



Ways to help locally with food insecurity

Food insecurity among Oklahoma's youth is a real thing. In fact, more than 208,000 children in the state don't get the amount of food they need to grow and thrive.

Food insecurity, as defined by the United States Department of Agriculture, is a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food, said Jenni Klufa, Community Nutrition Education Program assistant state specialist for youth.

"Many children across the state depend on school meals to get the nutrients they need. When the pandemic hit last year, schools closed their doors," Klufa said. "Fortunately, many schools were able to continue their food program and provide vital meals to their students. However, we have a lot of ground to make up in the fight against child hunger."

Klufa works with Hunger Free Oklahoma, an organization dedicated to bringing a unified, statewide voice to the issues and solutions surrounding hunger.

"Their goal is to ensure all Oklahomans have access to affordable, nutritious food," she said. "One way to help is to become an Oklahoma youth hunger hero, which involves three easy steps."

Raise awareness about hunger: There often are misconceptions about what hunger looks like and how much it exists in our communities. Accepting that it is an issue and that we may not always be able to visibly recognize food insecurity is an important step in this effort. In addition, educating Oklahomans about the effects of hunger, the successful systems in place to fight hunger and how they play a part is another way to raise awareness.

Support local efforts: When people realize how great of an issue hunger really is, it is easy to become overwhelmed regarding where to start. Start in your local community by supporting local food pantries. This can be done by volunteering, participating in fundraisers, advocating or making monetary donations.

Connect those affected by food insecurity to available resources: Armed with the knowledge of steps 1 and 2, people can further help bridge the gap between those suffering from food insecurity and available resources. These may look different in each community.

Continued on Page 2

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In this issue...

Page 2:

Homeowners should gear up for fall maintenance projects

Page 3:

Take-Out Sanity

Page 4:

USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline
Recipe: Vegetable Nachos

Page 5:

Family and Consumer Science
& OHCE Programs & Events

Ways to help locally with food insecurity, continued from page 1

“The holiday season is just around the corner, which is a great time to become involved in helping those in need. Many organizations put together food baskets for families in need,” Klufa said. “Get your local Oklahoma Home and Community Education group or a 4-H club to help with these efforts.”

Oklahoma has some of the worst food insecurity statistics in the country. Hunger costs Oklahoma more than \$1.4 billion each year through increased illness and medical costs and decreased academic achievement alone. Research also shows that hunger can lead to low birth weight, delayed development and decreased language acquisition.

“Food-insecure children are more likely to have lower reading and math scores, more significant behavior and social problems and lower high school graduation rates,” she said. “Also, food insecurity weakens the labor force and decreases educational attainment.”

The pandemic has played a big role in food insecurity and impacted families that already were facing hunger or were one paycheck away from hunger. Households with children are more likely to experience food insecurity.

“Take a look around your community and become involved to help raise awareness of this problem,” Klufa said.

Homeowners should gear up for fall maintenance projects



Many Oklahomans have a big list of to-dos for spring cleaning, but the fall season is a great time for some home maintenance projects.

“Now that the triple-digit heat is on the back burner, these home maintenance projects will help protect your home during the cold, winter months,” said Gina Peek, Oklahoma State University Extension housing and consumer specialist and interim associate dean. “Tasks such as checking the roof for leaks, having the chimney professionally cleaned and changing air filters will help protect the integrity of your home.”

Check roofs for loose or missing shingles. This is especially important with the high winds that accompany many of Oklahoma’s severe thunderstorms. Also check around vents, skylights and chimneys for leaks and make necessary repairs. Look for loose or missing mortar around the fireplace.

“It’s a good idea to have your fireplace professionally inspected and cleaned to remove soot, blockages and built-up creosote from the chimney liner, firebox, smoke chamber and damper,” she said. “Even if you don’t use your fireplace regularly, birds, squirrels and other critters may be calling your chimney home, which can make it unsafe to use without clearing out the accumulated debris from nesting activity.”

The fall season also means leaves are falling. While most do end up on the ground, it’s a sure bet a home’s rain gutters and downspouts get clogged with leaves. This results in rainwater spilling over the edge or remaining in the gutters because they can’t drain. When the temperature falls below freezing, this water will freeze and can cause an ice dam, which could damage shingles and possibly cause roof leaks.

“It doesn’t take much time to clean the leaves out of your gutters,” Peek said. “If the leaves are dry, homeowners can use a leaf blower to speed up the removal process. Otherwise, take the time to remove leaves by hand.”

Ensure all smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors and fire extinguishers are in good working order. Replace batteries as needed. An easy tip to remember to check those batteries is to do so when Daylight Saving Time begins and ends. It ends Nov. 7 this year, so set clocks back one hour and change batteries in all safety equipment.

Continued on Page 3

Homeowners should gear up for fall maintenance projects, continued from page 2

A few other quick and easy fall maintenance tips include:

- Remove window air conditioners or put weatherproof covers on them.
 - Check for leaky faucets and replace washers as necessary.
 - Make sure refrigerator door seals are airtight. Test them by closing the door over a sheet of paper. If you can easily pull the paper out, the door may need to be adjusted or the seals replaced.
 - Seal drafty doors and windows. Heat can easily escape even small cracks of space, which ultimately will cost more in heating bills.
 - Have the heating unit serviced and change the filters.
 - Inspect home siding for holes and cracks and replace caulk if necessary.
 - If a home has storm windows and screens, take down the screens and replace with the storm windows.
- “These routine chores will help ensure your home is ready for the cold weather a little later in the year,” Peek said. “They’ll also help conserve energy, which is money in your pocket.”

Take-Out Sanity



Busy, busy, busy. Multi-tasking Americans have a love affair with take-out foods, heat and eat entrees and other meal items they can pick up at a restaurant or grocery store on their way home.

Some foods are hot and some are cold when purchased. Sometimes you eat these foods right away, but other times you buy take-out foods in advance. Many of these perishable foods can cause illness if not handled safely on the trip home or in home preparation and reheating. Proper handling of these foods and any leftovers is essential to reduce your family’s risk of foodborne illness.

Always start with clean hands – wash hands with warm water and soap for 20 seconds before and after handling food.

Keep it Hot — The 2-Hour Rule

- Never let hot prepared foods sit – in your car or on the counter – for more than two hours without refrigerating them.
- If you don’t plan on eating the food immediately you have two choices: You can hold it hot in a preheated oven or preheated warming tray, at an internal temperature of 140 °F or above (use a thermometer to check the temperature); or you can put it in the refrigerator and plan to reheat it to a temperature of 165 °F just before serving

Chill it – Cold Food Know-How

- Cold foods should be kept at 40 °F or below.
- Refrigerate perishable foods as soon as possible, always within two hours after purchase or delivery. If you’re someplace that’s 90 °F or hotter (including in your car), make that one hour.
- When take-out or prepared food is purchased cold for an outdoor event—like a picnic, sporting event or outdoor buffet—a cooler well packed with ice or frozen gel packs is a practical alternative to a refrigerator. Keep the cooler in the shade. After food comes out of the cooler, remember the two-hour rule: Discard all perishable foods that have been left at outside temperatures longer than two hours; one hour in temperatures above 90°F.

Reheating Right

- Reheat foods containing meat or poultry to an internal temperature of 165 °F. Always use a food thermometer.
- Reheat sauces, soups, and gravies to a boil.
- If reheating in the oven, set oven temperature no lower than 325 °F.
- Reheating in slow cookers and chafing dishes is NOT recommended because foods may stay in the “Danger Zone” (between 40 and 140 °F) too long.

Continued on Page 4

Take-Out Sanity, continued from page 3

- When reheating food in the microwave oven, cover and rotate food for even heating. Consult your microwave oven owner's manual for recommended times and power levels.

Think Before You Thaw

Many people are making home cooked meals to freeze for convenience, while others are freezing leftovers for later. Although the freezer inhibits bacterial growth, food can become contaminated both before and after freezing. Remember the basic food safety rules—clean, separate, cook and chill when preparing meals and handling leftovers.

- Thaw foods following these tips to reduce your risk of foodborne illness.
- Thaw the wrapped, cooked meat or poultry on a tray in the refrigerator. Allow about 24 hours for every 5 pounds. Small packages of cooked stuffing, gravy, potatoes, etc., will take less time to thaw.
- Once the cooked meat or poultry and side dishes thaw, plan to eat them within three to four days.
- Food should be heated to a safe internal temperature.
- Frozen food can be put directly into the oven without thawing, but will require a longer cooking time.

Ready-to-Eat vs. Not Ready-to-Eat

Use care when cooking up foods from the freezer, deli, or refrigerated sections of the grocery store. Not ready-to-eat products (NRTE) are identified as “raw” and require the consumer to cook thoroughly in order to be safe for consumption. Examples of these types of foods include frozen food entrees (pizzas, pot pies, TV dinners, etc.) and marinated, stuffed and/or breaded poultry, fish or meat. Foods that might appear to be fully prepared can still be classified as not ready-to-eat. Read and follow label instructions. Use a food thermometer to ensure food reaches a safe internal temperature.

Ready-to-eat foods include those foods that can be eaten straight from the packaging if held at the correct temperature. Ready-to-eat foods include cooked and prepared items from the deli, as well as canned meats. Be sure to hold ready-to-eat products at the correct temperature as some require refrigeration.

Source: <https://www.fightbac.org/take-out-sanity/> Partnership for Food Safety Education

FOOD SAFETY QUESTIONS? CALL THE USDA MEAT AND POULTRY HOTLINE

If you have a question about meat, poultry, or egg products, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline toll free at **1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854)**.

The Hotline is open year-round Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. ET (English or Spanish). Recorded food safety messages are available 24 hours a day. Check out the FSIS Web site at www.fsis.usda.gov.

Send email questions to MPHotline@usda.gov.

Ask USDA! ([Ask USDA](#) | [Preguntele a Karen.gov](#))

USDA's automated response system can provide food safety information 24/7 and a live chat during Hotline hours.

- 1 c. diced tomato
- 1/4 c. diced green pepper
- 2 Tbsp. sliced green onions
- 2 Tbsp. chopped ripe olives
- 2 Tbsp. chopped green chilies
- 2 tsp. white vinegar
- 1/4 tsp. garlic powder
- 1/8 tsp. freshly ground pepper
- corn tortilla chips

1/4 c. (1 oz.) shredded 40% less fat sharp Cheddar cheese

Combine first 8 ingredients. Spoon 2 teaspoons vegetable mixture on each tortilla chip; divide cheese evenly among chips. Broil 6 inches from heat 1 minute or until cheese melts.

Vegetable Nachos



Makes 26 appetizers, 18 calories each, including 0.8 g. protein, 0.5 g. fat, 2.8 g. carbohydrate, 1 mg. cholesterol, 25 mg. sodium, and 18 mg. calcium. Source: *OSU Extension Healthy Living A to Z curriculum*.



**Food and Farm
Festival Photo
Entries
Due Nov. 18th**

The 2021 Okfuskee County Food and Farm Festival will be held virtually. A special commemorative gift will be presented to participating exhibitors. To participate, first take a photo of your item. Then email the photo— along with your name, contact number, and a description of your exhibit— to Jan Maples (janelle.maples@okstate.edu) or Amanda Sestak (atressl@okstate.edu). Exhibit photos must be submitted to the Extension Office staff no later than 4:30 p.m. Thursday, November 18th.

****Please note a slide show featuring each exhibit photo, exhibitor name & related information will be posted to Facebook for viewing.**

Exhibit photos must be submitted to the Extension Office staff no later than 4:30 p.m. Thursday, November 18th.

The 2021 Okfuskee County Food and Farm Festival is open to residents of Okfuskee County, OHCE members, or students in any Okfuskee County school.

Categories available in the Food and Farm Festival include the following.

***Pecans in the shell** (Native Large Group Class; Native Small Group Class; and Pecan Improved Varieties)

***Food Exhibits**

(**Pecan** Food Classes include: pies; brownies; cookies; cakes; quick breads; pecan brittle; candy; fudge; yeast breads; muffins; miscellaneous)

(**Peanut** Food Classes include: brownies; cookies; cakes; quick breads; peanut brittle; candy; fudge; muffins; miscellaneous)

(**Honey** Food Classes include: pies; cookies; cakes; muffins; candy; miscellaneous)

----- Food items must contain at least ½ cup nuts or nut butter, or ¼ cup honey, as applicable, and must be accompanied by a recipe. The nuts, nut butter, or honey must be in the batter or candy, not just sprinkled/drizzled on top of the finished product.-----

***Honey Exhibits** (bulk white comb honey class; white extracted honey class; amber bulk comb honey class; and amber extracted honey class)

***Pumpkin Exhibits** (field type class; jack-o-lantern class; and giant class)

There is a coloring sheet category for children 3 years old to 2nd graders. Stop by or call the Extension Office for a coloring sheet.

For older children and youth there is a poster category for youth in the 3rd – 12th grade. Posters should promote the Food and Farm Festival. Contact the Extension Office for more information.

Okfuskee County OHCE Winter Meeting...

Tuesday, December 14th beginning 10 a.m.

**Okfuskee County Fair Building
and held via Zoom Conferencing**

The Winter Meeting of the County OHCE organization will begin at 10 a.m., Tuesday, December 14th. It will be held at the Okfuskee County Fair Building and also will be conducted via Zoom Conferencing. Those attending live and virtually are asked to bring a “brown bag” lunch for themselves. Sack lunches can be decorated, etc. It is the responsibility of each attendee to provide their own food safety measures for their lunches. Awards will be given for sack lunch creativity. Following the winter meeting, (approximately 12:15 p.m.) will be the Holiday Treasures workshop where there are opportunities to create economical gifts and decorations. There may be a small donation requested for workshop materials. **Pre-registration is required.**

...and Holiday Treasures Workshop!



Those planning to attend the OHCE Winter Meeting &/or Holiday Treasures Workshop either live or in person **MUST PRE-REGISTER BEFORE MONDAY, DECEMBER 6TH** to the Extension Office, 918-623-0641.





**OKLAHOMA COOPERATIVE
EXTENSION SERVICE**

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Oklahoma Home & Community Education, Inc. is a local and state wide partner with Cooperative Extension which brings the best knowledge from OSU to its members. Join a local OHCE group and enjoy programs that help make Oklahomans be their best. www.OHCE.okstate.edu



Family & Consumer Sciences helps communities, families, youth and individuals address issues of health, wealth and well-being through research-based Extension education and programs that are proven to work.



**“Like (Follow, or Share)” our Okfuskee County
Family & Consumer Science Facebook page!
Okfuskee County OSU Extension FCS
or OkfuskeeOSUFCS**

Strengthening Oklahoma Families is published by the Okfuskee County OSU Extension Center—Family and Consumer Science Programs. This newsletter is one way of providing educational information to interested citizens of Okfuskee County. ***Editor: Jan Maples, Extension Educator, Family and Consumer Sciences/4-H***

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