Food Bank and Dairy Community Partner to Improve Health Outcomes

One thing is certain for food banks across the United States: Milk is in demand, but it can be logistically challenging to procure and distribute.

One Michigan food bank exceeded its own goal of making fresh, nutritious milk available to clients. By partnering with the dairy community and innovating its distribution methods, it created a system that’s built to last. That’s why Gleaners Community Food Bank of Southeastern Michigan is this year’s Outstanding Community Impact winner.

Last year Gleaners surpassed its goal of raising $96,000 for milk donations and its goal of distributing 103,680 gallons of milk. It was able to purchase more than $132,000 in milk and distribute 229,000 gallons of milk to those served by the emergency food network in Detroit and surrounding areas.

Ultimately, Gleaners’ goal is to improve clients’ health outcomes—in part by supplying a glass of fresh milk with every meal—and it’s inspiring donors to support this vision through an annual fundraising program called M.I.L.K. (Making Investments in the Lives of Kids), a campaign that aims to ensure kids have access to all the essential food groups starting with fresh milk. Gleaners tapped into the power of its relationships with United Dairy Industry of Michigan and Michigan’s dairy farmers, who provided milk-purchase match funding. That grew the sort of success that attracted more donations.

Milk is picked up from Michigan Dairy, an arm of the Kroger Company of Michigan, and typically delivered straight to an agency served by Gleaners or immediately sent to the Gleaners warehouses for distribution. The team worked out a process that maximized efficiencies of refrigeration while putting fewer trucks on the road.

Already, the work is paying off with smiles from those who were eager to stock their refrigerators again. Says one client:

“My son is always so happy when I bring milk home, so he can have milk on his cereal. Sometimes he has to eat his cereal without milk because we cannot always afford to buy it.”