

*Oregon growers donate nearly 800,000 pounds of food products to Food Bank in 2007*

## **Farmers Ending Hunger begin a new year of donations**

**April 9, 2008...** The productivity and generosity of Oregon farmers is putting food on the plate for many of the state's most hungry citizens. Nearly 800,000 pounds of food from the harvest of producers around the state was donated to Oregon Food Bank and its network of providers in 2007, all from an organized group calling itself Farmers Ending Hunger. This year's goal is to approach two million pounds of food donations with new commitments from the wheat and livestock sectors.

"The U.S. Department of Agriculture used to contribute as much as 50 percent of the food donated to the Oregon Food Bank Network, now that has dropped to about 10 percent," says John Burt, executive director of Farmers Ending Hunger. "Now it's up to the food industry and agriculture to make up the difference. What we are all about is providing fresh, high quality local food products right out of harvest. It often doesn't need processing and can come directly into the warehouse."

Since the initial delivery of 173,000 pounds of frozen peas in November 2006, Farmers Ending Hunger followed up with an impressive list of donations to Oregon Food Bank last year. That includes 405,000 pounds of potatoes, 158,000 pounds of onions, 93,000 pounds of wheat for pancake mix, 84,000 pounds of dried peas for soup mix, and 28,000 pounds of carrots.

Just three years ago, Oregon actually ranked number one in a USDA survey on food insecurity. While Oregon has improved to number 22, there are still an estimated 192,000 Oregonians who eat meals from an emergency food box each month.

"The Oregon Food Bank Network distributes about 56 million pounds statewide," says Burt. "Nearly 800,000 food boxes are delivered each year throughout the Network. The demand is there. A great part of the need comes from working families— single parents are typical recipients."

Three years ago, irrigation consultant Fred Ziari of Umatilla County listened to a presentation about Oregon's hunger ranking. Ziari believed farmers would join together to donate a portion of their harvest to the Oregon Food Bank Network. Ziari and his long-time friend, Jim Youde, formed Farmers Ending Hunger and recruited a board of directors that included Frank Lamb, formerly of Eastern Oregon Farming Company, Bob Levy— a Hermiston-area farmer and member of the State Board of Agriculture, and Rick Jacobson, retired CEO of Norpac Foods, Inc.

The concept is simple. Farmers agree to donate a portion of their crop prior to harvest. Processors agree to donate a portion of the cost of processing. Farmers Ending Hunger raises funds to pay for the remaining processing, packaging, and transportation. The public participates through the unique "Adopt an Acre" program to help pay the cost of getting the product processed and delivered to the food bank.

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If Farmers Ending Hunger can reach its goal of two million pounds, it will claim about seven percent of all the food distributed directly by Oregon Food Bank each year. The effort is now focusing on expanding the base of contributors, both on the farm and in the non-agriculture community.

"We've been only working with a handful of growers so far," says Burt. "Participants have had the capacity to contribute, but there are a lot of other growers who also have that capacity. We're ready to get more of the public to participate through the "Adopt an Acre" program, too. We just need to spread the word."

The 90,000 pounds of pancake mix supplied to Oregon Food Bank last year was made possible through the cooperation of several parties that have a hand in the commodity. Farmers Ending Hunger and the Oregon Wheat Foundation provided the raw product. Pendleton Flour Mills turned the wheat into flour. Continental Mills then turned it into enough pancake mix to provide 1.89 million pancakes, 630,000 breakfasts of three pancakes per meal, and a stack of pancakes that could reach almost ten miles high.

The wheat industry is making a commitment to do much more for 2008 and is planning to donate enough wheat for 500,000 pounds of pancake mix, generating about 3.5 million pancake breakfasts for those in need.

Also for 2008, Farmers Ending Hunger has received a commitment from Oregon's dairy industry to deliver 25 head of cattle each month to be processed into hamburger and donated to Oregon Food Bank.

"That will generate about 9,500 pounds of hamburger," says Burt. "This is good quality, local cattle, locally processed, with the hamburger put into one-pound packs. The quarter-pound hamburgers will result in about 450,000 servings of protein a year for food box recipients in Oregon."

This year's wheat and hamburger donations will combine to produce 600,000 pounds of food above what was donated in 2007. By adding a few other commodities, the two million pound goal is not far from reach.

Farmers Ending Hunger emphasize that they are looking for growers who produce the types of basic commodities needed by the Oregon Food Bank Network. They won't just take anything, and they aren't just getting second-rate food. Producers commit prior to the end of the growing season and set aside that commitment as they harvest. It's the same quality of product as they send to the consumer market or processor.

One of the first farmers to step up in 2006 and support Farmers Ending Hunger was Darrin Ditchen of Stanfield, one of five producers providing green peas that was part of the inaugural shipment to Oregon Food Bank. His willingness to help is echoed by others who have donated food from the field.

"It's my duty, I feel farmers have a duty to help feed those less fortunate," says Ditchen. "I have been blessed and I hope to be able to bless others. When you donate a few bushels from each acre you grow, you don't even notice it at the end of the day. But those bushels add up and make a huge difference statewide."

The need for food donations is great. The response from Oregon farmers is significant and gathering momentum in 2008.

For more information, contact John Burt, (503) 931-9232 or go to <http://www.farmersendinghunger.com>