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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Hunger Connection and Northern Illinois Food Bank join forces in the fight against hunger in northern Illinois.**

**ROCKFORD, IL** – Two hunger-fighting agencies, Hunger Connection (HC) and Northern Illinois Food Bank (NIFB), announced on Friday January 14<sup>th</sup> that they have officially joined forces. Community leaders and officials from Hunger Connection and Northern Illinois Food Bank gathered at the Hunger Connection warehouse in Rockford to celebrate the new partnership.

The need for food assistance continues to grow at a record pace in northern Illinois. By sharing more than just a mission, NIFB and HC are able to reduce operating expenses to provide more to the communities at large – more food to people in need, better customer service, increased volunteer opportunities, and much more.

“This merger is an excellent fit,” stated Mark Robinson, Hunger Connection board president. “We have significantly reduced our operating expenses while dramatically improving our access to food sources.”

Food pantries, soup kitchens, homeless shelters, and other food assistance programs in Boone, DeKalb, Ogle, Stephenson, and Winnebago counties will see a more balanced and expanded shopping list of products available from Northern Illinois Food Bank as a result of the combination.

Through its membership in America’s Second Harvest – The Nation’s Food Bank Network, NIFB has improved access to food donations from national food retailers and manufacturers and other food banks.

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"One of the challenges all food banks face is declining donations from more efficient food manufacturers," remarked Pete Alle, NIFB board president and Kraft Foods director. "By joining forces, we can identify additional resources and implement programs that will increase the amount of food for people in need."

NIFB's strong partnerships with food donors, such as Jewel-Osco, General Mills, and Kraft, will greatly benefit agencies in HC's service area.

"Through our food rescue and recovery program where we pick up perishable, prepared, and shelf-stable items from retailers, we have been able to secure an additional and important source of meat for our agencies. This program has made it possible to offer highly desirable red meat, pork, poultry and seafood to our agencies," commented H. Dennis Smith, NIFB executive director.

By joining forces with NIFB, Hunger Connection gains access to food donated to America's Second Harvest – The Nation's Food Bank Network, of which NIFB is a member. For 25 years America's Second Harvest has been working to feed the hungry and has now become a nationwide network of more than 200 member food banks and food rescue organizations across the country. This unique network is responsible for providing emergency food assistance in virtually every one of America's 3,141 counties. In 2004, the America's Second Harvest network distributed nearly two billion pounds of food to 23 million hungry people. The America's Second Harvest national office solicits donations of surplus and unsaleable food and grocery products from more than 500 national donors and is also the county's largest single distributor of federal food commodities.

NIFB receives donated food from retailers, manufacturers, corporations, and community resources and distributes it through a network of 490 nonprofit food assistance sites in 13 northern Illinois counties. NIFB and HC together distributed over 19 million pounds of food in calendar 2004. Together, these entities currently serve nonprofit agency partners in Boone, DeKalb, DuPage, Grundy, Kane, Kankakee, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, Ogle, Stephenson, Will, and Winnebago counties.

For more information, contact Northern Illinois Food Bank at 630.443.6910 or visit [www.northernilfoodbank.org](http://www.northernilfoodbank.org).

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