

Harvest News



A publication of

Food Bank of North Alabama

This Side Up Moving joins hands with the Alabama Credit Union and Food Bank of North Alabama

Last December, the Food Bank received an unexpected call from local business owner Colby Robinson of This Side Up Moving. Robinson, a Madison native, wondered how his full-service moving company could “give back to the community, not just say we give back.” After exploring options, This Side Up Moving committed a moving truck and a team of two professional drivers once a month to assist the Food Bank with deliveries of two-day meal kits to schools across Morgan and Cullman counties. These special kits go to students who depend upon school meals and may go without when school is closed over the weekend. They ensure children arrive to school Monday morning ready to learn without the distraction of hunger. Alabama Credit Union partners with the Food Bank on the program and faithfully sponsors over 1,000 of these meal kits each month. “What an incredible partnership!” says Food Bank staffer, Laura Fincher. “This Side Up Moving and the Alabama Credit Union are giving back in such an innovative, resourceful way. The children of North Alabama are the true winners. We cannot thank them enough for their commitment to our community.”



“This Side Up Moving has enjoyed the opportunity to provide deliveries for the Backpack program and keeping kids fed in North Alabama. We are always looking into opportunities to help our community and this partnership has been an absolute blessing. We cherish the idea that, with each other’s help, we can save children from going hungry over the weekend if they do not have food at home. I would like to personally thank the Food Bank for giving us this opportunity and we at This Side Up Moving look forward to continuing our partnership.”

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Locally Grown Strawberries in Schools!

Students in Madison City, Madison County and Huntsville City schools recently enjoyed the sweet taste of local strawberries in their school cafeterias for the first time. The ripe fruit came from Brown Farms in New Market.

This unique farm-to-school journey was made possible by a new initiative at the Food Bank of North Alabama called the Farm Food Collaborative. "We help local farmers sell fresh, local fruits and vegetables to public schools and other buyers," says Farm Food Collaborative Coordinator, Janice Dyer.

Local farmer, Noel Brown, picked the strawberries just hours before delivery so the strawberries were at the peak of taste and nutritional value this spring.

For too many students, school lunches are the most reliable meal of the day. "This is a great opportunity to give students fresh, healthy food choices and help them realize food doesn't come just from a store—it's being grown by farmers right here in their community," Dyer said.

Several years ago Madison County's School Nutrition Supervisor, Janice Owen, encountered difficulties trying to buy locally grown strawberries from Mr. Brown. He had to decline the sale because he simply did not have the resources to deliver strawberries to the district's 42 schools. Thanks to a great partnership, the Farm Food Collaborative, Food Bank staff, schools, farmers and a local distributor worked together to solve these delivery challenges and arranged for delivery of more than 400 gallons of Mr. Brown's strawberries to 40 schools during the first two weeks of May.

To gauge how well students liked these locally-grown strawberries, Food Bank staff and volunteers conducted surveys at three area middle schools. Students voiced their opinion about the appearance and taste of the strawberries. In some cases, students learned for the very first time how healthy food choices like strawberries travel from farm to plate in North Alabama!

Agency Spotlight: YMCA of the Shoals



Colbert County High School Students End their Year with Giving Back to the Food Bank

For 75 Colbert County High School Agriscience students, their final project of the year wasn't just about getting a good grade or putting the skills they learned to practical use. It was about helping others.

The students transformed two 6 x 10 cargo trailers into refrigerated trailers. The Food Bank of North Alabama partnered with Colbert County High School and the Northwest Alabama Resource, Conservation and Development Council (RC&D) to build the trailers in order to supply fresh produce and refrigerated products to our neighbors in need.

Jeff McKinney, Agriscience Instructor at Colbert County High School and Future Farmers of America Adviser, made sure his students were aware of the Food Bank's mission and plans for the cold-storage trailers.

"The excitement level for them is sky-high; they know it's a really good cause," McKinney said. "They know people who could be impacted by the use of the trailers."

McKinney said he was proud of his students' accomplishments.

"I was so proud of the students to be able to showcase their skills," he said. "Life's not just about cell phones; they can use their hands to work, build things. We are actually teaching useful, lifelong skills to students who wouldn't otherwise receive that instruction."

The students started working on the trailers in April.

"It gave them a sense of purpose," McKinney said. "The end result of all of their hard work was going to help people in need."

Charlie Meek, RC&D Executive Director, invited McKinney to take on the Food Bank's trailer project.

"It was a surreal moment for me when we hooked up the last trailer," Meek said. "The kids were so attached to the project."

The students had to use wiring, carpentry and construction skills, including precise measuring and cutting while assembling the trailers.

These kids will never forget this experience. They competed to see which trailer could get to 32 degrees the fastest. They piled eight kids into a trailer to see how having a load would affect how fast the temperature lowers.

"Giving back is part of our mission," McKinney said. "No project has allowed the students to give back more than this one."



The Food Bank of North Alabama has two new refrigerated trailers that will help maintain the proper temperature for fresh produce and refrigerated products given to community members in need.



RC&D Executive Director Charlie Meek checks the temperature of the trailers after delivering them to the Food Bank.



RC&D Executive Director Charlie Meek shows Food Bank staffer Justus Augustus how to operate the generator that will ensure the trailer stays cold.



The YMCA of the Shoals, a Food Bank partner, plays an important role in feeding Florence children who are at risk of hunger. During the school year, the YMCA provides afterschool snacks and weekend backpack meal kits to students who struggle to find enough to eat over the weekend. What's more, the YMCA was one of the first agencies to participate in a Food Bank sponsored program that ensures children receive nutritious meals during the summer months.

Catherine Schiez, the Childcare Program Director, described how one little boy inspired their hunger relief activities. "About five or six years ago, the YMCA had a little boy in our program who seemed like a 'bottomless pit' for food. We knew he received

breakfast and lunch at school, but in the afternoons, when he came to the Y, he would stuff his pockets with crackers and often complain that his stomach hurt. Trying to learn more, we asked him what he ate for dinner the night before. He said he and his brother had pork rinds and Mountain Dew. That had been his entire dinner." When Catherine heard this, she knew she had to do something and soon launched the YMCA's feeding programs. Last year, the YMCA provided 3,248 summer meals through the Food Bank of North Alabama and Alabama Food Bank Association.

We appreciate the great work the YMCA and our other partners do to feed hungry children!



Food Bank of North Alabama Achieves the Top Food Safety Score in the Nation

Did you know we practice food recall drills and check the temperatures of our coolers and freezer TWICE a day? Did you know we inspect all canned goods for severe dents and proper labeling?

Food safety lapses cause millions of cases of illness, hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations, and thousands of deaths every year in the United States.

Food safety is vitally important to us because we feed North Alabama's most vulnerable citizens, including children and seniors.

This year, the Food Bank of North Alabama passed an AIB audit - the gold standard for food safety in the industry. We earned the highest score among Food Banks across the country and, as a result, were asked to speak at a national conference about our culture of food safety.

"Adhering to these new rigorous food safety standards is very labor intensive," says Gloria Hollins, Facility and Food Handling Manager. "Thinking of the children and families we feed makes all the hard work worthwhile."

What's more, we shared our food safety expertise with local farmers to help them sell local produce to new buyers. Over the past year, we worked one-on-one with 19 local farmers, helping them attain a difficult food safety certification so they can sell locally grown fruits and vegetables to school cafeterias across the region. As an example, we helped Will Scott, a young fifth-generation farmer in Madison County, attain this certification so he could sell locally grown apples to schools all across Alabama!

Kudos to the Food Bank's Food Safety Team! They are setting the bar high and ensuring a safe, healthy food supply for public school children and those at risk of hunger across our region!

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