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**County Of Dane**  
Office Of The County Executive

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## **Dane County Leaders Seek to Bolster Funding for Food Pantries Ahead of Busy Holiday Season**

*County Executive, Supervisors Announce \$1.7 Million Increase for “Farm to Foodbank” Program as Demand for Emergency Food Supply Continues to Surge & Area Pantries Serve Record Numbers*

Dane County would add \$1.7 million in funding for food as local pantries struggle to keep up with surging demand ahead of the holidays, under a new proposal unveiled today by County Executive Joe Parisi and a number of County Board supervisors. The local officials made the announcement at a press conference at The River Food Pantry, one of the largest providers of food assistance in the county.

The additional funds would go to bolster the county’s “Farm to Foodbank” program, which was created during the COVID-19 pandemic as a way to get fresh, home grown produce onto the kitchen tables of the increasing numbers of families in need across our community.

“It is important that as public policy makers lead, they be responsive to the moment, and right now there’s so much need for help with food for so many families,” County Executive Parisi said. “Through innovative work we did at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Second Harvest has an established pipeline to our local growers and producers and is well positioned to use these extra dollars to make sure the families coming through the doors of pantries like this one can be fed through the holidays and beyond.”

The Dane County Board recently adopted the 2024 county budget and included about \$4.5 million for the Farm to Foodbank program. The Executive originally proposed \$6 million for that emergency food supply, and the \$1.7 million resolution being introduced this week will restore funding past its original level.

“Overall demand for The River's services is up by 33% compared to the same period from 2022, and we are only now entering what are typically our busiest weeks of the year,” said Rhonda Adams, Executive Director of The River Food Pantry.

To date, The River has served over 14,000 individuals and helped more than 1,000 households last week alone. This week, that number is expected to grow to at least 1,200 households, as The River works to help with holiday groceries and meals. Meanwhile, Badger Prairie Needs Network’s Verona-based food pantry has seen a 10 percent increase in the number of households served year-to-date.

“I’m introducing this resolution to more adequately fund our food pantries because access to safe, healthy food is a basic, fundamental need that we in county government have a responsibility to help meet. In the operating budget that was just passed, some of the funding Executive Parisi had allocated toward our local

food pantries was allocated elsewhere. As I noted during the budget discussion, that decision hurt our families, kids, and farmers throughout the county. I am pleased that we have the opportunity to make it right,” Wisconsin State Representative and Dane County Board Supervisor Melissa Ratcliff said.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture recently noted that food insecurity nationally increased almost 25% last year over the previous 12 months. One in eight U.S. households struggled with hunger in 2022, exacerbated by the impacts of economic inflation on grocery prices.

The additional \$1.7 million comes from unallocated federal dollars provided to Dane County from the 2021 American Rescue Plan. Supervisor Ratcliff’s resolution will be introduced at the Dane County Board meeting this Thursday evening, with review and action expected by the full Board in the next couple of weeks.

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