



Rhinelander Area Food Pantry, Inc.

627 Coon Street

715-369-7237

A NON-PROFIT 501(c)(3) ORGANIZATION

Rhinelander, Wisconsin

This institution is an equal opportunity employer and provider.

November 2020

According to [statistics](#) provided by Feeding America, more than 50 million people nationwide — including 17 million children — may experience food insecurity due to economic hardships associated with the coronavirus pandemic. Simultaneously, a [March study](#) found that food-insecure individuals are at higher risk for severe illness associated with COVID-19.

Unfortunately, the pandemic has not spared our Northwoods residents. In Wisconsin, the [projected overall food insecurity rate](#) in 2020 is 12.4 percent. In Oneida County, the Rhinelander Area Food Pantry (RAFP) is already on track to distribute over one million pounds of food to those facing hunger in the Northwoods.

Not only has the COVID-19 significantly increased the amount of food RAFP has distributed, but the pandemic has required the Pantry to make a number of COVID-related changes to our day-to-day operations in an effort to stop the spread of the virus. Since March, RAFP has made the switch from a choice pantry to a no-contact, drive-up distribution; a sanitizing station and sneeze shield have been installed; volunteers and staff are required to wear a mask, sign in and check their temperature upon entry to the building; customers are not allowed in the building; and we have implemented extra sanitizing, all in an effort to keep our customers and volunteers safe. In addition, we recently installed a walk-in cooler, automatic doors and added shelving to increase the effectiveness of Pantry services long into the future.

To support Northwoods residents experiencing financial hardship as a result of the pandemic, we also extended our income eligibility requirements and this change may qualify households that were not eligible in the past. Oneida County residents with a household income of less than 300 percent of the poverty level are now eligible to receive food. As an example, a household of four with a monthly income of less than \$6,550 would qualify with the new changes.

When Pantry customers drive up, they receive a pre-packaged box containing a variety of nutritious non-perishable and perishable food items based on their household size. Customers can also choose from an assortment of special items like vegetable oil, dairy products or produce depending on availability.

Of the approximate 920,000 pounds of food that has already been distributed this year, 14 semi loads containing 413,450 pounds of food were provided free of charge to community members regardless of income through the USDA Farmer to Family program for several weeks throughout the late summer and early fall.

But in order to make it all happen, RAFP relied heavily on our steadfast volunteers. One Farmer to Family distribution day, for example, requires upwards of 21 volunteers contributing a collective 70 hours in support of the cause. This is in addition to over 1,000 volunteer hours logged each month at RAFP on average. Since the pantry made the switch to a no-contact distribution, extra volunteer hours are also required to pre-package the boxes and implement extra sanitizing procedures.

However, the pantry is fortunate to live in a giving community. Through generous donations provided by multiple service organizations, businesses and individuals in the community, RAFP provided 280 turkeys to Northwoods residents for Thanksgiving and the Pantry is working hard to provide customers with holiday gift bags during the Christmas season.

Please send donations to RAFP: c/o BMO Harris Bank, PO Box 280, Rhinelander, WI 54501

“Helping to Build a Hunger-free Community”
(www.rhinelanderareafoodpantry.org)