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State providing \$1.6 million to food banks

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ALBANY -- The state is giving \$1 million in grants to eight New York food [banks](#), as well as an additional \$620,000 to food pantries in flood-hit areas such as Broome, Chemung and Delaware counties, Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced Wednesday.

Also Wednesday, the governor launched a statewide initiative called "Help Your Neighbor" to encourage New York residents and businesses to [donate](#) to regional food banks. The food banks distribute goods to 5,000 soup kitchens, food pantries, shelters and other emergency programs, reaching about three million people a year.

"The economy has been very difficult, as we all know. We're all suffering through it. Some people are suffering more than others," Cuomo told reporters during a conference call.

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"The demand on food banks is very, very high, and I encourage all New Yorkers to remember that and think of that this Thanksgiving," he said.

has boosted requests for food assistance, Cuomo said. The need for help is particularly great in parts of the state that were damaged by tropical storms Irene and Lee in late August and early September. Some donors have pulled back on their contributions because of the tough times,

he said.

"We're especially cognizant of our fellow New Yorkers who are in communities that are still rebuilding from the flood and storm

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damage that we had," he said.

John Eberhard, executive director of Delaware Opportunities Inc., said the organization got a "happy surprise" Wednesday in the form of a \$60,000 state grant.

The flood took away a lot of people's food supplies, so they had immediate needs that had to be met, Eberhard said. But "food insecurity" has been increasing steadily in the region. Demand for food has probably gone up by a third in the last couple years, he said.

"Income levels are not particularly high here and from time to time, [families](#) have trouble putting food on the table," he said.

The \$1 million is from a federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Contingency Fund grant the state received in October. The \$620,000 is from the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program in the current state budget, Cuomo said.

The [funding](#) is welcome, but it doesn't get to the crux of the hunger problem, said Mark Dunlea, executive director of Hunger Action Network.

"We certainly always appreciate more [charity](#) at Thanksgiving time and there's certainly a lot of need out there, so we appreciate the governor finding some extra money," he said. "I think many of us believe the solution to hunger remains economic justice and not charity."

Dunlea said the state should spend more [money](#) on hunger prevention. Hunger Action wants a \$4 million increase in the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program.

Governors have announced gifts to food banks at Thanksgiving time in recent years, but they have not raised the program's base funding, Dunlea said. The number of people fed through emergency food programs has increased by two-thirds in the last four years, and they run out of food before they can feed everyone. Meanwhile, food has been growing more costly, he said.

Hunger Action also supports continuing the state's temporary income-tax surcharge on wealthy New Yorkers, Dunlea said.

Cuomo opposes extending the measure beyond the Dec. 31 expiration date.

Foodlink of Rochester found out Wednesday that it would receive



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\$107,000, said Julia Tedesco, director of development and strategic initiatives for the organization.

"It'll have a huge impact on the agencies and the individuals that they serve in our 10-county region," she said.

Soup kitchens in Monroe County that are member agencies are serving about 30 percent more meals than they did at this time last year, Tedesco said.

The growing need isn't isolated to urban areas, she said. Many people are turning to emergency-food providers for the first time in their lives.

The \$64,000 is going to fill up the Food [Bank](#) for Westchester's food shelves and help put more food out to the community, said Christina Rohatynskyj, executive director.

The number of people served by the food bank increased 30 percent in 2008 and 2009. The demand has been growing since then, although not at such a dramatic rate, she said.

"We don't have peaks and valleys anymore," she said. "It's just an ongoing, constant need for food."

The Food Bank outgrew its distribution center in Millwood and is moving to a facility in Elmsford, she said.

Cara Matthews is a staff writer in the Gannett Albany Bureau.

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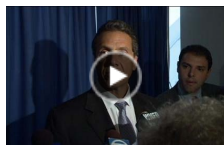
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