

Grant County Food Bank serves 1,200 more people in 2020 than in 2019

Pandemic, new guidelines lead to massive increase

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

The Grant County Food Bank served 1,200 more people in 2020 than in 2019.

Tom Sutton, a member of the food bank board of directors, said the pandemic and changes in food bank eligibility created the increase in people served.

The 2020 income guidelines to qualify for the Emergency Food Assistance Program greatly raised the monthly and annual income limits in 2020, according to Sutton.

In 2019, a monthly income of \$1,926 or a yearly income of \$23,017 for a family of one was the maximum. In 2020, a monthly income of \$3,190 and a yearly income of \$38,280 for a family of one was the maximum.

Sutton said the pandemic also created an interesting pattern in the amount of people going to the food bank. When people received stimulus checks, less families went to the food bank the following month, but this made it so the members on the food committee would need to adjust their plans for distributing food.

"On the food committee, we need to expect if we're going to gain or lose the amount of clients coming from the previous months," Sutton said. "This month, because of the numbers from last month, we're planning to feed 150 families. When we set up, we set out enough food based on this distribution to cover that."

Sutton said, since the pandemic, the food bank has seen an increase in people from outside of John Day requesting food. He said Long



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

Jim Spell takes a box of pears March 4 at the Grant County Food Bank.

Creek and Seneca signed paperwork that authorized volunteers from those cities to haul other people's food to them.

This allowed more people from outside of John Day, especially the elderly, to gain access to the food bank.

"In those communities, the people that needed food are getting food that had never gotten food before (from the food bank) because it was too far to drive or they couldn't drive at all," Sutton said. "They can work with their local people who can pick up their food for them."

Sutton said, prior to the pandemic, there would be about three to four families from Long Creek driving to the food bank for food, but now they receive about 20-30 families a month, thanks to the vol-

unteers in their city. He said they noticed the same increase from Dayville and Seneca.

"What's making this so good is that we're getting food to senior citizens in Long Creek that didn't have it before," Sutton said. "That's what it's all about."

The trend continues in 2021 as 419 families were served food throughout the months of January, February and March — 29 families more than 2020.

Sutton said there has also been an increase in volunteers coming from cities outside of John Day. He appreciates and enjoys the enthusiasm they had to prepare the food and serve their community.

"They have foreign exchange students that come from Long Creek, and they enjoy being



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

Boxes used at the Grant County Food Bank have been provided by Grant County Veteran Services for years.



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

John Day Mayor Ron Lundbom drove the truck that delivered food to food bank in John Day.

here, and we enjoy having them here. They are hard workers, and it's a pleasure having them here," Sutton said. "We enjoy and appreciate the help from the Boy Scouts."

Hope on the menu for Grant County restaurants, bars and food trucks

Grants may cover all COVID-19 losses

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Hope is on the menu for Grant County restaurants, bars and other food service businesses.

A year after Gov. Kate Brown ordered restaurants and bars to shutter because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the county's local eateries will soon get a lifeline.

Within the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan signed by President Joe Biden, lawmakers earmarked \$28.6 billion to create the Restaurant Revitalization Fund, a grant program for small restaurant owners impacted by the pandemic.

Misty Palmer, an economic development specialist with Grant County's economic development office, said the new grant program provides eligible restaurants tax-free grants equal to the amount lost due to the coronavirus.

Palmer said the Small Business Association said the awards are calculated by subtracting the 2020 gross receipts from 2019 gross receipts. She said those who own and oper-



Eagle file photo

Brandon Elliott runs the grill at The Outpost last spring.

ate 20 or fewer establishments as of March 13 are eligible. Grants cannot exceed \$5 million per individual restaurant.

Palmer said the SBA applications and deadline have not been announced.

Palmer said she has emailed, called and has even hand-delivered flyers to restaurants, bars and small businesses in the county to get the word out to people.

"Restaurants and food carts throughout the county are definitely showing interest," she told the Eagle.

She said the SBA said applicants for the Restaurant Revitalization Grant pro-

gram do not need to register for a Data Universal Numbering System, which removes a complicated and timely piece of the system.

The National Restaurant Association dubs eligible



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expenses like payroll, principle or interest on mortgage obligations, rent and utilities. She also said construction to accommodate outdoor seating, supplies such as protective equipment and cleaning materials, regular food and beverage inventory, and certain supplier costs are also covered.

The flyer states it will prioritize awarding grants

for small businesses owned and controlled by women, veterans or socially and economically disadvantaged small businesses.

Palmer said she regularly updates the county's website, grantcounty.net. For other questions, call 541-575-1555.

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Applications due by April 16th.

Contact the Grant Soil and Water Conservation District Office at (541) 575-1554 or visit 721 S. Canyon Blvd., John Day, OR 97845 for applications and additional information.