



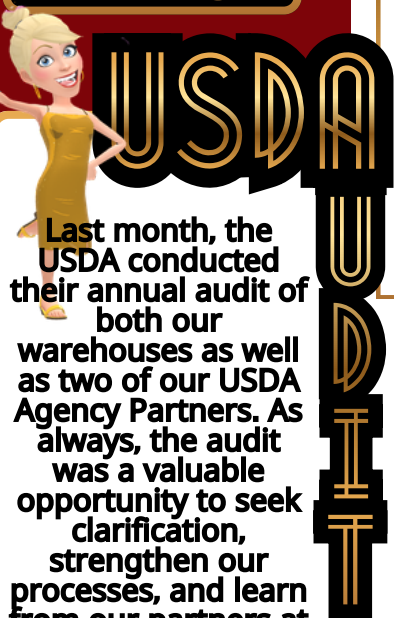
FOOD BANK OF NORTH ALABAMA

AGENCY NEWSLETTER

February 2026

The Warehouse and Food Bank will be closed

Monday February 16



Last month, the USDA conducted their annual audit of both our warehouses as well as two of our USDA Agency Partners. As always, the audit was a valuable opportunity to seek clarification, strengthen our processes, and learn from our partners at the state level.

We are pleased to share that we had another successful audit year. This achievement is only possible because of the dedication, leadership, and hard work of our USDA-participating agencies and their volunteers. We are truly grateful for all that you do.

- Marshall County Hope Center
- The Well / 12 Bushels

In 2024, we strengthened our communication.

In 2025, we deepened our partnerships.

Now, in 2026, our focus is clear: **IMPACT.**



This year we are taking a closer look at the difference we make together—and the places where we can grow. That means observing programs in action, reviewing reporting trends, and gathering insight from you, our agency partners, as well as from neighbors receiving assistance, program collaborators, and the broader community. Every piece of information helps us identify opportunities to strengthen our collective impact and move closer to our mission of ending hunger in North Alabama.

More than half of our agencies have already completed the capacity survey sent out in mid-January. Your responses are already highlighting both the challenges you face and the areas where you excel.

If your agency hasn't submitted the survey yet, please check your email and take a few minutes to complete it. Duplicate submissions from the same agency will be merged and clarified as needed.

Thank you for helping shape a stronger, more responsive network. Together, we're building a year defined by meaningful impact.

In our following newsletters we will be sharing the insights from our Hunger Summit sessions, early findings from the Agency Capacity Survey, as well as the Neighbor Survey.

By sharing these analyses, we hope you'll join us in envisioning what's possible when our network leans into intentional, data-driven programs and opportunities.

Our hope is that when we revisit this work a year from now, we'll see meaningful progress—real change sparked by the actions we take in response to the results you've provided.

TANF BOXES You've seen them. You ask for them.

TANF food boxes are provided through programs funded by Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). These boxes are designed to support low-income families with children in Alabama.

Who is Eligible to Receive Boxes?

- Households with a child under age 18, or
- A child under age 19 who is a full-time high school or vocational student
- Recipients must live in Alabama.

Who Is Not Eligible?

- Adults without children
- Individuals who are not Alabama residents
- Families with children over 19 who are not in school



But what do you **KNOW** about them?

ROLLING OUT THE RED CARPET

ALL-STAR DEMOGRAPHIC REPORTERS

These groups submitted their demographic reports on time every month throughout 2025. Thank you for your consistency, dedication, and commitment to compliance.

*In order to be recognized as an all star reporter, agency partners must have been an active partner for the full 12 months and submitted demographic reports by the 15th of each month.

- Saint John's Cath. Church
- The Link
- Asbury Church
- New Life Church
- Underwood Baptist
- The Helping Hand
- Mt. Zion Methodist
- Grace Community
- Killen Methodist
- Center Star Methodist
- Fellowship Presbyterian
- Ch. of the Nazarene
- St. Joseph On the Mountain
- Annunciation of the Lord
- The Crossing
- Little Flock Primitive Baptist
- Good Shepherd UMC
- Mt. Hope Baptist Church
- Rose of Sharon
- Parkside Outreach Program
- Abundant Life Food Pantry
- Huntsville Assistance Program
- First Baptist Madison
- Good Samaritan "Faith House"
- Thrive
- SVDP - Guntersville
- United Church of Huntsville
- Macklin Baptist Church
- Cotaco Global Methodist
- Athens/Limestone Family Resource Center
- Queen of the Universe - SVDP

food safety training UPDATE

We've updated our Food Safety Training slides! The content has been reviewed, streamlined, and refocused on food-bank-specific practices—meaning **we went from 241 slides to fewer than 60**. The slides now align directly with the Food Safety Test, making it easier to review material and locate the correct responses. Food safety is about more than a passing score; it reflects our shared commitment to handling food safely and responsibly for our neighbors.

We also received clarification on certification timelines: Food Safety Certifications are valid for two years. Since most groups completed the training last year, we will begin notifying agencies next year during the month their certification expires.

SPEAKING OF FOOD SAFETY...

"Blessing Boxes," "Little Free Pantries," "Giving Boxes," "Sharing Boxes," and "Kindness Cabinets" operate on a well-intended principle of "take what you need, leave what you can." While the spirit behind these community efforts is generous and heartfelt, they also present significant concerns regarding the safety and security of any food placed inside them.

Food received through your partnership with the Food Bank of North Alabama **may not be used to stock these boxes**. These structures do not meet several required conditions necessary to ensure that food remains safe, stored at proper temperatures, protected from tampering, and maintained in accordance with food-safety standards.

Official guidance from Feeding America on this topic is attached for your reference.





Blessing Box-Community Fridge Unsecured/Unattended Free Pantry Guidance

Background

Outdoor free pantries commonly called “Blessing Box”, “Little Free Pantry”, or “Mini Pantry” are small, enclosed structures (wood box, shed) designed for an organization and/or the general public to leave food, and for others to pick up anonymously. These outdoor free pantries have in some cases expanded into a larger category of client self-serve models that include structures such as lockers, refrigerators, and vending machines. While some models are designed to hold product safely, most of these structures/units are unsecured and unmonitored.

The food or products left within these pantries are intended for the recipient’s personal use. They are often located in public areas, such as in front of a church or in a neighborhood. Anyone can contribute items such as non-perishable food to toiletries and often out of their home inventory.

Feeding America Concerns Regarding Food Safety

The free self-serve pantry units (boxes, sheds, lockers, refrigerators) are designed to be left unsecured (unlocked) and unattended most of the time to allow easy and accessible access to donors and receivers. There are no assurances or confidence that the food has been handled and stored safely prior to and during storage and display within these units.

Storage of the food product within these units is also a concern for potential pest activity, product temperature abuse (even for shelf-stable), expired shelf life, and chemical contamination. The lack of security and routine monitoring elevates the food safety risk.

The FDA Food Code and State and local health regulations do not address nor support unattended, open-access food pantries. County and municipal building codes and zoning laws vary from location to location. In addition, donations placed in the free self-service pantry structures or units by the public are not protected from the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act as they will not be receipted and inspected by an organization prior to their distribution. The organization or person operating the self-service pantry may also be liable for illness, injury, or damages that may occur in the operation of the program.

Feeding America’s Position on Unsecured and Unattended Free Pantries

The Feeding America network is required to follow specific guidelines for the receipt, storage, and distribution of donated grocery products. An unmonitored, unsecured product storage box would not meet the requirements of the IRS 170e3 Regulations or the Feeding America Partner Agreements/Contracts (Note: All donated food and grocery items distributed through the Feeding America Network and their partners are intended only for people that are ill, needy or infants), In addition, these food distribution models do not meet Feeding America food safety and handling guidelines.

As a result of the above violations of Feeding America and IRS regulations, unsecured and unattended distribution programs should not be supported by our partner food banks nor should food from the food bank be provided to supply these types of distribution points.