

Our History

For more than 35 years, Feeding America has responded to the hunger crisis in America by providing food to people in need through a nationwide network of food banks.

The concept of food banking was developed by John van Hengel in Phoenix, AZ in the late 1960s. Van Hengel, a retired businessman, had been volunteering at a soup kitchen trying to find food to serve the hungry. One day, he met a desperate mother who regularly rummaged through grocery store garbage bins to find food for her children. She suggested that there should be a place where, instead of being thrown out, discarded food could be stored for people to pick up—similar to the way “banks” store money for future use. With that, an industry was born.

Van Hengel established St. Mary’s Food Bank in Phoenix, AZ as the nation’s first food bank. In its initial year, van Hengel and his team of volunteers distributed 275,000 pounds of food to people in need. Word of the food bank’s success quickly spread, and states began to take note. By 1977, food banks had been established in 18 cities across the country.

As the number of food banks began to increase, van Hengel created a national organization for food banks and in 1979 he established Second Harvest, which was later called America’s Second Harvest the Nation’s Food Bank Network. In 2008, the network changed its name to Feeding America to better reflect the mission of the organization.

Today, Feeding America is the nation’s largest domestic hunger-relief organization—a powerful and efficient [network of 200 food banks across the country](#). As food insecurity rates hold steady at the highest levels ever, the Feeding America network of food banks has risen to meet the need. We feed 46 million people at risk of hunger, including 12 million children and 7 million seniors. Learn more about how we get food to people in need in our ["How We Work"](#) section. Support Feeding America and help solve hunger. Donate. Volunteer. Advocate. Educate.