

OPERATION FOOD SECURE

Hunger and Food Insecurity in 2020

With the onset of the coronavirus pandemic and economic crisis, Americans are facing a staggering increase in hunger and food insecurity¹. Millions are facing unemployment and furloughs, as well as the loss of life and livelihoods. Fear and hopelessness have risen dramatically for those who were struggling before the pandemic. According to Census survey data, over 65% of Americans who earn less than \$25,000 a year are currently unemployed.² Furthermore, grocery store prices have surged, particularly impacting those who depend on a fixed income such as individuals who are retired or disabled.³ In addition to these factors, many parts of our region were already facing barriers to food access like pervasive food deserts, food cost disparities, and transportation challenges.

About Operation Food Secure

Operation Food Secure is designed to address hunger and food insecurity in Northeast Kansas. Recognizing that we can go farther together, OFS built a network of over 70 churches, nonprofits, tribes, and neighborhood improvement associations to distribute boxes of fresh produce, cheese, and dairy products from the USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program. Though it is the shortest leg of the supply chain, “the last mile” is often where hungry individuals fall through the cracks. OFS is filling the gap by utilizing a network of volunteer Site Captains to deliver food boxes to hungry people in their own neighborhood. The OFS team has come to find that these food boxes provide much more than food. They have come to serve as a vehicle to strengthen and stabilize the community, build new relationships among neighbors, and sow seeds of hope amidst the storm of this pandemic.

About the Farmers to Families Food Box Program

OFS food boxes come from the USDA Farmers to Families Food Box program, created as a part of the federal government’s response to the coronavirus crisis. The program purchases surplus food products from farmers and redistributes it to community organizations, such as the Topeka Rescue Mission. The program, authorized and funded by the CARES Act, purchases food that would otherwise be wasted and redistributes it to nonprofits providing hunger relief. As of August 24, 70 million food boxes were distributed across the country through the Farmers to Families Food Box Program.⁴

By the Numbers

Over **thirteen weeks**, OFS has distributed **580,297 pounds of food**, the equivalent of **866,115 meals**.⁵ to Northeast Kansas.

- **22,150 food boxes** (produce, dairy products, cheese)
- **4,963 gallons of milk**

OFS began distribution the week of **May 25** with **381 food boxes** and **90 gallons of milk**. The week of August 1, OFS distributed **2,687 food boxes** and **595 gallons of milk**. This averages a **23% week over week growth rate**.

Just on the morning of August 25 (before the press conference), OFS distributed 1,316 food boxes and 210 gallons of milk.

OFS has partnered with over **70 organizations** to make this effort possible. The Topeka Rescue Mission employs **16 volunteers** each week to fulfill food box orders for site captains.

¹ **Hunger**—an individual-level physiological condition that may result from food insecurity; **Food insecurity**—the condition assessed in the food security survey and represented in USDA food security reports—is a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food. **National Research Council Committee on National Statistics.** <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security/cnstat-assessment/> ² ‘Oil on the inequality fire’: How slashing jobless aid could widen the wealth gap <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/23/unemployment-aid-inequality-gap-coronavirus-380779> ³ Pandemic grocery prices shot up like a rocket and fell like a feather, even after supplies recovered <https://www.nbcnews.com/business/consumer/pandemic-grocery-prices-shot-rocket-fell-feather-even-after-supplies-recovered-n1236155> ⁴ The Farmers to Families Food Box Program boosts economy <https://www.fayobserver.com/story/opinion/columns/quest/2020/08/24/ivanka-trump-farmers-families-food-box-program-boosts-economy/3430935001> ⁵ Meals are calculated as .67 pounds of food, based off food service figures from Topeka Rescue Mission feeding programs.

Partners

Organizational Partners

- City of Topeka
- United Way of Greater Topeka
- Harvesters

In-Kind Partners

- Mars
- Reser's Fine Foods
- US Foods
- Shawnee County Extension Office
- Aubrey Swanson

Farmers to Families Food Box Partners

- C&C Produce
- Citygate Network
- CityServe
- Liberty Fruit Company
- USDA Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement
- World Vision

Site Partners

Anchor Church
Boys and Girls Club of Topeka
Boys and Girls Club of Lawrence
Bread of Life
Central Park Christian Church
Church of God Fellowship
Citizen Potawatomi Nation
City Life
Coachlight Mobile Home Communities
Community Action
Cowboy Church
Cross Road Community Church
East Topeka Senior Center
First Baptist Church of Silver Lake
Grace Point Church
Hospitality Incubator Program (HIP Program)
JayHawk Area Agency on Aging

- Century Plaza Retirement Center
- Cottages of Topeka Apartments
- Jefferson Street Apartments
- Luther Place Apartment Homes
- Mission Towers Apartment
- Shorey Villa Retirement Home

Kansas Avenue United Methodist Church
Kansas Children's Service League
Let's Help
Lighthouse Bible Church

Likins Foster Neighborhood Improvement Association
LULAC Senior Center
Maple Hill Community Congregational Church
Mayetta United Methodist Church
Mickey Moore
Morris County Care & Share

- Alta Vista Christian Church
- Community Christian Church
- Council Grove Christian Church
- Council Grove Senior Citizen Center
- Council Grove United Methodist Church
- Flint Hills Apostle Church
- Wilsey Christian Church

Mount Carmel Missionary Baptist Church
Oakland United Methodist Church
Seaman Community Church
Silver Lake United Methodist Church
Second Baptist Church
Topeka North Outreach
Topeka City Union Mission
Topeka Family Friends Juneteenth
Topeka Housing Authority
Topeka Rescue Mission-Street Reach
Valeo
Valley Falls Fire Department