



# Food for Thought



SUMMER 2020

A PUBLICATION OF THE FOOD BANK OF CENTRAL LOUISIANA

## From the Executive Director

**In times of crisis, people come together. We've heard it before, and current times are proving it true every day. Over the past few months, the generosity of the community has been nothing short of disarming, from friends and strangers alike. Gifts of food, funds and time have been daily treasures for the Food Bank, coming from all walks of life in every corner of Central Louisiana. Even as so many are struggling, our community is standing up and stepping forward to help each other in remarkable and inspiring ways.**

We have always known that relationships are invaluable in ordinary days, but they have never been more important than in times like these. New partnerships, longstanding alliances, and working together in different ways have allowed for unimagined growth in the few months since the virus arrived in Cenla. Whether we are working with a local food pantry to re-open, finding new locations for mobile food distributions, or strategizing with other agencies to deliver food to people in quarantine, we couldn't do it alone. We simply wouldn't be able to do the work we do without people and organizations dedicated to helping the communities where they live and do business.

So what can we learn from the Cenla community during a pandemic? To assume that everyone we meet has helped someone today because you probably have. To make friends wherever and whenever we can, because maybe one day you and I will have a chance to do something amazing together. And to share the hope we feel, because there is so much goodwill out there, we can be certain we'll come out of this crisis better than we were before it started.

**If you'd like to support our work, please consider donating at [www.fbcenla.org](http://www.fbcenla.org) and click on Donate Now, mailing your donation to the Food Bank, or calling (318) 445-2773 to make your gift over the phone.**

Thank you for continuing to inspire us and give us hope during these extraordinary times.



Sincerely,  
**Jayne Wright-Velez**  
Executive Director



## Thank You to the Louisiana National Guard

In March, Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards activated the Louisiana National Guard to assist in COVID-19 response efforts. Guardsmen have been mobilized throughout the state to support operations including medical, engineering assessment, shelter assistance, commodities distribution, traffic control point and drive-through testing site support, proper PPE training, assistance at food banks, and to provide liaison officer teams to Parish Emergency Operations Centers.

Here at the Food Bank of Central Louisiana, the 527 Battalion Company of the Louisiana National Guard first arrived on April 17 — not a moment too soon. The stay-at-home order and social distancing guidelines meant that we were not able to draw from our usual volunteers for our daily operations: Working in the warehouse, packing food boxes and bags, and distributing food to more people in need than the Food Bank has ever served. In short, without the dedicated soldiers of our National Guard, we couldn't have done it.

As we settle into the new normal of life with COVID-19, we must prepare to say goodbye to the Guardsmen. They came to our rescue, and stayed to give us time to plan for sustaining pandemic-level operations once they're gone. The Guard's mission at the Food Bank will end in September and we appreciate every day we were lucky to have them.

**Thank you to all the Louisiana National Guard members who helped to feed Cenla in this time of crisis. You are true heroes.**

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(3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov)

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# Help Stamp Out Hunger

Every May, the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) supports food banks by conducting the Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, forced the postponement of the scheduled May 9 drive for safety reasons — even as the pandemic-related economic shutdown has worsened food insecurity.

To deal with this urgent situation, NALC developed a new plan to address the problem of hunger that affects one in eight Americans, including millions of children, elderly, and military veterans.

A novel donor drive approach to fit the current circumstances. Americans in big cities and suburbs, in small towns and rural areas, can go to a website set up just for this, select a food bank close to them, and donate funds to help the pantry purchase food. This has been set up in a manner that allows every dollar raised to go directly to purchasing food for the hungry.



For the meantime, there may be a silver lining to this approach born of necessity. Rather than a one-day event, this effort will continue as needed. And, food banks can purchase more food than a resident could buy and donate with the same resources.

The Food Bank of Central Louisiana appreciates the continued support from the National Association of Letter Carriers!

To find a local food bank in your state, please go to [www.nalc.org/food](http://www.nalc.org/food).

## How you can help the Food Bank of Central Louisiana

You may have seen the numbers: food banks are feeding nearly 60 percent more people during the COVID-19 pandemic than they were this time last year. At the same time, many food banks are seeing decreased donations from the grocery stores and manufacturers that helped them in the past.

With so many families visiting food banks for the first time, you may be wondering what food banks need. Should you start a food drive? Should you donate cash?

We've got some dos and don'ts about what food banks need right now (and what's best to avoid) as they ensure our neighbors have enough food to eat during the pandemic and beyond.

### Do: Make a monetary donation

It might sound simple, but right now, monetary donations are the most useful and efficient way to support food banks. These donations give food banks the flexibility and funds to respond wherever the need is highest. Whether that's purchasing more food to meet the demand, hiring more staff, setting up new meal

distributions, or simply putting gas into delivery trucks, cash ensures food banks can meet the demand in their communities.

To ensure a contactless donation, the best way to make a gift to your local food bank is to donate through their website ([www.fbcenla.org](http://www.fbcenla.org)).

### Don't: Be afraid to ask what your local food bank needs

Every food bank is unique and in this unprecedented situation, what your food bank specifically needs might be different from what other food banks need or what your food bank has needed in the past. Call us at the Food Bank of Central Louisiana at 318-445-2773 or follow us on social media.

### Do: Donate your time

Two-thirds of food banks are accepting volunteers right now. And sometimes, the thing your food bank needs most is you. Volunteers are helping pack emergency food boxes, distribute food at drive-thru pantries, and much more. If you are interested in volunteering at the Food Bank of Central Louisiana, please call the Food Bank at 318-445-2773.



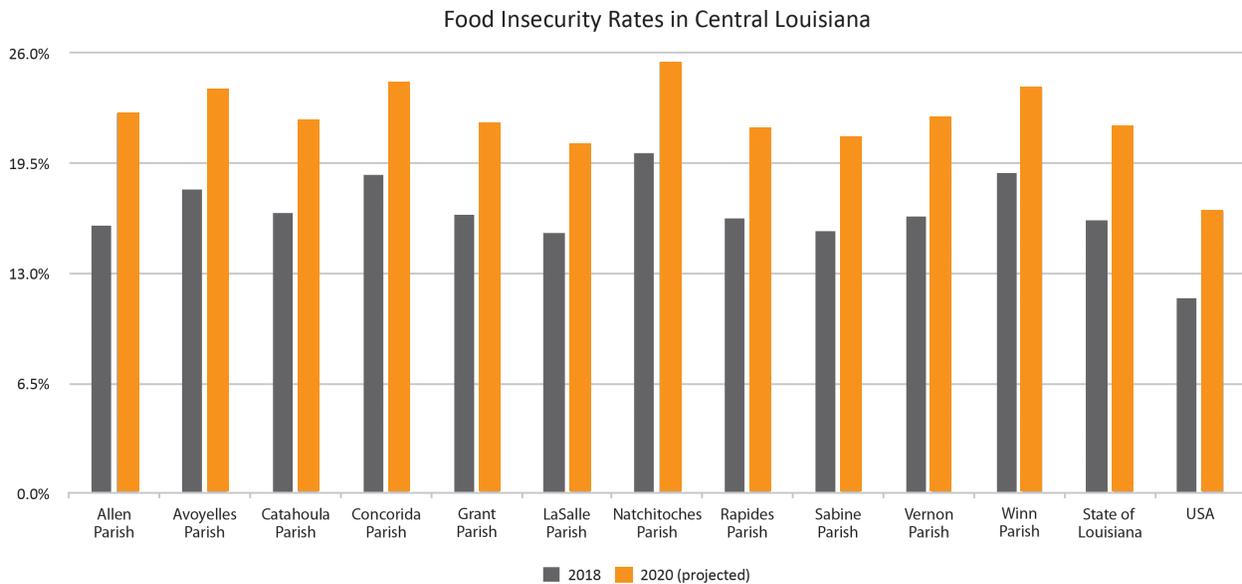
# COVID-19 and *Local Food Insecurity*

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit Louisiana hard. Johns Hopkins University & Medicine reports that Louisiana is experiencing one of the highest rates of COVID-19 infection per capita — 1st nationally. The pandemic has also brought about historic job losses and resulting losses in health insurance, making it more difficult for struggling families across the US to put food on their tables.

According to Feeding America’s “Map the Meal Gap 2020” study based on 2018 data, Louisiana had the 4th highest statewide rate of overall food insecurity in the US, the 4th highest rate of senior food insecurity, and the #1 highest statewide rate of food insecurity among

children. These 2018 rankings will hold true today, according to Feeding America’s companion study which projects Food Insecurity rates for 2020 based on the impact of COVID-19.

Statewide, Feeding America estimates that the effects of the pandemic have increased food insecurity in Louisiana such that more than one in five people don’t have enough to eat. Here in Central Louisiana, eight parishes in the Food Bank’s service area exceed the food insecurity rate for the state. Nearly a quarter of residents of Central Louisiana are food insecure in 2020.



*Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap 2020 & Impact of COVID-19 on Local Food Insecurity*

## How does 2020 compare to last year at the Food Bank of Central Louisiana?

We served over **78,000 more clients** March through June than during the same months last year.

From March through June, we distributed nearly **one million more pounds of food** than during the same months last year.

Our hours are expanded — instead of distributing food only Tuesday through Thursday, the Food Bank is now **open five days a week**.

**Thirteen new monthly mobile pantry distribution sites** have been added since March, with still more planned.

**Food costs are up 30%** over last year’s costs.

# Gardening Frugally During a Crisis

Thinking about starting a garden during this uncertain time? Think you have to go out and buy things to have a garden? Here are some tips to garden frugally and to help you stay away from stores. Try the "no till" gardening method to make a row or to use for containers you have at home — be sure to use containers not previously used to hold chemicals and punch or drill holes for drainage. Five-gallon buckets, kitty litter buckets, or recycled plastic containers all make good plant containers.

- 1 **START SMALL!!** — it's easy to add to your garden, once you have practice.
- 2 Observe how the sun shines where you live. Where does it get morning sun, midday sun, and late evening sun? Vegetables like morning and midday sun.
- 3 Place your bed or container as close to your water source as you can. If not, place it where you can water it with minimal effort.
- 4 Put cardboard (with no ink, dye, or cellophane) or strips of newspaper — make this as thick as you possibly can — on the ground in a spot that will get 6-8 hours of sun a day. If you are making a row, you'll need an area about 3 feet wide and about 6 – 8 feet long.
- 5 Wet the paper down very well. This helps attract microbes and earth worms that enrich your soil. If you have potting soil, add it now or scratch up soil from under trees and shrubs, taking care to look for critters coming out of hibernation.
- 6 Rake around trees or shrubs in your area for decomposing leaves — put that on your wet paper. Add some of the following to the pile you have started: grass clippings, pine straw, more strips of paper (no shiny colored papers) old white rags — all these things help build your "soil" and to keep it moist. You are creating a perfect place for seeds to germinate.
- 7 Know what you can plant **RIGHT NOW**. Don't try to plant things at the wrong time of year. If you have packs of seeds, read the back of the pack. If you don't have seeds, save them from your kitchen scraps. Lay seeds on a ceramic plate to dry or, in the case of "wet" tomato seeds, place them on a paper towel or coffee filter that you have dampened, then on top of a pot of soil, cover very lightly with soil, moisten with a small amount of water. In about a week, you should see sprouts coming up. Wait until they have several leaves before gingerly pulling apart and planting separately in other pots of soil.
- 8 If you have started seeds and have transplants that have hardened off and are ready to go outside — ones with good, strong stems — for instance, like tomatoes, then plant them deep.
- 9 When you are planting seeds, make your furrows or holes shallow, not too deep. Water lightly.
- 10 Don't plant things too close together – overcrowding can attract harmful insects.
- 11 Start a compost pile of kitchen scraps, grass clippings, dead leaves, eggshells, and coffee grounds. Use this compost to side, or top dress your vegetable rows — remember, it's very nitrogen-rich and can burn your vegetables, if you use too much. (Contact The Food Bank's Good Food Project to get helpful tips on composting or check out the GFP Facebook post about composting on 3/30/20)
- 12 Once you plant, observe your garden every day — it will tell you what it needs — are the plants drooping, turning yellow, are there critters chewing on leaves? Once you get used to looking closely, you can head off problems quicker.

Call 318-445-2773 x212 for one-on-one coaching. Remember, gardening IS NOT an exact science, it is a practice that we all learn from each day! Happy growing and best wishes from all of us at Good Food Project!

