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Western States Equipment readies food drive as need jumps

Meridian-based heavy machinery dealer Western States Equipment on Dec. 29 will launch Dump Hunger, a six-week food drive that partners 13 Western States branch locations with food banks in their communities.

Demand has increased by about 30 percent from a year ago as unemployment has increased, and the post-holiday timing for the program is critical for food banks. January and February typically bring the lowest donation volumes, Western States said in a release.

“Hunger doesn’t stop after the holidays,” said Western States President Tom Harris. “Western States is committed to giving back to the communities in which we live and serve. We are launching the Dump Hunger campaign as a way to rally our employees and customers together to re-stock the warehouses of our area food banks.”

Terry Graves, food resources manager for Idaho Foodbank, said in the release that the organization faces unprecedented need. Officials foresee a 30 percent increase in need over and above the 27 percent increase from last year.

“Food pantries also serve families and individuals that are working and don’t earn enough to meet all of their basic needs,” Graves said. “Most people use a food pantry for about six months to help them through a rough financial period; they are not permanent recipients.”

Western States said that due to the increased need, the company has set a goal of gathering 150,000 pounds of food, an increase over 116,000 from last year. “We understand that food pantries are empty in January,” said Harris. “In addition to increasing our goal for gathering more food, Western States will contribute \$1 for every five pounds of food collected, up to a \$17,000 dollar match.”

Dump Hunger seeks to secure enough food to fill the bed of two Caterpillar-made CAT 730 dump trucks. The company said this is the industry’s largest payload vehicle in its class, each truck capable of holding 75,000 pounds of food. Donations to the campaign can be brought to any of the Western States branch locations.