



Food 4 Lives delivers food to those in need. Photo By: Powell Harris.

## **Food Banks in the Time of Coronavirus**

By Karah Lindsey

The outbreak of COVID-19 has done tremendous damage and has shaken the U.S. to its core. At the time of publication, the death toll has reached over 100,000, and more than 1.6 million cases are confirmed. Because the virus can be fatal, many businesses have either shut down or are opening with limited capacity, which adds fear of losing income to the fear of losing loved ones. As of April 2020, the unemployment rate was 14.7%, which is the highest since the Great Depression. Families that were struggling to make ends meet before now go to food banks to gain the supplies they need. Therefore, many food banks saw an increase in demand in the last two months. Now, they are faced with attempting to help more people in a time when large gatherings, which are easiest to serve, are discouraged.

New York has an unemployment rate of 14.5% and lost 1,904,900 jobs. Although the unemployment rate does not show that New York's food banks would have more demand, the sheer amount of people without employment places extra stress on the food banks. Food banks in New York City face even more stress because the bulk of the state's population is located there. Goke Food Pantry in Brooklyn, New York, faces a challenging situation. They now serve 20,000 customers, which is twice the usual amount, with 60 volunteers. "We need a lot of things [including] food, funding, and PPE." Said Mr. Babatunde, a volunteer. Goke allows limited numbers of customers in at a time. They also are trying to provide food for people who can't cook for themselves.

Georgia has a lower unemployment rate than New York, coming in at 11.9%. However, food banks have still seen large amounts of growth. Intown Ministries, located in Atlanta, saw their client base triple, from less than 100 pantry visits a week to over 300. They are in urgent need of canned goods, cereal, spaghetti sauce, peanut butter, and shelf-stable milk. They require seven volunteers in the food pantry on Tuesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. They also depend upon volunteers to act as

delivery drivers. Food 4 Lives is another food bank in Atlanta. Prior to COVID-19 they served their food-catering style but now have switched to delivering food directly to their clients. “Immediately after those two weeks of the shutdown, we encountered truly hungry people who were cut off from public services and many services to the homeless community. The weather was still cold, and many of them hadn’t eaten in several days. We did our best to provide the clothes, blankets, and sanitation supplies we had in stock along with the food,” said volunteer Powell Harris. They serve seven times as many people as before the pandemic, due to the shutdown and limited capacity of some social services.

California has an unemployment rate of 15.5%. However, the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank has seen less of an increase in demand than others. According to CEO Michael Flood, they’ve experienced a 20% increase in the number of clients they serve each month. They have enough food for the moment; their most urgent need is funding.

### References

“5 Coronavirus Questions for the L.A. Regional Food Bank CEO.” *Los Angeles Regional Food Bank*, 25 Mar. 2020, [www.lafoodbank.org/stories/5-coronavirus-questions-president-food-bank-michael-flood/](http://www.lafoodbank.org/stories/5-coronavirus-questions-president-food-bank-michael-flood/).

Lindsey, Karah. “Interview with Mr. Babatunde of Goke Food Pantry.” 22 May 2020.

Lindsey, Karah. “Interview with Powell Harris of Food 4 Lives.” 22 May 2020.

“Local Area Unemployment Statistics Home Page.” *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020, [www.bls.gov/lau/home.htm](http://www.bls.gov/lau/home.htm).

“An Update from ICM - over 700 Neighbors Served as We Respond to COVID-19.” *An Update from ICM - over 700 Neighbors Served as We Respond to COVID-19*, 21 May 2020, [mailchi.mp/intowncm.org/covidresponseupdatemay?fbclid=IwAR1P5uM42qxGc-LPzBBmr7UEdyfcreF83\\_sXr\\_v2Xo6V588nGJQNb\\_B7QLY](https://mailchi.mp/intowncm.org/covidresponseupdatemay?fbclid=IwAR1P5uM42qxGc-LPzBBmr7UEdyfcreF83_sXr_v2Xo6V588nGJQNb_B7QLY).