

US food banks and homeless shelters struggle to meet record demand ahead of Thanksgiving

Alex Findijs

16 November 2020

With the Thanksgiving holiday less than two weeks away, food banks and homeless shelters across the United States are struggling to meet the growing demand caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Dallas, Texas, thousands of people lined up in their cars in what has been described as the largest mobile food distribution in history. The North Texas Food Banks handed out 7,000 turkeys and 600,000 pounds of food on Saturday. Organizers said it was enough to feed 25,000 people.

The state of Washington has seen the number of people who rely on food banks double from one million to 2.2 million this year. Linda Nageotte, the CEO of Food Lifeline, told the Seattle Times that she expects that “by the end of this year one in five Washingtonians could be facing hunger.”

The pandemic has also placed an extra burden on food bank workers, who now need to prepare and box food packages together before they can be distributed. It is labor intensive work that is even more difficult during a health crisis. In an attempt to lighten the load on food banks, the Washington National Guard has sent 550 soldiers to 26 distribution sites to help.

In Rochester, New York, the food bank Foodlink is working to feed a line of 50-100 people on any given day. The organization Dimitri House, which operates a food pantry and homeless shelter in Rochester, has had similar issues and has also decided to prepare meals ahead of time and distribute them to families for pick up.

Laurie Prizel, the executive director for Dimitri House, told ABC13 WHAM that “we’re getting a large number of working poor individuals coming through as well, not just the typical somebody on a fixed income

trying to survive. It’s people who are holding down two jobs or lost their jobs. We’re saving the average family at least \$100 on a Thanksgiving meal, and it’s allowing at least the families to come together.”

Every year, thousands of volunteers in Albany, New York work to feed thousands of people in need. This year, however, the Equinox Thanksgiving Day Community Dinner has found a creative solution to the problem of social distancing. Instead of hosting a large event, the organization raised \$100,000 to deliver meals directly to the homes of people in need. To accomplish this the organizers will work with restaurants to purchase and prepare food, enabling them to feed needy people and support local businesses in the process.

In Santa Rosa, California, the Redwood Empire Food Bank has done what it can to keep up with the significantly higher demand than usual. During a normal year, the food bank would hand out around 11 million meals. This year, however, Redwood has already produced 22 million meals.

The wealth disparity in Santa Rosa, 55 miles north of San Francisco, in California’s wine country, has been rising for years, resulting in a poverty rate of 11.5 percent. According to the Census Bureau, the top 5 percent of households make an average of \$331,000 a year, with the bottom 20 percent making just \$16,000. It is no wonder that food banks in this area would see such high demand for food assistance.

The San Francisco Bay Area has some of the highest levels of income inequality in the country. In San Francisco County the top 5 percent earn an average of more than \$800,000 a year while the bottom 20 percent average just over \$16,000. The San Francisco-Marín Food Bank is currently providing food aid to 55,000

households—nearly double its pre-pandemic total—and is planning to give away 1,000 turkeys to families in need on Thanksgiving.

Similarly, the Food Bank of the Hudson Valley has reported a 53 percent increase in demand in Westchester County, New York. Food shipments used to arrive twice a month, now they come once a week and are still barely keeping up with the need.

Westchester is often mistaken as a wealthy county with pockets of poverty, but it is actually the opposite. Islands of ultra-wealthy neighborhoods inflate the general cost of living, making otherwise typical working class wages barely enough to survive on.

The pandemic has made it especially difficult to operate homeless shelters and offer large communal Thanksgiving meals for the homeless. Restrictive capacity requirements to limit the number of people interacting indoors have forced shelters to limit the amount of beds they can fill.

In many cases, shelters and food aid organizations have moved their events outdoors to compensate for the restrictions on indoor events. In Charlottesville, Virginia, the organization Volunteers from Charlottesville is making “blessing bags” that will include a Thanksgiving meal and materials to help people survive the winter.

After almost canceling the event, the organizers decided to push through and host it outdoors at Washington Park, where they plan to hand out 100 bags the Sunday after Thanksgiving.

Albany’s Capital City Rescue Mission in New York has done its best to continue with indoor activities throughout the pandemic. Doing its best to maintain social distancing and mask wearing, the organization has continued sheltering and feeding those in need and expects to feed thousands this holiday season.

The need to provide meals to struggling families and the homeless grows every year, but the economic crisis triggered by the pandemic has placed a demand on charity organizations that can barely be kept up with. Such immense social distress, even as Wall Street soars to record highs and trillions in bailouts have been handed over to the banks and corporations, is a damning indictment of the capitalist system and the two parties who represent it, the Democrats and Republicans.

Without the intervention of the working class to shut

down non-essential production and demand full pay for workers to stay home in order to suppress the pandemic, the need will only grow as the ruling class continues to pursue its murderous “herd immunity” policy, which has already killed more than 250,000 Americans and pushed millions into poverty.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact