

Draft Op-Ed—Food Banks and the Census

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You've heard their stories - people suddenly finding themselves struggling to put food on the table, never imagining their family would be in this situation.

You've seen the photos and videos - lines of cars snaking up and down a parking lot, like a Friday night football game just let out.

You've watched as the West Texas Food Bank team and National Guard spent countless hours loading and distributing boxes of food so kids don't go hungry.

Almost overnight, food banks across the country found themselves at the heart of the COVID-19 pandemic, overwhelmed by sudden need. Compounded by the collapse of the oil market, and COVID-19, the West Texas Food Bank has seen a tremendous increase in the people it serves and the food it is distributing. The Food Bank has distributed over 2.5 million pounds of food since early March, over 61 percent more than this time last year.

To help meet this demand, the Food Bank has relied on community members and corporate leaders to step up financially. We are so grateful for your support.

But even if you don't have the financial ability to contribute, there's another simple way you can help the Food Bank: Fill out the 2020 Census.

Federal food and nutrition programs make up a critical component of the Food Bank's funding, including 12 percent of its Fiscal Year 2018-19 revenue.

Those annual funds are allocated based off population figures, which are a result of the Census count conducted once a decade.

An accurate 2020 Census count positions the region for a more successful future, ensuring the Permian receives adequate federal funding for essential community programs and services, including food and nutrition, education and schools, healthcare and hospitals, transportation and road infrastructure and housing.

So by taking just a few minutes to fill out the online form, you're not just helping ensure the Permian is appropriately represented over the next decade, you're helping ensure our friends and neighbors can put food on their table.

Across all programs affected by the Census count, if just 2 percent, or one in 50, of Permian residents were not to complete the census, over the next 10 years this undercount would result in regional losses of \$1.1 billion in gross product, 13,135 job-years of employment, and \$52.9 million in federal funding for local government entities.

For the Food Bank, an undercount puts millions of dollars of funding at risk over the next decade. With the ability to provide around four meals for every dollar it receives, an undercount could leave over 30 million meals for hungry West Texans unfunded during the 10 years until the next Census.

Census Bureau statistics show that, as of May 15, the self-response rates for Midland County and Ector County were just 49.8 percent and 44.8 percent, respectively.

There is still time to improve these numbers and encourage Census participation across the Permian Basin. If you have not completed the Census, please do so. If you have, thank you, and please encourage your friends and family to do so as well.

The form is brief. Residents can visit www.thepermiancounts.com to find out more about the impact of the Census in our communities, and can respond to the 2020 Census through October by completing form at www.2020census.gov.

With an accurate Census count, we have the power to shape our future. But with an undercount, we're leaving opportunities to support our region on the table, one of which is the ability to help our residents put meals on their tables.