



**Help is on the way for the hungry**  
**The Daily Herald**  
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Many of us spent New Year's Day enjoying snacks and hearty meals.

But others had barely enough food to put on the table, let alone enjoy a festive feast.

Nearly one in 11 people in Illinois is uncertain where his or her next meal will come from -- or even if it will come at all, according to the Northern Illinois Food Bank.

And nearly 500,000 children in Illinois are hungry, according to Gov. Rod Blagojevich's office.

Many seek to ease their hunger by visiting local pantries, where they can get donated food. In 2006, eight food banks in Illinois, including some here in the suburbs, provided meals and other services to 900,000 people through a network of 2,000 pantries, soup kitchens and shelters, according to the governor's office.

The Daily Herald has been helping those who rely on food pantries to feed themselves and their families through our Giving Garden program. In the eight years the program has been in existence, suburban gardeners have donated tens of thousands of pounds of produce to area food pantries.

But some of these pantries are struggling to keep their shelves filled. Donations of food, and cash to buy food, have fallen off.

And the money on hand is not always enough to purchase enough food because of a spike in food prices.

Compounding the problem is the fact that the federal government has not been able to provide enough commodities through its Emergency Food Assistance Program to keep pace with demand.

Thankfully the state is coming to the assistance of the hungry and those who help them put food on the table.

The governor has announced the state will provide \$1 million in hunger relief through its Food for Families program.

It's estimated this new initiative will provide 1.5 million pounds of food for an additional 37,500 families.

Pantries are expected to get \$300,000 in grants to help them stock fresh fruits and vegetables.

This new state program is a most welcome development. But we suspect it will not meet the needs of the hungry over the long term.

Hunger in the suburbs is a bigger problem than most residents might realize. There are always, of course, the jobless and the homeless who need food. But they are not alone. Increasingly, the working poor find their incomes do not stretch far enough to consistently put enough food on the table for their families.

So if donating food to your local pantry is one of your New Year's resolutions, it is one worth keeping.

It is a form of generosity that will go a long way toward providing what many of us take for granted -- a good breakfast, lunch and dinner on a regular basis.