

Dane County: To extend “Farm to Foodbank” program with \$3.75 million in 2022 to help residents struggling with record high inflation

Posted on Thursday, Apr 7, 2022

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An innovative Dane County program that has stocked the coolers and shelves at local food pantries with locally grown produce and goods will be extended through the end of 2022, County Executive Joe Parisi announced today. Dane County has agreed to a five-month, \$2.75 million extension with Second Harvest Foodbank of Southern Wisconsin to ensure food security for those struggling to meet basic needs, as residents continues to face record high inflation in stores and online.

“We are extending our partnership with Second Harvest to keep the shelves of food pantries well-stocked for vulnerable residents struggling to make ends meet during this period of record high inflation and support our network of local food producers through another growing season,” said County Executive Parisi. “The ‘Farm to Foodbank’ program has been a great success in addressing our community’s needs during the pandemic, and we thank Second Harvest for their continued partnership.”

Dane County and Second Harvest’s partnership was originally set to expire at the end of July, before County Executive Parisi included \$1 million in his 2022 budget for the program to cover the 2022 growing season through the end of October. The additional \$2.75 million means the program will be able to purchase \$750,000 worth of food each month from August through December. The extension brings Dane County’s total commitment to the “Farm to Foodbank” program to \$26.75 million.

“This funding has provided vital and consistent support for folks experiencing food insecurity during the pandemic, and for farmers and producers facing sudden and unpredictable changes in business demand,” said Second Harvest President and CEO Michelle Orge. “It has helped us build a blueprint for long-term collaboration with farmers, producers, and vendors. Partnerships like these are crucial in a time of significantly higher food and fuel costs caused by inflation. With the community’s support, we will continue our commitment to provide locally produced food through our partnerships and programs.”

Thanks to Dane County’s allocation of CARES Act and American Rescue Plan funds, the “Farm to Foodbank” program was able to distribute more than 8.45 million pounds of food to Dane County residents through February 2022. Nearly 72% percent of the food distributed was either fresh produce, dairy, or meat/protein. 37 vendors were able to have a reliable outlet for their food and get the help they needed to stay in business. 184 partner agencies received food purchased with funding from the program.

Dane County launched its partnership with Second Harvest in April 2020 to help meet emergency food needs during the Covid-19 pandemic. Through the “Farm to Foodbank” program, Dane County has been able to link Second Harvest with Dane County Dairy and Pork Producers, Dane County Farmers’ Market, and Fairshare CSA Coalition so more products can be bought directly, benefiting local farmers and growers regardless of whether they are pork producers, milk cows, or grow fresh produce. This partnership has brought producers and consumers together to improve sales for farmers and resupplied dwindling cupboards of area food banks during the pandemic.

A resolution to approve this additional food support to the community to assist with the higher costs of food and groceries will be introduced at tonight’s county board meeting. It is expected to be approved in the coming weeks.