

**Strengthening Support:  
Emergency Feeding in Ulster County and  
Recommendations for Network Resilience**

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Introduction to Ulster County Food Insecurity and Resources..... 3

Creation of the Ulster County Food Security and Access Network  
(UCFSAN)..... 4

Determining Feeding Program Needs..... 5

Variation in Emergency Feeding in Ulster County..... 7

Building Resilience in Ulster County Emergency Feeding..... 12

    Appendix A: UCFSAN Needs Survey, February 2023..... 14

    Appendix B: UCFSAN Needs Survey Results, February 2023..... 16

    Appendix C: Food Bank of Northeastern New York..... 18

References..... 19

## Introduction to Ulster County Food Insecurity and Resources

Despite a wide array of feeding resources available across Ulster County, food insecurity and hunger are still quite prevalent in the region.<sup>1</sup> To measure this, Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap tool estimates that in 2021, approximately 17,330 people in Ulster County (or about 9.5%) were considered food insecure<sup>2</sup>. While this estimate indicates a reduction in food insecurity from years prior (11.3% in 2020 and 11% in 2019, respectively), rampant housing insecurity and average wages that do not currently meet basic household financial need suggest that food insecurity will continue to afflict the region into the future.

To address this widespread issue, approximately 50 emergency feeding programs and organizations (food pantries, meal programs, meal delivery programs, and free community fridges) exist within county lines, with logistics support through the Farm to Food Pantry Collaborative, Feed HV<sup>3</sup>, and others. Many additional programs through Ulster County also work to address food insecurity and broaden access to healthy food. For detailed insight into County-wide food insecurity and the many resources currently available, readers should visit Chelsea Villalba's 2022 County Legislative Report on Addressing Food Insecurity in Ulster County.<sup>4</sup>

Feeding programs exist to lessen day-to-day hunger, and to ease financial burden on families and individuals suffering financial hardship. Thanks to volunteers and donation-based programs, the immense undertaking of regularly feeding entire segments of the public currently comes at an extremely low cost to communities, but feeding programs need steady and reliable support to function. Building a resilient emergency feeding network to connect programs, share information, and develop resources will provide a guaranteed return for those programs' commitments to the community.

This report seeks to introduce the Ulster County Food Security and Access Network, illustrate the landscape of emergency feeding in Ulster County, and serve as a guide to build resilience into the local emergency feeding network.

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<sup>1</sup> USDA defines food insecurity as the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways, and defines hunger as an individual-level physiological condition that may result from food insecurity (2022).

<sup>2</sup> For more on regional food insecurity mapping tool and to view prior years, visit [Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap](#).

<sup>3</sup> Feed HV is a program of Hudson Valley AgriBusiness Development Corporation. For more information, visit [Food Rescue & Donation at HVADC](#).

<sup>4</sup> [Chelsea Villalba's 2022 County Legislative Report: Addressing Food Insecurity in Ulster County](#)

## **Creation of the Ulster County Food Security and Access Network (UCFSAN)**

In 2022, the Ulster County Legislature directed a portion of the County's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) allocation toward assisting emergency feeding organizations, whereby county-wide social services agency Family of Woodstock, Inc. would convene and facilitate the Ulster County Food Security and Access Network (UCFSAN). Currently, UCFSAN members are representatives from programs or organizations that provide emergency food, though there is also representation from educational and community organizations like Cornell Cooperative Extension Ulster County and Live Well Kingston.

### **UCFSAN Vision and Mission**

The vision of UCFSAN is to create resilience and strengthen support for feeding programs in Ulster County. UCFSAN will also be the leading repository for information and resources relevant to feeding programs across the county.

The mission of UCFSAN is to foster a close partnership between Ulster County feeding programs, government agencies, elected officials, and donors, to determine the most effective use of financial resources currently available, periodically track and catalog feeding program data and changing needs, and regularly evaluate opportunities to build a more robust and collaborative feeding program network into the future.

### **UCFSAN Governance and Decision-Making**

As needed, UCFSAN will apply a democratic decision-making process through voting during quarterly meetings, or voting through email to all feeding program contacts. Each feeding program will be entitled to one vote, regardless of the number of representatives it may have at the meeting or on the email distribution list.

Moreover, should a decision need to be made among the group, voting will be limited strictly to feeding programs and will not be extended to education and outreach programs that do not maintain a regular feeding program schedule.

## Determining Feeding Program Needs

In January of 2023, feeding program contacts across Ulster County were sent an online survey to determine (1) their interest in joining the county-wide network of feeding programs and (2) what kinds of challenges they regularly encounter in their work. The survey, coupled with UCFSAN meeting discussions, informs a list of needs of feeding programs.<sup>5</sup>

Twenty-two feeding programs responded to the survey<sup>6</sup>. Overall, programs reported that their programs are most often challenged with recruiting and maintaining enough volunteers (particularly multi-lingual volunteers) to operate, funding for infrastructure and facility improvements, and having enough vehicles or staff to complete trips to the Food Bank and retail food donors.

*Figure 1. February 2023 Feeding Program Needs Survey Results*

Stated Need	# Programs expressing need
Multilingual Volunteers or staff	12
Infrastructure or facility improvements (coolers, freezers, tables, shelving, storage)	13
Additional Volunteers or staff	12
Vehicles or staff to complete Food Bank runs	9
Resources to help clients navigate other benefit programs like SNAP or WIC	8
More variety in food or meal offerings	9
Vehicles or staff to transport groceries or meals to clients	7
Materials for food or meal packaging	6
Outreach support (social media, emails, newsletters, fundraising, etc)	6
Better relationships with local public school	6
Administrative support (budget management, client tracking, grant writing, etc)	4

### UCFSAN Needs Discussions

Feeding programs further discussed challenges during quarterly UCFSAN meetings. Respondents expanded on their survey responses, with much focus on the increase in overall need and the lack of support to meet that need, specifically for houseless populations across Ulster County placed in motels who do not have resources to refrigerate or prepare food.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendices A and B for UCFSAN needs survey development and full results.

<sup>6</sup> 30 programs or organizations in total responded to the survey, however only 21 of them provide food to community members in need on a regular basis. The remaining 9 respondents operate as food donors, outreach and education programs, or operate outside of Ulster County.

More broadly, feeding program representatives at UCFSAN meetings highlighted that funding restrictions often overlook program needs beyond providing food. For example, many available grants do not allow recipients to use the funds towards operations or building expenses, resulting in program budget shortfalls. Additionally, representatives noted that local available funding would be most helpful if it was accessible both to individual programs and as collaborative, group funding. Less restricted funding would better allow programs to work together to build emergency feeding support among and between programs.

## Variation in Emergency Feeding in Ulster County

In the initial feedback received by UCFSAN coupled with its work towards prioritization of needs, it became apparent that there was significant variation in how programs operate. To best understand the emergency feeding landscape in Ulster County, a program operations survey was conducted into the variability in program structures, resources, and services. Out of the approximately 50 feeding programs in the county, 23 programs responded with this information, representing programs of varying size, organization, and geographic location.<sup>7</sup>

This data provides valuable insights, confirming that feeding program operations differ across the County.

However, it is important to note its limitations as well. For example, without ascribing unique identifiers to each client that every program serves, and data sharing between multiple programs in an individual area, it is likely impossible to know if clients served by one feeding program are also being served by other feeding programs as well; therefore this data cannot accurately draw conclusions about the number of cases of people experiencing food insecurity in a particular locale.

Further, metrics related to emergency feeding are only representative of a particular moment in time, and are a direct reflection of local poverty factors, including reduction in available and affordable housing, inflation, and current wages. Feeding program activity can increase and decrease quickly and unexpectedly as poverty factors change, resulting in more or fewer client visits and increasing or decreasing need for program resources and volunteers.

Program operations survey questions for feeding programs were broken up into three types of questions:

- Clientele visit metrics

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<sup>7</sup> Some respondents operate multiple feeding programs within a single agency or organization and submitted data for each individual program. In these cases, program data was combined unless there were significant differences. For instance, Kingston Emergency Food Collaborative submitted separate client totals for their grocery program and their hot meals program. These totals were combined to represent the total number of clients served by Kingston Emergency Food Collaborative Program. Similarly, Community Action in Ellenville operated an outreach program, a farmstand program, and a mass distribution program (the program has closed its Ellenville farmstand and “free giveaway” days as of the publishing of this report). Data from the three programs was combined to represent the total number of clients served by Community Action in Ellenville. Ascension Holy Trinity Mission Center, however, operates two pantries at two separate locations: The Holy Trinity Food Pantry in Highland, and the Ascension Food Pantry in West Park. Leadership roles and decision-making structures are the same for both pantries, but the pantries differ in terms of geographic location of clients served, Food Bank membership, and volunteer force. For those specific questions, The Ascension Holy Trinity Mission Center is represented as two separate programs.

- Operations and staff makeup
- Organizational structure

### Clientele Visit Frequency and Makeup

Overall, a majority of the respondent feeding programs reported serving more clients between April-October of 2023 than the same 6-month period in 2022. The average number of clients served monthly differs between programs, with a majority serving between 1-200 clients on average per month. For more, see tables below.

*Figure 2. Reported Changes in Client Visits, April-October 2023*

	# Programs Reported	% Programs Reported
Increase in clients Apr-Oct 2023 from Apr-Oct 2022	16	73%
Decrease in clients Apr-Oct 2023 from Apr-Oct 2022	1	4.5%
About the same number of clients Apr-Oct 2023 from Apr-Oct 2022	5	18%
Data N/A	1	4.5%

*Figure 3. Reported Feeding Program Average Number of Clients Served per Month, April-October 2023*

Per Month Average, Apr-Oct 2023	# Programs Reported	% Programs Reported
0-100 Clients	8	35%
101-200 Clients	8	35%
201-300 Clients	3	13%
300+ Clients	4	17%

### Operations and Staff Makeup

One trend is present throughout nearly all respondent programs: feeding programs rely overwhelmingly on volunteers to operate, with 96% of program respondents indicating that their program depends completely or partially on volunteers. A majority of programs require between 1-20 volunteers to operate.

*Figure 4. Reported Feeding Program Volunteer Dependency*

	<b># Programs Reported</b>	<b>% Programs Reported</b>
Depend exclusively on volunteers	13	58%
Depend on a combination of volunteers and paid staff	9	38%
Depend on paid staff only	1	4%

*Figure 5. Reported Number of Volunteers Typically Utilized for Program Operations<sup>8</sup>*

<b>Number of Volunteers Utilized</b>	<b># Programs Reported</b>	<b>% Programs Reported</b>
1-20 Volunteers	12	57%
21-40 Volunteers	4	17%
41-60 volunteers	1	4%
60+	5	22%

Additionally, respondents reported volunteers are not simply responsible for distributing food; they have roles within every aspect of the operation. Based on program responses, roles were distributed into four categories: Transport-focused, program operations-focused, administrative-focused, and building operations-focused.

*Figure 6. Reported Feeding Program Current Volunteer Tasks*

<b>Categories of Volunteer Work Reported</b>	<b>Reported Tasks</b>
Transport-focused	Pick up food from Food Bank, local retailers, and refrigeration bots, deliver groceries or meals to clients
Program Operations-focused	Stock shelves, food preparation, cooking, baking, and cleanup, sort donations, greet customers, pack grocery bags, clean
Administrative-focused	Manage inventory records, client records, and donation records, schedule other volunteers, food and supplies ordering, complete grant applications, maintain social media, send thank-you notes
Building Operations-focused	Building maintenance, trash and recycling management

Regarding the need for additional volunteers, programs reported that they mainly needed more volunteers in the Transport and Operations Categories. Some programs reported needing additional volunteers across more than one category.

<sup>8</sup> One respondent program does not utilize volunteers and is not represented in volunteer-specific tables.

*Figure 7. Reported Additional Volunteers Needed per Task Categories*

<b>Additional Volunteer Needs</b>	<b># Programs Reported</b>
Transport-focused	11
Program Operations-focused	9
Administrative-focused	1
Building Operations-focused	0
Did not specify task need	1

Though all programs represented are feeding programs, many offer services in addition to distributing food and hygiene products. These services can include screening and enrolling clients in assistance programs, clothing giveaways, lifeline giveaways, case management, or other services.

*Figure 8. Programs Reporting Offering Additional Client Services*

<b>Availability of Additional Services</b>	<b># Programs Reported</b>	<b>% Programs Reported</b>
Program regularly offers additional services or giveaways	10	43%
Program will at times offer additional services or giveaways when there are opportunities or enough staff to do so	7	30%
Program does not offer additional services or giveaways	6	26%

Many feeding programs throughout Ulster County are members of the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York, which serves 23 counties in the state. The Regional Food Bank has a satellite warehouse in Cornwall, NY, which serves 6 counties in the Hudson Valley, including Ulster. Through Food Bank membership, feeding programs can take advantage of state and federal funds to purchase food from the Food Bank. Non-food financial support for feeding programs is also available through Food Bank membership.<sup>9</sup>

*Figure 9. Programs Reporting Food Bank Membership*

<b>Food Bank Membership</b>	<b># Programs Reported</b>	<b>% Programs Reported</b>
Food Bank member program	17	74%
Not a Food Bank member program	6	26%

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix C: Food Bank of Northeastern New York for more information on how the Food Bank receives and distributes food to feeding programs.

## Organizational Structure

The reporting sample of feeding programs illustrates variation in organizational type and structure, with a majority reporting as a church or religious organization, charitable organization, or other nonprofit.

*Figure 10. Reported Organizational Structure of Feeding Programs*

Organization Type	# Programs Reported	% Programs Reported
Church or Religious Organization	5	23%
Charitable Organization	7	32%
Other Non-Profit	8	36%
Other (Fiscally-sponsored community organization)	1	5%
Other (Hospital)	1	5%

Feeding programs' leadership and decision-making structures vary as well, though most operate with a Board of Directors or Advisors.

*Figure 11. Reported Decision-Making Structures of Feeding Programs*

Decision-making structure	# Programs Reported	% Programs Reported
Non-hierarchical or Collaborative Model	2	9%
Board of Directors or Advisors Model	18	77%
Singular Decision-Maker Model	3	14%

## **Building Resilience in Ulster County Emergency Feeding**

Balancing short-term hunger relief with long-term resilience in emergency feeding is an ongoing challenge. Historically, feeding programs in Ulster County and elsewhere have built a reputation of being resourceful and scrappy, relying on the dedication of volunteers and generosity of community members and food donors. To build a broader sense of consistency and financial stability for feeding programs, UCFSAN should work to address prevalent obstacles within emergency feeding.

### **Recommendations to Strengthen Network Resilience**

- Provide access to unrestricted and collaborative grant opportunities.
- Build solutions for the nearly universal need for volunteers, including working directly with volunteer recruitment organizations to create a steady volunteer force. Other future solutions could include a County-sponsored stipend program or other tangible incentives for volunteers.
- Develop long term transportation solutions for feeding programs' transport of food from Food Bank locations and retail donors.
- Coordinate routinely with Ulster County to identify funding opportunities to boost longevity of the emergency feeding network. This work would include maintaining relationships with feeding programs, keeping abreast of system changes, sharing opportunities for feeding programs, and assisting feeding programs with administrative concerns.
- Continue to map the Ulster County emergency feeding system, including common food purchasing and donation sources and storage/cold storage locations.

### **Recommendations to Reduce Food Insecurity in Ulster County**

Reducing food insecurity throughout Ulster County will require an in-depth and multi-dimensional approach to addressing systemic barriers. Looking ahead, UCFSAN must call upon the vast knowledge base within the community to develop solutions, and consider the following recommendations provided by Chelsea Villalba's 2022 *Addressing Food Insecurity in Ulster County* legislative report:

- Incorporate food insecure people in discussions about county goals and hunger prevention policies. This is crucial for equitable and just leadership.

- Ensure that all forms of communications from the county including printed materials and websites, contain information about food assistance programs and safety nets are accessible in intelligible Spanish, and organized in a way that easily engages the public in seeking help feeding their families.
- Ensure that public or low-cost transportation is fully accessible for people in low-income areas to travel to places where food is available for affordable purchase or gratuitous distribution.
- Incentivize retailers or business owners to sell healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate foods and accept food assistance programs in Low-Income, Low Access areas.
- Support the expansion of local farm-to-school and food pantry programs that feed and educate youth and marginalized communities on healthy nutrition habits and cooking.
- Enhance efforts to inform families living below or near the poverty line of opportunities to connect with food safety nets and other assistance, especially minority populations, seniors, and single mothers.
- Implement processes to support increased collaboration of organizations to expand outreach and marketing of assistance services and food safety network programs through public school engagement and at health checkpoints, and an up-to-date food referral system.

# Appendices

## Appendix A: UCFSAN Needs Survey, February 2023

### Survey Recipient Identification

The Farm to Food Pantry Collaborative<sup>10</sup> maintains an internal contact list of employees and volunteers from approximately 50 feeding programs and food pantries in Ulster County<sup>11</sup>. The internal contact list was utilized to determine recipients to distribute the survey to via email.

### Survey Development

The survey included the following questions:

1. Email (short answer response)
2. Name (short answer response)
3. Feeding program or organization (short answer response)
4. Would you be interested in representing your program or organization in a core Ulster County Food Security and Access (UCFSAN) group? This group will meet at least once quarterly (virtually or in-person) to discuss individual and regional emergency feeding program needs and possible solutions.
  - Yes
  - No
5. If you answered “no” to the question above, but you would like updates on our work, please indicate below.
  - I would like to receive quarterly update
  - Please do not send me a quarterly update
6. Does your feeding program or organization experience any of the following difficulties? Select all that apply:<sup>12</sup>
  - Need for additional volunteers or staff
  - Need for multilingual volunteers or staff
  - Need for better relationships with the local public school

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<sup>10</sup> For nearly 15 years, the Farm to Food Pantry Collaborative program has been working to redirect excess produce from local farms into the emergency food network in Ulster County. The program is a partnership between Family of Woodstock, Ulster Corps, and Rondout Valley Growers Association. Family of Woodstock provides administrative and logistical resources to move food from farms to emergency feeding programs, UlsterCorps recruits and coordinates volunteers for on-farm gleaning events, and Rondout Valley Growers Association provides a direct link to farmers in the region.

<sup>11</sup> Map can also be found here: [UCAT-Pantries-11x17-Sep2023.pdf \(ulstercorps.org\)](#)

<sup>12</sup> Questions were developed based on discussion points that feeding program managers and volunteers regularly share verbally with Farm to Food Pantry staff.

- Need for resources to help clients navigate other benefit programs like SNAP or WIC
  - Need for infrastructure or facility improvements like coolers, freezers, tables, shelving, storage
  - Need materials for food or meal packaging
  - Need vehicles or staff to transport groceries or meals to clients
  - Need vehicles or staff to complete Food Bank runs
  - Need for more variety in food or meal offerings
  - Need more administrative support (budget management, client tracking, grant writing, etc.)
  - Need outreach support (social media presence, emails, newsletters, fundraising, etc.)
7. Please feel free to list any other difficulties that your program experiences. This is a solution-based initiative, so don't hesitate to bring your program's challenges to the conversation. (long answer text)

### **Survey Distribution**

The survey was first distributed to 57 feeding program contacts on 1/25/2023. Recipients received an email reminder on 1/31/2023 to complete the survey. Recipients were encouraged to share the survey link with any other members of their feeding program organization who might be interested in providing feedback on program challenges.

### **Survey Response and Results**

36 individual recipients responded to the survey, representing 30 programs and organizations. Of the 30 programs, 22 are feeding programs located in Ulster County. The remaining 8 programs are either food donors, outreach and education programs, or located outside of Ulster County.

## Appendix B: UCFSAN Needs Survey Results, February 2023<sup>13</sup>

Need Expressed	# of programs expressed this need	Programs Reported
Multilingual Volunteers or staff	15	Seasoned Delicious Foods, ERHN, People's Place, Salvation Army, Phillis Bridge, Ascension Holy Trinity, Angel Food East, St Joseph's Church, Ulster CCE, FOE, FONP, St Charles Helping Hands, Loaves and Fishes FP, Plattekill FP, CCEd
Infrastructure or facility improvements (coolers, freezers, tables, shelving, storage)	15	Angel Food East, ERHN, Seasoned Delicious Foods, Salvation Army, Woodstock MOW, Phillis Bridge, Ascension Holy Trinity, People's Place, FONP, Rochester FP, Community Action, Loaves and Fishes, NP Food Recovery, CCEd, Reservoir FP
Additional Volunteers or staff	14	Seasoned Delicious Foods, ERHN, People's Place, Salvation Army, Phillis Bridge, Ascension Holy Trinity, Woodstock MOW, Angel Food East, FONP, Rochester FP, Community Action, NP Food Recovery, CCEd, Reservoir FP
Vehicles or staff to complete Food Bank runs	11	Seasoned Delicious Foods, ERHN, Salvation Army, Phillis Bridge, Ascension Holy Trinity, FONP, St Charles Helping Hands, Plattekill FP, CCEd, St Mary's & St Andrews FP, Reservoir FP
Resources to help clients navigate other benefit programs like SNAP or WIC	10	Seasoned Delicious Foods, ERHN, Phillis Bridge, Woodstock MOW, St Joseph's Church, Angel Food East, FOW Childcare Connections, Community Action, Plattekill FP, CCEd
More variety in food or meal offerings	10	Seasoned Delicious Foods, ERHN, People's Place, Salvation Army, FOE, FONP, Community Action, Plattekill FP, CCEd, Reservoir FP
Vehicles or staff to transport groceries or meals to clients	9	Seasoned Delicious Foods, ERHN, People's Place, Phillis Bridge, Ascension Holy Trinity, FOE, Plattekill FP, CCEd, Reservoir FP
Materials for food or meal packaging	7	Seasoned Delicious Foods, People's Place, Woodstock MOW, Ascension Holy Trinity, FONP, CCEd, Reservoir FP
Outreach support (social media, emails, newsletters, fundraising, etc)	7	Seasoned Delicious Foods, Ascension Holy Trinity, Woodstock MOW, FONP, St Charles Helping Hands, CCEd, Reservoir FP
Better relationships with local public school	6	ERHN, People's Place, Salvation Army, FOW Childcare Connections, FOE, CCEd
Administrative support (budget management, client tracking, grant writing, etc)	5	Seasoned Delicious Foods, Woodstock MOW, St Charles Helping Hands, CCEd, Reservoir FP

<sup>13</sup> Only programs or organizations that regularly provide food to community members in need are reflected in the table on page 5. This table is inclusive of all respondents.

Appendix B (Continued)

Long Answer Responses	Program Reported
Solely reliant on local donations, need grant writing support, price of packaging has become prohibitive, facility rent has gone up, need to raise money	Woodstock MOH
overall increased need for services, supplies and fresh food prices also going up	Angel Food East
Needs more fresh food during winter months	People's Place
More Muslim family clients lately, need for Halal foods	St Charles Helping Hands
Available volunteers are aging	Reservoir Food Pantry
Need more volunteers, multilingual volunteers, facility improvements, materials for packaging, vehicles to transport groceries, admin and outreach support	Second Chance Foods (not in Ulster)
Needs a long term location for pantry	Reservoir FP

**Acronyms**

CCEd - Center for Creative Education

ERHN - Ellenville Rural Health Network Pharmacy Program

FOE - Family of Ellenville

FONP - Family of New Paltz

FP - Food Pantry

Ulster CCE - Cornell Cooperative Extension Ulster County

Woodstock MOW - Woodstock area Meals on Wheels (not affiliated with national Meals on Wheels America group)

## Appendix C: Food Bank of Northeastern New York

The Food Bank acquires and distributes food through multiple channels:

**Co-op Buying Program:** Wholesale purchasing program for staple items that are not usually donated. Items are re-sold to member agencies.

**Salvage Program:** Food Bank volunteers sort and repackage dented cans, crushed boxes, and other cosmetically damaged food and grocery products, which are redistributed to member feeding programs.

**USDA Commodities Program:** Contract program between Food Bank and NYS to provide commodities to member feeding programs. Food is provided to the Food Bank through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) USDA program.

**Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP):** New York State program administered by the Food Bank. HPNAP provides funds for the Food Bank to supply food and operations support to member feeding programs.

The Food Bank also provides additional resources to feeding programs:

**Training Programs:** The Food Bank offers free seminars on nutrition, food safety, menu planning, and other topics for member agencies, and provides helpful tips and advice through its monthly publication, the Members Guide.

**BackPack Program:** the Backpack Program supplies partners with schools to provide chronically hungry children with food on Fridays so they have something nutritious to eat on weekends, when food is often not available at home

For more information, visit [Home - Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York](#).

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