

# Nevada food bank helping Tahoe's working poor

By Linda Fine Conaboy

RENO – The Food Bank of Northern Nevada services an area of about 90,000 square miles. Included within their client base are communities on the eastern slope of the Sierra, which covers California locations such as Lake Tahoe, Susanville, Bridgeport, Bishop and many points in between. In Nevada, a food truck makes the rounds of Ely, Winnemucca, Gerlach, Elko as well as other small towns in Nevada once a month.

“It would be pretty drastic for us not to show up with our food truck,” Laura Hellen, one of two development officers at FBNN told *Lake Tahoe News*. “About two weeks ago, when we had a major snowstorm, our patrons wondered if we were coming. It would have to be something pretty drastic for us not to show up.”

Not surprisingly, the Food Bank is extremely busy this time of year.



Volunteers with the Food Bank of Northern

Nevada load boxes for  
recipients.  
Photo/Provided

According to marketing director Jocelyn Lantrip, "This is when we raise a lot of money and a lot of food, but the truth is, we feed people year-round. If you talk to our partner agencies, they'll tell you they are even busier in the summer because kids are out of school then."

The client base includes more than children, although kids and seniors make up half of the 103,000 people who receive food each month. Additionally, the Food Bank supplies food to emergency food pantries, mobile pantries, commodity supplemental food programs and other senior programs.

"We feed kids after school, distribute fresh produce and also feed kids in the summer. We work with senior centers and operate another USDA program, which provides boxes of food to about 2,500 seniors monthly," explained Hellen.

The USDA money is considered "pass through" money. "We raise money to hire cooks, but we're reimbursed by the government for meals. This includes summer meals and after-school meals."

It's easy to see why record keeping is meticulous. "Counts are important. We must be very careful to note both the number of kids fed as well as the location. In Nevada, 53 percent of the children qualify for a free lunch," Hellen said.

Lantrip told *Lake Tahoe News* that if a school qualifies for free lunch, then the entire neighborhood is eligible. "That relieves us of having paperwork on each child."

Seniors can receive a box of food containing staples like beans, rice, oatmeal, cheese as well as canned fruits and vegetables. There is also a mobile pantry offering mostly fruits and veggies, which is available to all of the FBNN partner agencies depending upon their

refrigeration capabilities.

The refrigeration unit at the Food Bank's new headquarters east of Sparks is massive and can easily accommodate the fresh produce they provide—at least 50 percent of all their food consists of fresh fruit and vegetables.

"We happen to have moved next door to the Walmart distribution center," Hellen said. "Consequently, we get about 2 million pounds of food from them, including lots of fresh produce. We tell other food banks to try to build next door to a Walmart," she laughed. "Their employees even come here to donate time."

While much of the produce is sourced from California, not all of it can be returned there. According to Lantrip, there is a list of fresh food that cannot be returned back across state lines to California distribution points.

"Food like some citrus and yams. We follow this list carefully. It's an isolated thing based on state agriculture laws," Lantrip said.

Many of the service boundaries within FBNN's distribution locales are decided by Feeding America, their parent organization, populated not only by the Nevada facility, but also by 200 other food banks throughout the United States.

"We've had underserved counties and areas identified by them and now we're meeting that need," Lantrip said.

One of these partner agencies, which distributes food not only to Nevadans, but also to California residents, is Project MANA based in Incline Village.

Heidi Allstead, the executive director, told *Lake Tahoe News* that each year Project MANA serves 3,000 people more than 11,650 meals through their four mobile food distribution sites, including Tahoe City, Kings Beach and Truckee.

This group receives food not only from FBNN, but also Placer

Food Bank and several local grocery stores, weekly.

“We assist the working poor,” Allstead said. “Most of the people we serve work seasonal jobs and many have multiple jobs, but still can’t make ends meet. This is mostly due to low wages and the high cost of living at Tahoe.”

She added that nearly 10 percent of the people living in her local service area are below the poverty line. According to statistics provided by the Placer Food Bank, 1 in 8 individuals in Placer, Nevada and El Dorado counties—43,000 people—struggle with hunger.

With two vehicles, one being a refrigerated truck and the other a refrigerated van, employees and volunteers deliver food and also rescue food from grocery stores and food drives. Besides weekly distribution to the local sites, they also make once-a-week rounds to home-bound people.

Project MANA’s offices and warehouse are in the Don W. Reynolds Community/Non-Profit Center in Incline Village, where, among other activities, they train volunteers, meet with the public and pack bags for the Food and Companionship Exchange program.