

# Hungry residents flock to fairgrounds for food

*Milk, frozen meats given*

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Hundreds of cars line up at the Big Butler Fairgrounds on Tuesday for free food distributed by the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank. Participants received two 25-pound boxes of food per vehicle – enough for 40 meals – including milk and frozen pork, chicken and fish.

HAROLD AUGHTON/BUTLER EAGLE

FRANKLIN TWP – Chilly temperatures and a dark, threatening sky greeted a caravan of motorists lined up to receive free boxes of food Tuesday morning at the Big Butler Fairgrounds.

“Times are pretty bad, money-wise,” said Connoquenessing Township resident Russell Kelley as he waited his turn in the off-road traffic jam, “and you can't find food you're looking for.”

A retired maintenance worker, Kelley wasn't necessarily happy to be there. "It's something that I don't want to do," he admitted.

But in troubling times, his priority is making sure his four-member household is fed.

The event Tuesday — the second in the county this month — was a continued multiagency effort to distribute food during the coronavirus pandemic.

"It's unprecedented times. Our neighbors need help," said Charlese McKinney, network development director for the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank. "We have the ability to help, and that's exactly what we're going to do."

The food giveaway was a partnership between the food bank, the Alliance for Nonprofit Resources, Friends of the Bantam Jeep Association and the Butler County Sheriff's Office.



Trisha Paine, a volunteer with the Friends of the Bantam Jeep Association, directs traffic at the food distribution at the Big Butler Fairgrounds on Tuesday.  
HAROLD AUGHTON/BUTLER EAGLE

More than 70 volunteers with the agencies helped to hand out two 25-pound boxes of food per vehicle – enough for 40 meals. And there were enough food boxes for 1,500 vehicles, organizers said.

With sheriff's deputies providing traffic control in and out of the fairgrounds, only those in a vehicle were served. No walkups were allowed. Due to COVID-19, individuals were required to stay in their vehicles while volunteers loaded the food into trunks and back seats.

Just like at a similar distribution two weeks ago at Alameda Park in Butler Township, each box contained dry goods, produce, bread and milk.

But there was something additional in the boxes Tuesday.

“We have frozen meat today,” McKinney said. “Frozen pork, chicken and fish.”

That news brought a smile to the face of Ron Matson of Butler, a meat cutter at Sam's Club. His was one of the first vehicles in line.

“I came to make sure we have some (food),” he said, “and I came out early.”

Sandy Curry, community partnership manager for ANR, said the event was a team effort of public agencies and private businesses.

Marburger Dairy in Evans City, for example, provided milk, and Dawson's Orchards in Lawrence County supplied apples – some that were donated and some purchased by the Butler County Food Bank. Bread was donated by Bimbo Bakeries.

A church in Butler donated \$10,000 for the produce, and the Friends of the Bantam Jeep Association donated \$2,500 for the milk.

Even before the pandemic, Curry noted, ANR identified food insecurity as a priority issue in the region.

“Since COVID,” she said, “that issue has been exacerbated. This pandemic has exposed things that were there under the surface which were maybe not always visible, and now they're visible.”



Janet Darling, of Boyers, brought her 8-year-old Shitzu-Yorkie mix, Sissy, with her to the food distribution. More than 70 volunteers helped at the event.

HAROLD AUGHTON/BUTLER EAGLE

Ron Sullivan of Boyers has been laid off from his truck-driving job at a Beaver County company for three months, dating back before the spread of COVID-19.

He drove to the food giveaway for the sake of his family.

“I’m feeding the kids and grandkids,” he said. “I have a lot of grandkids.”

Manning an entrance gate for motorists winding around the fairgrounds en route to their food boxes, volunteer Joyce Appel of Frogtown was hard to miss wearing both a bright green Friends of the Bantam Jeep Association T-shirt and an ear-to-ear grin.

“I’m happy to be here,” she said. “It’s a good feeling to know in some way you can help.”

A retired 35-year elementary school teacher in Armstrong County, she was saddened to see so many in need. But looking around, she saw hope.

“Maybe people now will think a little less of me, me, me,” Appel said, “and think a little more about respect and love and helping others.”