

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Delayed SNAP Benefits Cause Significant Increases in Demand at Area Food Pantries

MADISON — Six of Dane County's largest food pantries are already seeing the impacts of SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) delays. SNAP, known as FoodShare in Wisconsin, provided benefits to nearly 65,000 people in Dane County in 2024. As America's most extensive anti-hunger program, it gives out monthly government benefits to low-income households to help them purchase food. Even before SNAP benefits lapsed over the past weekend due to the federal government shutdown, many area food pantries began seeing increases as people turned to them to fill anticipated gaps. This comes on top of significant increases in demand that Dane County food pantries have already experienced over the last several years.

"The disruption to the SNAP program is already creating additional pressure as we enter our busiest time of year," reports Rhonda Adams, Executive Director of The River Food Pantry. "The River provided nearly 500 grocery orders and over 900 take-home meals in a single day last week, even before benefits were delayed. That is our busiest day ever outside of a holiday week. We are bracing for a surge in need, both among current clients and families who have not been visiting a pantry. I spoke to people waiting for their groceries last week, and most worried about how they will replace the meals that FoodShare covered, even with the support available from local pantries."

Other food pantries are also seeing significant increases in visitors. "Last Tuesday, we saw our highest number of customers ever in our food pantry," said Goodman Community Center's Director of Food Resources, Francesca Frisque. "This included a large number of new shoppers who had never visited our pantry before. The rest of the week continued to be high, and we anticipate more this week."

Food pantries are bracing for hard weeks ahead. Yesterday in response to a federal judge's order to release a contingency fund, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced that this contingency fund would only cover \$4.6 billion of November's SNAP benefits, roughly half of

what is typically distributed. No timeline was provided to when people would receive these benefits.

Despite these challenges, Dane County food pantries want to emphasize to community members impacted by the delay and partial payment of FoodShare benefits that they are prepared to do everything possible to ensure continued access to basic food. They are seeing firsthand the strain that the delay in benefits, along with the disruption and confusion from constantly changing information, is putting on families.

“People are worried. We’re hearing concern from both those who need help and those eager to offer it,” said Ann Maastricht, Executive Director of Sunshine Place. “Sunshine Place and our partner pantries across Dane County have food and support available, and together with community support, we are making sure everyone who needs help can get it.”

For now, food pantries are filling a critical gap. Although they can do this for a short time, food pantries can’t be the permanent solution. “Food pantries and SNAP are intended to work together to combat food insecurity,” said Chris Kane, Senior Director of Client Services at St. Vincent de Paul — Madison. “Food pantries cannot replace SNAP. According to Feeding America, for every one meal provided by food pantries, the SNAP program provides nine meals. That is too large a gap for the charitable sector to replace.”

Community members can give now to their local food pantry to make sure pantries continue to have food to meet the surge in demand. Even after the SNAP crisis ends, community support will still be important as we head into the holiday season. “Crisis or not, hunger doesn’t take a break,” said Marcia Kasieta, Business and Development Director at Badger Prairie Needs Network. “Even when SNAP funding begins to return, record-setting need will continue. And with more federal cuts on the horizon, even more vulnerable families will be affected. Dane County has one of the most organized and collaborative food pantry networks in the country — but we rely on the strength and generosity of our wider community to help lift our neighbors through tough times.”

Cash donations enable pantries to target their buying to the most-needed items and to purchase in bulk at lower prices than retail. Most pantries also accept donations of nonperishable food. Check your local food pantry’s website for more details about giving or to see information about volunteer needs they may have.

“WayForward Resources and other local pantries have already seen an incredible response from the community,” said Ellen Carlson, Executive Director of WayForward Resources. “Thank you. We appreciate the monetary and food donations, the offers to volunteer and the concern and support that have all come our way. It is essential. Please continue to partner with us during the delay and reduction in SNAP benefits—and into the future so that we can build a strong community together.”

About the Food Pantries:

About Badger Prairie Needs Network

Founded in 1986, Badger Prairie Needs Network (BPNN) is a volunteer-powered 501(c)(3) nonprofit working to end hunger and reduce poverty in Dane County. In addition to operating one of the region's most collaborative food pantry and food recovery programs, BPNN offers a range of wrap-around community services including pro bono legal assistance, onsite social workers through Joining Forces for Families, a commercial kitchen, community meals, and job-training programs in partnership with the Latino Academy of Workforce Development. Demand for food assistance continues to reach historic levels. In 2025, BPNN is on pace to support more than 95,000 neighbors — nearly triple pre-pandemic levels. Learn more at bpnn.org.

About the Fritz Food Pantry at Goodman Community Center

Located on Madison's east side, the Goodman Community Center strengthens lives and secures futures, through programs focusing on food security, older adults, children ages 3–19, and building community. The Fritz Food Pantry at the Goodman Community Center provides groceries for more than 350 households every week. We believe everyone should have access to a variety of healthy, fresh foods, regardless of their income level, and we're proud to provide this valuable service to anyone in our community who needs it. The pantry is open three days a week and all are welcome. No pre-registration is required.

About The River Food Pantry

The River is South Central Wisconsin's busiest food pantry. Services include free groceries for pickup or delivery, to-go meals, online grocery orders, mobile meals, and after-hours food lockers. The River also recovers food and resources—that would otherwise go to waste—from local retailers. Since 2006, The River has grown to serve over 3,500 people every week in pursuit of its vision: *a fully nourished community*. Learn more at www.riverfoodpantry.org.

About St. Vincent de Paul — Madison

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul — Madison is a membership organization dedicated to helping our neighbors in need. They offer services such as food, prescription medicine, clothing, furniture, household goods, storage lockers and guidance to neighbors in need. Seven St. Vinny's Thrift Stores across Dane County help fund these services and provide direct charity through a furniture, household goods and clothing voucher program. St. Vincent de Paul — Madison is currently accepting new volunteers during their "Volunteers Are Magic" drive with Magic98. Please visit <https://svdpmadison.org/event/magic98-volunteer-drive/> to learn more.

About Sunshine Place

Located in Sun Prairie, Sunshine Place is a community resource serving Dane County and surrounding areas. The nonprofit provides a one-stop shop for support, offering its own programs focused on food, housing, and basic needs, alongside co-located partner agencies that provide additional wraparound services. The largest of Sunshine Place's programs is the Sun Prairie Food Pantry, a full-choice pantry open six days per week and serving households across Dane County and beyond. The pantry also provides community-based food distribution to children in Sun Prairie and nearby communities through neighborhood and school partnerships. Learn more at <https://sunshineplace.org>.

About WayForward Resources

WayForward Resources focuses on creating food security and housing stability. Located in Middleton, their food pantry and clothing center are open five days a week to anyone in Dane County. WayForward's housing stability programs provide case management, referrals, and financial assistance to community members living in the Middleton-Cross Plains School District and part of the west side of Madison. Learn more at wayforwardresources.org.

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