

Q&A

Food pantry demand jumps during COVID

By Gene Lucht

Iowa Farmer Today

Angela Wright is executive director of Worth County Community of Promise, which includes the Northwood Community Center and the Worth County Community Pantry in Northwood.

IFT: Tell us a little bit about Worth County Community of Promise?

WRIGHT: We are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. The community center provides a place for enrichment classes. It is a place for kids to come after school. It is used for educational programs. Unfortunately, because of COVID we were not able to do some of those things in the past year and a half. We did just install a multi-level indoor playground, and we are just finishing work on that so we hope to be able to open that to the public soon.

The food pantry has been very much needed. We opened the permanent on-site pantry in 2018. We gave it a lot of thought because there was another pantry in the county, so we weren't sure if it



Angela Wright

was needed. The schools also have a program. Most people just don't realize that so many people need assistance, even in a small town.

IFT: Did demand for your food pantry increase with COVID?

WRIGHT: When COVID started we had a huge jump in the number of people needing assistance with food. From 2019 to 2020, our demand went up 132%. We are down a little from that peak, but we are still about 70% above where we were before COVID.

IFT: What kind of schedule do you have there?

WRIGHT: We are all volunteers, including myself. I work 40 hours a week for free. We have a very dedicated board. With COVID, we were open two days a week for two hours each time. The first Tuesday of the month we have a mobile pantry, which is

very popular. We used to do a free meal with that before COVID. With the regular pantry you get choices, but with the mobile one you don't.

IFT: How did you meet the increased demand in the past two years?

WRIGHT: We have been very blessed. We have several businesses and individuals who have stepped up. We worked with local farmers to try to bring in food. We really tried every avenue to get what we needed. We always push very hard to get fresh fruit and protein. We bought new refrigerators and freezers to help with that. Those fresh fruits and vegetables are very important. We serve a lot of seniors or families with small children and some of them have health issues. They need good nutrition. Dia-

betes, for example, is a problem.

IFT: What do you tell people in need?

WRIGHT: We encourage people to continue to come back if you are low-income. We can't fix your car or help with some other things, but we can help with your food bill. There is help. We have done deliveries for some people during COVID. There is help.

IFT: What do you tell those who want to help?

WRIGHT: Our biggest need is always volunteers. If you have time, please help out. For those who want to help in other ways, they can donate food, but cash is

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probably the best thing to give. With that we can fill the gaps of things we need and we can buy food at discounts. Cash is efficient. Five dollars can buy a case of food. We go through 6,000 to 7,000 pounds of food a month. We serve 500 to 700 people a month. All of that

requires time and money.

IFT: Have you seen any issues related to logistics or supply chains this fall?

WRIGHT: We buy some things at grocery stores, and there have been some odd shortages, just odd stuff. Saltine crackers were impossible to find, for example.

IFT: Are the holidays a challenging time?

WRIGHT: Yes. I don't know how much is the holidays and how much is winter and higher heating bills, but the holidays can be tough. We have plenty of demand. Also, the end of the school year can be a tough time. I don't know whether it is related to school lunches or people who see less income after the school year ends, but June is a peak time for us.

Vilsack praises broadband, climate measures in infrastructure bill

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack released the following statement following passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act by the U.S. Congress.

“This is a transformative, historic investment for America. ... As we make significant progress in closing the digital divide and delivering 21st century broadband, farmers will have access to real-time information and new technologies needed to maintain their competitive edge, small businesses will be able to develop their markets, and rural communities can become better connected to jobs, telemedicine, and distance learning.

“As we repair crumbling roads and bridges and make much-needed investments in our ports, waterways, and rail transit, we will connect agriculture and rural communities to more markets and more economic opportunity. Upgraded power infrastructure, environmental remediation, and clean and safe drinking water will power and revitalize communi-

ties historically left behind.

“As we invest in green infrastructure, we will preserve our lands and natural resources and the outdoor recreation opportunities they provide for so many Americans. At the same time, we will respond to the climate crisis by increasing community resiliency and conducting critical work on our farms and in our forests to mitigate wildfires, support farmers and ranchers grappling with drought, and improve watersheds and water supply in the West.

“This is a tremendous opportunity to build up rural America with wealth that stays in rural communities, jobs you can raise a middle-class family on, and the ability to compete around the world. I'm thankful to those in Congress who drove this bipartisan legislation over the finish line, and to President Biden for his leadership for America's working families. Now, let's get to work and see to it that the benefits of modern infrastructure reach every corner of country.”

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