

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF SERVING OUR NEIGHBORS



APRIL 2025



This year, your Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank is celebrating its 40th Anniversary of serving the food insecure in our community. What started out as a grassroots effort of volunteers distributing bread and surplus food from the parking lot of Victoria Baptist Church four decades ago has now evolved to serving thousands of neighbors in need across 11 parishes. From hurricanes and floods to Covid-19 emergency response and trying economic times, we will always be there for our neighbors when they need us most – creating a legacy of hope and resilience for our community. *Together, We're Fighting Hunger.*

Michael H. Manning
President & CEO,
Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank



1984

In 1984, the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank was born out of necessity. Baton Rouge was reeling from an economic downturn that left many families struggling to afford basic necessities. Amid this crisis, Nancy Penn, then serving as the Episcopal Hunger Coordinator, stepped forward with a vision to address hunger in her community. Her efforts, alongside a coalition of local leaders and organizations, laid the foundation for what would become a vital resource for thousands of individuals in need.



1985 (Year Established)

The Food Bank began as a grassroots effort, with volunteers distributing bread and surplus food from the parking lot of Victoria Baptist Church. Alongside a coalition of faith-based organizations, community groups, and civic leaders, Penn helped form the Steering Committee that laid the groundwork. This committee, which included representatives from the Salvation Army, St. Vincent de Paul, and United Way, shared a vision of a centralized food distribution network to serve those in need. This collaborative effort would establish the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank in 1985.



1987

Seeing a need to move from a parking lot to a covered location, the committee was able to secure a home on 21st Street in 1987 where the mission could operate in more organized way. As the mission grew, the needs of the organization changed as well and the search for a larger more permanent space was underway. The Food Bank was able to secure its first warehouse space on Chippewa Street where it continued to operate until 1996.



→ 1996

In 1996, the Food Bank moved into a 25,000 square foot warehouse building where it would operate for the next 17 years. The new facility added more than three times the square footage of the Chippewa location. So many milestones would occur over those 17 years as the operation expanded to serve 11 parishes in and around Baton Rouge. With a fleet of trucks able to make daily deliveries, the number of food pantries and member agencies also grew quickly.



→ 2005

In 2005, the city of New Orleans was overcome with city wide flooding from Hurricane Katrina. With Second Harvest Food Bank in New Orleans impacted from the storm, the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank became an emergency response center for the state to distribute food to impacted areas. This would lead to the Food Bank being designated as a critical first responder for food distribution in the event of natural disasters going forward, including CEO Mike Manning serving as a member of the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness for any natural disasters in the state going forward.



→ 2007

Seeing the need for more growth based on the demand for families struggling with hunger, the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank launched a capital campaign in 2007 to raise much needed funds to make a move possible to a larger space. So many of our cherished donors and supporters answered the call to make a lasting impact in what the Food Bank would become.



→ 2014

Seeing the capital campaign come to fruition along with a generous gift from the Albert Fraenkel family, the Food Bank was able to expand operations in 2014, moving into a 170,000+ square foot facility at the Fraenkel Center. The new square footage would be a transformational game changer for the Food Bank allowing us to expand programs, increase inventories, build out larger coolers and freezers, and expand fleet with a much larger loading dock. This move would allow for the operation to move millions more pounds of food a year to those in need.



→ 2016

The Food Bank was able to acquire the first bulk packaging machine of its kind in any food bank across the country thanks to a generous donation from the Ron Zappe Family and Lamar Family Foundation. The new machine would allow the Food Bank to acquire rice, beans, pasta, cereals and more in 2,000-pound bags just for the cost of transportation and then package that product up into family friendly sizes for distributions.



→ 2016

Families and neighbors across the Greater Baton Rouge area were impacted by the flood of 2016 – destroying homes and businesses across the community. The Food Bank was inundated with 4 feet of water which destroyed millions of pounds of food. Even with a flooded facility, daily food distributions continued using rental trucks and food shipped in from neighboring states and food banks across the country.



→ 2020

In March of 2020, a national pandemic was officially declared due to the COVID-19 virus. With shutdowns across the country and many temporarily unemployed, local families were turning to food pantries for assistance. With the added demand, your Food Bank distributed a record 13.6 million meals – over 16.3 million pounds of food.



→ 2022

Given the expansion of services following the COVID-19 pandemic, finding innovative ways to be more efficient with inventories and distributions became critical. The operations team migrated to a new cloud-based warehouse software management system in 2022 – finding efficiencies in order processing, warehouse operations, transportation, accounting, nutrition, and reporting.

→ 2025

Over the past four decades, the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank has grown exponentially, evolving from a small-scale operation to a major regional resource. By leveraging partnerships with grocery stores, food manufacturers, and community donors, the Food Bank has increased its capacity to serve more people each year. Today, it distributes millions of pounds of food annually to agencies and organizations across 11 parishes in South Louisiana.



GREATER BATON ROUGE FOOD BANK



HOW PURCHASING FOOD MAKES BEST USE OF DONOR FUNDING

Perhaps you have heard the Food Bank mention that just \$1 can provide food equivalent to 3 meals in our 11-parish service area. At first glance, you may be asking yourself – ‘how is that possible?’ This article explains how it works.

As a partner Food Bank of Feeding America, the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank can source food in several ways to restock our shelves throughout the year. While we receive a large amount of USDA product and additional food shipments through Feeding America partnerships and federal programs, we also collect food from local food drives and area grocery retailers and restaurants via food rescue programs.

All these donations of food product go a long way to supplement our inventory, but alone, it is not enough to meet the demand for food assistance in our community. This is where purchasing food comes into play.

Our operations team works daily to source needed food items through a national food auction platform. This platform allows food banks and retailers to bid on available food products online at greatly reduced costs – making it possible to acquire food at a much lower cost per pound than if we had to purchase it at retail rates. The purchasing team will look to acquire everything from fresh produce and proteins to shelf-stable pastas, grains and canned goods.

“Through leveraging our national partnerships, we can secure competitive bids on truckloads of food, which significantly

reduces our cost per unit,” said Monty Doggett, Director of Logistics. “For context, when a donor purchases a can of food at a retail price of \$1.50 and donates it to us, that same \$1.50 if donated as funds instead can be stretched to acquire three cans through our purchasing department’s strategic buying power.”

In some cases, we are also able to purchase additional bulk food product for just the cost of transportation. The product ships to us in 2,000 lb. bags via an 18-wheeler, and we then have volunteers working our bulk packaging machine to repackage that product into 1lb. and 2lb. bags for distribution to families in need.

We are the only Food Bank in the country with in-house bulk packaging machines, allowing us to greatly increase the amount of food we can distribute in a year. The bulk machines can repackage popular food items such as rice, beans, cereals, pastas and more.

“Over the past year, we’ve made significant improvements to our bulk packaging room by adding equipment and reengineering the process to where we have nearly doubled capacity,” said Monty. “With the new upgrades we now have the capability to pack up to 40,000 pounds per day.”

With these online resources and new capabilities in place, we can distribute more food at a lower cost than ever before – making best use of donor funds to feed as many people as we can with every dollar donated. To learn more about how it works or to take a tour of the Food Bank, contact us online at brfoodbank.org or call (225) 359-9940.

NEW SCHOOL PANTRY PROGRAM AIMS TO MEET FAMILIES WHERE THEY ARE



For decades, your Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank has worked to reach children in schools who are food insecure through our Backpack Program. The program is typically funded through donors, and it provides shelf-stable food for kids who are at risk of missing meals over the weekend while not receiving free or reduced cost meals through the school.

The program has been very effective in reaching over 3,400 food insecure kids in our 11-parish service area, but it is rather complex to operate and expensive to fund. While this program will continue to serve children as long as needed, a new School Pantry Program is underway to more effectively reach not only children but also local families who may be struggling with food insecurity.

“The School Pantry Program uses a model that addresses the challenges that low-income families may face in getting access to food assistance. Families in need are often unable to access their local food pantry because of limited transportation options or work schedules that conflict with the pantry opening hours,” said KiEtha Gage, Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank Senior Agency Relations and Programs Manager.

“We have three active school pantries underway now. These school families appreciate the convenience and familiarity of visiting a

school pantry that provides regular access to a variety of nutritious food items for their children,” said Gage. “Schools appreciate the ability to improve children’s nutritional status, helping children to attend school without the distraction of hunger so they can focus on academic challenges and opportunities.”

HOW IT WORKS

Once we secure a commitment from a school site and decide on the model to be implemented, the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank works with leaders to determine equipment needed, including shelving, tables, refrigerators, freezers and opening hours. The schools are responsible for funding the recommendations for the space. Once the space is ready, our staff on-boards the school as an official TFAP pantry site.

Schools then use their communication channels to inform the school families of the availability of this service, including flyers, social media and robocalls to remind families of dates/times of food distribution.

For more details on how the School Pantry Program works or to visit one of our existing school pantries to learn more, contact us online at brfoodbank.org or call (225) 359-9940 and ask for KiEtha Gage.

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