



Photos by Tom Tingle/The Arizona Republic

Bob Evans, chief executive officer for United Food Bank, checks donations. "For every dollar of donation, we distribute \$12 in food value, or enough for six meals," he said.

Food banks trying to fill stockings

By Sarah Parkin
Special for The Republic

It's the eleventh hour for area food banks.

Food banks in the East Valley and throughout the region rely on receiving the majority of their donations — including 75 percent of their non-perishable goods — during the holiday season.

"That will get us through until about April," said Norm Gold, program manager at St. Mary's Food Bank. "After that we have to buy food. People are hungry year-round."

With crunch time on right now, food banks have been busy.

"Right now we've got about a hundred food drives going on," said Cynde Cerf, communications coordinator for St. Mary's Food Bank in downtown Phoenix.

The state Department of



Sue Cooper, a distributor for United Food Bank, checks an order at the Mesa warehouse Monday.

Food drive tips

- Canned foods: beef stew, chili, fruit, green vegetables, juice, soup, tomato products, tuna.
- Bagged food: dried beans, pasta, rice.
- Boxed food: cereal, powdered milk, macaroni and cheese, pasta.
- Other: baby food, baby formula, diapers, peanut butter.

Check expiration dates. Food banks cannot distribute food past the coded date.



Joe White, a volunteer for United Food Bank, whips around the warehouse on a forklift during this especially busy time of year.

Economic Security said 891,307 Arizonans live in poverty, about 18 percent of the population, and more than 70 percent of those do not receive food stamps or government assistance.

Many people depend on the Valley's network of more than 900 agency partners and distribution sites, pantries, churches and case managers to collectively prepare and provide nearly 80,000 meals per day.

"We're a distribution center," said Bob Evans, chief executive officer at United Food Bank in Mesa. "We work as partners with social service agencies."

The food bank concept began in Phoenix in 1967 when John van Engel volunteered at a St. Vincent de Paul charity dining room. When he learned that grocers routinely dumped food that was edible but not saleable, he created a central location where grocers could drop food off, and

agencies could pick food up. Cities across the nation quickly imitated the program.

"We need high protein and nutritionally dense food," Evans said.

Area Food Banks:

- Agua Fria Food Bank
405 E Harrison Drive,
Avondale
(623) 932-9135
- Buckeye Food Bank
218 S. Fourth St., Buckeye
(623) 386-7839
- Desert Mission Food Bank
9229 N. Fourth St., Phoenix
(602) 997-1747
- Paradise Valley Emergency Food Bank
10862 N. 32nd St.
(602) 867-9228
- Paz de Cristo Community Center
424 W. Broadway Road,
Mesa
(480) 464-2370
- St. Mary's Food Bank
2841 N. 31st Ave., Phoenix
(602) 352-6340
- Westside Food Bank
13050 W. Elm St., Surprise
(602) 242-3663
- United Food Bank
358 East Javelina
Mesa AZ 85210
(480) 926-4897.

"We get lots of beans and corn. What we desperately need is canned meats and peanut butter."

Emergency Food Boxes are distributed free to case-workers who are assisting people in crisis. Boxes contain a three-day supply of nutritionally balanced, non-perishable foods to bridge the transition from emergency assistance. St. Mary's also provides a baby box,

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which will contain diapers, formula, baby cereal and baby foods.

Agency caseworkers pick up the boxes from the food banks. One recent development is the Kids Café, sponsored by America's Second Harvest. This program provides a nutritionally balanced evening meal five nights a week to at-risk children. United Food Bank currently operates Kids Cafes in Mesa, Tempe and Gilbert, providing more than 545 nightly meals.

Although food drives are the most visible to the public, financial donations are also accepted. Money is used to buy food, keep equipment updated, operate a fleet of trucks, maintain coolers, freezers and warehouse equipment.

"For every dollar of donation, we distribute \$12 in food value, or enough for six meals," Evans said. "But don't get me wrong. We will take any donation. You give me a washing machine today, I will find a downstream agency that will find a use for it."

Many food banks provide cooperative food box programs where people can buy a box of food for \$15 and receive an equivalent of \$25 to \$30 of groceries. (St. Mary's is called "Cash and Carry." United Food Bank calls its program "Help Yourself!").

Food banks have a greatly increased capacity to buy in bulk and can pass those savings on to the public.

"We have the ability to purchase by the truckload," Gold said.