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Gov. Gregoire kicks off statewide food drive

Gregoire unites agriculture community, food banks to provide 300,000 lbs. of surplus food to needy

OLYMPIA - Gov. Chris Gregoire today kicked off her "Feeding Washington" initiative, a first-of-its-kind food drive uniting the state's agriculture community to increase donations to local food banks. The governor made the announcement at the 2008 Hunger Walk in Tacoma.

"Many Washington families are struggling during this time of national economic uncertainty," Gregoire said. "With winter around the corner and more families facing the prospect of higher heating bills, I don't want anyone to have to choose among paying for a warm home, a healthy meal or quality health care."

Due to the slowing national economy and increases in food prices, food banks statewide are serving roughly 30 percent more people while donations have declined by 15 percent.

"Our agricultural community is extremely giving," Gregoire said. "Our growers and producers have stepped up time and time again, and their donations will help offset the declines in donations to state food banks. But we need additional help and I encourage Washingtonians from all corners of the state to step up and meet this challenge."

"As one of the many Puget Sound food banks struggling to meet the increased demand among our communities, I applaud Governor Gregoire's leadership and the agricultural industry's willingness to step up their donations of fresh produce," said Kevin Glackin-Coley, director of the St. Leo Food Connection and co-chair of the Pierce County Food Coalition. "We always need more high-quality, nutritious fruits, vegetables and dairy products. But the need is especially great during these tough economic times. We're all thankful to Washington's farmers for answering the call, and encourage others to join them in helping feed our neighbors."

The state Department of Agriculture is working with growers and producers to donate all types of products, from fruits and vegetables, to dairy products and meat. The department is asking that food first be donated to local food banks, and is working with Rotary First Harvest to see that food is picked up and delivered to food banks across the state.

"As producers of fruit in this great state, we understand that it takes a whole community to grow, package and sell our fruit," said West Mathison, president of Stemilt Growers. "We are blessed and thankful for the support of our communities, and happy to give back."

In June, Gregoire announced the release of \$200,000 from the governor's emergency fund to help food banks offset rising fuel costs. Gregoire also announced that the state received a bonus payment from the federal government of about \$2 million for the high level of accuracy and sound management of Washington's food assistance initiatives.

There are more than 300 food banks in Washington. Last year, the state's food banks distributed nearly 100 million pounds of food to 1.2 million people.



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