it will in the fall if school parking lots are no longer available. We have learned to be nimble and accept change as the only constant.

We quickly made decisions for our warehouse and office to keep our team safe and healthy. We closed the warehouse to all volunteers, making the decision to open on offsite "pop up warehouse" to pack emergency food boxes. In a matter of days, we secured space at the Reno Sparks Convention center, set up a temporary team to run the distributions, and recruited



volunteers to begin packing emergency food boxes. In just 3 weeks, we packed over 17,000 emergency food boxes that were distributed out to communities in need, primarily through our mobile harvest program. This allowed us to limit the number of people coming into our building, helping us to keep our warehouse team safe. Our work has never stopped, picking orders, loading trucks and shipping food across our great state. The ability to get food in has posed a significant challenge however. We have seen huge problems with the supply chain. As a food bank, we are competing not only with other food banks for resources, but also with grocery stores. This has led to huge time delays and resource delays when it comes to getting the food that we need into our building and back out to our partners and community members. We are seeing lag times as long as 12 weeks to get orders in, orders that prior to the pandemic would have taken 7-10 days. This puts a serious strain on our operations, as well as our partners and those in need.

Partner Agencies who are tasked with providing food pantries and other food assistance support throughout our service area had to rapidly address distribution changes as well, many of them finding ways to move to drive through distributions, home delivery, pantry appointments or grab and go models. We are proud to share that although some of our partners had to pause their food pantry distributions to prepare for these changes, all have remained open and continue to serve those most in need. We continue to see increases in pantry need in our more urban communities, with far less increases in our more rural communities. We believe that this is tied to the job market. In Washoe county and Carson City, community members who work in the hospitality industry have been the hardest hit. We have also seen some declines in congregate feeding programs such as soup kitchen or community feeding sites. All of these programs had to move to grab and go models, since social distancing is required. This has led to a decline in the number of people who are accessing prepared meals as well as the number of seniors accessing meals at their local senior centers. These vulnerable populations are fearful to leave their home, so we continue to work with partners to help and address home delivery options to the best of our ability.

Senior Hunger resources through our Commodity Supplemental Food Program made similar adjustments to all of their distributions. We are excited to share that we did not have to close any CSFP sites, but we did make operational changes to address safety. We moved more distributions to drive through models, and we limited client contact by dropping boxes at senior apartments and asked their maintenance staff to help with the delivery of those boxes, to limit the exposure for our seniors.

To support the need for increased home delivery request, in March, FBNN quickly responded to the need of seniors and people with underlying health conditions who could not leave their homes. We partnered with RTC to provide clients with home delivery on a weekly basis. This started in March and continues through June.



As referenced above, our Mobile Harvest program shifted to a drive through for all sites. This meant that we had to transition from 43 sites located in neighborhoods to about 20 sites located in large parking lots. These new sites all moved to locations that were large enough to accommodate drive through distributions, spaces large enough to accommodate 750-1000 households. At one distributions that took place in April at the Grand Sierra Resort, we served 1,000 households in about 3 hours. This takes significant resources, volunteers and food to meet this need. Community members received an Emergency Food Box, as well as fresh produce. We have continued to add emergency food boxes to all mobile harvest distributions through June, and will be transitioning back to produce only beginning in July. In the month of April, we served 28,272 people through mobile harvest. A normal month prior to the pandemic we would see about 8,000 people. This is a 350% increase in one month.

The Child Nutrition Team was prepared for Spring Break when COVID hit so we immediately met with the Washoe County School District to go into a summer service mode using our mobile trucks/vans. We had to get waivers from the NDA to be able to serve meals in a grab-n-go style to be heated and eaten at home in a non-congregate manner. We were also able to get a waiver to serve multi-day meals at each location. We started on 3/17/2020 at 10 locations and added 10 more additional locations on 3/24/2020. We started delivering meals twice a week in partnership with the school district at Natchez ES. The ability so secure waiver extensions have assured that we can continue to provide service through summer. In addition, we saw a rapid increase in the number of families accessing school pantries in April and May and we have a handful of school pantries who will be operating through the summer to support that need.

Additionally, many of our partnering school pantries continued operations or were able to re-open beginning in April, so provide food support to those school families, above and beyond what we could provide through meals. We saw a 150% increase in utilization at school pantries from April-June, as compared to the same time last year. We have a handful of school pantries that have committed to operate through the duration of summer.

SNAP- FBNN's SNAP Outreach efforts shifted to a handful of sites and basic phone applications. Our SNAP team has been manning the phone line to assist clients with online SNAP and Medicaid applications. Three of our Washoe County SNAP sites have remained open for in-person outreach, as well as three of our rural outreach sites. The team will be resuming in-person outreach as community partner organizations open their doors.

Nutrition Education- FBNN's nutrition education classes in the schools and at Senior Centers were immediately halted when the COVID shutdown occurred. The team has since offered virtual nutrition education classes for adults and seniors. These classes can be accessed from a home computer or phone.

Partner Agencies total people served:

- March – 90,746



- April – 88,542
- May

Mobile Harvest people served:

- March – 9,719
- April – 28,272
- May – 21,004
- June to date – 15,825 (estimate)

Child Nutrition meals provided:

- March – 32,876 meals
- April – 125,668 meals
- May – 131,274 meals
- June to date – 72,074 meals

SNAP applications:

- March- 110 SNAP applications, 48 Medicaid
- April- 47 SNAP applications, 18 Medicaid
- May- 55 SNAP applications, 16 Medicaid
- June to date- 38 SNAP applications, 10 Medicaid

Nutrition Education Classes:

- Smart Shopper
  - 2 classes (June)
  - 8 participants (unduplicated)
  - 27 participants (duplicated)
- Seniors Eating Well
  - 1 class (June)
  - 1 participant (unduplicated)
  - 4 participants (duplicated)

Homebound Boxes- RTC delivery (22lb food boxes)

- April- 104 boxes delivered
- May- 199 boxes delivered
- June to date- 229 boxes delivered

## Resolutions/Successes

As we faced the challenge of converting our distributions to a drive through model, significant space requirements arose quickly. We had great success reaching out to corporate partners that we had worked with in the past asking to sue their parking lots. These larger businesses were part of the shutdown and they were eager to help in any way that they could and providing us



space to do our distributions also provided these partners great publicity as they automatically became part of our outreach. At the beginning of the shutdown, about half of those visiting Mobile Harvest had never reached out for assistance from us before. Partnering with these businesses that were well known and familiar to many in the community, also came with the unintended consequence of making this transition a little more comfortable for the first time Food Bank recipient. We also saw great success using our social media as an outreach tool. Traditional media outlets also have been instrumental in helping us to get the word out.

We also saw great successes in our off-site packing projects, with thousands of emergency food boxes created in a few short weeks with volunteers. We were fortunate to also receive assistance from the Nevada Air National Guard, who are still helping us in many significant ways.

We are so proud of the fact that our partner agencies remain open and continue to serve their communities with healthy food every day. We are thankful to them for their continued effort and support.

We have found that the community has been extremely generous. Either through financial support, PPE donations, volunteer support, business support to hold distributions, and much more.

### Barriers/Needs/Gaps in services

At the start of the shutdown, people were stocking up in serious ways, which truly shocked and changed the supply chain. We are still seeing the effects of this and it is taking us much longer to get food in the door, even when we are paying for it. We are also dealing with some unpredictable service numbers with significant highs and lows that are making it more difficult to plan. We are concerned that when federal aid runs out, our numbers may soar to levels that will prove difficult to meet.

We need more volunteers to do the work, but we are trying to keep them at a safe social distance. This is a problem that everyone is facing but it does make larger tasks take much longer than they used to.

Even with significant outreach efforts we remain concerned that those in need might not be able to find us. We want to make sure that we are reaching people and connecting them to our services and that of our partners.

Waivers for USDA programs have been vital to our ability to administer these programs. We do have concerns that these may expire before the work can truly revert back to past methods.



Challenging to keep our in-person SNAP Assistance and in-person nutrition education classes going with community organizations being closed. We want to make sure to keep our clients and staff safe at all times and not place unnecessary risk. In addition, having the SNAP interview waiver terminated, meaning an interview is once again required significantly hinders our ability to safely and effectively serve SNAP eligible clients.

With extended unemployment benefits setting to expire at the end of July, as well as Pandemic SNAP set to expire at the end of July as well, we anticipate significant increase in requests for support in August and beyond.

Predicting the unemployment rate and under-employment rate as we continue to move through this calendar year poses a significant barrier for us. People may return to work eventually, but they may return to reduced hours or reduced rates of pay, which will have a cascading effect on their ability to meet their basic needs.