

Pantry from A1

When pantries get a lot of one item, as can be the case with shipments from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, they will offer recipes to help clients figure out how to use that food.

Still, maintaining that supermarket-style environment has gotten more difficult as supplies have gotten tighter. The Creswell pantry has had more patrons in the last few months and that's making it harder to give out as much food as they would like, Blachnik said.

"We were giving everyone five pounds per person [per day] in a family. Now we're down to two pounds," she said. With the addition of the Creslane food drive supplies, she hopes to get that number back up to three or four pounds.

Demand at the Creswell pantry has been up 42 percent since July. That's among the five highest demand-increases in the county. FFLC supplies and other donations should keep the pantry stocked well enough, but that increased demand means Blachnik has to stretch already thin supplies even further.

It's not clear exactly why demand is up — 12 percent across Lane County on average — even as the USDA has found that food insecurity had been decreasing through 2018. Rising rent, stagnant wages and changes to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, previously known as food stamps, may be factors. The Creswell pantry, FFLC and the Community Sharing Program in Cottage Grove all mentioned SNAP benefit changes in their assessment of the growth in

demand.

"Any time we see benefits decreasing for people, the natural response for people [is] to seek out food at an emergency pantry," Woodward said.

Benefits are administered by individual states, though the federal government can change the rules on who qualifies.

The current rule changes being considered by the USDA, for which one of the public comment periods ended Dec. 2, would prevent states from automatically extending "categorical eligibility" for SNAP benefits to those who also use programs like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, effectively removing more than three million people across the nation from SNAP, including some 66,000 Oregonians, according to the Oregon Food Bank.

It would also cut the dollar amount of benefits for thousands more in the Beaver State.

The FFLC-network pantries — 31 in total — don't abide by the same rules. They run on the honor system; no one who uses the service has to prove identity, income or residence.

"If people really need food, we want them to be able to access it. Our mission is that nobody should be hungry. Let's all have access to food," Woodward said.

A July rule change by FFLC tried to increase that access by allowing people to visit any food pantry they distribute to in the county. As a result, the Creswell pantry has seen patrons from as far as Florence and Dorena come through their door.

Another contributing

factor could be low wages in Lane County. Forty-five percent of residents live at or under the ALICE threshold — a measurement of those people who are employed but make just enough to pay the bills — according to a 2016 report from United Way.

That contributes to 11.1 percent (about 460,000) of Oregonians lacking dependable access to enough food to lead a healthy lifestyle, according to the USDA.

SNAP benefits and pantries are critical to meeting the needs of those Oregonians.

Patrons of rural pantries in particular have more on-going need. FFLC calculated that rural pantries see repeat visitors an average of five times per year, compared to four times for the Eugene and Springfield pantries.

One of the reasons rural pantries see more repeat visitors is a lack of access to grocery stores. Small communities like Creswell have seen grocery stores close or never had one to begin with. That forces Creswellians to go to Eugene, Springfield or Cottage Grove to do their shopping.

For the patrons of FFLC pantries, many of whom fall under the ALICE threshold, that extra expense is too much to bear.

"If [people] are on a limited income, they are making decisions as to where that money is going," Woodward said. "We see that the food budget in every household is the most flexible."

Woodward said that despite the high homeless population in the county, that isn't who the majority of pantry patrons are.

"Most are the working poor, for lack of a better term," she said. "For the

most part, they can cover their expenses. But when the unexpected happens, that's when they need extra help."

Even as demand has grown, pantries have been able to keep feeding those in-need, thanks to the generosity of others. Lane County residents have stepped up to help pantries all over the county. Donations poured in during the "Stamp Out Hunger" food drive led by the National Association of Letter Carriers and from grocery stores, farmers and individuals all year long. Those donations help maintain the shopping-style pantry experience.

"The community support, in those ways, makes a huge difference," Blachnik said. "If we were only depending on Food for Lane County, we would do fine. But we wouldn't do as well, you know what I mean?"

Supporting the pantry goes beyond donations. An all-volunteer workforce keeps things running. Sani-pac provides free trash and recycling services to the building. PayneWest Insurance in Cottage Grove donated 400 pounds of food and many hours of labor when the Creslane donation came in to make sure

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 Pastor: Riley Hendricks
 Sunday School: 9:45am
 Worship: 11:00am
 The Journey: Sunday 5:00pm
 Praying Thru Life: Wednesday 6:00pm

Church of Christ
 420 Monroe St • 541-942-8565
 Sunday Service: 10:30am

Cottage Grove Bible Church
 1200 East Quincy Avenue
 541-942-4771
 Pastor: Bob Singer
 Worship 11am
 Sunday School: 9:45am
 AWANA age 3-8th Grade,
 Wednesdays Sept-May, 6:30pm
www.cgbible.org

Cottage Grove Faith Center
 33761 Row River Rd.
 541-942-4851
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www.cg4.tv
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 541-942-7711 • Pastor: Bob Friend
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 9am - Classic in the Chapel
 10:30am - Contemporary in the Auditorium

First Baptist Church
 301 S. 6th st • 541-942-8242
 Pastor: David Changte
 Sunday School 9:30am
 Worship Service 10:30am
 Youth Wednesday 6:30pm
cgfirstbaptist.com

First Presbyterian Church
 3rd and Adams St
 541-942-4479
 Rev.: Karen Hill
 Worship: 10:00am
 Sunday School: 10:00am
fpcgrove.com

Hope Fellowship
 United Pentecostal Church
 100 S. Gateway Blvd.
 541-942-2061
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Non-Denominational Church of Christ
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 541-942-8928
 Preacher: Tony Martin
 Sunday Bible Study: 10:00am
 Sunday Worship: 10:50am & 5:30pm
www.pennoyeravcoc.com

Old Time Gospel Fellowship
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 Pastor: Jim Edwards
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 541-942-3420
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 Sunday - 10:30 PM
 For weekday and Holy Day of Obligation schedule see website
OLPHCG.net
 Confession: 4 PM to 5 PM
 Saturdays or by appointment

St. Philip Benizi, Creswell
 552 Holbrook Lane
 Sunday 8:30 AM

St. Andrews Episcopal Church
 1301 W. Main • 541-767-9050
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Seventh-day Adventist Church
 820 South 10th Street
 541-942-5213
 Pastor: Kevin Miller
 Bible Study: Saturday, 9:15 am
 Worship Service: Saturday, 10:40
 Mid-week Service: Wednesday, 1:00

Trinity Lutheran Church
 6th & Quincy • 541-942-2373
 Pastor: James L. Markus
 Sunday School & Adult Education
 9:15am
 Sunday Worship 10:30 am
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 5:00pm TLC Groups
tlccg.com


United Methodist Church
 334 Washington 541-942-3033
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"VICTORY" Country Church
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