

Iowa Food Bank Association Casts Wide Net to Fulfill Mission

by Diane DeBok, INRC Editor & Content Manager

Even though many indicators suggest the economy is improving, the percentage of food insecurity has increased. Iowa remains below the national average, yet the percentage of food insecurity in the state is greater than it was ten years ago according to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) report released in September 2014.

In the USDA's 2001-2003 survey, food insecurity was at 9.5 percent. The 2008-2010 survey revealed 12.1 percent food insecurity. The most recent survey, which covered 2011-2013, showed a small decline to 11.9 percent.

To learn about hunger and the issues intertwined with it, the Iowa Food Bank Association (IFBA) is a good place to start. IFBA State Director Cory Berkunes closely follows the many factors relating to hunger and continually seeks solutions and support for food insecure Iowans.

Berkunes attributes the gap between the recent food insecurity figures and those of ten years ago, in part, to the lingering effects of the 2008 recession.

"In so many families, someone lost work, then, if they found something else, it paid less. You can't improve your situation over night," he says.

As the Iowa Legislature reaches the final weeks of its session, Berkunes and others concerned with hunger, are keeping an eye on two bills. One is the State Food Purchase Program Appropriation (HF95, SF338) which would continue the appropriation of \$1 million of state money to match \$1 million from private donations to food banks. Language regarding matching is the same as for the current appropriation. The bill remains at a standstill while the state budget is being negotiated. If passed, the program would once again be a one-year appropriation.

The other bill is Sales Tax Exemption for Food Banks (SF136). By allowing tax exemption, this bill would enable food banks to direct more funds to food distribution, mobile food pantries, backpack programs, and similar projects. Last year the bill passed the Senate, but the House didn't get to it before the General Assembly adjourned. Supporters are optimistic that the bill will be passed this year.

An existing piece of legislation, which supporters hope will gain traction, is the Farm to Food Bank

Donation Tax Credit. Eggs, meat, and other fresh produce grown by individual taxpayers, partnerships, and groups as specified in the law, may donate produce to a certified food bank.

The tax credit is equal to 15 percent of the value of the food commodities donated or \$5,000, whichever is less. (See the related article on page 1.) To receive the donations, food organizations must register with the Department of Revenue (DOR). Qualified food donors were able to receive the tax credit on their 2014 returns.

Recently, the IFBA received a Solid Waste Alternatives Program (SWAP) grant from the Iowa Department of Natural

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Resources. The grant money will be distributed among several food pantries and, according to Berkunes, will pay for the installation of 25 to 30 coolers which will increase storage capacity for fresh produce.

Support and resources to meet hunger needs come from many directions.

Says Berkunes, "It takes everybody to address hunger."

The eight Feeding America food banks in Iowa formed the IFBA in 2009 and by doing so, strengthened its collaborative efforts and gave Iowa food banks a stronger voice. The executive directors of the eight food banks make up the IFBA board of directors. They hired their first state director in 2010. Cory Berkunes took the position in January 2013. The organization serves all 99 counties in Iowa.



Learn more about the Iowa Food Bank Association at <http://www.iowafba.org/>