

## *Food for Tomorrow*

### **A Tri-County Food Initiative serving Fond du Lac, Manitowoc and Sheboygan Counties Final Report Summary**

In January of 2009, a community collaborative called the 'As One Unemployment Task Force' (As One) was organized to proactively begin addressing the needs of the unemployed and underemployed in Sheboygan County. A spin off of the primary activities of As One was a proposal for 'Food for Tomorrow'. Food for Tomorrow proposed to implement and operate a food center/warehouse. The mission at that time was to maximize and efficiently use the resources of the community by providing a central clearinghouse for distribution of food to Sheboygan County food pantries.

Other needs within the food pantry food system were identified by a Silver Lake College student team in a plan developed for the Sheboygan County Food Bank (Food Bank). The identified needs included developing relationships with businesses in Sheboygan County, enhancing corporate and public knowledge of the Food Bank, creating a list of potential businesses and organizations that may be in a position to assist, establishing a volunteer network and coordinating the logistics of food delivery. The Silver Lake report summary stated, "The impact of non-implementation of this plan is to sacrifice the needs of the underserved population. We believe the Sheboygan County Food Bank needs to partner with community organizations, such as Sheboygan County Interfaith Organization (SCIO) and United Way to make this happen."

During the last quarter of 2009, Bill Weissert, CFRE and Executive Director of the Sheboygan and Plymouth Area United Way, convened a meeting of representatives from Fond du Lac, Manitowoc and Sheboygan counties to discuss interest in collaborating on a Tri County Food Clearinghouse (Clearinghouse). The representatives from these three counties reached consensus that:

- People are in need of food.
- Food supplies from local sources are available.
- The system can be improved to get the food to the people.

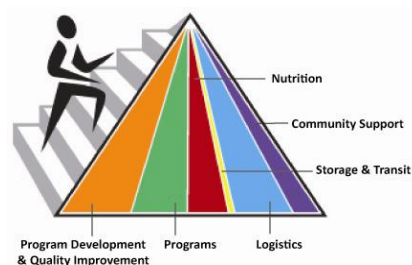
As Mr. Weissert stated, "We are at the early stages of defining the scope of the problem and designing a solution. We are now at the jumping off point where we need to compile the research, develop the marketing approaches and write a business plan of how such an endeavor would provide quality service to individuals and families in need and in addition be financially stable." Based on this proposal, the Sheboygan and Plymouth Area United Way received a grant to conduct a study and develop a plan so that a Regional Food Clearinghouse will have an opportunity for success.

As the original intent was to develop a business plan for a Clearinghouse, it is important to note that the final report proposes development of a system that will build on the strengths of the current systems, improve efficiencies and sustain a food system across all three counties not only for today but also for tomorrow. The data and research coupled with the current economic conditions, at this point in time, does not support purchasing or long term leasing of a physical plant for a clearinghouse. Over the next 18 months or more, storage needs can best be met through utilizing donated storage space or short term rental of space. Based on the amount and type of space used/needed over the next 18 months, a better assessment of actual short and long term storage requirements will be available.

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These building blocks, based on the food pyramid, may be implemented by county and/or across the three counties.

These blocks begin to address the changing nature of the economy and the food pantry/food supply system which has become even more integral to the support of low income, working individuals and families and for many has become their primary source of food.



The recommendations in the final report are also in line with other national and state initiatives and programs. Much of the focus throughout the state and nationally is to move from just talking about hunger to supporting organizations working to end hunger in three ways.

1. Increasing access to programs, public and private that provide food to children, families and individuals.
2. Connecting children, families and individuals to healthy food through strengthening community resources.
3. Educating - improving knowledge about available programs and how to stretch limited resources.

In fact, the focus has moved from ending hunger to food security. Food security for a household means access by all members at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. (Per the United States Department of Agriculture)

The following summarizes the six building blocks included in the *Food for Tomorrow* final report.

**Program Development & Quality Improvement – Building Block One** Within each county develop resources to support, improve and expand both short and long term food security capacity and address hunger issues. Funding to support full time staffing will lead to improved efficiencies, provide for distribution across a broader area and provide access to a larger variety of food resources/producers. Some of the specific assigned responsibilities include:

- Engaging, educating and mobilizing a broad network of county residents and organizations.
- Improving access to healthy locally produced foods for all members of the community, especially the low income population.
- Serving as a point person to assist with programs, projects, policies and partnerships for a sustainable local food system.
- Assisting with an ongoing community food assessment for identifying resources and needs regarding the local food system, underserved population and key stakeholders.
- Strengthening links between existing food system groups.
- Working with food programs to develop and institute consistent operational practices of accountability for distribution of food resources, procedures to promote community services and remove barriers for participants (individuals and families).
- Working with schools and other child-serving organizations that are beginning to consider various food program concepts including access to healthy food choices, importance of local food and farm to school programs.
- Developing food resources for rural areas and for other populations unable to access existing food resources due to transportation constraints distance to the organization or service and/or limited hours of service.

**Programs– Building Block Two** While gathering information for Sheboygan County, the staff at the Sheboygan and Plymouth Area United Way had the opportunity to meet and work with NOURISH Farm to Family Philanthropy a program of Sheboygan County Interfaith Organization (SCIO). Building Block Two - Programs will provide funding to NOURISH and other food programs. Funding will support Snack Attack- afterschool snack program for children, Farm to Table – a meal program for individuals and families residing in a homeless shelter or other transitional housing program and partnering to provide a summer lunch program for children. NOURISH focuses on the need for healthy food to address obesity and other health related risks, volunteerism and asset building by linking adults volunteers with children/families and individuals via experiences that will impact positively on behaviors.

**Logistics– Building Block Three** Providing support for pantries and other food organizations to assist individuals and families in accessing other needed support programs and services including Women, Infant and Children (WIC), FoodShare (formerly Food Stamps), BadgerCare (Medicaid Programs) and connections to other appropriate community resources. Part of the model for food security is a safety net - helping individuals and families access food assistance through publicly funded programs. Pantry food generally was to be a supplement rather than a primary source of food security. Due to the changing nature of the food pantry system, the food provided by the pantries has become integral to the support of families and for many has become their primary source of food. Building Block 3 will make available financial support for interested food pantries and other food organizations in the three counties to apply for funding for computers, printers and internet access. Pantry volunteers will be able to assist pantry users in using the computer to research eligibility for State and Federal programs including health, nutrition, child care, prescription drug plans, energy assistance and tax credits. Pantry users would also be able to apply on line with the assistance of a pantry or food program volunteer. The State of Wisconsin has a website [access.wi.gov](http://access.wi.gov) that allows for on line gathering of information, determining potential eligibility and applying on line for benefits and/or services.

The computer/logistics system would also be used by the pantry or food program for assessment and quality assurance activities, communication, tracking of food inventories, maintaining a website, compiling and tracking pantry user information and other approved uses.

**Nutrition – Building Block Four** Sheboygan County has three farmer’s markets operating in the county through the Sheboygan County Interfaith Organization (SCIO). These farmer’s markets are certified to provide access to low-income seniors/elderly and women, infant and children (WIC) household through the federal and state program guidelines. Currently, the senior/elderly and women and children use of nutrition program coupons at these farmer’s markets is above

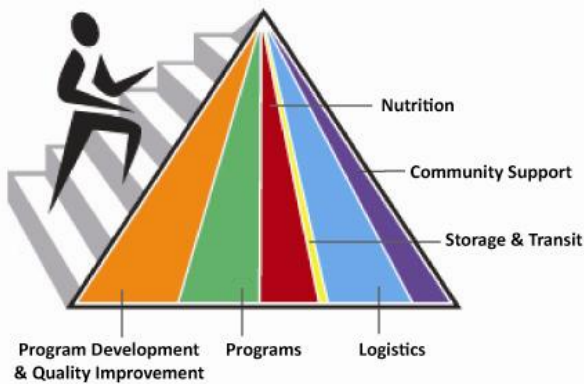
the statewide average. Building Block 4- Nutrition will increase the number of children, individuals and families who will be able to purchase fresh produce – vegetables and fruits - through using their FoodShare benefits. The approach is two –pronged. One is to educate farmer’s market vendors regarding the FoodShare program and obtaining agreement from some of the vendors to accept FoodShare benefits. Secondly, FoodShare recipients will need to be informed of their ability to use FoodShare benefits to purchase fruit and vegetables at the farmer’s market.

To implement this option, SCIO will need to purchase Electronic Benefit Transaction equipment to assist the vendor and the FoodShare purchaser complete the purchase transaction. There is an initial expense to purchase the wireless terminal and then a monthly fee for use of the terminal.

**Community Support – Building Block Five** Financial and in-kind support for food pantries and other feeding programs is needed. Community support is and will be needed for maintaining and expanding current programs and services and in developing and sustaining new programs. This will include, but is not limited to: volunteers, food and financial donations, donations of other basic need (non-food) items, technical assistance, etc. As an example, volunteers and food donations will be needed to maintain and expand the summer lunch program for children and recently a group of volunteers from a Sheboygan County based company helped at food pantries in Sheboygan and Fond du Lac counties.

**Storage & Transit – Building Block Six** The pantry survey identified storage as an issue for local food pantries. At times, the pantries need storage for food requiring refrigeration or freezing beyond their current capacities. As an example, Glacier Transit and Storage (GTS) provides in-kind support by providing dry and refrigerated storage for items that cannot be stored at the existing pantries. In October of 2010, GTS provided storage for a large donation of potatoes. Expansion is necessary to provide each county a location(s) for dry, refrigerated and frozen item storage, allowing for pick up or delivery of stored items. On site storage often is an issue for pantries and feeding programs. A small financial assistance fund will be established to assist pantries, on an application basis, to purchase or replace refrigerators and freezers, used for onsite storage.

**Budget Summary**



**Building Blocks Expenses Revenue**

<u>Building Blocks</u>	<u>Expenses</u>	<u>Revenue</u>
Nutrition	\$ 4,750	\$3,750
Community Support	In-Kind	
Storage & Transit	\$12,100	
Program Development & Quality Improvement	\$44,140	
Programs	\$30,000	\$6,000
Logistics	\$11,880	\$2,750

The first year budget for all six building blocks is \$102,870. Revenue totaling \$12,500 has been designated during the 2010 Sheboygan and Plymouth Area United Way campaign, chaired by Jim and Jan Sartori, for the *Food for Tomorrow* initiative.

In conclusion, special thanks to the anonymous donor who provided funding for the research process, to the food pantries and other food programs in Fond du Lac, Manitowoc, and Sheboygan counties for providing information and participating in the process, to food suppliers/producers for sharing information, data and technical expertise and to the United Ways of the three counties and other community partners in helping facilitate the process. It is only through these types of collaborations that success and change is possible.

*Hunger is isolating; it may not and cannot be experienced vicariously. He who never felt hunger can never know its real effects, both tangible and intangible. Hunger defies imagination; it even defies memory. Hunger is felt only in the present.*

--Elie Wiesel