



Resources and Action to Help Stop Summer Hunger

For families facing food insecurity, summer has long marked a time when kids no longer have easy access to meals at school. Many parents and caregivers struggle to fill this gap, making the summer months among the most challenging times of year to keep food on the table.

These challenges come as the Food Bank and our partner network brace for what may be our most difficult period in decades. **New research shows that nearly 174,000 school-age children and teens are now food insecure across central and eastern North Carolina — an increase of more than 39,000 over the prior year.**

The daunting figures quantify what many front-line organizations have long experienced in our communities: the combination of waning state and federal support as housing, food, and other essential costs rise has worsened the hunger crisis. As a result, demand for food assistance is as high as it's been since the Great Recession, and the gap widens when school meals are no longer accessible.

Fortunately, our network of 700+ local organizations is moving mountains to ensure nutritious food reaches affected families throughout the region. Together we offer a host of additional programs to help fill the meal gap when schools are closed. And there are concrete ways to help our network ramp up efforts to connect kids with essential resources while school is out.

See page 4 for resources and opportunities to help **#StopSummerHunger**.

Our Stop Summer Hunger efforts are made possible by:



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A Worsening Hunger Crisis

When our national network released its annual update on hunger prevalence recently, many observers in the media and even government were surprised. But for those of us on the front lines, the fact that **1 in 7 people are struggling with food insecurity** has been our reality for quite some time. No-cost markets, pantries, and meal sites across the 34 counties we serve have long reported increasing demand. Many see more families today than they did at the peak of the pandemic. The data, it turns out, is just catching up.

Some leaders have asked how this could be possible — and I get it. By a host of measures, our economy has recovered from the pandemic’s impacts; employment is rising; profits and productivity are up in most sectors.

But the reality is that **far too many people who are working, sometimes two or three jobs, can’t make ends meet**. Housing, healthcare and other essential resources are getting more expensive, and the state and federal support that kept families afloat during the pandemic is now drying up. Add in the challenges facing seniors with fixed incomes, along with the summer loss of school-provided meals for thousands of kids, and the result is near-unprecedented hunger in North Carolina and beyond.

The Food Bank is the central hub of a strong and resilient network — and **we’re doing all we can to keep food flowing to people and communities who need it most**. But if the pandemic taught us anything, it’s that it takes a sustained effort at all levels to meet a major crisis head-on. Our experience — and now the data — tells us that hunger has absolutely reached crisis levels.

So if you’re able, now is the time to dig deeper. Donate time or funds. Share information with neighbors. Advocate for the investments and changes we need to prevent this hunger crisis from getting worse. Because there’s nothing this community can’t overcome when we work together.

Anne H. Lloyd
Board Chair



New Data Shows Many More People Face Food Insecurity in our Region

Feeding America’s annual Map the Meal Gap study reveals that food insecurity has reached its highest level in more than 15 years. **Compared to the prior year, 111,000 additional people are now food insecure — and the challenges are even deeper in Black and Hispanic/Latine communities that have faced barriers for generations.**

The analysis underscores the serious impact of waning state and federal support as costs for essential resources rise. From significant investments in emergency food purchases, to direct support for affected families, nearly all of our government’s most effective anti-hunger initiatives have expired without serious consideration of renewal. As a result, **far too many people across our region are now unsure where their next meal might come from.** And for the 560,000 neighbors who are struggling to make ends meet, action from our elected leaders can’t come soon enough.

Find details and take action at FoodBankCENC.org/24FoodInsecurity



Produce Partnerships Reach Major Milestone with Publix

Our longtime friends at *Publix* reached an incredible milestone recently — donating enough fresh fruit and vegetables to support more than 83.3 million meals (100 million pounds!) across Feeding America food banks nationwide.

What began as a pandemic-era food purchase and donation program to support struggling farmers has since grown into a long-term commitment to address hunger through regional partnerships with food assistance organizations. Together, we connect pantries, no-cost markets and meal sites with surplus food from nearby Publix stores — bringing in the equivalent of 2.7+ million meals for local families so far.

Among the partners helping to make this incredible effort possible is *Wish Farms*, who have donated truckloads full of fresh berries in recent years. Volunteers from both companies came together this Spring to staff a large Pop Up Market in Zebulon — anchored by a major donation from Wish Farms and a new, state-of-the-art Food Bank truck provided by Publix. More than 700 people attended the market in a single day!

Learn more about the impact of food industry partnerships at FoodBankCENC.org/WishFarms

Celebrating Community Leadership and Impact in Wilmington

Community leaders recently gathered at the Food Bank’s Wilmington Branch to mark the one-year anniversary of our nCino Hunger Solutions Center. Opened in 2023 after a community-led fundraising campaign, **our team has already distributed more than 8.7 million meals to organizations across Brunswick, Columbus, Duplin, New Hanover and Pender counties in the center’s first year.**



In addition to the anniversary, area leaders celebrated important milestones for the Food Bank’s groundbreaking Commercial Kitchen. Now fully equipped thanks to our partners at *Food Lion Feeds*, our team can produce 5,000+ fully prepped, ready-to-heat meals on a daily basis that are available year-round to local families, especially in response to natural disasters. And we’re able to train students from Cape Fear Community College on culinary fundamentals along the way — offering the real-life experience needed to work in restaurant or commercial kitchen settings.

Rounding out the services offered in Wilmington is the newly opened no-cost *Market on Greenfield*. Launched with the support of residents who faced challenges accessing food following the loss of the neighborhood’s only grocery store, **the Market offers fresh fruits, vegetables, pantry staples, and meal kits — all within walking distance.** Since opening, Market staff and volunteers have provided enough food to fuel more than 15,000 meals at no cost to community members!

Join our efforts to end hunger in Wilmington and beyond at FoodBankCENC.org/Wilmington

Visit StopSummerHunger.org for...

STOP
SUMMER
HUNGER
2024

...Resources for Families while School is Out

- *The Summer Food Service Program*: Free meals, snacks, and activities for kids and teens at local community centers, faith organizations, and summer camps.
- *NCDHHS.gov/SUNBucks*: Extra grocery money for families while school is closed. Funds are deposited on easy-to-use debit cards that are accepted at many local retailers. Available to most families with children eligible for reduced-cost school meal programs, Medicaid, or Food & Nutrition Services (SNAP).
- *No-cost Pop Up Markets*: Working with local governments and nonprofit organizations, we bring seasonal produce, pantry staples, and other items directly to communities.
- *FoodBankCENC.org/FoodFinder*: Our network of 700+ pantries, no-cost markets, and meal sites also ramp up operations when hunger is at its worst. Use this tool to find a location near you.

...Opportunities to Make A Difference

- *Donate to Stop Summer Hunger*: Return the enclosed envelope or give online at StopSummerHunger.org. All donations will be matched through July 31, so every dollar translates to 10 meals!
- *Volunteer at a Local Food Distribution Center*: In the average volunteer shift, a single person will sort and pack enough food to fuel more than 160 meals for local families!
- *Spread the Word About Available Resources*: We all have someone in our lives who's been touched by food insecurity. Share StopSummerHunger.org resources with your friends, family, and social networks!

Addressing Hunger at Its Roots

All of us at the Food Bank are working toward a future where no one goes hungry. And we know we can't reach it through food assistance alone — **we have to take action to prevent hunger from happening in the first place.**

Hunger is so much more than a single empty stomach or individual experience. It's a community-wide symptom of not having enough — whether that's enough nutritious food, enough income, or enough voice in the decisions that impact us. It's a symptom of barriers to employment, education, housing, and healthcare.

That's why we're committed to the kind of change that's needed to eliminate these barriers and reduce inequities in communities across our Food Bank Network. We can all agree that no one should go hungry — no matter where we live, where we're from, or the color of our skin. And together, we can fulfill this commitment and win the fight to end hunger for good!

Read more about our commitment and get involved at FoodBankCENC.org/Equity

