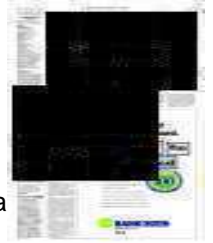


Title: Leading and feeding

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# Leading and feeding

Waterloo food bank,  
producers thanked  
by **Iowa** ag secretary

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WATERLOO — Heightened food insecurity during COVID-19 was met with robust efforts from local food banks, including the

don't realize that some of us could be one paycheck away from being in a situation where we have to rely on the services that our food banks provide," Hart said.

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Northeast **Iowa** Food Bank in Waterloo. Staff stepped up to provide more food to more people.

The efforts of the **Iowa** Food Bank Association were celebrated at a Tuesday morning event in Waterloo. State Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig presented food bank leaders with the Ag Leader Award for Leadership in Community. He commended the ability of food

banks to find solutions and institute programs that fed Iowans.

"Every link in that supply chain has to be connected, working together," Naig said. "Producers need to support communities like Waterloo, and Waterloo can support producers. And they need each other."

Mayor Quentin Hart officially proclaimed Tuesday as National Ag Day, which is meant to rec-

ognize the work of agriculture workers.

"Sometimes, some of us live very comfortable lives, but we

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CHRIS ZOELLER, COURIER STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig speaks Tuesday at Northeast Iowa Food Bank during a celebration where he awarded the Iowa Food Bank Association with an Ag Leader Award.

## Food bank

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Representatives from Tyson Foods, Iowa Pork Producers Association and community development organization Grow Cedar Valley were recognized for their efforts in bolstering the supply chain.

"I personally have done a lot of reflection on the last year and how everything came together," said Barb Prather, executive director of Northeast Iowa Food Bank. "It's really humbling and overwhelming."

Prather said the food bank distributed about 10 million meals to people in need during the 2020 calendar year. This was a 25-30% increase in food distribution from

the previous year, she said.

She recounted how one food bank volunteer suffered an illness and had to rely on the food bank. Meat from producers like Tyson and the Iowa Pork Producers Association helped the food bank provide protein to residents in need.

"Protein is one of the items food banks have long needed more of," Prather said. "As soon as it comes in, it's usually out the door pretty fast because it's often one of the most expensive items for the clients."

Rick Petersen, new plant manager at the Tyson Fresh Meats in Waterloo, said hunger relief is the main way the company gives back to the community. He said Tyson donated more food in the past year than ever in the company's 85-year

history.

"I think it's very important that we have a good community relationship, and we do give back to the community," Petersen said.

Hart and Petersen said they had recent meetings together. The Tyson plant in Waterloo was the site of more than 1,000 COVID-19 infections and at least six worker deaths. The company invested more than \$540 million across its U.S. facilities to implement safety measures.

"We do have extensive mitigation things in place, and we'll continue those," Petersen said.

Those measures include walk-

through temperature scanners, workstation dividers, social distance monitors, COVID-19 testing,

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added pay and benefits and more health services staff, including a chief medical officer.

Petersen said Tyson workers in Waterloo should feel proud that they “helped feed the world through this whole last year and through the issues we’ve gone through.”

“I think just the biggest thing is we want to go through this together, right?” Petersen said. “We want to work together with the community, the industry and make things right, make things better.”

Cary Darrah, president and CEO of Grow Cedar Valley, said she worked “shoulder-to-shoulder” with the business community, including large corporations like Tyson and John Deere. She called it “an honor” for businesses to be able to help people re-enter the workforce and contribute to the local economy.

“No one could’ve seen 2020 coming, so how do we learn from it?” Darrah said. “How are we prepared to make sure that we can pull up our bootstraps and get through it again? ... Not any one entity of any one of us here today could’ve handled all of this by ourselves.”

Naig commended Iowa’s “resilient system” in the agriculture supply chain. He said the “health and safety of our critical workforce,” including Tyson workers in Waterloo, needs to “remain a focus.”

“Folks had to learn some lessons, and what I see is a company that’s learning lessons and engaging with the community, and I think that’s what’s important,” Naig said of Tyson. “They need to continue to do that.”

Tuesday’s event was followed by pork deliveries to Waterloo’s first responders, Hart said. A ribbon cutting at the National Cattle Congress was followed by a pork

giveaway to community members from 4-6 p.m.

Similar celebrations are expected to be held this spring in Denison, Marshalltown, Ottumwa, Sioux City and Storm Lake, according to news releases.



CHRIS ZOELLER, COURIER STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Waterloo Mayor Quentin Hart speaks Tuesday at Northeast Iowa Food Bank during a celebration where Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig awarded the Iowa Food Bank Association with an Ag Leader Award.