

## **Community Hunger Solutions provides hunger relief regionwide**

**April 24, 2025**

Community Hunger Solutions, (CHS) Vernon Economic Development Association's food recovery program, has had a busy year working to alleviate hunger in our communities, according to the impact numbers for 2024. CHS sources excess fresh produce and dairy products from farms in our bountiful Driftless Region and distributes this nutritious food to pantries, meal sites and food banks where many elderly and low-income families who are struggling with hunger go for help.

CHS does this through community partnerships with farmers, food processors and retailers, food pantries and meal sites, and community supporters. CHS provides critical infrastructure that brings needed nutritious food to families who face barriers to accessing nutritious food, thus closing the gap between supply and need in this region.

CHS partners with more than 20 food pantries and meal sites in Vernon, Monroe, Crawford, and Grant counties, serving at least 2,000 elderly and low-income families per month. These communities include Viroqua, La Farge, Viola, Westby, Hillsboro, Ontario, Soldiers Grove, Gays Mills, Boscobel, Cashton, and Wilton. For some of these partners, CHS is the only source these pantries can obtain perishable items from, and they are thrilled with the quality and freshness of items CHS delivers.

As one pantry coordinator recently stated, "The Wilton Food Pantry would like to thank the Community Hunger Solutions program for their monthly donation of produce, dairy, and miscellaneous food items. It's almost like Christmas every time we receive the delivery. Our pantry has about 18 - 20 families, which is anywhere from 50 -60 people, who frequent our facility. Everyone is extremely grateful for your generous support."

A CouleeCap volunteer also picks up donations from CHS and serves the communities of Sparta and Norwalk each week. Hunger Task Force of La Crosse is another valuable distribution partner. CHS regularly sends them excess dairy and vegetables, allowing local resources to be delivered north and west, even into Minnesota.

In 2024, Community Hunger Solutions sorted and distributed more than 54,000 pounds of fresh produce, cheese and packaged goods, in addition to more than 10,000 gallons of fluid dairy. According to CHS Program Coordinator Dan Barron, "A majority of the produce received by CHS was donated from Harmony Valley Farm, a CSA farm outside of Viroqua. We also received large donations from Driftless Organics (carrots, beets and potatoes), GoMacro (bars), and Hunger Task Force (dry goods and produce). All of our dairy resources were provided by Organic Valley."

This past growing season, CHS continued to distribute Viroqua Growing Forward Together Garden produce for Parkview Manor residents. Garden coordinators also provided educational opportunities for a variety of community members through the McIntosh Library. The garden is made possible by funding and coordination through FoodWise Vernon County. Barron said, “We appreciate their partnership to help bring fresh garden produce to our community members.”

“Distribution efforts wouldn't be possible without the consistent support of dedicated and hard-working volunteers,” Barron continued. “In 2024 our group of active volunteers exceeded 20 people, with a collected effort of more than 400 hours of work donated to the program. The success of CHS is made possible by these dedicated community members who collect, sort, package and assist in distributing fresh produce and dairy products sourced from our partners.” Within 24-48 hours, much of this food is distributed to partner pantries and meal sites.

Sue Noble, Executive Director of VEDA explains, “Community Hunger Solutions is truly a community effort, funded entirely by grants and generous donations.” Financial donors in 2024 included Bader Philanthropies, Delta Dental Foundation, Dubuque Community Foundation, La Farge Power of 100 group, Living Faith Food Pantry, Organic Valley, Vernon Women’s Alliance, Viroqua Food Co-op and many local community individuals. Noble added, “Organic Valley and Bader Philanthropies deserve additional recognition because they have shown a significant commitment to the ongoing support of our mission.”

Mark your calendars for December when CHS is the “Give Where You Live” organization for Viroqua Food Co-op in 2025. Thank you to all who voted for us to receive this valuable donation.

Looking forward to 2025, CHS plans to continue serving current partners, looking to improve that service through offering a wider variety of perishable options, while focusing on the mission to connect locally produced foods with community members who face barriers to accessing nutritious food. For more information check out the website at <https://www.chs-wi.org> or find CHS on Instagram.

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