



# Give a Helping Ham: Expanding Access to Local Protein During the Holidays

## Challenge

Protein is essential for health and often difficult for families to afford. Pantries in Manitowoc receive few protein donations, and even fewer after the USDA-funded WI Local Food Purchase Assistance Program ended in January. Misfits Homegrown had supplied meat to Grow It Forward through that program for three years, so the funding loss reduced pantry access and farm income.

As the holidays approached, pantry managers noted that many families hoped for traditional meals, including ham. FoodWise and community partners began looking for a way to increase the supply of protein while also supporting local producers.

## Collaborative Approach

FoodWise Coordinator Laura Apfelbeck met with Pastor Andy Wendle of First Lutheran Church, who was exploring ways for his congregation to work together in service. Many members use Thrivent Financial, making the Thrivent Action Teams program a natural fit. Each client can access \$250 in annual seed money to support a community project.

Together, partners developed Give a Helping Ham, purchasing locally raised hams for Grow It Forward and other members of the Manitowoc County Hunger Coalition. First Lutheran had an established relationship with Grow It Forward, so the project moved forward quickly. In total, congregation members contributed \$1,250 in Thrivent Action Team funds, and an additional \$850 was donated through the church, bringing First Lutheran's total contribution to \$2,100. Amy Johnson of Misfits Homegrown also waived credit card fees to stretch those dollars further.

Apfelbeck contacted meat producers including Amy Johnson of Misfits Homegrown. Misfits Homegrown participated in the Local Farmer Procurement Program for three years, supplying meat to Grow It Forward through that effort. Johnson immediately supported the new project. She values helping residents understand where their food comes from.

“ I feel as a community we need to take care of each other. It is a scary world right now. I love inviting the community to see an active farm and learn.

— Amy Johnson, Misfits Homegrown LLC

Pastor Andy said the project aligned with the church's long-standing commitment to walking with people who face food insecurity. “It gave the congregation a clear way to act during the holiday season.”

## Community Impact

Give a Helping Ham resulted in 75 locally raised hams for Grow It Forward and distribution across the Manitowoc County Hunger Coalition, increasing access to high-quality protein for families during a time of high food costs. The project also supported a local farm during a period of lost revenue and strengthened connections among First Lutheran Church, Grow It Forward, Misfits Homegrown, and Extension FoodWise.

Johnson noted that helping at the pantry and seeing families receive food “really humbles you and makes you appreciate what you have and what you can do for your community.” Misfits Homegrown offers delivery now and will accept EBT in the coming year. Give a Helping Ham shows how local partnerships, clear needs, and shared values can increase food access and support community-based agriculture. As a first-time effort, the project shows strong potential for seasonal expansion.

## By the Numbers

- 75** locally raised hams purchased for Grow It Forward Food Pantry
- \$2,100** contributed by First Lutheran Church
- \$1,250** in Thrivent Action Team funding
- \$850** in additional church giving
- 5** congregation members contributed Thrivent Action Team funding





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## What Partners Are Saying

“ Give a Helping Ham shows the power of the Hunger Coalition's core value: collaboration. When partners bring their unique strengths to the table, everyone wins. We're seeing more of these creative collaborations emerge, and they're essential as our community navigates changing funding landscapes and rising food costs.

— Ben Peters, United Way Manitowoc County

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— Amy Johnson, Misfits Homegrown LLC

“ With generous support from First Lutheran, Thrivent, and Misfits Homegrown, we are able to share hope and a helping ham with families in need. Together, we are making holiday meals possible.

— Amber Daus, CEO of Grow it Forward

“ What I like best is that this is a project involving local people supporting a local business. The local business is then able to help the local community with such a basic need as food. It doesn't get much better than this.

— Beth Seizert, First Lutheran Church

“ This is what loving one's neighbors looks like. Unfortunately, homelessness and living with food insecurity has grown with the loss of funding for local pantries. Individual households are about to lose healthcare, and many have been laid off or have lost jobs. ... Our mission at First Luthren Church is to gather, grow, and go. This is what going looks like. And it is local, and critical to this area.

— Beth Seizert, First Lutheran Church

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“ This project aligned with our long-standing commitment to walking with people who face food insecurity. It gave our congregation a clear way to take action during the holiday season.

— Pastor Andy Wendle, First Lutheran Church



Pastor Andy Wendle, Amy Johnson, Amber Daus