EAST TEXAS FOOD BANK

SERVINGS

News from the East Texas Food Bank

2026 Holiday Newsletter

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PARTNER FOOD BANK OF FEEDING AMERICA

The Gift That Saves Lives



Margaret knows that every meal is a gift.

At 67, the widow and pastor lives on a fixed income and depends on the East Texas Food Bank's Tyler Resource Center for nutritious groceries. As a cancer survivor, she believes healthy food has been an important part of her healing journey.

"I prayed that you would have blueberries because they are a superfood,"* she says with a smile. *"The next day when I came, you had them. I use what God blesses me with."

For Margaret—and thousands of neighbors across East Texas—food is more than nourishment. It is hope, healing, and the strength to face another day.



Margaret's story is one of many made possible because of generous supporters like you. Mike, 75, is a veteran raising his three grandchildren. After years in the workforce, he became a full-time caregiver when his wife was diagnosed with ALS. Today, after her passing, he depends on the Longview Resource Center to help keep healthy food on the table for his family.

"It really helps a lot,"* Mike says. *"More people are in worse shape than I am, so I consider myself lucky and very grateful that donors support this pantry."



Dawnsana understands how quickly life can change. Once a teacher and school administrator, a devastating car accident left her disabled and homeless. While rebuilding her life, she discovered the Tyler Resource Center. Today, she not only receives healthy food but also connects with housing assistance and other vital services.

"It's wonderful,"* she says. *"They help me with so much more than groceries."

Last year, the East Texas Food Bank provided nearly 30 million meals through pantry partners, feeding programs, and Resource Centers. Yet more than 232,000 East Texans still don't know where their next meal will come from. **Thanks to compassionate supporters like you, that story is changing every day.**

Every story is different, but each one reminds us of the same truth: no one should have to choose between paying the bills and putting food on the table.

Together, we can fight hunger and feed hope.

Your gift today provides healthy meals, strengthens families, and saves lives across East Texas. Together, we can fight hunger and feed hope.



A Special Holiday Message from Our Board Chair

As we gather with family and friends this holiday season, I find myself reflecting on the extraordinary generosity that defines East Texas. Throughout the past year, I have witnessed our community come together to ensure our neighbors have access to the nourishment they need.

As a pediatrician, I see firsthand the profound impact that food security has on the health and well-being of children and families. **Access to nutritious food is fundamental to healthy growth, learning, and development.** When families do not have to worry about where their next meal will come from, children succeed in school, parents can focus on their work and caregiving responsibilities, and communities become stronger.

I am honored to serve as chair of the ETFB Board. Every day, our dedicated staff, volunteers, partner agencies, and supporters work together to fight hunger and feed hope. As we celebrate this season of gratitude, I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to everyone who's part of the ETFB's mission. Together, we are building a healthier, stronger, and more resilient East Texas.

We wish you and your loved ones a joyful holiday season and a happy, healthy New Year.

With gratitude,
Valerie Smith, MD, MPH
Chair, Board of Directors

PANTRY PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: TYLER FAMILY ASSISTANCE CENTER



At 79, Carolyn never imagined she'd rely on a food pantry. After 44 years in the classroom, she and her husband now live on a tight budget while navigating his ongoing medical challenges. Rising grocery prices have stretched every dollar.

Each month, Carolyn visits the Tyler Family Assistance Center — a ministry of First Baptist Church Tyler. She fills her cart with fresh vegetables, milk, eggs, and staples her family will actually eat, plus a monthly ETFB Senior Box.

"The pantry food is most of what we eat at home," Carolyn says. "We live on a fixed income, and everything is so expensive. This pantry is a great help to my family."

The center serves 700–800 households every month, welcoming each neighbor with dignity and compassion. As Pantry Director Kellie Hooker puts it:

"We believe God calls us to serve the marginalized, oppressed, and hungry. Meeting physical needs gives us the chance to offer spiritual help, too."



A HOSPITAL SYSTEM THAT FEEDS HOPE

For St. Luke's Health Memorial Hospital Lufkin, a member of CommonSpirit, caring for the community is central to the mission.

"The legacy of Catholic Health has always been to promote the wellness of its community," says Curtis Prunty, Market VP of Mission. "Our ministry exists both within and outside our hospital walls, serving the most vulnerable through trusted partnerships."

That's why CommonSpirit proudly supports the East Texas Food Bank. Recognizing food insecurity as a major driver of poor health, they see nutritious food as both a basic need and a matter of dignity.

"ETFB exists to fight hunger and feed hope," Prunty says. "Partnering with organizations like ETFB lets us build healthier communities together."

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"YOU WON'T GET A BETTER BANG FOR YOUR BUCK"

Ginny Harleston and Dr. Jeffrey Levin began partnering with ETFB in 1992, but the COVID pandemic moved the food bank to the center of their philanthropic focus. "Like many people, you realized how much need there is," Ginny says. "You need to try to help ensure other people's lives are better."

Drawing on 38 years in public health, Jeff sees food as medicine.

"It's not just about having food. It's about having access to the right kind of food... to allow people to have longer, healthier lives."
-Jeff

The couple focuses on ending child hunger through ETFB's BackPack Program. "It's hard to imagine that here in Tyler, there are children who wouldn't eat if it weren't for the public schools and the ETFB," Ginny says. Since 1992, they've provided 102,575 meals to children facing hunger.

Her advice this holiday season? "Right off the bat, you're not going to get a better bang for your buck with a gift to the ETFB! It's up to us who support and believe in it."



A HOLIDAY TAX UPDATE!

As you plan your year-end giving, there's good news for charitable donors. Under recent tax law changes, individuals who do not itemize can now deduct up to $1,000 in charitable gifts — and married couples filing jointly can deduct up to $2,000.

That means your holiday gift to the East Texas Food Bank can provide meals and hope to hungry neighbors and reduce your taxable income. Be sure to consult your tax advisor about your specific situation!

HEALTHY HOLIDAY SUGAR COOKIES



Cookie Ingredients

1/4 cup unsalted butter, softened
1/4 cup maple syrup (or honey)
1 egg yolk, room temperature
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 cup white whole wheat flour
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
1/4 teaspoon salt

Icing Ingredients

1 cup powdered sugar
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
2-3 tablespoons milk of choice

Instructions:

1. With a hand mixer or stand mixer, cream butter and maple syrup. Beat on medium-high speed for a couple of minutes until light and fluffy. Add the egg yolk and vanilla and beat until combined.
2. Add flour, baking powder, and salt to the wet ingredients and mix on low speed until combined. Do NOT overmix.
3. Shape the dough into a flat disc and cover with a plastic wrap. Refrigerate for at least 1 hour, or until the dough is firm. Chilling the dough will make it easier to roll out and cut into shapes so don't skip this step!
4. When ready to bake, preheat oven to 350°F. Take the dough out of the fridge and let it sit at room temperature for a few minutes to make it easier to work with.
5. Place a sheet of parchment paper on your work surface. Lightly sprinkle with a small amount of flour. Place the dough in the center and place a second sheet of parchment paper on top. Gently roll from the center outwards, using light, even pressure and turning the dough occasionally to maintain an even thickness, about 1/4-1/3 inch is ideal.
6. Use your cookie cutters to cut out shapes. Peel away the unused dough from around the shapes, and then transfer the entire parchment paper with the cut-out shapes to the cookie sheet.
7. Bake for 8-10 minutes, until the edges are lightly golden brown.

Icing:

In a bowl or liquid measuring cup, combine all the ingredients. Stir well to combine. If the icing is too thick, add an additional teaspoon of milk one at a time until you reach your desired consistency. If too thin, add more powdered sugar.

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THE LEGACY TABLE

"I chose to leave a legacy gift in my will because our children are the future. No child should experience food insecurity, and no parent should worry about whether or not they can provide a nutritious meal. Each of us can contribute and then rewards are boundless."

– Patricia, Legacy Table Member

Leave a legacy that feeds East Texas for generations. To learn how you can include the East Texas Food Bank in your estate plans, contact Tim Butler, ETFB Chief Development Officer, for more information: tbutler@easttexasfoodbank.org.

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