

Counting down to Food Drive No. 25

NALC's 25th annual Letter Carriers' Stamp Out Hunger® Food Drive is just weeks away—on Saturday, May 13—and with that date drawing ever closer, food drive coordinators in hundreds of NALC branches across America are finalizing their preparations for the nation's largest one-day food collection event designed to help replenish local food banks in the communities we serve.

"Too many people in this country are going hungry," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "We know this to be true because we see it as we deliver to every address in America at least six days a week."

Sadly, statistics back this up. Nearly 49 million Americans—1 in 6—are unsure where their next meal is coming from. This includes 13 million children as well as about 5 million seniors over age 60—many of whom live on fixed incomes and often are too embarrassed to ask for help.

Since 1992, when the national food drive began, letter carriers in every part of the country have worked with family members, friends, other postal co-workers and allies to use the second Saturday in May as a day to give something back to the communities that know and trust us.

Last year, the food drive collected a record 80 million pounds of non-perishable food, raising the total amount of donations picked up over the quarter-century history of the drive to more than 1.5 billion pounds.

By the time our national food drive rolls around each year, the shelves of food pantries and other charitable organizations often are nearly empty, turning our hard work on Food Drive Day into a much-needed replenishment with summer fast approaching.



The Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive has a new website at stampouthungerfooddrive.us.

"Letter carriers lead this massive collection effort," President Rolando said, "but we couldn't make the food drive a reality without the help of our national partners."

This year's partners are the U.S. Postal Service, the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association (NRLCA), the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW), Valpak, United Way Worldwide, the AFL-CIO, the AARP Foundation and Valassis.

"These partners provide tangible support that helps to encourage the generous participation of our postal customers," Rolando said.

For example, local United Way agencies often help branches coordinate distribution of food to local food banks, pantries and shelters. Countless NRLCA members volunteer their

time to work with their brothers and sisters in the city carrier craft to help collect and distribute non-perishable food donations in the country's rural and underserved areas. AFL-CIO's community services liaisons work with field mobilization staff members, state federations and central labor councils (CLCs) to coordinate support and recruit volunteers.

"Our extraordinary history of filling local food pantry shelves in communities across the country is made possible by our partnerships with these national organizations in conjunction with the dedication and hard work of letter carriers," Rolando said.

"The food drive is just one of the many ways letter carriers give back to our communities," he said. "It's almost time for us to shine once again."

On the web

A few weeks before the food drive, NALC expects to roll out a new public-facing food drive website. The address of the new site, which was in the final design stages as this magazine went to press, is stampouthungerfooddrive.us.

"This new website will have all of the same types of information available at nalc.org/food," Rolando said, "but in a place that will be easily accessible for the public at large."

A post office locator, downloadable files, contact information and answers to frequently asked questions are planned be among the site's many features.

And speaking of websites, the food drive's online merchandise store is proving to be a success.

At stampouthungerstore.com, anyone can buy a wide range of items related to the food drive: apparel, such as T-shirts and hats; accessories, such as buttons and pins; and printed items, including posters, banners, yard signs and bumper stickers.

Through this website, you can even create an account and track your order's status.

Both websites will remain active year-round and will be updated as needed.

While you're online, be sure to keep in touch with the food drive's official social media accounts—on Facebook, "like" [facebook.com/](https://www.facebook.com/facebook.com/) StampOutHunger, and on Twitter, follow [@StampOutHunger](https://twitter.com/StampOutHunger).

Plans are underway to once again use the Thunderclap service to create an "online flash mob" in support of the food drive. A few weeks before Saturday, May 13, look for details on the Facebook and Twitter accounts about how you can take part. **PR**



An artist rendering of the proposal to use closed post offices as food-recovery storage centers for those who are food insecure.

Using USPS to deliver a 'First Class Meal'?

A recent story in *The Guardian* reported on some students from Washington University in St. Louis who had an idea: Could the U.S. Postal Service's unique, universal delivery network be used to help feed millions of hungry Americans, while also cutting down on an estimated 60 million tons of wasted food annually?

About 18 percent of low-income Americans—about 54.4 million people—live in so-called "food deserts," lacking convenient access to fresh, healthy and affordable food options. In urban areas, this can mean living more than half a mile away from the nearest supermarket; in rural areas, this can be 10 miles or more.

"It's just ridiculous in a country that is as resource-rich as we are," graduate student Anu Samarajiva told the newspaper. "The issue isn't a lack of food or a lack of resources, but of distribution, pickup and logistics."

With that in mind, Samarajiva and classmates Irum Javed and Lanxi Zhang came to realize that no agency in the U.S. would be able to solve such problems better than USPS, with its more than 30,000 post offices and tens of thousands of letter carriers serving every community in the country at least six days a week.

Cleverly calling their solution "First Class Meal," the team proposes having grocery stores and

markets schedule pickups of surplus perishable food that otherwise would be thrown away, with letter carriers driving specially equipped LLVs to deliver the food to local food pantries.

Although First Class Meal is in the earliest of planning stages, one place where the Washington University team would eventually like to test it out is Los Angeles County, a locale where 1.5 million people are classified as "food insecure."

"With urban sprawl, a lot of communities have been left behind," said L.A. Food Policy Council's Iesha Siler. Using the First Class Meal concept, existing local infrastructures could be reimaged to benefit local communities in new ways.

"People would like to see those post office spaces be put to use," Siler said.

In fact, looking at how to take advantage of existing infrastructures—rather than build entirely new ones—is a key component of the Washington University team's aims. And the Postal Service's massive fleet of delivery vehicles is well suited to overcome one of the biggest stumbling blocks food pantries face: sustainable transport.

First Class Meal, Samarajiva said, "has the potential to reinvigorate the USPS and more strongly define its role as a community resource while strengthening the existing network of community food providers." **PR**