Serving Hope

WINTER 2026

ARKANSAS FOOD BANK

> **I've seen people come in and cry when they get their food because they didn't have any.** *That's why we're here.*





Lending a Hand, *Emphasizing Choice*

For the past 10 years,Michael, a dedicated volunteer, has helped welcome neighbors to Lend-A-Hand Food Pantry, where families can access the food they need in a way that respects their individual circumstances.

One of the biggest changes he's seenis thetransition to a choice pantry. Instead of receiving a pre-packed box, neighbors can select the foods that work best for their households, whether they're managing dietary restrictions, health conditions, or simply trying to feed their families with foods they'll actually eat.

"They love it," he said. *"They love to pick what they can use."*

The choice model reduces food waste, but more importantly, it restores dignity. Volunteers walk alongside neighbors as they shop, helping ensure everyone leaves with food that fits their needs and preferences.

After a decade of service, Michael says it's the people who keep him coming back.

"I've seen people come in and cry when they get their food because they didn't have any," he said. *"That's whywe'rehere."*

For him, a choice pantry is about more than groceries. It's about giving neighbors the opportunity to make decisions for their families and ensuring they leave with food they can use, enjoy, and share around their tables.

A Season of *Gratitude and Opportunity*

As we approach the holiday season, I'm reminded that food is about so much more than a meal. It's about gathering around the table, sharing traditions, and creating memories with the people we love. Yet for too many families across Arkansas, those moments are made more difficult by the uncertainty of where their next meal will come from.

That's why this fall has been such an exciting season for Arkansas Foodbank.

Across our network, we're helping more partner pantries transition to a choice pantry model, giving neighbors the opportunity to select the foods that best meet their family's needs. Rather than receiving a pre-packed box, families can choose foods they will use, enjoy, and feel good about serving. It's a more dignified, neighbor-centered approach, and we're proud to see it growing throughout our service area.

We're also celebrating the announcement of the Delta Community Resource Center, an important step toward expanding access to food and resources in the Arkansas Delta, especially Phillips County. This investment will help us strengthen partnerships, increase efficiency, and better serve communities where need remains high.

As we look toward the end of the year, there are also tremendous opportunities for our community to multiply their impact. On November 12, Triple Turkey Thursday will triple every gift, helping provide even more meals for neighbors during the holiday season. Then on Giving Tuesday in December, every donation will be doubled, making generosity go even further at a time when demand for food assistance remains strong.

None of this work happens without supporters like you. Whether you're donating, volunteering, advocating, or sharing our mission, you are helping ensure that families across our 33-county service area have access to the food they need and the dignity they deserve.

Thank you for standing with us this holiday season. Together, we're building a stronger, healthier Arkansas!

In partnership,

Brian Burton

Brian Burton
CEO











> **Choice puts that decision back in the *hands of the neighbor.***

Why We're *Embracing Choice*

At Arkansas Foodbank, we're helping more partner pantries move to a choice model because we believe neighbors facing hunger deserve the same experience all of us want when shopping for food: the ability to choose.

Rather than receiving a pre-packed box, neighbors can select the foods that best fit their family's needs, preferences, and health goals. This approach recognizes that every household is different. What works for one family may not work for another.

"With a traditional box distribution, we're deciding what foods go into someone's home," said Rusty Hart, Director of Agency Services. *"Choice puts that decision back in the hands of the neighbor."*

Choice pantries also help reduce food waste and make the most of available resources because neighbors take foods they know they can use. But perhaps most importantly, **choice creates a more dignified experience, empowering families to make decisions for themselves.**

As we continue expanding choice across our network, our goal is simple: to provide not just food, but a welcoming, neighbor-centered experience that meets people where they are and helps ensure every family leaves with food they'll use, enjoy, and feel good about bringing home.



Cutter Morning Star School Market is about more than food. It's about dignity and choice.

Giving Families the *Power of Choice*

When Tonja Bolding began leading the food program at Cutter Morning Star School, she saw an opportunity to do more than provide food. She wanted to create a welcoming space where families could choose the foods that worked best for them.

With support from Arkansas Foodbank, the school's traditional pantry has evolved into a school market, creating a shopping experience that puts families in control. Instead of receiving a pre-packed box, parents can walk through the market and select the items their households will use and enjoy.

For Tonja, that change has been transformational.

Every family has different needs. Some are managing health conditions like diabetes. Others have young children with specific food preferences or dietary restrictions. By allowing families to choose their own groceries, the market helps ensure food ends up on the table instead of going to waste.

The school market has also strengthened relationships between the school and the families it serves. What started as food assistance has become an opportunity to build trust, offer support, and connect families with additional resources when challenges arise.

"We're becoming friends with our families," Tonja shared. ***"It's not so much like we're doing a handout. It's more like, 'I've got something I want to share with you.'"***

Today, the Cutter Morning Star School Market is about more than food. It's about dignity, choice, and creating a supportive community where families feel welcomed, respected, and empowered to make the best decisions for their households.

15-AFBAR-1126-N

ARKANSAS FOOD BANK

4301 W 65th Street
Little Rock, AR 72209

586 Phillips County 241 Road
Lexa, AR 72355

205 N Martin Street
Warren, AR 71671

Follow Us
on social media

arkansasfoodbank.org