

# Donations further Pork Power

By JOSH FLINT

ONCE 10 sows and five market hogs are reduced down to 2,500 pounds of ground pork and placed on a pallet, the load fits nicely in the back of a half-ton pickup truck.

This summer, the 2,514 one-pound frozen packages will have quite an impact in feeding Illinois' hungry. The kickoff donation, held at the Central Illinois Food Bank in Springfield, was the start of the "Pork Power: Partnering to Fight Hunger in Illinois" initiative, a partnership comprised of the Illinois Pork Producers Association, Illinois Corn Marketing Board, Illinois Soybean Association, Illinois Association of Meat Processors and the food bank.

The pigs were donated by four Illinois producers, including the Weitekamps. Roy and Fran Weitekamp were on hand for the donation.

"We volunteer at the Panhandle Food Pantry in Raymond, so we definitely thought this was a worthwhile cause," Roy says.

The Weitekamp hog operation, located near Raymond, produces approximately 26,000 hogs per year and is currently operated by Roy and Fran's sons, Dale and Allan. The family has been raising hogs since 1889.

Tim Maiers, IPPA director of public relations, says families such as the Weitekamps will help Pork Power reach its goal of donating 100,000 pounds of ground pork by the end of August. IPPA members provide the hogs, and the Illinois Corn Marketing Board and soybean association have put up \$42,000 in checkoff funds for processing fees. The meat processors have contributed by processing the hogs at the reduced rate of 42 cents per pound. If the program meets its goal, Maiers estimates 300 to 400 hogs will be donated.

## Meeting a need

Although the initial donation was made to Central Illinois Food Bank in Springfield, eight food banks are involved in the initiative. Additionally, 15 meat processors statewide are helping out.

Pam Molitoris, Central Illinois Food Bank director, says food bank donations typically come in from USDA community programs and regional distributors. At the local level, retail grocery stores and food drives will often contribute to a food bank.

A tour through Central Illinois Food Bank's warehouse reveals it is stocked with vegetables, canned goods, boxed foods and drinks. However, there's not an overabundance of meat in the freezer. Molitoris says this is because protein is always a difficult item for any food bank to come by. The logistics of transporting meat safely is a hindrance for local donors.

Central Illinois Food Bank serves 21 counties for a coverage area of 12,000 square miles. According to Molitoris, they distribute food to approximately 160 agencies. This food will reach an estimated 75,000 people each month.

"In our area, we estimate the poverty rate has risen by 10% in the past couple

## Key Points

- Thus far, four pork producers have donated hogs for Pork Power.
- The program is designed to help feed Illinois' hungry.
- The initial 2,500-pound donation is the first step toward the 100,000-pound goal.

**FILL FOOD BANKS:** Phil Borgic, Illinois Pork Producers Association, is working with Pam Molitoris of the Central Illinois Food Bank on the "Pork Power" project.

of years," Molitoris adds. To quell the hunger, the Central Illinois Food Bank in Springfield puts out 4.5 million pounds of food each year.



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