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Local grocers step up donations to the Hunger Coalition

Atkinson's Market and Albertsons grocery store participate to feed hungry

Atkinsons Market and Albertson's grocery stores are pitching in to help the Blaine County Hunger Coalition, which has seen an increased demand for food donations due to the recession.

The Hunger Coalition, which was founded in 2003 to serve the hungry in the Wood River Valley, saw a nearly four-fold increase in demand for services from 2007 to 2008. During a three-day period in late February of 2009, more than 200 families were served with 5,205 pounds of food, the same amount usually handed out in one month by the coalition.



Albertsons assistant store manager Rob Dreimeyer helps load up a cart for Hunger Coalition volunteer Alison Higdon at the Albertsons grocery store in Hailey

"The grocery stores have contributed one third of the food we have given out this spring,' said Hunger Coalition Executive Director Jeanne Liston. "It's amazing what they have done to step up and help out."

The Hunger Coalition began a mobile food bank in February after acquiring a refrigerator and van. In March the local grocery stores began providing perishable food to the coalition's 120 volunteers, who dispense it to the hungry each week in Carey, Bellevue, Hailey and Ketchum.

Those in need of food are screened and interviewed to get them help with other government resources, but no one will be turned away.

"If they show up and are hungry we will feed them," said Liston.

Atkinson's Market Manager Tom Pyle has been saving day-old breads, chips and other out-of-date food products for the coalition, as well as apples, bananas, artichokes and other produce that, because of blemishes or other imperfections, would otherwise wind up in the garbage.

Rob Driemeyer, Assistant Store Director at Albertson's in Hailey said his store has been supplying the coalition with food since the store opened in 2003, providing donations and reduced rates on purchased food.

The Hunger Coalition's volunteer "Grow a Row" program begins this week, seeking participation from local gardeners willing to plant an extra row of vegetables to feed the hungry in Blaine County.

Suggested plants include tomatoes, peas, green beans, garlic spinach and fruits.