

## Southern Illinois food pantries benefit from Ameren donation

By: [Marilyn Halstead](#)

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Volunteer Jason Skidmore organizes items on shelves at the Du Quoin Food Pantry in January 2019 in Du Quoin. Many of Southern Illinois' food pantries are collaborating to form Southern Illinois Food Pantry Network through an initiative by University of Illinois Extension, SIU's food and nutrition program, Jackson County Health Department, Southern Illinois Healthcare and the SIU School of Medicine's Center for Rural Health and Social Service Development. Byron Hetzler

The 2019 Ameren Thanksgiving Day Parade in St. Louis had some exciting news for some Illinois food pantries. "Ameren Illinois is donating \$50,000 which will be split between six food pantries in the Ameren Illinois service area," said Kelly Hendrickson, spokesperson for Ameren Illinois. "Obviously, food pantries receive a lot of donations this time of year. We just wanted to try to make things a little better for the holidays." Southern Illinois Food Pantry Network pantries will receive \$8,333, according to Angie Bailey, community benefits manager for SIH.

"SIH is a pass-through organization. We will distribute the funds back to the pantries," Bailey said. Hendrickson said by giving a monetary donation, the pantries can purchase exactly what they need. Bailey explained that food pantries can purchase food at a discounted rate through the St. Louis Area Food Bank. "It is always exciting for the food pantries to get cash donations. They can make that money grow," Bailey said. Ameren Illinois has made similar donations in the past. Hendrickson said food insecurity is something that Ameren employees keep in mind all year. Some employees volunteer at their local food pantries.

"We are part of the communities we serve and want to show our appreciation by taking the time and giving back when we can," Hendrickson said.

Southern Illinois Food Pantry Network held its first meeting on Sept. 19, 2018. The goal is for pantries to share resources and ideas that will help them serve those who need help feeding their families. Food pantries that are part of the network will have the ability to apply for mini-grants. Bailey said the applications are currently being finalized, and she expects food pantries to have them in the next week or two. Mini-grants will be focused on implementing healthier initiatives. Applications will be due Dec. 13. "They will be asked to give some strategies to create a healthier food pantry. The application includes ideas or pantries can use their own idea," Bailey said. Some of the ideas for implementing healthier initiatives include: Adding or enhancing cold storage, upgrading shelving and moving toward client choice of foods, enhancing technology, nutrition education, and physical activity. She added that each pantry is so unique, she expects to receive a lot of new ideas.

Southern Illinois Food Pantry Network includes 95 pantries in the lower 16 counties in Illinois. Any of them may apply for the grants. "We really hope that this contribution can make a positive impact for local families during the holidays and beyond," Hendrickson said.

The Ameren Corporation is a sponsor of the 2019 St. Louis Thanksgiving Day Parade.

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