

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

June 2021



CCEOK AND THE USDA FARMERS TO FAMILIES PROGRAM

The USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program (F2F) will be ending on May 31, 2021. It began in April of last year with the passage of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. The program was a temporary initiative by the USDA to purchase and distribute agricultural products to those in need. The USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service was authorized to partner with national, regional, and local distributors to purchase up to \$6 billion in fresh produce, dairy and meat products from American producers. Distributors were responsible for packaging these products into family-sized boxes, transporting them to food banks, community and faith-based organizations and other nonprofits who distributed them to Americans in need.

Since the program started in 2020, there have been five "rounds" or phases, in which potential distributors bid for the work of acquiring the food, packaging it, and delivering it to distribution partners. The USDA specified the content of each box and potential vendors submitted a winning per-box price to get the work. Tulsa Fruit Company's ("GoFresh") \$54 million

bid was selected in Round One (May 15 through June 30, 2020) to create five types of food boxes: (1) fresh fruit, (2) fresh vegetables, (3) dairy products, (4) milk and (5) a combination box, which consisted of a mix of the above foodstuffs. GoFresh won an extension to their Round One contract into Round Two, which ran from July 1 to September 18 of 2020.

The USDA recognized after Round One that some localities were underserved and that the need was greater in some areas – those two metrics are not the same – and they adjusted the distribution in Round Two by selecting additional contractors to cover the two shortfalls.

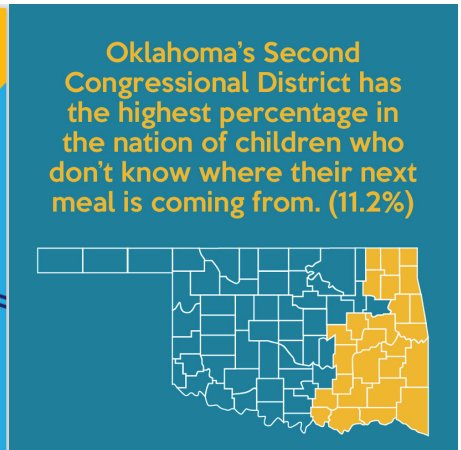
Round Three, consisting of only combination-type boxes, was conducted from mid-September to the end of October 2020. To fund the very successful program, an additional \$1 billion in funding was made available to provide additional assistance during this

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period. During this time, the state of Oklahoma was served by contractors that included Tulsa's GoFresh, Sysco, DiMare Fresh, and Proffer Wholesale Produce, a family-owned operation out of Park Hills, Missouri. Proffer's exclusive distribution area included Tulsa county and a few counties in the surrounding area. Their contract was worth almost \$20 million.

Round Four, which ran from November 1 through December 31, was funded with \$500 million in supplemental appropriations. The RK Group, a San Antonio, Texas-based contractor, bid \$22 million for the rights to collect food, build, and distribute boxes in Texas and Oklahoma. Again, all the boxes in Round Four were combination boxes.

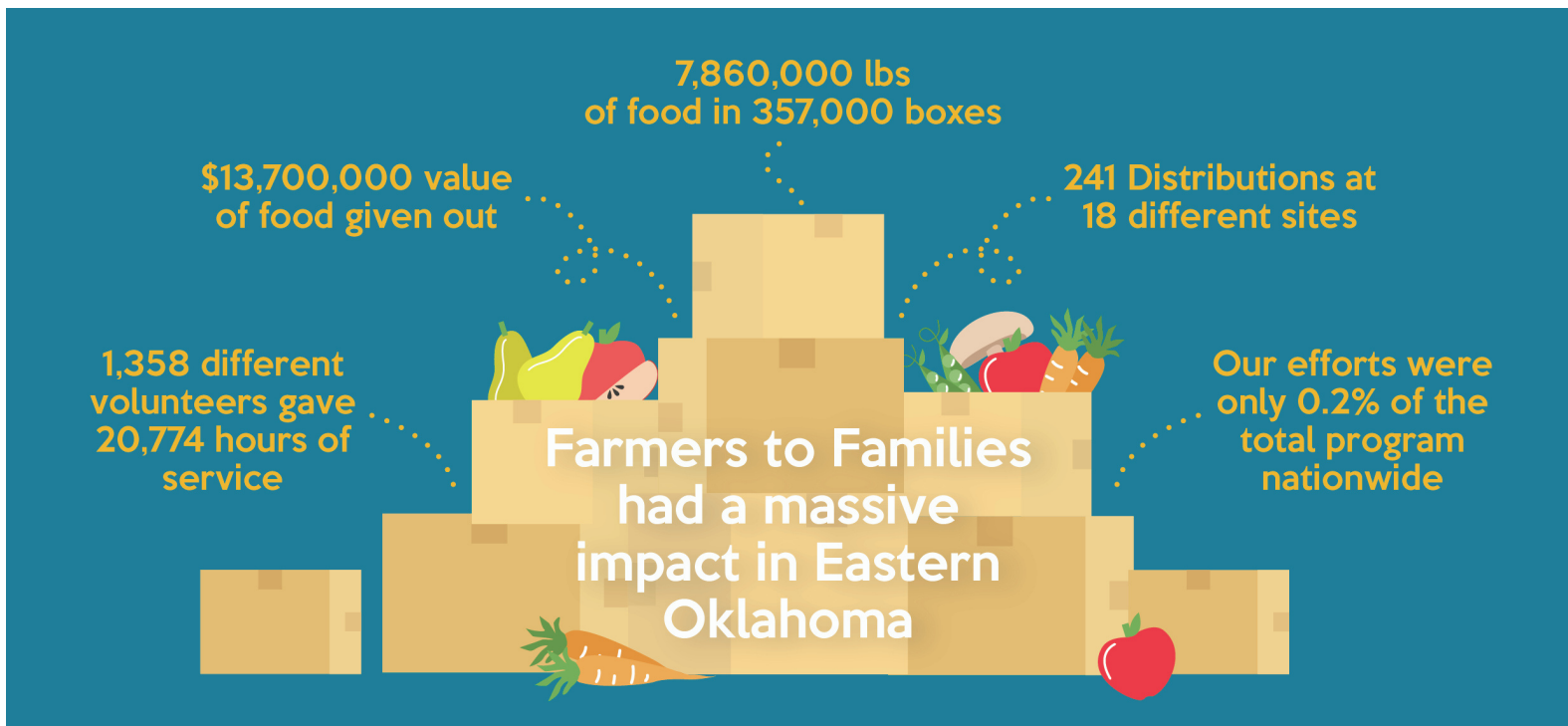
Round Five, the most recent phase, ran through the end of April 2021, and was funded with an additional \$1.5 billion from the COVID-19 Relief Package, part of the 2020 Consolidated Appropriations Act. All boxes in Round Five were combination-type boxes, but with a twist – seafood could be included in these boxes. Tulsa's GoFresh submitted a \$9 million winning bid to distribute boxes in Wyoming, Oklahoma, and Arkansas.



As with any government program, there are rules – and lots of them – regarding almost everything on and in the box, and how the box gets from the producer to the consumer. The rules include the label above.

Catholic Charities began participating in the program in May of 2020 and will cease distributing food in May 2021. In Round One, 13 Catholic Charities sites received F2F boxes. Food was delivered to each site in a semi and offloaded by up to 30 volunteers. Round Two F2F boxes were distributed to 8 sites. Catholic Charities has distributed F2F boxes to 8-10 sites in each of the following Rounds. These sites are generally locations where Catholic Charities does not have an existing presence. Targeting these additional sites permits those clients not close to an existing Catholic Charities location to receive some food assistance.

See the "by the Numbers" section below to get an idea of the magnitude of Catholic Charities' involvement in this successful program.



STAFF SPOTLIGHT: Gabriel Simental

Everyone has a story. Gabriel's is about a guy who is truly, from the bottom of his heart, dedicated to helping those who need it most.

Gabriel was born in Mexico in a small town about 50 miles south of El Paso but spent the summers of his childhood with relatives in Phoenix. Gabriel migrated permanently to Phoenix when he was 11. He studied architecture in college, which he said blended his passion of art with engineering. After moving to Nevada in 1991, he went into nursing. When changes in Medicare and Medicaid brought more record keeping to each patient interaction, Gabriel took on a management role, until... the lush verdant pastures of southeast Kansas and a John Cougar Mellencamp video - "Rain on the Scarecrow" - drew him into....farming and ranching.

While in Kansas, Gabriel met his future wife, Shannon, who at the time was living in Tulsa. Gabriel and Shannon (who works with battered women at DVIS and Saint John) found out about a Mexican-based charity called Paradise Ministries. Paradise advertised on the web for donations to support their work providing shelter and help for sex-trafficked women in Puerto Vallarta. Gabriel and Shannon were encouraged to come to Puerto Vallarta and become house parents, but things with the charity were not as they appeared online (surprise!). The two, on their own, and with no financial support from anyone, set up an alternative ministry in Puerto Vallarta to get food and help to not

only those women, but to the families that were subsisting on what they could find in the city dump. They stayed nine months before returning to Tulsa.

Back in December 2020, Gabriel was working at a ministry finding housing for clients north of the CCEOK main campus and noticed that those clients would come to CCEOK's food pantry to get groceries. Intrigued, he applied to volunteer, and was immediately put to work. Gabriel remarked that he has been working with various ministries for more than 35 years and had never - up to the time he joined us - been a part of a group of people that were as easy to get along with, who don't argue, and who are more

committed to helping the poor as we are. Given his experience at other ministries, Gabriel says that working in the food pantry with us is a breath of fresh air.

Gabriel and Shannon continue to provide help to the needy by taking bread, coldcut packages and juice to their home, where they make cold meals of sandwiches and drinks for sex workers in Tulsa.

Gabriel volunteers with us during the day and has been fortunate to be able to sell oil paintings he creates in the evenings at his home studio.

Gabriel Simental: Renaissance Man. Everyone has a story.

2 TRUTHS & A LIE

So now that you know all this, he has two truths and a lie to share. Can you figure out which they are?

WEDDING BELLS: Both my wife and I received an invitation to our own destination wedding, with no apparent means to get there.

BOB ROSS: Oil paintings I completed and sold years ago have appeared in Christie's catalog.

THIRD LITTLE PIGGY: I worked on a team that made hundreds of adobe bricks a day.

The answers will be in the next newsletter!



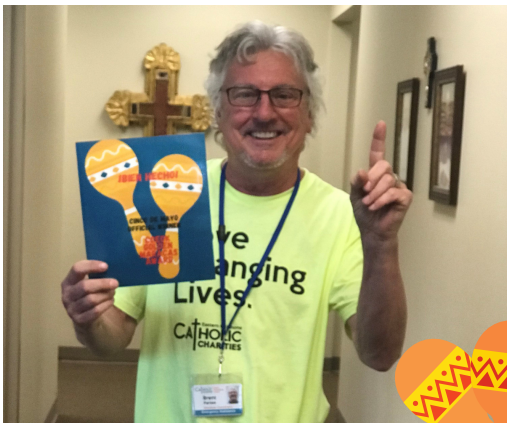
Answer to Mark Marston's Two Truths and a Lie: Mark does have a pilots license, and he did teach in north Africa getting paid with propane, but he is not a three-time textbook author.

Welcome, Wilburton!

We are expanding our reach into more of Eastern Oklahoma to bring Christ's merciful love to those who suffer! We opened a new outreach location in Wilburton on May 20, 2021. Bishop Konderla was there to say Mass and give the building a blessing the next day. This location will serve residents of Wilburton and the surrounding area. This is our first location in Latimer County.

The outreach location is open on Thursdays from 10-2, and is staffed by coordinators Cassie Casildo from Poteau and Amelia London from McAlester and the wonderful volunteers of Sacred Heart and St. Catherine of Siena Parishes.

Please pray for all those who have been instrumental in helping this project come together!



Congrats to The Outpost for winning the Golden Maracas award on Cinco de Mayo!

Chef Michael Fusco's Tomato Salad

- 1 pound cherry tomatoes, rinsed & cut in half
- 1 medium onion, diced (optional)
- 3 oz. olive oil (EVOO)
- 2 oz. balsamic vinegar
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 Tbs. chopped basil (fresh is best)
- 1/2 tsp. sea salt
- Fresh ground black pepper to taste

1. Blend EVOO, balsamic vinegar and seasonings
2. Add tomatoes & onions
3. Mix well and refrigerate for 2 hours

Feeds 6 people



Eastern Oklahoma
CATHOLIC CHARITIES | Love Changing Lives.

GET INVOLVED

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Join our Facebook Group!

For story ideas, feedback, etc.,
email: volcommunications@cceok.org