

## **Wal-Mart makes big pledge to food banks**

### **Over five years, chain will commit \$2 billion**

**By Tim Feran** Thursday, May 13, 2010 2:52 AM

#### **THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH**

Wal-Mart Stores Inc. plans to add to the nation's food-bank larder in a big way with \$2 billion in cash and other gifts over the next five years.

The initiative, "Fighting Hunger Together," includes more than 37million donated meals to food banks across Ohio. At least a dozen food banks in Ohio will benefit from the initiative, including the Mid-Ohio FoodBank in Grove City.

"This support couldn't come at a more critical time," said Lisa Hamler-Fugitt, executive director for the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Food Banks. "In just the first three months of 2010, Ohio food pantries served more than 1.6million Ohioans, and did so with 5million fewer pounds of food than the quarter before."

Wal-Mart has been an important supporter of Ohio food banks beyond its financial contributions, Hamler-Fugitt said, citing such contributions as trucks and equipment and Wal-Mart employees who regularly volunteer at food banks throughout Ohio.

Wal-Mart estimates that, by 2015, its gift to Ohio food banks will add 47.6 million pounds of food, or 37.2 million meals.

The Mid-Ohio FoodBank, which serves 535 charities in a 20-county area in central and eastern Ohio, said that more than 248,000 people received food last year, 28percent more than in 2005, the last time a similar survey was taken.

In 2009, Mid-Ohio received 1.3 million pounds of food from Walmart and Sam's Club stores, said Matt Habash, food bank president.

"We have forged a wonderful relationship with local Walmarts. They've been very supportive," Habash said.

In addition to the food, Wal-Mart has provided a truck to Mid-Ohio, an important item in delivering fresh food to pantries, Wal-Mart spokesman William Wertz said.

Wal-Mart's initiative "will be significant in stemming the tide of hunger," said Scott Marier, executive director of Westerville Area Resource Ministry, which operates one of the food pantries served by the Mid-Ohio FoodBank. "Last year, we served a record number of families - 13,001 people, or the equivalent of 240,000 meals- a 34.5 percent increase over 2008.

"So when Wal-Mart donates that much, the tide goes up and everybody's boat goes up."

Wal-Mart joins other grocers in hunger relief, including the nation's second-largest chain, Kroger Co., which donated 50million pounds of food in 2009.

Wal-Mart's plan comes in two parts: At least \$250 million in grants over five years will go toward the purchase of such things as refrigerated trucks and to programs to feed children during the summer when they're not in school and receiving government meals.

But the bulk of the donations will consist of more than 1.1 billion pounds of food that doesn't sell or can't be sold because it's close to expiration dates, for example.

Wal-Mart estimates the food will provide 1 billion meals nationally.

*Information from the Associated Press was included in this story.*

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