

Gather.

SUMMER 2026: NOURISH, CONNECT, SUPPORT.



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Gather is a seasonal publication of the Rhinelander Area Food Pantry.
Together, we're building food security through healthy food, community partnerships,
and welcoming spaces where everyone belongs.

www.rhinelanderareafoodpantry.org

Welcome

HELLO FRIENDS

If it seems like a while since you've seen a newsletter from the Rhinelander Area Food Pantry, you're right! Over the past year, we've been busy, not just serving our community, but growing in new ways. As our programs, partnerships, and impact have expanded, we realized it was time for our newsletter to grow too. Welcome to Gather.

While the name has changed, our purpose remains the same: keeping you connected to the people, partnerships, and programs that are building food security throughout our community.

We gather food from local partners and producers. We gather volunteers who generously give their time and talents. Most importantly, we gather as a community to ensure healthy food is accessible to everyone.

Gather will share stories about the many ways our community continues to invest in one another. Whether you've volunteered for years or are reading about our work for the first time, thank you for being part of this community. We hope you'll discover something new about RAFP and perhaps find a new way to get involved. We're glad you're here.

Cheers,



Courtney Smith, Executive Director



**Join Us on August 25th
from 12pm to 2pm at
Pioneer Park for our
Annual RAFP Volunteer
Picnic! Bring a side dish to
pass and a chair.**

If it rains, meet us at RAFP.



NEW COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Building a stronger, healthier community takes more than providing food. It takes partnerships, creativity, and people who enjoy bringing others together. That's why the Rhinelander Area Food Pantry is excited to welcome Allison Wilson as our new Community Programs Coordinator. This new part-time position reflects RAFP's continued growth beyond the pantry walls. Allison will help coordinate community outreach, communications, events, advocacy, and nutrition education while supporting the Hodag Kids Programs.

Allison is no stranger to RAFP. During her five years with the UW Extension FoodWise Program, she partnered with our team to help transform the Hodag Food Wagon into more than a summer meal program. In her new role, Allison will continue building those connections by expanding partnerships throughout Oneida County.

One of Allison's passions is creating welcoming spaces where healthy food and community go hand in hand. Whether she's coordinating a summer pop-up, connecting with a new community partner, or sharing simple ways to prepare nutritious meals, her goal is to help make food access feel like a natural and valued part of community life.

Building Local Food Systems

NOURISHING WISCONSIN

When you shop at the Rhinelander Area Food Pantry, you're also supporting Wisconsin farmers, food producers, and local businesses. Thanks to the Food Security and Wisconsin Products Grant Program, RAFF received \$30,000 to purchase Wisconsin-grown and Wisconsin-produced foods. The funding includes \$20,000 administered by The Hunger Task Force to purchase products through the Wisconsin Food Hub and \$10,000 from Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin dedicated to locally grown and produced foods.

The goal of the program is simple: strengthen food security while investing in Wisconsin's agricultural economy. By connecting food pantries with local producers, the program helps ensure nutritious foods reach families while creating new market opportunities for farmers and food businesses across the state.

At RAFF, we've used these funds to purchase foods that many households enjoy but may not always fit within a grocery budget. Butter, cheese, fresh produce, meat, locally produced honey, jams, and other Wisconsin-made products add both nutrition and variety to our market. These foods complement pantry staples and give shoppers even more choices. For our shoppers, these products represent something equally important: access to fresh, high-quality local foods.

Choosing Wisconsin products has benefits that extend well beyond our shelves. Every purchase supports farmers, food processors, distributors, and small businesses that are part of our state's food economy. It's an investment that strengthens local agriculture while helping build a more resilient food system for everyone.





Growing Healthy Food

LOCALLY GROWN SINCE 2006

There's something special about harvesting a tomato still warm from the sun, picking a handful of fresh herbs, or sharing gardening tips with a neighbor. At the Rhineland Area Food Pantry, those moments happen every week in our Garden and we'd love for you to be part of them.

The RAFP Garden Table brings the season's harvest directly to pantry shoppers during distribution hours. Just like stopping at your favorite farm stand, shoppers can browse freshly picked vegetables, herbs, and seasonal produce while chatting with volunteers about what's growing, how to store it, or simple ways to prepare it at home.

This season, we're inviting more neighbors to join us. Whether you're an experienced gardener or simply enjoy being outside, there are plenty of ways to get involved. Help plant, weed, water, harvest, or greet shoppers at the RAFP Garden Table during pantry shopping hours. No experience is necessary. We're happy to share what we know, and there's always something new to learn.

The garden is open throughout the growing season, and volunteers are welcome to work whenever it fits their schedule. If you'd like to spend a few hours helping fresh food grow or hosting the Garden Table, we want to hear from you.

The RAFP Garden is open Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Volunteers and visitors are welcome.

For more information, contact Tom Jerow, Garden Coordinator, at 715-401-1578.



Expanding Summer Meals

THE HODAG FOOD WAGON HITS THE ROAD

Summer looks a little different when school is out. Households settle into new routines. Grocery budgets stretch a little further, childcare costs increase, and families find new ways to balance work, meals, and summer activities. The Summer Food Service Program (USDA SFSP) helps make healthy, nutritious meals part of that routine, supporting children and teens while giving households a little extra flexibility throughout the summer months.

The SFSP is administered by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and is designed to make healthy meals available to children and teens while school is not in session. As a sponsor, RAFP is expanding our summer meal program by adding two new sites.

These new partnerships reflect what RAFP believes food security is all about. Nutritious food is important, but so are the welcoming places where we can gather, children build healthy habits, and neighbors connect with one another. Every meal served through the Summer Food Service Program is made possible through collaboration. Federal child nutrition funding, state leadership, local partnerships, dedicated volunteers, and generous community support all play a role in making these programs successful.



SUMMER POP-UPS AT RAFP

HEALTHY HODAG ADVENTURE:
SNACK WORKSHOPS AND
SUMMER ACTIVITIES

The Hodag Food Wagon at RAFP returns to provide free weekly meal bags for children aged 18 and under without registration or income eligibility. Summer Pop-Ups at the Pantry feature the Healthy Hodag Adventure where children and families can enjoy games, hands-on snack workshops, free books, and visits from community partners. The Hodag Food Wagon is on Thursdays from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. starting July 9th through August 27th.

The Healthy Hodag Adventure nutrition workshops and activities are funded by a generous grant from the Rhinelander Community Foundation.

Hornet Food Truck



at the Elcho Area
Community Food Pantry

The Hornet Food Truck will bring meals closer to families in their own community. Free weekly meal bags for children aged 18 and under can be picked up on Thursdays from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. starting July 9th through August 27th.



SUMMER POP-UP AT

Kinship
OF TOMAHAWK

The Hodag Food Wagon Pop-Up at Kinship of Tomahawk provides weekly meal bags for youth enrolled in the Kinship Klub. Weekly meal bags will be distributed starting July 9th through August 27th.

Investing in Childhood Nutrition



HODAG MONSTER MEALS

2025–2026 Community Impact Report

*Hodag Monster Meals is not a backpack program.
It's a household food security program.*

From September through June, kids and teens have access to a free monthly meal bag filled with groceries to keep healthy food in the refrigerator and cupboards all school year long.

Our Model

Reliable Access Matters.

Healthy food should be available throughout the month, not just on weekends or during emergencies.

Healthy Food Strengthens Families.

Nutritious groceries help households stretch their food budget while supporting children's growth, learning, and well-being.

Food Access Should be Welcoming.

There is no registration, no income eligibility, and no paperwork. Families can access support when they need it, without unnecessary barriers.

Real Life is Flexible.

Parents and guardians may authorize trusted relatives or caregivers to pick up meal bags, making the program work for busy schedules and changing family needs.

The Impact

2,204 Meal Bags
distributed September
2025 through June 2026.

58,840 Meals
provided to kids and
teens throughout the
school year.

2,204 Loaves of Bread
1,762 Gallons of Milk
1,540 Dozen Eggs
provided as part of a
balanced diet.

707 Children Connected
to reliable food access
through adult proxies.



Why It Matters

Building Food Security.

Reliable food access helps households build routines, stretch grocery budgets, and keep nutritious food available for children every day.

Supporting the Household Supports the Child.

With consistent access to healthy food, children experience greater stability, less stress at home, and more opportunities to learn, grow, and thrive.

Dignity, Flexibility, and Choice.

Households decide what works best for them, without stigma or unnecessary barriers.

The Hodag Way.

We believe the best way to support children is to strengthen the households that care for them. When we make healthy food easy to access and normalize community support, we raise stronger, healthier kids.

Reliable Food Access. Stronger Families. Thriving Kids.



Hodag Monster Meals is made possible by the generosity of volunteers, grant partners, local businesses, community organizations, schools, clubs, churches, and individuals who believe every child deserves access to healthy food.



Rhineland Area Food Pantry
627 Coon Street
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rhinelanderafoodpantry.org

Celebrating Together

JOIN THE FUN: SPONSOR OR VOLUNTEER

To sign up to volunteer [CLICK HERE](#). To learn more about sponsorship opportunities, email csmith@rhinelanderareafoodpantry.org.

Harvest Hoedown

Saturday, September 26, 2026

11am to 4pm at Pioneer Park

**Horse Drawn
Wagon Rides
to the Pumpkin
Patch!**

**Free Petting
Zoo & Games
for Kids!**



**Famous Smoked Pork
Sandwich Plate!**

**Green Bay Packers
Tickets Raffle!**

50/50 Raffle!

**GFWC
Rhinelander
Woman's Club
Bake Sale!**

**Live Music on the
Harvest Stage**
11:00am Dennis McGinnity
12:00pm Shannon Hauser
1:00pm Hodag Ukers
2:00pm Mike Velis

**Burgers, Brats
& Hot Dogs
by the Personal
Essentials Pantry!**

*Green Bay Packers Tickets and 50/50 Raffle Drawings at 3pm. You do not have to be present to win.

FREE ENTRY! FREE Shuttle to Ocala St. Parking Lot

Come to The Pioneer Park Historical Complex & The Hodag Farmer's Market too!



WESTERN CONNECTION RANCH & KRAFT'S KUDDLY KRITTERS





Building Food Security

SERVING ONEIDA COUNTY

Behind every number is a person, a household, and a community working together. Here's a snapshot of RAFFP's impact from January through June 2026.

111	774	1,629	4,056	1,616	8,980	442,446	368,705
new	households	individuals	household	Senior	volunteer	pounds	average
households	shopped	with access	shopping	Stock	hours	of food	= number of
registered	for food	to food	visits	Boxes	given	distributed	meals

Working Together

IT'S A COMMUNITY EFFORT

Whether you share your time, make a financial gift, grow fresh produce or simply help spread the word, every contribution helps create a healthier more connected Northwoods.

Nourish

- Make a financial gift.
- Donate healthy food.
- Support children's nutrition.

Connect

- Volunteer.
- Join the Garden.
- Attend Harvest Hoedown.

Support

- Become a sponsor.
- Partner with RAFFP.
- Host a Community Food Drive.

Thrive Together

- Share our mission.
- Advocate for food security.
- Invite someone to get involved.



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