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## BackPack Program Expands to Reach More Students in Forest County

**ERIE, Pa., February 4** --- Erie, PA – The Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest Pennsylvania serves 167,700 food insecure individuals a year. An unfortunate reality is that 29% of these individuals (48,633) are children under the age of 18. Many hungry children rely on school resources such as free or reduced-priced school breakfast and lunch to meet their hunger needs, and these children face unique challenges when they are sent home for the weekend or holiday breaks.

Students in Forest County will have additional resources to help tide them over their weekends, as Second Harvest has announced an expansion of the BackPack program to East Forest Elementary School. Funded by a grant from PNC bank, the first distribution will occur this Friday, February 5<sup>th</sup>, and provide backpacks of food for up to 72 students.

“PNC is proud to support families and children that are in need in our communities,” said Jim Stevenson, regional president of PNC Bank. “We want to see students excel in their education, and they certainly can’t do that if they are hungry and they are worried about their next meal.”

“We know that 56% of students in East Forest County are eligible to receive free or reduced lunches,” said Karen Seggi, executive director of Second Harvest. “We want to make sure every child has enough food so that hunger is not a distraction to them, and the BackPack Program helps us address their needs.”

The BackPack Program provides children in poverty with nutritious, child-friendly food necessary for overall growth, physical and cognitive development when other resources, such as school lunches and after-school meals or snacks, are not available. Eligible students who sign up for the BackPack Program will receive enough food for two breakfasts, two lunches, two dinners and two snacks. A donation of \$136 sponsors a BackPack for a child for one academic year.

Second Harvest operates 30 of the more than 2,200 BackPack sites throughout the United States. In the 2015-2016 academic year, Second Harvest will distribute weekend backpacks to 1,928 children within eight school districts in five counties of northwest Pennsylvania. In total, Second Harvest anticipates distributing nearly 65,000 backpacks in the 2015-2016 academic year.

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***About the Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest Pennsylvania***

The mission of the Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest Pennsylvania is to provide food to those in need within 11 counties of northwest Pennsylvania while creating awareness and educating the community on the realities of hunger. Last year, Second Harvest distributed nearly 13 million pounds of food to 298 member agencies, 144 distribution sites for the Commodity Supplemental Food Program for low-income seniors.

Second Harvest serves the following 11 counties in northwest Pennsylvania:

Cameron, Clarion, Clearfield, Crawford, Elk, Erie, Forest, Jefferson, McKean, Venango and Warren.