Harvesters—The Community Food Network
History

1979

In February 1979, Harvesters is founded by a coalition of businesspeople, churches and social service agencies. The food bank begins operations on May 1 in space donated by Kansas City Cold Storage. During its first eight months of operation, Harvesters distributes 155,000 pounds of food.

1980 – 1981

Harvesters secures a warehouse at 2431 Prospect, Kansas City, Mo.

1982

Annual food distribution hits and surpasses the one-million-pound mark with 1.8 million pounds distributed.

1983

Ozarks Food Harvest in Springfield, Mo. begins operations as an affiliate.

1984

The MO-KAN Regional Food bank in St. Joseph, Mo. opens as an affiliate.

1985

Judy Perry is named Harvesters' executive director.

1987

The first food drive coordinator is hired.

1988

KC Harvest, the prepared and perishable food rescue program, is initiated.

Let's Help Topeka joins as an affiliate.

1989

Harvesters' capital campaign raises $1.2 million.

Harvesters moves from the Prospect location to a larger facility at 1811 N. Topping, Kansas City, Mo.

1990

Harvesters holds dedication ceremony for Topping facility.

The first community relations director is hired.

1991

A record-breaking 700,000 pounds of USDA commodities are distributed.

1992

Harvesters is honored by Second Harvest (now Feeding America) with the "Second Harvest Excellence in Food Banking" award.

Check-Out Hunger is initiated. 148 participating grocery stores raise $78,000.

1993

Project STRENGTH, nutrition education program, is introduced.

Harvesters assists in disaster relief effort in response to Midwest flooding, providing 2.2 million pounds of food, beverages, cleaning supplies and personal care products.

First annual Quisenberry-Harvesters Celebrity Golf Classic is held.

1994

Harvesters' service area is expanded to include 13 counties.

1995

Harvesters is honored by the Congressional Hunger Center with the "Victory Against Hunger" award.

KC Harvest receives the "Excellence in Food Rescue" award from Food Chain.

1996

Harvesters marks 100 million pounds of food distributed since its inception.

1997

Forks & Corks replaces Taste of the Nation. The first Chef's Classic is held

1999

Karen Haren is named Harvesters' executive director.

2000

Harvesters is recognized by America's Second Harvest (now Feeding America) with a Hunger's Hope award for general management.

2001

The Agency Menu Order Service (AMOS), allowing agencies to pre-order product by phone and fax is implemented.

Harvesters launches the Kids Cafe program to provide meals to children when school is not in session. Harvesters' childhood hunger education initiative is honored with a Hunger's Hope award.

Harvesters participates in the largest hunger study ever conducted; revealing a broad and growing cross-section of the population relies on emergency food assistance.

2002

Harvesters lifetime distribution surpasses 200 million pounds of food and household products.

The first National Hunger Awareness Day is observed.

Harvesters initiates a capital campaign to relocate and expand operations.

2003

The Agency Menu Order Service expands to include “eHarvest,” giving member agencies the ability to place orders via the Internet.

Harvesters moves from 1811 N. Topping to a greatly expanded distribution center at 3801 Topping Avenue in Kansas City, Mo.

2004

Harvesters is honored by the Missouri Association of Social Welfare with its Pillar Award for outstanding community organization.

The BackSnack program pilot begins. Weekly backpacks of nutritious, child-friendly foods are distributed to elementary students at risk of hunger on the weekends.

The Senior Mobile Food Pantry begins, providing on-site distribution of fresh produce and other perishable foods to seniors living in low-income housing.

2005

Harvesters participates in national disaster relief activities, sending trucks and food to the Gulf Coast following hurricanes Katrina and Gustav.

The $11.5 million “Harvesters is the Solution” capital campaign, which allowed Harvesters to purchase and move to 3801 Topping Avenue, is completed.

Harvesters’ Demonstration Garden is created to promote growing of fresh, healthy fruits and vegetables.

2006

The AmeriCorps Missouri program begins, providing AmeriCorps members in the community outreach areas of food drives, volunteers and nutrition education.

2007

Harvesters’ Building Hope Initiatives wins Feeding America’s Circle of Excellence Award for Model Fundraising Campaign of the Year.

Harvesters hosts its first agency conference with workshops focused on growing the distribution, volunteer and fundraising capacity of our member agencies.

2008

With a $1.3 million three-year grant from the Hall Family Foundation and support from other donors, Harvesters expands its BackSnack program from serving 650 children each week to providing weekly backpacks of food to 8,000 children in the 2008-2009 school year.

Harvesters responds to the increase in need as a result of the economic downturn. The fiscal year 2008-09 distribution goal is expanded from 27 million to 33 million pounds of food and household products.

2009

Harvesters is named as one of five Feeding America regional disaster staging sites.

Karen Haren receives Feeding America's Executive Director of the Year Award, which honors the leader of a member food bank who has contributed an extraordinary effort to the network's viability and momentum.

2010

Harvesters earns the food industry's highest food safety rating, becoming one of only two food banks in the nation to receive a superior rating from AIB International, an organization that works to ensure the safety of the global food supply chain.

Harvesters opens a second distribution center at 215 Southeast Quincy Street, Topeka, Kan., to strengthen its services and increase the amount of food available to partner agencies in the Kansas counties Harvesters serves.

The Missouri Restaurant Association holds Kansas City's first annual Restaurant Week benefitting Harvesters.

2011

Feeding America names Harvesters the 2011 Food Bank of the Year, recognizing our food bank for increasing access to nutritious food across our service area, being one of only two food banks in the nation to receive AIB International's superior rating for food safety and increasing awareness about the issue of hunger across our community.

Harvesters' long-time partner in feeding the hungry, Sprint, receives Feeding America's Hunger's Hope Award for Group Volunteer Service.

2012

Harvesters and CEO Karen Haren receives the Mid-America Regional Council's (MARC) Regional Leadership Award, which recognizes leadership and excellence in applying innovative solutions to regional problems and achieving improved quality of life and equitable opportunity for the region's citizens.

In July, Harvesters reaches a milestone: since its founding the food bank had acquired 500 million pounds of food.

Harvesters' familiar logo appears on NASCAR legend Richard Petty's iconic No. 43 Ford at Kansas Speedway's fall race during the Bacon A Difference campaign with Farmland Foods to raise funds and awareness about hunger relief.

2013

Harvesters President and CEO Karen Haren retires from Harvesters after 25 years with the organization. Valerie Nicholson-Watson is named the new president and CEO and becomes the fourth person to lead Harvesters.

Harvesters begins an annual food drive called *Our Community CAN* held during Hunger Action Month and encourages people to hold neighborhood food drives on a certain Saturday.

2014

To recognize his work on behalf of the hungry, Feeding America names Harvesters' Chief Operating Officer, Norm Bowers, Central Region Operations Leader of the Year.

Harvesters marks its 35th anniversary and distributes more than 43 million pounds of food.

Harvesters begins an annual food drive called *Take Your Can to Work Day,* encouraging businesses to collect food on one day in April.

Harvesters holds its first Canstruction event in Topeka.

Harvesters is recognized by the Community Resource Council in Topeka, Kan. as the Nonprofit Organization of the Year.

Harvesters receives the Kansas City Industrial Council Sustainability award for Recycling.

Feeding America recognizes Harvesters in its advocacy Hall of Fame. One of the first two food banks to receive the recognition.

Luntea Her, AmeriCorps Food Drive Specialist, is honored by the Missouri Community Service Commission with a 2014 AmeriCorps State Service Award – the first Harvesters' AmeriCorps member to receive a state award.

2015

Harvesters Chief Operating Officer, Norm Bowers, retires after 16 years with the organization. Steve Davis is named the new COO.

Harvesters begins offering fresh produce on its menu for agencies.

Harvesters receives its first $1 million dollar gift from an individual.

Harvesters launches a new speaker series called *Food 4 Thought* to raise awareness of hunger.

Harvesters launches online registration availability for volunteers.

Harvesters' social media followers top 15,000.

Harvesters concludes its five-year KC Challenge campaign with the *Kansas City Star*. The total raised over the campaign run for the BackSnack program is more than $1 million.

Harvesters holds its first new large-scale special event in many years. *Fed Up Fest* is a one-day festival featuring live music, food trucks, a food packing station, yard games and more. The festival was designed to attract and engage Millennials in Harvesters and the issue of hunger.

2016

Harvesters begins work on a major addition to its Kansas City facility, the first expansion since the current facility opened. The project will increase the size of the freezer/cooler and allow for increased acquisition and distribution of fresh produce.

Harvesters launches a partnership program with Hiland Dairy called *Milk2MyPlate* that provides delivery of fresh milk directly to Harvesters' agencies at a discount. Agencies purchase the milk at cost.

Forks & Corks and Chefs Classic, two signature Harvesters' special events, celebrate 20 years.

2017

Harvesters completes its construction project at the Kansas City facility which adds 13,000 square feet to the organization's cooler, creates a new climate-controlled area for packing BackSnacks and boxing bread donations and includes a Bulk Repackaging Zone, where bulk dry goods like rice, pasta, cereal and flour can be re-packed into family-size portions.

Harvesters purchases the facility at 215 SE Quincy Street in Topeka, which it had leased since opening a warehouse there in 2010.

Harvesters distributes more than 50 million pounds in one year for the first time in its history. The Acquisition department marks the milestone of collecting 750 million pounds of food and household products in the organization's history.

Harvesters' SNAP outreach department assists with applications to provide more than three million meals.

Harvesters revamps two former Topeka Metro buses and uses them to expand efforts to feed hungry seniors and children. The larger bus distributes fresh produce and the smaller bus is used as a mobile Kids Cafe distribution vehicle.

2018

Harvesters completes its renovation project at the Kansas Distribution Center in Topeka, Kan. Key components of the project included renovation of the cooler, expansion of the freezer, renovation of the volunteer engagement center, Hunger Education Center, front lobby/entrance and agency pickup and loading dock areas. Outside, the building receives a new roof and new paint.

Harvesters adds a fourth officer position to its Executive Leadership Team, promoting Director of Finance, Robin Potts, to Chief Financial Officer. Potts also is named a CFO of the Year finalist by t*he Kansas City Business Journal*.

Harvesters receives an Excellence in Nonprofit Leadership award from the local organization, Support KC.

Harvesters receives preliminary certification from the USDA to begin re-packing meat product donations inside its Clean Room facility.

Harvesters pilots a school pantry program in six elementary schools.

2019

Harvesters launches 18 school pantry programs in elementary schools. The pantries provide convenience for parents already dropping off or picking up children from school and help supplement the BackSnack program, providing food for the whole family.

Harvesters expands its Health and Hunger initiative by adding mobile pantries that specifically serve veterans or are hosted at a medical clinic or physician's office.

Harvesters further reduces its carbon footprint by replacing all lighting throughout the Kansas City facility with LED lights.

Harvesters' number of agency network partners now stands at more than 760.

Harvesters is the first Feeding America food bank to volunteer to be part of an unscheduled AIB food safety audit. The organization successfully received a top score.

2020

Harvesters celebrates its 40th anniversary of operation. The Sosland Family and Foundation hosts a special luncheon to thank key long-time supporters of Harvesters' mission.

Harvesters implements Four Good, a brand new special event in the Topeka market. This event exceeds both fundraising and attendance expectations, with 249 people attending and $80,000 raised.

Harvesters responds to the COVID-19 Pandemic when it strikes the country and region in the last quarter of the fiscal year. Demand for food assistance surges to an all-time high with Harvesters setting monthly and annual (65.9 million lbs. or 57.4 million meals) distribution records. Operations are greatly impacted as the number of food drives drops and volunteer shifts are limited due to social distancing and other safety concerns. A record $23 million ($13 in last quarter) is raised for the year.

Harvesters re-engages agency partner, Just Food, as an RDO (Redistribution Organization) partner.

2021 As the pandemic continues, Harvesters continues to respond to the high demand for food assistance across its service area. Harvesters distributes more than 76.9 million pounds of food, surpassing the previous year's distribution record by more than 10 million pounds.

Fundraising hits an organization high of more than $32 million.

Harvesters distributes more than $1.7 million in grants to its agency network to help ensure they can stay open and meet increased need during the pandemic.

Harvesters begins exploring partnerships related to the root causes of hunger, beyond healthcare, focusing on workforce development and transportation.

Harvesters tops 1 billion pounds in total food acquired since its founding.

2022 Harvesters President and CEO, Valerie Nicholson-Watson, receives the John van Hangel award from Feeding America. This is the highest award in food banking.

On June 30, Nicholson-Watson retires from Harvesters after 20 years of service to the organization. Stephen Davis is named the new President and CEO and becomes the fifth person to lead Harvesters.

Harvesters learns its Topeka facility will be in the path of new construction involving changes to the Quincy/Polk Viaduct on I-70 and that the state of Kansas will be acquiring the property through eminent domain. Plans begin to locate a new home for the Kansas Distribution Center.

Harvesters adopts new mission and vision statements.

Mission Statement

Harvesters mobilizes the power of our community to create equitable access to nutritious food and address the root causes and impact of hunger.

Vision Statement

Our vision is a healthy, thriving community where no one is hungry.

2023

Harvesters purchases a building housed by Reuter Organ Company to become its new Kansas Distribution Center. The building is in Lawrence, Kansas. Construction/renovation begins in June with expected completion by March of 2024.

Harvesters promotes Monic Houpe to Chief Operating Officer. She previously served as Director of Agency Partnerships and Capacity.

Harvesters reformats its previous fundraising event, Forks & Corks, into a new two-day food and drink pop-up event called Feastival. Feastival includes a Friday night dinner, Saturday brunch and volunteer produce packing event. The first one is held in July at Union Station. A second event is held in Topeka in October.

Harvesters officially brands and names its work related to hunger's root causes as Food+.

2024

Harvesters moves its Kansas Distribution Center to 1220 Timberedge Road in Lawrence, Kansas in May 2024.

Harvesters' Chief Resource Officer, Joanna Sebelien, retires after 23 years with the organization.

Harvesters brings its Kids Cafe program to close as of September 30.

2025

Harvesters adds Leavenworth County, Kansas, to its service area, bringing the total number of counties served up to 27.

Harvesters hires Elizabeth Keever as Chief Resource Officer and promotes Angela Holcomb to Chief Human Resource Officer.

Harvesters' volunteer program receives accreditation through the Volunteer Service Enterprise program, signifying its commitment to maintaining the highest standards in strategic volunteer engagement. Harvesters is the 12th Feeding America food bank to hold this recognition.

Harvesters launches a series of focused advocacy efforts, including the Advocacy Beet newsletter, as federal hunger relief programs such as SNAP, TEFAP and LFPA take major funding cuts.