

Etheridge visits area to talk food bank funding

By [Eric Klamut](#)

Rocky Mount Telegram

Wednesday, June 04, 2008

As fuel costs steadily increase, so do the prices of food – which continues to put a strain on community food banks and food pantries throughout Eastern North Carolina.

U.S. Rep. Bob Etheridge, D-2nd District, and representatives from the Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina, were in Rocky Mount on Tuesday morning to address the issue at St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church on Winstead Avenue.

Etheridge was in town touting the Food, Conservation and Energy Act, a new five-year farm bill passed by both the U.S. House and Senate, but vetoed by President Bush last month.

The bill includes more than \$10 billion in funding to support nutrition programs, \$1.2 billion for food banks and an increase of \$1 billion for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's snack program, which provides healthy foods for children in after school programs.

These figures are in addition to \$50 million earmarked to meet immediate food supply needs at food pantries across the nation, Etheridge, a senior member of the House Agriculture Committee, added.

"Families are having a hard time putting food on the table without assistance," he said, noting that St. Paul's food pantry had run out of food in recent weeks because of high demand. "Every place I've been this week has told me the same story."

The changes to the farm bill are the first in 14 years, he added.

Bush vetoed the bill on May 21. Congress voted to override the veto on May 22 but had to revise a portion the bill because of an omission to the bill's language.

"It's long overdue," Etheridge said. "I'm very optimistic that Congress will do it. Why? It's the right thing to do.

"It's been a tough year; food banks have faced some hard times."

According to statistics provided by the Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina, last year St. Paul distributed 112,045 pounds of food and other items.

The church distributed federal commodities provided by The Emergency Food Assistance Program to 2,344 households in Nash County.

The food pantry's distribution accounted for 14 percent of Nash County's total food distribution.

Peter Werbicki, president and chief executive officer of the Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina, said high transportation costs are taking their toll on food prices.

"It's presenting a lot of challenges to food banks and food pantries," Werbicki said.

In the 34 counties the agency serves, 32 million pounds of food was distributed, he noted.

"You're seeing an increased number of people reporting," Werbicki said, adding that most food banks and pantries have experienced a 25 percent to 30 percent increase in people needing assistance. "We seen a decline in pounds of food from the federal level."

The Rev. Dennis Jones, pastor of St. Paul, said that although supplies are limited, the food pantry strives to give all that it can to those in need of basic food necessities.

"We just try to give them what we have," Jones said. "We've had a great response from the community. We just thank God for that."

Vote for this story!

**Find this article at:**

<http://www.rockymounttelegram.com/search/content/news/stories/2008/06/04/etheridge.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.