

## OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT IN COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

### Northern Illinois Food Bank and Prairie Farms Dairy Geneva, Illinois



### Simple solutions for the greater good

While milk is one of the most nutritious items requested by food bank clients, it's rarely donated. Milk needs to be kept cold and safe, and has a relatively short shelf life compared with other donated items. Some food pantries purchase milk at retail stores, but that presents another set of challenges. As a result, many families have to do without.

"We know milk is the top food source for calcium, vitamin D, potassium and other essential nutrients," says Kelly Brasseur, Northern Illinois Food Bank's registered dietitian. "One of our key priorities is to provide our neighbors in need with nutritious food like milk that may not be affordable for them. This way they can best maximize what limited budgets they have while still getting the nutrients they need to thrive and lead productive lives."

Northern Illinois Food Bank and Prairie Farms Dairy created the Milk 2 My Plate program to get around the challenges of providing fresh milk to families. So far, it has brought more than 194,000 gallons of milk to families through 34 food pantries. It serves as a model for food banks across the country:

- Food pantries in the Northern Illinois Food Bank network purchase low-fat gallons of milk directly from Prairie Farms Dairy at a fixed cost.
- Prairie Farms Dairy gains a consistent, year-round customer and is able to deliver fresh milk directly to each agency through its existing ordering system and delivery routes.
- To cover costs, food pantries in the network secure donations from corporate and individual supporters, such as FORWARD (Fighting Obesity, Reaching Healthy Weight Among Residents of DuPage). This local coalition sees the Milk 2 My Plate program as a way to help achieve its goal of reversing the obesity trend.
- With Prairie Farms in charge of storage and distribution, Northern Illinois Food Bank eliminates food safety concerns that might arise if the milk first must be routed through its warehouse.

"Partnering with Northern Illinois Food Bank to implement the Milk 2 My Plate program exemplifies our commitment to being good neighbors and making sure fresh, delicious and nutritious milk is available for families to enjoy every single day," says Geary Crom, general manager for Prairie Farms. "Giving back is an important part of our heritage that began over 75 years ago, and we are committed to making a difference in our communities."

### Triple-bottom-line:

- The food bank's Community Nutrition and Food Distribution Center is one of the first to receive LEED Gold® certification.
- Through the Milk 2 My Plate program, more than 3.1 million servings of milk have been made available to families, so far.
- The food bank has an extensive recycling program and is planning the rollout of a composting operation.