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John Deere Foundation commits $18.5 Million to connect American farmers with food banks

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Three-year Farm-to-Plate strategy will fund food recovery, strengthen farm-to-food-bank supply chains and expand access to nutritious food, with more than $13 million earmarked for food security initiatives in Iowa

The John Deere Foundation has announced an $18.5 million multi-year investment to strengthen food security across the United States, linking agricultural producers more directly with food banks while addressing food waste and expanding access to nutritious produce.

The Farm-to-Plate strategy combines a $17 million commitment to Feeding America with a $1.5 million investment in The Farmlink Project. The programme will support food banks, recover surplus produce from farms, establish direct sourcing channels between farmers and hunger-relief organisations, and mobilise John Deere employees to support community food initiatives.

More than $13 million of the total commitment will support food security efforts in Iowa, including a new initiative designed to connect more than 100 local farmers with regional food banks. The programme aims to create additional outlets for locally grown produce while improving access to fresh food for households facing hunger.

The investment addresses a structural challenge in the US food system: agricultural production and food insecurity can coexist when supply chains, market access and distribution systems fail to connect available food with people who need it. By building closer relationships between farmers and food banks, the Foundation aims to improve the movement of surplus and locally grown food from farms to communities.

â??Through our Farm-to-Plate strategy, weâ??re excited to build on John Deere's decades-long support of food banks while helping farmers play an even bigger role in addressing hunger,â?• said Deanna Kovar, president of the Worldwide Ag & Turf Division for Production and Precision Ag at John Deere. â??Farmers have a long tradition of supporting their communities. By connecting them directly with food banks, we're creating new opportunities for producers and helping more families access nutritious food closer to home.â?•

Expanding food sourcing and distribution

The $17 million commitment to Feeding America will support food sourcing, distribution infrastructure and partnerships across the organisation's nationwide network. Feeding America works with more than 250 food banks, over 20 statewide food bank associations, more than 10 regional cooperatives and upwards of 60,000 agency partners, food pantries and meal programmes.

A central component of the investment is the new Iowa farm-to-food-bank initiative. Working with three food banks, the programme will expand existing partnerships with agricultural producers, with the goal of involving more than 100 farmers. The initiative is intended to create additional routes to market for participating producers while bringing more locally grown food into regional hunger-relief networks.

The commitment will also fund national sourcing and distribution capacity, helping food banks strengthen the infrastructure needed to procure and move food across their service areas.

Employee participation forms another part of the strategy. Between 2026 and 2029, approximately 22,000 John Deere employees are projected to help pack 1.8 million meals through company-supported volunteering initiatives conducted during paid working hours.

â??America grows a lot of good food, and farmers know their communities. Our job is to make sure more of that food can reach neighbors who need it,â?• said Denis McDonough, CEO of Feeding America. â??John Deereâ??s investment will help food banks build stronger, more direct relationships with farmers in Iowa and across the country, while strengthening the systems that move fresh food where it can do the most good. That is the kind of partnership this moment requires.â?•

Recovering surplus produce before it goes to waste

The Foundation is allocating a further $1.5 million over three years to The Farmlink Project, a nonprofit organisation that connects surplus agricultural produce with food banks and communities experiencing food insecurity.

The partnership is projected to recover 6.4 million pounds of fresh produce over the grant period, equivalent to approximately 5.3 million meals based on the US Department of Agriculture's estimate that 1.2 pounds of food represents one meal. The programme is also expected to increase access to fresh, nutritious food for more than 273,000 people and support between 30 and 60 farming operations across multiple states.

Recovering surplus food can create value at several points in the supply chain. Produce that might otherwise remain unharvested or go to waste can be redirected to hunger-relief organisations, although collection, transport, storage and distribution remain important operational considerations.

â??Too much of Americaâ??s fresh food still never leaves the farm,â?• said Eliza Blank, CEO of The Farmlink Project. â??With this grant from John Deere, The Farmlink Project can continue building a more resilient supply chain that keeps good food in circulation, supports farmers when markets fail, and ensures millions of pounds of fresh produce reach people instead of landfills.â?•

A broader approach to agricultural and food security

The Farm-to-Plate strategy expands the Foundation's longstanding support for food security through a coordinated approach spanning farm-level recovery, agricultural partnerships, distribution infrastructure and employee engagement.

Its significance lies in bringing farmers and charitable food networks closer together rather than treating food production, surplus recovery and hunger relief as separate challenges. The Iowa initiative, in particular, offers a model for connecting regional agricultural production with local food distribution systems.

The long-term impact will depend on how effectively these partnerships translate funding into sustained farmer participation, reliable produce procurement and improved access to nutritious food. For agricultural producers, food banks and communities facing hunger, stronger local supply chains could offer a practical route to reducing waste while making more of America's food supply available to those who need it.