



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **A Message from Second Harvest CEO Karen Seggi Regarding its COVID-19 Response**

**Erie, Pa., March 17, 2020** – The Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest Pennsylvania is working to maintain a high level of food relief service across our 11 county network. As we do this, our main priority is to employ steps that keep our clients, volunteers, donors and staff safe from the spread of COVID-19 (Coronavirus).

A COVID-19 planning committee consisting of leadership from across the Second Harvest organization meets daily to develop action plans to make progress in each department. Second Harvest is committed to sharing those efforts and will continue to provide information regarding all areas of the organization through a variety of communication channels including website updates, email correspondence, social media posts and media releases.

Second Harvest continues to rely on information gathered from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Pennsylvania Department of Health for recommendations to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Daily conference calls are being held with Feeding Pennsylvania, Hunger Free Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and other government officials to share situation updates. We also are working through our network of Feeding America colleagues from 200 food banks across the country to stay on top of developments and measures at the national level.

Based on the guidance we continue to receive, and an abundance of caution, Second Harvest is taking actions on the following items for the foreseeable future:

### **Clients / Community Members in Need of Food**

- Second Harvest understands that there are currently 91,490 individuals in the 11 counties of northwest Pennsylvania – of which, 28,340 are children under the age of 18 – who are considered food insecure. Of those individuals, 39,000 reside in Erie County. We anticipate this number to rise as the COVID-19 crisis deepens. If you or someone you know is in need of food, we encourage you to please use the agency locator online at [www.nwpafoodbank.org/need-help/agency-locator/](http://www.nwpafoodbank.org/need-help/agency-locator/) or call our food line at 814 459 3663 x 117.

### **Programs and Community Partnerships – Food Pantries / Soup Kitchens / Homeless Shelters**

- Agencies are being encouraged to order additional food to provide to their clients at their distributions.

- Safety communications are being shared across our member agencies and programs with distribution recommendations to limit the spread of COVID-19.

### **Produce Express Mobile Food Distributions / Military Share – a Produce Express Program Mobile Food Distributions**

- Mobile Food Pantry distributions are being modified to closely follow social distancing recommendations offered by the CDC. In some instances, this may lead to the temporary suspension of a mobile distribution. Second Harvest continues to work on contingencies for those individuals affected by the temporary halting of a local food distribution.
- Cancellations will be shared online at [www.nwpafoodbank.org/COVID-19](http://www.nwpafoodbank.org/COVID-19).

### **Child Feeding Programs – Including the Backpack Program and School Pantry Program**

- The Second Harvest program manager and coordinator are working with school districts in our service area to continue the Backpack and School Pantry programs while schools are no longer in session.

### **Senior Box Program**

- Senior boxes continue to be delivered to recipients.

### **Volunteer Operations**

- Volunteers are needed to help pack food boxes, which will be our priority over the next few weeks.
- Volunteer operations are being modified to ensure safe social distancing. The emphasis on extra health and safety measures requires limiting the number of volunteers per shift as well as instituting new project guidelines, including the use of disposable protective gloves.
- If you are healthy and under the age of 60, please consider volunteering at Second Harvest. Children between the age of 10 and 17 must be accompanied by an adult.

### **Community Need / Donors / Events**

- Second Harvest is discouraging the community from conducting food drives. Instead, donors are being asked to conduct virtual food drives or send a monetary contribution to keep our shelves filled in the next couple of weeks.
- The Empty Bowls fundraiser, scheduled for March 28<sup>th</sup>, is postponed until a later date to be determined.

Second Harvest asks for continued community support as we amplify our efforts in northwest Pennsylvania. We play a central and vital role in food distribution but require the assistance of donors and volunteers to provide these services. We are grateful for the community support that is received.

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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 9.6 million meals through an anti-hunger network of 399 partner organizations. Second Harvest serves the following 11 counties in northwest Pennsylvania: Cameron, Clarion, Clearfield, Crawford, Elk, Erie, Forest, Jefferson, McKean, Venango and Warren.