



Mobile Food Pantries Facts and Talking Points

This information will be useful to Harvesters agencies holding mobile food pantries. Please share this information with your volunteers, so that they understand the purpose and importance of this program and can respond to questions or comments about your mobile food pantry.

Mobile food pantries benefit your agency and your community

Mobile food pantries provide nutritious food to families in need of emergency food assistance in areas where access to traditional bricks and mortar food pantries is limited.

- Mobile food pantries enable Harvesters to quickly and efficiently provide large quantities of healthy food where it is needed most.
- Agencies are able to provide much-needed fresh produce and other perishable foods without the expense of storing the food.
- By offering a degree of anonymity, mobile food pantries help families who will not visit a traditional food pantry.

Why mobile food pantries make a difference

Across Harvesters' 26-county service area, 375,000 people, or 1 in 7, are at risk of hunger.

- Agencies in Harvesters' network are supporting 107 mobile food pantry programs, including 37 in rural areas and 70 in urban neighborhoods.
- Agencies in almost all of the 26 Harvesters' serves.
- Since July 1, 2012, mobile food pantries have distributed 10 million pounds of food, much of it nutritious fresh produce, which is often unaffordable for low-income families.
- When families have enough healthy food to eat they are more productive, children do better in school and seniors have a higher quality of life.

Mobile food pantries DO NOT compete with community businesses

Occasionally Harvesters' agencies will hear from local retailers that mobile food pantries are hurting their businesses.

- Mobile food pantries often distribute food that is donated to Harvesters by the food industry because it is unsuitable for retail sale because of cosmetic reasons (the apple isn't perfectly round) or because it is past its optimal sale date or distressed.
- Before food banks existed, this perfectly good food would have ended up in a landfill or, in the case of produce, been plowed under. Retailers pay tipping fees to dispose of food unfit for sale.
- Your agency's mobile food pantry is feeding the hungry, reducing waste and building a healthier community.

Mobile food pantries provide nutritious food for people in need

Harvesters is working with its agencies to ensure that mobile food pantries are accountable and providing nutritious food to families in need of food assistance.

- There is no charge for food distributed at mobile food pantries.
- Mobile food pantry participants are asked to self-certify that they are in need of the food they are receiving or are picking up food for a family in need.
- Harvesters is working with its agencies to provide an appropriate amount of food to avoid either shortages or surpluses at distributions. Agencies and volunteers are responsible for distributing the food equitably to families in need of food assistance.

Responding to mobile food pantry questions

Today, opinions about how to help families in need vary widely. Education is the key to helping your community understand who you serve, their circumstances and to dispel the myths surrounding those seeking emergency food assistance at a mobile food pantry.

Someone might say: People who come to a mobile food pantry are looking for a handout.

The Facts:

- Nearly half the people Harvesters serves aren't in the job market because they are children (37%) or seniors (8%).
- Forty percent (40%) of the people Harvesters serves live in a household with at least one person working. Many of the households we serve have multiple people working.
- An uneven economic recovery, higher food and fuel costs and a changing job market have left some families in even more dire circumstances as they fall further and further behind.
- When a family is struggling to meet basic needs, food is often the first thing to be cut. Forty-eight percent (48%) of our clients tell us they have had to choose between buying food and paying for heat or utilities.

Someone might say: People in line at the mobile food pantry are overweight or obese. How can they be hungry?

The Facts:

- Research indicates that low income and food insecure people are especially vulnerable to obesity.
- Low-income families often face unique challenges to adopting healthy behaviors. Many live in areas without full-service grocery stores. Fresh produce, if available, is more expensive and often of poorer quality in low-income neighborhoods.
- Instead of buying more expensive nutritious food, low income people may choose inexpensive, energy-dense, high-fat foods, which are often more readily available.
- Some clients have health issues that affect their income and ability to afford nutritious food as well as their ability to be active.
- More fresh produce is being donated to Harvesters. Mobile food pantries enable network agencies to efficiently distribute more healthy produce and other perishables.

Someone might say: The people in line at your agency's mobile food pantry are driving late model vehicles. They probably don't need food assistance if they can afford to drive a vehicle.

The Facts:

- Many areas lack public transportation and vehicles are essential for families to get to work, school and to other needed services.
- Many seeking food from Harvesters' network are coming for the first time. They may own a car or a home and still at some point be unable to buy food for their family.
- Among Harvesters clients who have worked in the past, one in five either had or currently have managerial or professional jobs.
- Many clients don't have access to a vehicle or public transportation. The vehicle in line at a mobile food pantry may belong to a neighbor, relative or friend, who is providing a ride.

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