

Human Services, Agriculture Secretaries Remind Pennsylvanians of Food Assistance Resources, Encourage Support of Charitable Food Networks

Lancaster, PA – Department of Human Services (DHS) Secretary Teresa Miller and Department of Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding today visited Power Packs Project in Lancaster to assist with volunteer efforts keeping food available for families experiencing challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic and current economic insecurity. Power Packs Project partners with area schools in Lancaster and Lebanon counties to distribute nutritious weekend meals and recipes to families.

“Difficult circumstances created by the pandemic have not subsided, and many families around Pennsylvania still must endure challenges that come from COVID-19’s effect on food security,” said Secretary Miller. “Schools often provide at least one or two nutritious meals each day for students, but as summer continues and schools remain closed, students still need to eat breakfast and lunch. That’s where programs like Power Packs Project come in, bridging the gap when school breakfasts and lunches are not available. We know that going without meals can jeopardize children’s health and development, and the Wolf Administration is committed to doing everything it can to support families and connect them with the resources they need to get through this trying time. We are incredibly grateful to programs like Power Packs Project for their commitment to the communities they serve.”

“The Power Packs project not only provides food, but it also includes an educational recipe that can be used with the food found in the pack. This gives families the power to build nutritious, delicious meals, filling the void that exists when school is not in session,” said Secretary Redding. “We know COVID-19 has caused more people to use food banks and rely on programs like this. We estimate that in 2020, the Bureau of Food Assistance will move more than \$80 million of USDA Foods through Pennsylvania’s charitable food system in all 67 counties, with the state’s allocation of The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) funding from USDA. That is compared to 2019 when nearly \$50 million was allocated to the purchase of USDA Foods. We are committed to assuring that even during difficult times, no one should go hungry.”

Power Packs empowers nearly 2,000 families with education and ingredients to create nutritious weekend meals, so their children return to school fed and ready to learn. During the school year, Power Packs children qualify for free- and reduced-price breakfast and lunch, ensuring that they will receive at least one or two nutritious meals each day. On weekends, when school lunches are not available, Power Packs fills the void by providing nutritious recipes, the ingredients for those recipes, and extras like peanut butter and cereal to see them through until Monday.

Power Packs Project has also provided summer distribution boxes in response to COVID-19 that contain shelf-stable milk and other products such as a protein, beans, cereal, peanut butter, and fresh produce when it is available. The boxes can be easily distributed to ensure that families still receive the nutrition they need.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted many families in our area. We have seen an increase in need, especially from individuals who have recently lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic and are facing food insecurity for the first time. Power Packs Project will continue to

work to ensure families receive the nutrition they need for their children to continue to grow and develop,” said Power Packs Project Executive Director Brad Peterson.

Pennsylvanians who need help feeding themselves or their family should find and contact their local food bank or pantry through [Feeding Pennsylvania](#) and [Hunger-Free Pennsylvania](#).

Help with buying food is also available through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP helps more than 1.9 million Pennsylvanians expand purchasing power by providing money each month to spend on groceries, helping households have resources to purchase enough food to avoid going hungry. Inadequate food and chronic nutrient deficiencies have profound effects on a person’s life and health, including increased risks for chronic diseases, higher chances of hospitalization, poorer overall health, and increased health care costs. As the nation faces the COVID-19 pandemic, access to essential needs like food is more important than ever to help keep vulnerable populations healthy and mitigate co-occurring health risks.

With the 2020-2021 school year right around the corner, the Wolf administration also reminds families to apply for free or reduced price meals through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). Children from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the poverty level, and children in families receiving SNAP or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) are eligible for free lunches. Children in families whose income is between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty level are eligible for reduced price lunches.

Applications for SNAP, NSLP, TANF, and other public assistance programs can be submitted online at www.compass.state.pa.us. Those who prefer to submit paper documentation can print from the website or request an application by phone at 1-800-692-7462 and mail it to their local [County Assistance Office](#) (CAO) or place it in a CAO’s secure drop box, if available. While CAOs remain closed, work processing applications, determining eligibility, and issuing benefits continues.

Applications are processed within six days on average for SNAP and once a benefit is approved, it can be immediately accessed. All Pennsylvanians who are in a difficult financial situation due to the economic challenges of this pandemic should apply to see if they are eligible for assistance.

Secretary Miller and Secretary Redding also encouraged anyone who is healthy and able to consider taking some time to support their food bank, pantry, or charitable food organization through volunteer time or monetary donations, as this time is creating an incredible strain on organizations’ volunteer efforts and resources. Anyone interested in volunteering can find organizations in need of volunteer support on the [United Way of Pennsylvania’s 211 website](#).

For more information about food assistance resources for people around Pennsylvania impacted by COVID-19 and the accompanying economic insecurity, visit https://www.agriculture.pa.gov/Food_Security/Pages/default.aspx