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Guard will help Second Harvest through September

Jason Hawk
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WELLINGTON — The National Guard will stay on through at least Sept. 30 to help Second Harvest Food Bank feed hungry families as the pandemic wears on.

"We hope some of them will be here longer with us," said Brittney Hopkins, program and education coordinator for the Lorain-based food bank.

The Guard helped load boxes of eggs, apples, oranges, canned goods, dairy products and ham into cars Wednesday afternoon at Wellington High School.

About 140 vehicles lined up at the start of the event, and organizers had enough for 500 households to take 50 to 60 pounds each of food.

Wellington Schools staff were among the volunteers who carted cardboard boxes to open trunks.

"It's a partnership. We're part of the community and we're funded by the community," said Superintendent Ed Weber, explaining why teachers wanted to help.

Staffers from the Educational Service Center of Lorain County also were on the job. The agency employs many of the social workers for local school districts who have made volunteering at food giveaways a summer priority.

They were on hand "to take stress off some of the families during the pandemic, and hopefully just help them rest a little easier, if not forever then just for a few nights," ESC Assistant Superintendent Dave Kish said.

"So many have given help to me along the way and to my family. I feel like paying it forward," he said.

Taking a breather after loading boxes, Carol Burke of Thrive Southern Lorain County said she had time and talent to donate to the Second Harvest giveaway.

"We're talking time, love, labor. That's what it's all about," she said.

Kiwanis Club members and Wellington police officers also helped.

But with demand soaring since March, Hopkins said it's the Ohio National Guard personnel who have made distributing thousands of pounds of food possible through the summer months. Fourteen Guardsmen were on site Wednesday.

"We certainly appreciate their muscle and their minds," she said.

The Guard's contract to provide pandemic relief to food banks had been set to expire Aug. 7 but was extended. Hopkins said Second Harvest must now periodically reapply for assistance.

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