

Chapter 5

Farm-to-Food Bank Pathways
Missouri Farm-to-Food Bank Activities and Opportunities

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5.1 INTRODUCTION

Farm to Food Bank describes activities that move food from farms in a given area to hunger relief efforts in the same given area. These activities include selling or donating whole or value-added farm products. They may involve intermediaries such as food processors, distributors, or manufacturers. The food may also move directly from a farm to a regional food bank or food pantry. Partners including nonprofit gleaning organizations, private businesses, industry groups, or federal and state agencies may fund or facilitate these activities.

This paper explores farm-to-food bank activities in Missouri using information collected through key informant interviews with supply chain stakeholders. It examines farm-to-food bank activities in other states, and it notes federal programs that support farm-to-food bank activities. Ultimately, the paper makes research-based recommendations to better facilitate farm-to-food bank activities in Missouri.

5.2 BACKGROUND

Food insecurity and hunger impact 11.5% of Missouri householdsⁱ — approximately 277,670 households or 683,068 people. Many people benefit from federal nutrition assistance programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP or food stamps); free and reduced-price meals via the National School Lunch Program; and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). However, national estimates show that as many as 45% of food-insecure households do not participate in an assistance programⁱⁱ. Lack of participation may be due to ineligibility, such as when a family's income exceeds a program's eligibility threshold. In other cases, people may not know about programs, have difficulty navigating the required paperwork, or avoid applying for help because of stigma. For thousands of families not reached by federal programs, food banks and food pantries may serve as the only source of supplemental food.

In Missouri, these families are supported by six Feeding America-affiliated food banks that are part of Feeding Missouri, one independent food bank named Operation Food Search, and other independent hunger relief organizations. The food banks serve as regional food distribution hubs that receive and then redistribute food purchases and donations from local, state, and national sources. Food banks cooperate with hundreds of local food pantries, meal sites, and other agencies that make food available at no cost to people in their communities.

Most food that flows through this food bank network is sourced from national producers, processors, manufacturers, and distributors. However, an opportunity exists to cooperate with more Missouri-based producers and entities, especially those producing or adding value to edible specialty crops, dairy products, eggs, and livestock. Food production and farming are important parts of Missouri life, livelihoods, and the economy. Missouri agriculture contributes an estimated \$88 billion to the economy annually, and it has 95,000 farms covering two-thirds of the land area of the stateⁱⁱⁱ.

5.3 METHODS

This paper summarizes farm-to-food bank findings sourced from key informant interviews and internet research. The semi-structured interviews with key informants collected input from stakeholders along the farm-to-food bank supply chain. During 2021, eight interviews were conducted in the late summer and early fall. They focused on gathering information concerning opportunities and roadblocks for farm-to-food bank activities in Missouri. Informants were professional contacts of the researcher. To explore farm-to-food bank activities in other states, the researcher conducted internet research, which studied activities in bordering states and states farther from Missouri. This summary provides a snapshot of farm-to-food bank activities in Missouri and other states and highlights areas where efforts might grow.

5.4 THE FARM-TO-FOOD BANK SETTING IN MISSOURI

Farm-to-food bank activities happen across Missouri. They take many shapes; operate on different scales; and use various arrangements to make products such as fruits, vegetables, meat, and eggs available to residents. Many are likely undocumented and happen out of the public eye. The farm-to-food bank activities documented below represent three major models:

1. **Farmer Direct to Food Bank or Food Pantry**
2. **Farmer via an Intermediary to Food Bank or Food Pantry**
3. **Noncommercial Partner to Food Bank or Food Pantry**

In addition, this section discusses how **Tax Incentives** play a role in farm-to-food bank activities.

Farmer Direct to Food Bank

This model involves direct engagement between a commercial producer and a food bank or food pantry. To work effectively, agencies must maintain connections and communication with producers or at least develop a working relationship with producers. One food pantry director noted that this model works well for their pantry — with very little time investment — because of the pantry’s awareness in the community. The director noted that once a relationship is made with a producer and the producer understands where and when to donate, the arrangement is relatively hassle-free. The pantry’s director has invested time in letting the community know about the food pantry in general and that it accepts donations from local producers. The pantry is open multiple days per week and has a large-capacity cooler and freezer. Both aid its Farm to Food Pantry efforts. Pantries open less often with less cold storage area may have more challenges working directly with producers.

Scale is an important consideration with this model. The size of farmers’ donations should generally match the food storage and distribution capacity of the food pantry or food bank. Bins or small truckloads of product are likely better suited for a food pantry. Semi-truckloads of product, especially in regions where the product itself is more like a commodity such as watermelons and potatoes in southeast Missouri, are better suited for a food bank.

Farmer via an Intermediary to Food Bank

In this model, an intermediary coordinates donations or sales between producer or producer group and a hunger relief agency. Key informant interviews uncovered both nonprofit and for-profit partners working as intermediaries.

Nonprofit partners

Nonprofit partners in Missouri include industry-focused groups and a gleaning organization.

Industry-focused groups

An industry-focused group coordinates a program involving livestock producers, processing plants, regional food banks, and the state association of food banks. This effort utilizes product donated by producers or purchased from producers. Animals are sent to processors and ultimately picked up by a regional food bank. For the food banks and state association, this program requires very little effort apart from product handling and covering product and processing costs when applicable. When there is a product cost, it is generally below market rates. Participating producers and the industry group benefit from goodwill and positive public relations generated on their behalf.

Gleaning organization

Missouri is also home to a gleaning organization that facilitates produce donations to hunger relief agencies. The organization works independently with regional producers and via a national program that facilitates subsidized produce sales from large producers selling to national and international markets.

Regionally, the organization works with more than 100 growers under three main arrangements. First, the largest share of regional produce comes from growers who pick and pack their own produce. Growers receive a “nonprofit” price negotiated by the organization. A regional food bank handles the transportation. This arrangement benefits greatly from groups of coordinated Amish and Mennonite growers whose farms concentrate in a few regions.

Second, the gleaning organization collaborates with farm stands and farmers markets. It picks up leftover produce at the end of the market day and takes it to a central cold storage facility or a partnering hunger relief agency.

A third arrangement involves coordinating volunteers to pick and pack produce at farms. Although this arrangement yields the smallest share of produce, it involves the most people and provides ancillary benefits to the organization. For example, it enhances public relations and develops donors.

Farmer cooperative/food hub

A for-profit farmer-owned cooperative operating as a food hub has been involved in farm-to-food bank activities. It contracts with human service agencies to create weekly boxes stocked with locally sourced vegetables and meat. The agencies cover the product and handling costs — generally through grant or stimulus funding — and make the food available to their clientele at food pantries, housing developments, and early childhood centers. The food hub’s logistical infrastructure makes these transactions relatively routine. The food hub representative noted

clientele’s overwhelmingly positive response. However, funding and agency priorities tend to affect program longevity.

Noncommercial Partner to Food Bank

Notably, several noncommercial growing efforts lead to donations of local and regional food to food banks and food pantries. Many Missouri prisons contribute food from their gardens to hunger relief agencies through their restorative justice programs. One key informant noted that their hunger relief agency provides seeds to a regional prison. Nonprofit and noncommercial community and urban gardening organizations in Missouri grow food for hunger relief. Likewise, numerous home gardeners contribute food to their local food pantries, shelters, and feeding sites.

Tax Incentives

State and federal tax incentives can facilitate farm-to-food bank activities in Missouri. Annually, Missouri offers a Food Pantry Tax Credit^{iv} through the department of revenue. The tax credit benefits “taxpayers who make donations of cash or food supplies to a qualified local food pantry, homeless shelter, or soup kitchen.” A taxpayer may claim a credit of up to \$2,500 per year for donations. Claims must be filed by April 15 of each year, and the amount of tax credits available in each fiscal year totals \$1,750,000.

Likewise, at the federal level, businesses that donate product may be eligible for general or enhanced tax deductions^v. For general tax deductions, businesses may claim a deduction equal to the product’s basis value or “cost to the business.” The enhanced tax deduction provides an extra incentive in addition to the product’s basis value. Find more information online, or contact a tax professional.

5.5 FARM-TO-FOOD BANK EFFORTS IN OTHER STATES

To better understand what might be possible in Missouri, a variety of other states’ farm-to-food bank activities are summarized below.

Examples from States Bordering Missouri

States neighboring Missouri can serve as examples. The programs summarized below were found through internet searches or professional contacts.

- **Oklahoma:** A partnership between Oklahoma Food Banks and the Conservation Partnership — an effort of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Oklahoma Conservation Commission — encourages farmers to plant multispecies, edible cover crops including beans, squash, and turnips on 1 acre to 4 acres. In addition, volunteers can register to work as gleaners to harvest crops and deliver them to hunger relief agencies. Find more information at okconservation.org/farmtofoodbank.
- **Kansas:** The Kansas Farm Bureau sponsors an End Hunger campaign that encourages members to make monetary donations toward hunger relief efforts. In addition to the

financial contributions that go directly to agencies, Kansas Farm Bureau also makes grant funds available to county bureaus and agents for projects. Find more information at bit.ly/3bjoy2a.

- **Iowa:** Activities featured on the Food Bank of Iowa website (bit.ly/3mpJyue) encourage corporations to host *giving gardens* at their offices. Those gardens would grow fruits and vegetables for donation. The food bank also partners with Iowa prisons that grow produce for donation. In addition, several short-term pandemic-related activities were initiated by the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship through the Governor's Feeding Iowa Taskforce. They include Pack the Pantry (cold storage grants for food pantries), Pass the Pork (pork donations with funding for processing), Beef Up Iowa (beef donations from 4-H and FFA with funding for processing), Turkey to Table (turkey bologna purchases), and egg donations. These activities all included agriculture industry groups as partners. Read more at bit.ly/3iUi0ez.
- **Illinois:** The Illinois Sustainable Technology Center, Feeding Illinois, and other organizations have partnered to launch a farm-to-food bank feasibility project. The goal is to connect food banks with farms to purchase fruit, vegetables, dairy products, and meat directly from farmers. The project includes a farmer survey, farmer focus groups, and pilot project. Find more information at feedingillinois.org/farmers and bit.ly/3bCA6Oh.
- **Kentucky:** Feeding Kentucky's Farm to Food Banks program uses funds to cover farmers' costs related to harvesting, packing, and transporting food to food banks and food pantries. The program started in 2011 and has worked with more than 1,000 farmers across Kentucky. Find more information at feedingky.org/farms-to-food-banks. The program has been supported by state funds in the past; it received \$600,000 in 2016-17: bit.ly/3nJ0OtW.
- **Tennessee:** Second Harvest Food Bank of Middle Tennessee Farm to Families sources local food directly from farmers and via volunteer gleaning. The program also encourages gardeners to donate produce to the food bank and hosts a tool share service. Find more information at secondharvestmidtn.org/farm.
- **Arkansas:** Like the Tennessee program, The Food Bank of Northeast Arkansas Fresh Produce Program accepts donations of produce that is surplus or irregular from local growers. It also can help set up volunteer gleaning opportunities through the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance. Home and community gardeners are encouraged to donate as well. Find more information at foodbankofnea.org/fresh-produce-program.

Examples from Other States

- **Indiana:** Supported by a state budget allocation of \$300,000 per year, Feeding Indiana's Hungry pays below market rates for surplus or No. 2 produce. Find more information at bit.ly/318jls1. Additionally, the Farm to Family Fund in Bloomington purchases produce, dairy, and eggs year-round at half the market value when the Bloomington Farmers

Market closes for the day. Items are then donated to area hunger relief organizations. Read more at farm2familyfund.org.

- **Washington:** The Washington Department of Agriculture (WDA) and nonprofit Harvest Against Hunger (HAH) partner to implement the Farm to Food Pantry initiative. Between \$3,500 and \$30,000 in funding is available per hunger relief agency to set up wholesale contracts with local, small-scale growers to provide food to local hunger relief agencies. WDA and HAH provide technical support. In addition to enhancing the viability and success of small farmers and hunger relief organizations, the program seeks to create lasting relationships between growers and agencies. Find additional information at bit.ly/31gd4dZ. Read more about the work of HAH, a well-established gleaning organization, at harvestagainsthunger.org.
- **Ohio:** The Ohio Association of Food Banks operates the Ohio Agricultural Clearance Program. The program acquires and redirects unmarketable fresh fruits, vegetables, and dairy items to the state's 12 Feeding America food banks and partnering agencies. Nearly 100 producers are involved. The program receives funding from the state of Ohio and Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. In FY 2020, the program distributed more than 32 million pounds of food and paid \$0.2230 per pound on average for food products. Find more information at ohiofoodbanks.org/what-we-do/food-programs.
- **Arizona:** Phoenix directed part of its federal CARES Act funding to Feed Phoenix, a collaborative effort of the city and Local First Arizona. Funds provided a lifeline to restaurants, caterers, and farmers whose businesses were negatively impacted by COVID-19. The support enabled them to work together to prepare meals with locally sourced food for those adversely affected by the pandemic. The goals included sustaining jobs and supply chains, strengthening the local food economy, and keeping Phoenix residents healthy during the pandemic. Most of the meals were distributed to food banks and those living in refugee housing. Typical meals included sandwiches, wraps, and salads — cold, ready-to-eat items. The project started in July 2020 and will continue through July 2022. Find more information at <https://www.goodfoodfinderaz.com/feed-phoenix> and <https://bloom.bg/3cZ9V4H>.

5.6 SUPPORT FOR FARM-TO-FOOD BANK ACTIVITIES AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL

The Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 provided grant funding to state agencies that administer The Emergency Food Assistance Program. Funding would pay for “projects to harvest, process, package, or transport commodities donated by agricultural producers, processors, or distributors for use by emergency feeding organizations (EFOs).” The program intended to reduce food waste, provide food to individuals who need it, and build relationships between the agricultural sector and EFOs. For FY 2019 to FY 2023, \$20 million was made available. States must contribute matching funds; the federal share of any given project is not to exceed 50% of the total project cost. In FY 2020 and FY 2021, \$217,542 was granted to the Missouri Division of Social Services and partnering food banks.^{vi}

5.7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GROWING FARM-TO-FOOD BANK ACTIVITIES

Missouri could take a number of directions to facilitate more farm-to-food bank activities. The following recommendations build on this researcher's findings:

- **Create and fund ongoing programs.** COVID-19 spurred farm-to-food bank programs in Missouri and across the country. Lessons learned from these programs, along with dedicated funding, can be used to build and sustain ongoing farm-to-food bank programs.
- **Pay producers for product.** Even if paid less than market prices, producers can use the revenue they do receive to offset costs. Payment also incentivizes producer engagement. Most key informants agree that producers should be compensated at some level.
- **Designate a coordinator.** Hunger relief agencies can designate staff to engage producers and coordinate donations and purchases. Clear communication about product delivery, pickup arrangements, and storage capacity is key!
- **Raise awareness among producers.** More producers are likely to donate or sell to agencies if they know these opportunities are options.
- **Pick up product from farms.** With busy schedules, especially during the growing season, producers have difficulty prioritizing donations, sales, and deliveries. By arranging transportation, producers have one fewer task to coordinate themselves.
- **Grow Missouri's fruit and vegetable industry, including food hubs and repacking facilities.** A larger industry would create more opportunity for donations and sales of firsts and seconds. More production would require more infrastructure to handle product.
- **When appropriate, partner with intermediaries to utilize existing infrastructure.** Good partners include food hubs and mainline distributors with the infrastructure to sort, store, and ship donations and purchases.
- **Focus on building relationships.** Combined with logistics, relationships are a key ingredient for making farm-to-food bank work for all involved.
- **Explore Missouri's strategic advantages.** Consider what Missouri does well and where Missouri has advantages in terms of production, processing, and distribution. Opportunities exist with Missouri livestock producers and regions of the state where vegetable production occurs.

ⁱ Household Food Security in the U.S. in 2020, USDA Economic Research Service, September 2021, ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=102075

ⁱⁱ Household Food Security in the U.S. in 2020, USDA Economic Research Service Insights Webinar, September 8, 2021, ers.usda.gov/multimedia

ⁱⁱⁱ Missouri Agriculture at a Glance, Missouri Department of Agriculture, accessed October 2021, agriculture.mo.gov/topcommodities.php

^{iv} Food Pantry Tax Credit (FPT), Missouri Department of Revenue, dor.mo.gov/tax-credits/fpt.html

^v Federal Tax Incentives, U.S. Food Waste Policy Finder, policyfinder.refed.org/federal-policy/federal-tax-incentives

^{vi} The Emergency Food Assistance Program Farm to Food Bank Project Grants, USDA Food and Nutrition Service, fns.usda.gov/tefap/farm-to-food-bank-project-grants