

Summer Nutrition Summit

January 12-13, 2026



Bridging the Gap: Food Banks, Community-Based Organizations, and Summer Meal Expansion

JANUARY 12, 2026

Summer Nutrition Summit 2026



Speakers



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Disclaimer

Our speakers represent their own experience with non-congregate summer meal programs in their states and localities. Certain program models and implementation methods may be restricted in some states. Check with your local state agency before implementing any new meal service models or implementation methods.

Goals

- To share examples how food banks and CBOs are filling critical summer meal service gaps in rural and underserved areas.
- To provide actionable strategies for schools to effectively partner with local food banks and CBOs to expand summer meal access.
- To outline how state agencies can leverage the capacity and reach of food banks to initiate and support summer meal programs in unserved communities.
- To equip attendees with insights into unique challenges and solutions associated with summer meal provision in rural and remote settings through community partnerships.



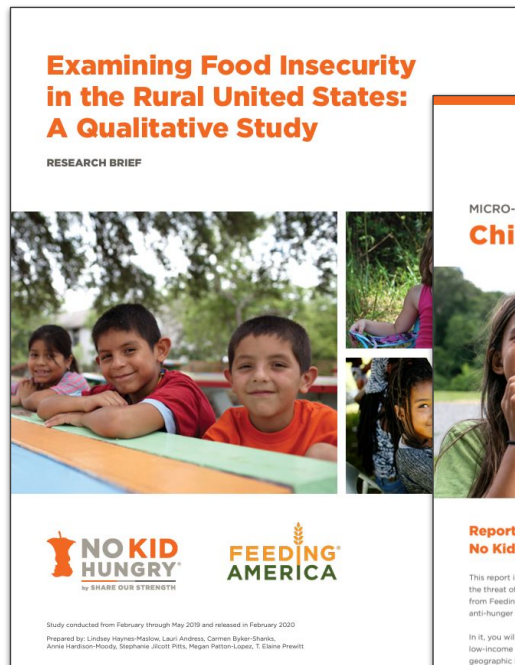
Our Shared Commitment to Addressing Rural Hunger

In 2019, Share Our Strength and Feeding America® partnered with a team of researchers from six universities, led by North Carolina State University, on an in-depth qualitative study to explore what makes it easier or harder for families in rural areas to provide food for their kids. The study was the first to provide an in-depth exploration of the experiences of food insecurity in six rural counties across the United States.

Micro Report: [Child Hunger in Rural America](#)

Research Brief: [Examining Food Insecurity in the Rural United States: A Qualitative Study](#)

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What We Can Do to Help

Understanding the causes of rural food insecurity is critical to ensuring no child goes hungry in America. Building upon the current study's findings, we have some immediate recommendations:

- **Make breakfast part of the school day.** We encourage schools in rural areas to adopt “breakfast after the bell” programs. Our study confirmed that parents value school breakfast programs, but find it difficult to get their children to school early. By providing breakfast after the bell, schools can ensure more students in rural areas can start the morning with a healthy meal.
- **Improve summer meals.** Our study found that transportation to summer meal sites is a major barrier to participation for rural children. Making the rules governing the summer meals program more flexible could give community groups more ways reach children despite these barriers, including changing the requirement that children consume food on-site and expanding access to other meal options, such as the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (Summer EBT) program.
- **Offer culturally appropriate meals.** To reach more children, we recommend that schools and community programs serve culturally appropriate, appealing foods at their school breakfast, afterschool meals, summer meals and charitable food assistance programs (e.g. food pantries, meals offered through faith-based organizations, etc.). Likewise, for charitable food programs, the client choice model, which allows families to choose the food that they take home, can encourage participation.

Screenshot from 2020 Micro Report: [Child Hunger in Rural America](#)

WHO CAN DO IT?



YOU CAN DO IT!

CENTRAL TEXAS FOOD BANK

- **Service Area:** Our partner agency network spans 21 counties in Central Texas
- **Summer Overview:**
 - Summer Meals sponsor since 2010
 - Strategic shift toward rural access + flexibility using the rural non-congregate (RNC) flexibility

	2024 RNC Pilot Year	2025 RNC Expansion
Congregate Sites	92	53
RNC Sites	3	12



RURAL NON-CONGREGATE PLANNING

- **Meal Gap Data**
 - Targeted underserved rural counties
 - Note: Partner with local Food Banks to access child hunger data
- **Hired seasonal staff for:**
 - Distribution
 - Reporting & compliance

County	Meals Distributed	Total Meals	Meal Gap	MPIN % to Date
Coryell	265,358	265,358	2,924,479	36.2%
Fayette	72,018	73,005	664,974	44.7%
Gillespie	83,059	83,059	688,088	48.9%
Hays	567,115	581,336	7,313,219	31.9%
Lampasas	63,250	63,250	656,968	38.3%

(MPIN stands for Meals Per Person in Need)

RURAL NON-CONGREGATE IMPLEMENTATION

- **Designed for simplicity and efficiency**
 - Minimal touchpoints, streamlined distribution
 - Reduced administrative burden for families/staff
- **Volunteer-built meal boxes**
 - Shelf-stable items and microwave-ready options
 - 10 shelf-stable breakfasts and lunches
- **Staff-led distributions**
 - Visited one site daily, some days had more
 - Biweekly schedule for sites
 - Vans loaded by CTFB staff, boxes distributed by CTFB staff
- **Verification system**
 - No pre-registration
 - Tickets issued with proof of children
- **Added value:**
 - Meal taste tests, nutrition curriculum
 - Community Kick-Off and Spike Events



RECRUITMENT

Meet partners where they are:

- **Use non-traditional recruitment methods**
 - Facebook, Google Maps, off-main-road searches
- **Prioritize high-visibility, child-serving locations**
 - Libraries, faith-based orgs, community spaces
- **Advertise reducing partner burden**
 - CTFB runs distribution
 - Partners provide space + help with marketing
 - One pickup = two weeks of meals
- **Leverage local knowledge**
 - Partner agencies suggest trusted locations
- **When needed, hit the road**
 - Many rural providers aren't online



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LESSONS LEARNED AND WHAT'S NEXT

- **ROI is tremendous**
 - Fewer sites, broader reach
- **Overestimate needs**
 - Demand exceeded projections
- **Personnel matters**
 - Long days (8+ hours in heat)
 - Train for teamwork & morale
- **Marketing works**
 - Targeted geographic Facebook/IG ads
 - Media, community partners, kids, kick-off/spike events
- **Exploring final-mile solution**
 - Transportation remains a barrier
 - Door-to-door delivery + RNC
- **Partnerships are key**
 - Example: local nonprofits helping bring families to distribution sites

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BLUE RIDGE AREA FOOD BANK (VIRGINIA)

- **Service Area:** Blue Ridge Area Food Bank is the largest hunger-relief organization in central and western Virginia, covering 25 counties and 8 cities.
- **Summer Overview:** Summer program grew significantly in 2025, from 2 to **13 sites** and 9,630 to **54,610 meals**.
 - Filled RNC site gaps in 9 counties, 7 of which did not have school-led RNC sites.
 - Bulk shelf-stable meal boxes with 5 breakfasts and 5 lunches.
 - Focused on partner site distributions, not direct Food Bank distributions



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STRATEGY 1: UNDERSTAND GAPS, DEFINE PRIORITIES

Start at the beginning: What do you know? What do you not know? Who can help you find the answers that you need?

- Food bank internal analysis
 - BRAFB conducts internal analysis using Link2Feed, Census data, and Map the Meal Gap data to **determine 4 priority areas that inform Food Bank-wide work**. Key data points included:
 - Child food insecurity rates
 - General food insecurity rates vs. how many food access points are in the area
 - Availability of services – partner days/hours, what foods they offer, etc.
 - Areas with high percentage of groups disproportionately impacted by food insecurity
 - These 4 localities were my starting place for RNC implementation/expansion, given that they already had the full attention of my leadership and organization.

STRATEGY 1: UNDERSTAND GAPS, DEFINE PRIORITIES (CONTINUED)

- No Kid Hungry/state agency birds-eye view of state needs
 - Reach out to your state NKH contact!
- Discussions with your leadership about the RNC opportunity
 - Make sure you have a seat at the table when your Food Bank is discussing strategic planning and priority areas/services.
 - Words that work:
 - Leverage financial opportunity – \$15 cost vs \$41 RNC reimbursement
 - \$224,000 in reimbursement summer 2025 from RNC alone
 - Highlight easier logistical lift for Operations teams

Blue Ridge Area Food Bank: Summer 2025 Opportunities
Prepared in January 2025

Blue Ridge Area Food Bank Service Area Data Overview
*Counties with service area gaps are highlighted.

County	Total Enrollment (# kids)	FR Enrollment (# kids)	FR Enrollment %	Childhood Food Insecurity %	% of Non-White Students	Persistent Child Poverty?	Rural?
Albemarle County	13,090	4,806	37%	8%	40%	N	Pockets
Amherst County (CEP DW)	3,965	3,180	80%	15%	36%	N	Pockets
Appomattox County (CEP DW)	2,372	1,900	80%	18%	36%	N	All
Augusta County	10,139	6,159	61%	12%	17%	N	Pockets
Bath County (CEP DW)	509	486	92%	23%	9%	N	All
Bedford County	9,061	5,235	58%	12%	21%	N	Pockets
Buckingham County (CEP DW)	1,965	1,899	97%	20%	48%	Y	All
Buena Vista City (CEP DW)	855	785	89%	22%	15%	N	All
Campbell County (CEP DW)	7,896	6,245	79%	14%	32%	N	Pockets
Charlottesville City (CEP DW)	5,104	3,562	69%	17%	59%	N	No
Clarke County	1,921	914	32%	7%	26%	N	All
Culpeper County	8,360	4,763	57%	11%	53%	N	All
Fauquier County	10,385	3,634	35%	7%	38%	N	Pockets
Fluvanna County	3,372	1,591	47%	9%	33%	N	Pockets
Frederick County	12,580	5,708	45%	9%	34%	N	Pockets
Greene County (CEP DW)	2,818	1,889	67%	13%	31%	N	All
Harrisonburg City (CEP DW)	6,788	5,497	81%	17%	66%	N	Pockets
Highland County (CEP DW)	212	100	47%	15%	4%	N	All
Lexington City	509	194	32%	11%	17%	N	All
Loudoun County	81,505	21,300	26%	2%	58%	N	Pockets (very small)

STRATEGY 2: LEVERAGE EXISTING CONNECTIONS AND PROGRAMS

Work smarter, not harder: start with the partners you already know.

- Springboard off of existing food bank initiatives/partnerships
 - Existing food pantry/agency partners
 - Easier for Operations teams as well as myself!
 - Backpack programs
 - Go where kids already are (libraries, summer schools not serving SFSP, etc.)
- Ensure continuity of food access as other Covid-era funding streams run out



STRATEGY 3: ADJUST AS NEEDED TO MEET FEDERAL REGULATIONS

Manage expectations and build in extra time: even the best-laid plans may need some adjustments.

- Albemarle and Fluvanna: Confirming appropriate distance between food bank RNC sites and summer school congregate sites
- Bath: Working with summer school schedules
- Augusta: Picked up where schools left off in library sites and utilized Augusta County School volunteers to ensure continuity of service



ALLIE'S TIPS AND TRICKS

When reaching out to potential RNC partners and moving through your RNC planning, here are some words and actions that might ease your journey:

- **Words that work**
 - “Free” !
 - “Lighter lift” than congregate feeding
- **Actions that work**
 - Reach out early
 - Keep the ball in your court
 - “I’ll call you back in x days”
 - “I’ll come do my pre-monitor on x day and we can fill out paperwork together”
 - Talk to your state agency and NKH state partner
 - Keep your warehouses informed



SAMPLE SCRIPT

“Hi, this is Allie Henning, I work at the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank with our children’s programs. We’re looking to expand our Summer Meals program this year, and the amazing work your organization does in our community really made you stand out to me as a potential partner in this program.

We are offering through our SUN Meals program shelf stable boxes that contain ingredients for **5 breakfasts and 5 lunches** that can be given out to children or parents once a week. **These boxes are available at no cost to your pantry.** I would love to connect with you more about partnering in this capacity this summer if you’re interested! **If I don’t hear back from you in a week, I will call you back.”**



THE JOSH HOWARD FOUNDATION (TEXAS)

- **Service Area:**

- Provides Afterschool & Summer Meals through USDA CACFP & SFSP
- Partners with community organizations, schools, and youth programs
- Serves thousands of children annually across North Texas

- **Summer Overview:**

- 68,407 meals served in Summer 2025
- Rural Non-Congregate Meals served for the first time
- 25% increase in total meals served compared to previous summer



HOW WE GROW SUMMER SITES

1. Identifying High-Need Communities

Schools, apartments, recreation centers, rural areas

2. Community Outreach & Visibility

Social media, flyers, digital outreach

3. Building Strong Partnerships

Youth organizations, school districts, recreation departments, faith-based groups



OUTREACH PROCESS: HOW NEW SITES CONNECT WITH US

- **Our outreach process is simple and direct:**
 - Organizations contact us by email or phone
 - Site assessments completed to determine feasibility
 - JHF provides training, compliance support, and daily distribution
 - Ongoing communication and monitoring
- **Contact Us:**
 - Email: thejhf5@gmail.com
 - Phone: Mel Jackson – (972) 750-2305



PARTNERSHIPS THAT STRENGTHEN OUR REACH

- **We work with partners who expand our impact:**
 - YMCA & recreation programs
 - Apartment communities
 - School districts
 - Churches & youth ministries
 - Community nonprofits
- **Partnerships help us identify needs, expand sites, and stabilize services.**



WHAT OUR OUTREACH LOOKS LIKE

- **Our outreach is strategic and community-centered:**
 - Digital outreach
 - Community events & school partnerships
 - Direct communication with program leaders
 - Referrals from partners
 - On-site meetings to build relationships



EDUCATION SERVICE CENTERS: PARTNERSHIP AND SUPPORT

- **Education Service Centers (ESCs) have been essential to our compliance and growth:**
 - Technical assistance
 - Monitoring and regulatory guidance
 - Program expansion support
 - Training & best practices
- **Their partnership strengthens our operations and ensures compliance.**

THE IMPORTANCE OF EXPANDING SUMMER SITES

- **Expanding sites allows us to:**
 - Reach more food-insecure families
 - Serve children lacking transportation
 - Increase community engagement
 - Ensure consistent access to meals
 - Support academic & wellness outcomes



PANEL Q&A

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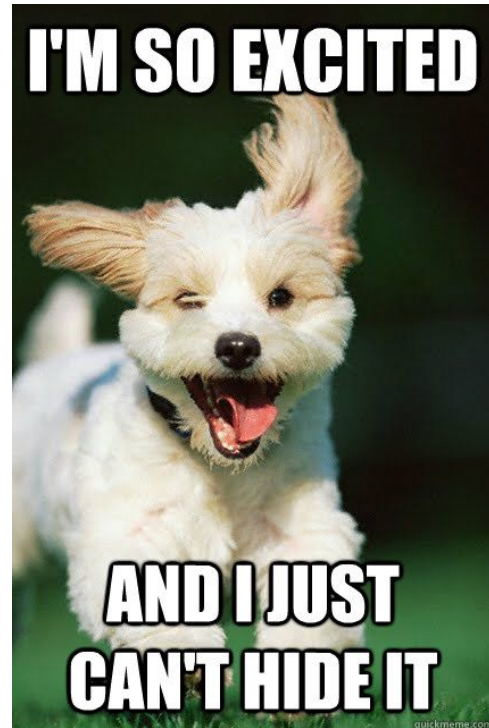
A PAUSE FOR REFLECTION

Take a moment to center around the following questions...

- What feelings did you feel over the last 60 minutes? Why?
- Identify at least one piece of inspiration and pledge to follow where it leads you when you get home.
- What do you wish you still knew?
- What can you learn from each other?


MEETING THIS MOMENT

- We understand the opportunities in rural areas.
- We have the historic flexibilities and a national commitment to modernizing federal summer meals access.
- We have proof of concept.
- And we know from research that these flexibilities have real impacts on kids, caregivers, and sponsors.





HURRAY!

A close-up shot of Jack Sparrow on the deck of a ship. He is wearing his signature black tricorn hat and has a serious expression. The background shows the ship's rigging and the ocean under a cloudy sky. A hand holding a dark sphere is visible on the right side of the frame.

Now...Bring me that horizon



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