

FOODLINK BACKGROUND SUMMARY

Foodlink Foodbank - Founded over 29 years ago by Tom Ferraro, Foodlink has grown to serve a 10 county area in the Genesee Valley and Finger Lakes Region of Upstate New York. As a member of America's Second Harvest – the Nation's Food Bank Network, Foodlink obtains and redistributes over 7.5 million pounds of food annually to a network of over 550 human service programs – especially area soup kitchens, food pantries, shelters and Kids Cafes. The network of Foodlink supported agencies provided more than 5.2 million emergency meals last fiscal year – a 6% increase over 2003-04. In addition to the core food banking function, Foodlink hosts a series of community health and wellness activities as outlined below.

Our mission: To empower at-risk communities by providing food, nutrition, education, and resources in Central and Western New York.

Our vision: To end hunger and foster nutritional wellness.

Thomas C. Ferraro (Tom), Executive Director, Foodlink: Tom founded Foodlink in 1976 when he appeared on a local television station making a communitywide holiday appeal for food to support the growing number of emergency food pantries in the area. From this initial appeal, the concept of formal food banking grew into Foodlink's current large full-scale operation including a 100,000 square foot warehouse, fleet of refrigerated trucks and computerized inventory. Tom was on the original America's Second Harvest Board of Directors to develop the concept of food banking nationally and assisted in the formation of the other 7 New York State food banks. Under Tom's leadership Foodlink has moved beyond the symptom of hunger by working toward solutions of the problem including job training, launching a Fulfillment Center to spur economic development, conducting emergency provider training to provide more than free food to those in need, incorporating nutrition and health education, and emphasizing child nutrition efforts.

Tom is currently the Chair of VOAD Disaster Response in New York State and was the 2004 recipient of the Thomas J. Shepardson Volunteer Contributions Award from the New York State Disaster Preparedness Commission. Tom is also the recipient of numerous distinguished community awards including the Mayor's Charles S. Crimi Pax Humana Award from the City of Rochester in 2000, Rochester Urban League Community Leadership Award for Golden Service, and the Greater Rochester Community of Churches Metropolitan Faith-In-Action Award.

Additional Foodlink Programming and Initiatives:

1. Community Kitchen - In an effort to address the growing paradox of childhood hunger and childhood obesity, Foodlink launched its Community Kitchen in 2001. The mission of the community kitchen is to raise the bar of institutional meals for children by focusing on fresh nutritious foods for our community's youth. The Community Kitchen's strength is in re-creating childhood meal favorites in a new and healthful way while simultaneously introducing new foods to our youth. Our fully equipped industrial kitchen is located on Central Avenue in downtown Rochester and prepares over 1500 hot nutritious meals daily for delivery to over 30 programs sites of Kids Cafe and Summer Meals.

- *Kids Cafe:* Foodlink started one of the first Kids Cafe after-school feeding programs for kids in the nation in 1993. Today, Foodlink supports 33 Kids Cafe programs in partnership with community agencies and City Recreation sites. Kids Cafe programming is funded by the Child and Adult Care Feeding Program (CACFP) through the NYS Department of Health.

- *Summer Meals:* During the summer months, Foodlink has historically seen a dramatic increase in clients at its supported food cupboards and soup kitchens as families who received free and reduced meals during the school year now fall onto the household to provide. Beginning in 2001, Foodlink became a sponsor of Summer Meals to provide hot nutritious lunches to youth throughout the city. As of 2005, Foodlink is sponsoring 35 sites with breakfast and lunch. Summer Meals are funded through USDA and the New York State Department of Education.

2. Freshlink Farms – In 2003, Foodlink acquired a hydroponic greenhouse in Penfield New York. Freshlink Farms produces high-end pesticide-free greens for sale at area retailers, restaurants, and farmers markets. The proceeds from the sales of the product are directed to support the anti-hunger charities of our community. In addition, produce from the greenhouse as well as other vegetables from the surrounding farm are used as the affordable, nutritious produce in our meal programs for kids.

3. NYS Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD): Foodlink is also active in statewide disaster preparation efforts, recognizing the essential link between strong, coordinated emergency services and effective disaster response. Foodlink is committed to strengthening the preparedness and networking capacities of the emergency service system to play a central role in disaster response. Foodlink's Executive Director is currently serving as Chair of the New York State Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster

4. Southeast Ecumenical Ministries (SEM) Food Pantry: In 2005, Foodlink expanded its efforts into direct service by joining with one of the oldest food cupboards in Rochester. SEM is a unique pantry providing an emergency meal delivery service to the homebound and elderly. SEM is seen as a model program by partnering with social workers to ensure proper stewardship of resources and the provision of multiple human services to its client population. SEM also provides emergency prescription drug assistance and a free transportation service to medical appointments.

5. Farmers Market: Foodlink is the market manager of a weekly farmers market at our community's largest suburban, low-income housing complex, Orchard Place, in Greece New York. The small farmers market provides an opportunity for fresh and affordable produce to low-income families to effectively stretch their dollars. The market is run from June to October every Tuesday afternoon.