



Your Turn
Nelle S. Miller
Guest columnist

Food bank working to meet summer hunger needs

As schools close for the summer, thousands of local children will lose access to the meals they count on each day. They will lose access at a time when families are already struggling to afford gas, groceries, child care and housing.

People across our region are facing mounting financial pressure. Grocery prices remain high. Gas prices have climbed above \$4.50 per gallon.

Rent, insurance and utility costs continue to stretch household budgets thinner each month.

The neighbors who are turning to us for food assistance are doing everything right. Yet they are working families still struggling to keep up with the growing challenges.

At the same time, critical safety nets are shrinking. The 2025 budget reconciliation bill included the largest cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in history. The cuts have reduced funding by nearly \$187 billion over the next decade.

And for the third consecutive year, Florida has declined to participate in the Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children (Summer EBT) Program – resulting in the loss of approximately \$120 per child in grocery assistance for more than 2.1 million children statewide.

Here in our community, the warning signs are already visible.

Due to ongoing public school funding challenges, the Sarasota County Schools district expects to serve up to 17,000 fewer meals this summer.

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This is why All Faiths Food Bank is urgently mobilizing this summer to help feed thousands of children who would otherwise face hunger when school cafeterias close.

For the 13th year, All Faiths is partnering with the Sarasota and DeSoto county school districts, along with hundreds of community organizations, to provide free, nutritious meals and food assistance to children throughout the summer months.

This effort is supported in part through the federally funded Summer BreakSpot program, which reimburses participating organizations through the U.S.

Department of Agriculture's Summer Food Service Program.

Through our Campaign Against Summer Hunger – supported by a \$1 million community match led by Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation and Gulf Coast Community Foundation – hundreds of compassionate donors and partners have stepped forward to help meet the growing need.

And thanks to the Claudia Barnett Charitable Fund, gifts received by May 15 are matched *twice* – up to \$50,000. This will further boost our ability to provide food and other essential services to children.

We know the need continues to outpace available resources. And we know that hunger affects far more than an empty stomach.

Children experiencing hunger are more likely to struggle with concentration, memory, illness and emotional stress. And over time, chronic hunger can negatively affect brain development, mental health and long-term stability. No child should spend the summer worrying about where their next meal will come from. At a time when economic pressures are rising and government support is shrinking, our community's response matters more than ever.

By coming together, we can help ensure local children spend their summer healthy, nourished and ready to return to school prepared to succeed.

Visit allfaithsfoodbank.org to learn how you can help children and families experiencing hunger.

And visit allfaithsfoodbank.org/summer-food sites to learn where food will be available throughout the summer.

Nelle S. Miller is the CEO of All Faiths Food Bank, which serves Sarasota and DeSoto counties.