

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all of us – our daily routines, our connections to family and friends, employment, health, and for so many, the ability to put food on the table. Before the pandemic, Oklahoma had one of the highest rates of food insecurity in the nation, with one in six Oklahomans facing hunger daily. Feeding America now projects that one in five Oklahomans, including an astounding one in three Oklahoma children, will face food insecurity a result of the pandemic. During Hunger Action Month, September, we are asking all Oklahomans to take note and take action. Hunger is closely tied to economic security. As a result of current job losses, furloughs, evictions and other pandemic-related economic impacts, the community-based partner agencies of the Oklahoma Food Banks – the Community Food Bank of Eastern Oklahoma and the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma – are responding to a 30% or greater increase in the need for food assistance throughout every county in the state. Over the summer, the federal and state governments helped the hunger situation for many Americans by relaxing regulations for food distribution from several U.S. Department of Agriculture programs. For example, children were no longer required to eat meals at summer feeding sites. This enabled working parents and grandparents to pick up meals for their children to eat at home. As a result, the children in these families didn't have to make dangerous walks across heavily trafficked streets or travel long distances in rural communities in order to get a no-cost lunch or snack. Consequently, many summer feeding sites served children in far greater numbers this year. We need USDA to continue that sort of flexibility through the end of the school year. Now, however, delayed action at the federal level, and a resistance in certain circles to increase funding for proven effective programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, is cause for grave concern. As a result, food banks may continue to shoulder an ever-increasing load of providing enough food for the growing number of people unsure of how they will put food on the table. For every meal Oklahoma Food Banks provide, SNAP can provide nine. Upsetting that ratio

will result in an undue burden on the charitable sector. Hunger Action Day is a great time to contact members of Congress and tell them that we need immediate action to bolster nutrition programs in the next COVID-19 relief bill. The Oklahoma Food Banks anticipate economic recovery from the pandemic will take time. Following the Great Recession, it took until 2018 for the number of food insecure people to approach prerecession levels. The petroleum industry, travel and aviation and service industry, all mainstays of the Oklahoma economy, have experienced some of the greatest economic losses. With recent gains made in the fight against hunger wiped away by the pandemic, it will take a sustained effort from the whole community to help those who have lost jobs and need food assistance. The collective activities and actions offered by the Oklahoma Food Banks are designed to educate, engage and raise the funds and food needed to meet the increasing need. Thursday is Hunger Action Day. We urge you to wear orange to mark the day and begin conversations on the issue of hunger. Ask others to join your efforts. Tell them you support hunger relief efforts and why. The Oklahoma children and adults who don't get enough to eat have increased risk of adverse health outcomes and diminished productivity in school, work and in their daily routines. It's not easy for someone to ask for help but it can be easy to help. Our neighbors need your support now more than ever. Together we can help the increased number of people struggling with food insecurity. Visit okfoodbank.org and feedingoklahoma.org to learn how you can get started today. Lori A. Long is CEO of the Community Food Bank of Eastern Oklahoma. Deb Bunting is the interim CEO of the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma. Featured video [Subscribe to Daily Headlines Sign up!](#) * I understand and agree that registration on or use of this site constitutes agreement to its user agreement and privacy policy.