

# Addressing Long-standing Rural Food Pantry Needs in Louisiana

## At a Glance

Food pantries throughout rural Louisiana often lack the funding and resources necessary to build capacity and bridge nutritional gaps for their clients. To address these challenges, LSU AgCenter Healthy Communities (LA HOP) conducted needs assessments, established nutrition standards, purchased cooling and storage equipment, and provided hands-on assistance to food pantries in 6 rural parishes: Assumption, Madison, Morehouse, St. Helena, Tensas, and East Carroll. As a result, 13 food pantries are equipped to serve healthier foods to 7,580 clients in rural Louisiana.



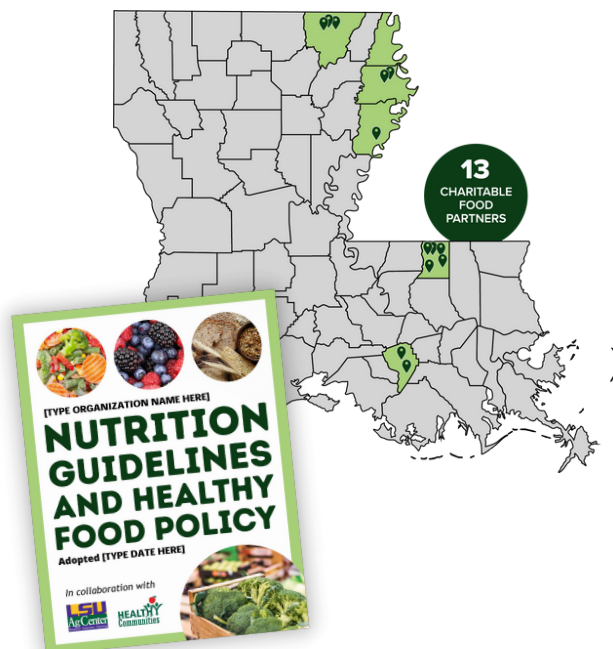
## Public Health Challenge

According to County Health Rankings, food insecurity, poverty, and obesity rates in all six parishes are above both the national and state averages. This means that residents face significant barriers to accessing nutritious foods, which puts them at higher risk for preventable obesity-related diseases. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these issues, and local food pantries across Louisiana experienced increased clientele volume. After conducting our needs assessment at 19 charitable food sites, we identified refrigeration, storage, and food as pantries' greatest needs for distributing more shelf-stable food and fresh produce. While rural food pantries work hard to provide a reliable source of nutritious foods to clients, their communities' needs often outpace their capacities and resources.

## Approach

Since 2018, the LSU AgCenter Healthy Communities team has partnered with charitable food sites across 6 parishes to improve the food system and increase access to healthier foods. Guided by assessment results, cooling and storage equipment was purchased for 13 charitable food sites to support the adoption of nutrition policies.\* Customizable nutrition policies and donation guideline templates were developed based on national nutrition standards, allowing pantries to adopt policies that were realistic to implement while best suiting their clients' needs. In four parishes, the team conducted a year-long pilot beginning March 2022 for Grow a Row to Share, a program that helps home gardeners donate fresh produce to nearby charitable food sites. The team also hosted the first statewide Louisiana Charitable Food Summit on May 2, 2023 to generate actionable ideas and strengthen resource-sharing networks to address the needs of Louisiana's food pantries and their clients.

## Food Pantry Locations



*\*During the COVID-19 pandemic, equipment was purchased for 3 sites without the nutrition policy requirement in order to meet dire food access needs within target communities.*

# Results

Results from LSU AgCenter Healthy Communities (LA HOP) efforts include:

- 11 sites with nutrition guidelines for healthier food service.
- 13 sites with increased cool and dry storage capacity.
- 7,580 clients impacted monthly.
- 8 Grow a Row to Share pilot sites, which distributed 1,103 servings of fresh produce over the course of 6 months.\*
- 143 attendees at the first Louisiana Charitable Food Summit.

*\*Distribution data collected from April 2022 to October 2022.*



That's enough for  
over 275 people!

## Partner Highlights

### Lena's Closet Food Pantry

Greensburg, LA (St. Helena Parish)  
Serves 1,173 students per month

*"We are working to meet the needs of our learners and their families by providing a multi-tiered system of supports that foster academic success. We are grateful for our partnership with the LSU AgCenter and the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank because they are helping us close those gaps that stifle progress."*

Dr. Kelli Joseph, St. Helena Parish School District  
Superintendent

### Robinson-Williams Restoration of Hope Community Center

Bastrop, LA (Morehouse Parish)  
Serves 316 clients per month

*"People have a great distance to go to get fresh fruits and vegetables [in Bastrop] and sometimes they can't get that transportation there. By being right here in the community, families can just walk across the street or in some cases...we'll even deliver the food to them."*

Randy Williams, Robinson-Williams Community Center  
Director

## Sustaining Success

While continuing to address immediate local needs like cooling and storage, the LSU AgCenter Healthy Communities team will continue hosting the biennial Louisiana Charitable Food Summit as well as quarterly networking calls to share best practices and brainstorm policy improvements for Louisiana's charitable food system. After a year-long pilot, Grow a Row to Share launched statewide in March 2023 to further connect home gardeners with charitable food sites. The team plans to continue promoting and expanding the program to increase the availability of fresh produce at local food pantries. The LSU AgCenter Healthy Communities team will continue working with local, regional, and state-level charitable food partners to implement nutrition standards and improve statewide policies and systems.



### Learn More or Get Involved!

healthycommunities@agcenter.lsu.edu  
<https://bit.ly/FoodAccessHC>



The LSU AgCenter and LSU provide equal opportunities in programs and employment.

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