

# Herald-Tribune



## Government policy changes, federal budget cuts mean devastating consequences for local children

**All Faiths Food Bank**

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For more than 40,000 children in our community, summer isn't just a break from school — it's a season of uncertainty, where empty refrigerators replace school meals. [Recent federal budget cuts](#) to key nutrition programs mean even more children are at risk of going hungry unless the community steps in to help.

All Faiths Food Bank's annual [Campaign Against Summer Hunger](#) ensures kids have access to the food they need when school is out. But this year, the challenge is greater than ever. Cuts to USDA, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) funding and school meal programs — as well as proposed tariffs that will raise the cost of groceries and other necessities — would leave many children in Sarasota and DeSoto counties without access to critical meals.

“No child should have to wonder where their next meal is coming from,” said All Faiths Food Bank president and CEO Nelle S. Miller. “Together, we can ensure that even during uncertain times, our neighbors can feed their families.”

**Florida has already declined vital funding**

For the second year in a row, Florida forfeited nearly \$260 million that would have provided crucial food assistance for more than 2 million children this summer by opting out of the federal summer food benefits program, Sun Bucks (formerly known as Summer EBT).

“We’ve effectively lost millions in funding to help Florida families put food on the table,” said Campaign Against Summer Hunger chair Lisa Krouse. “It is incumbent upon us as a community to step in and ensure children do not suffer from these policy decisions and are able to access the nutrition they need.”

### **One local family’s story**

Despite their military service, Sarasota couple [Jessica and Matthew](#) already face the painful reality of struggling to feed their two children.

“At times, it felt like we were barely able to stay afloat,” Jessica said. “There were times we would say, ‘OK, we need to fill up with gas, but if we hold off on paying this bill and we’re able to fill up our tanks, then that’s going to leave room to be able to make a grocery run this week.’”

Matthew, a Marine veteran and Purple Heart recipient, recalls enlisting to protect families back here at home — never imagining his own would one day experience food insecurity.

“I was going in, I was fighting for those people at home to not have to fight,” he said.

Community support, which enables All Faiths Food Bank’s various programs and services (including mobile food pantries) have helped Jessica and Matthew keep their children fed.

“As a parent, you feel like you don’t have to worry now about, ‘How am I going to get the next groceries?’” Jessica said.

### **Filling the hunger gap**

For 12 years, All Faith's Food Bank's [Campaign Against Summer Hunger](#) has been the community's strongest response to child hunger. Thanks to support from foundations, corporate funders and individual donors — along with partnerships with schools, libraries, summer camps and other organizations — this program has been able to fill the hunger gap for countless children.

In 2024, the campaign raised \$2.1 million, providing nutritious meals to more than 35,000 local kids. Since its inception, the initiative has brought in more than \$18 million. However, unpredictable federal resources mean every [donation](#) carries an even greater impact.

“We are taking a proactive approach, but we can't do it alone,” Miller said. “As government aid become less certain, our food bank will rely even more on the generosity of partners, volunteers and donors to keep our programs running and our shelves stocked.”

## Your support changes lives

Summer programs powered by the [Campaign Against Summer Hunger](#) include:

- **Backpacks** that provide kids with meals and snacks at numerous sites, including libraries, summer camps and early learning centers.
- **Mobile pantries** where families can pick up fresh produce, meats and groceries.
- **School pantries** which conveniently distribute food to students' families right on site.
- **Partnerships** with Sarasota and DeSoto County Schools that enhance meal programs for children.

## How you can help

With the support of lead investors the [Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation](#) and the [Gulf Coast Community Foundation](#), along with private individual investors, all

gifts to the [Campaign Against Summer Hunger](#) will be matched dollar-for-dollar between April 1 and May 15.

- **Donate:** Your gift will be doubled to help feed even more children.
- **Host a virtual fundraiser:** Rally your friends, family and colleagues to support the cause.
- **Volunteer:** Help sort, package and distribute food. Volunteers are desperately needed to fill roles during the summer months, especially at outdoor mobile food distributions.

Visit [allfaithsfoodbank.org](https://allfaithsfoodbank.org) to learn more, register to volunteer or make a gift today.