

PRESS RELEASE

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Cass Clay BackPack Program Expands to Meet Hunger Needs of Children

Fargo, ND – September 15, 2011 – As children and their parents begin the new school year, the Great Plains Food Bank, a program of Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota, is expanding the Cass Clay BackPack Program to 750 children living with, or at immediate risk of hunger in our community. This is an increase of 41% over last year, when 530 students were served.

During the 2010-2011 school year, 7,063 children in the Fargo, Moorhead and West Fargo school districts qualified for and greatly relied on the free and reduced school lunch program to meet their daily nutritional needs. But on weekends, many of these children struggled with hunger. The Cass Clay BackPack Program is designed to meet the needs of hungry children at times when other resources are not available. Students are recommended for this program by teachers or principals who see first-hand their nutritional needs. Food packages are filled with child-friendly, nonperishable and easily consumed food, and then discreetly given to the children on the last day before the weekend or school holiday.

“Childhood hunger can have lifelong consequences,” says Melissa Sobolik, director of member and client services for the Great Plains Food Bank. “Hungry children don’t learn as well at school, which in turn, limits their potential and productivity as adults. We believe that when a child is fed, they are equipped to learn, grow and dream of a future filled with opportunity. This program makes sense.”

The Cass Clay BackPack Program is tested and proven effective in alleviating childhood hunger. Children who participate in the program are more attentive in class, show improvement in attitude and behavior, and demonstrate better academic performance. “This program is changing lives,” says Nadine Moon, Title I Parent Coordinator and BackPack Program champion at both Robert Asp and Ellen Hopkins Elementary schools in Moorhead. “For some children participating in the program, this food is the difference between eating or not. They are so excited to receive their bags on Fridays!”

The Great Plains Food Bank secures the food for the program, provides warehouse space to store the product, coordinates community volunteers to fill the food packages, and provides a truck and driver to deliver the packages to the schools. Then, in collaboration with school personnel, the food is discreetly distributed to children in need. Program oversight is provided by a community-based steering committee. Currently it costs just \$4.25 to fill a backpack with juice, milk, fruit, food for four meals and snacks. To sponsor a child for the entire school year, it costs \$162.

The 14 schools participating in the program this year include: Cheney Middle School, Eastwood Elementary, L.E. Berger Elementary, Lodoen Center, Sheyenne 9th Grade Center and the high school in West Fargo; Ellen Hopkins Elementary, Robert Asp Elementary and S.G. Reinertson Elementary in Moorhead; and Jefferson Elementary, Lincoln Elementary, Madison Elementary, McKinley Elementary and Horace Mann Elementary in Fargo.

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About Great Plains Food Bank: *The Great Plains Food Bank strives for a hunger-free North Dakota and western Minnesota by recovering and distributing surplus food and grocery product, engaging in community partnerships, and advocating for social change. Each year the Great Plains Food Bank, through a statewide network of 273 charitable feeding programs in 99 communities, provides food to more than 67,000 low-income people facing hunger – nearly 40% being children and 13% seniors. In 2010, as the state’s largest hunger-relief provider, the Great Plains Food Bank distributed a record 7.4 million pounds of food, valued at \$11.9 million. The [Great Plains Food Bank](#) is a program of Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota and member of Feeding America. Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota is a nonprofit social services agency serving one in nine North Dakotans annually from offices in five cities with 19 programs that strengthen individuals, families and communities.*