* Six pantries now have a single location at Grace United Methodist Church in Coal Center, which began in summer of 2019.
* Clients drive right up to the Food Bank’s delivery truck and boxes are loaded into their car, ensuring the freshest perishable and non-perishable food products to the clients served.
* Cost savings from unifying these pantries will be reallocated towards providing fruits, vegetables, dairy, and other items that may have not been made available to certain clients before due to pantry refrigeration limitations.
* Proxy systems are in place to allow a pre-approved individual to pick up on behalf of a client if unable to attend Grace United Methodist Church distribution.

The Greater Washington County Food Bank has completed the consolidation of six individual pantries into one convenient location. Twice a year, Pantry Coordinators from around the county meet to discuss procedures, policies, and other pertinent information. Back in March of 2019, Pantry Coordinators met at the Greater Washington County Food Bank to discuss the idea of consolidation. After significant open discussion and hearing both positive feedback as well as potential concerns, the business decision to consolidate the pantries from Beth Center, California, Coal Center, Ellsworth, Centerville, and Marianna was made. The six pantries now have a single location at Grace United Methodist Church in Coal Center, which is a 15-minute or less drive for five of the six previous pantries.

There were factors considered in the discussions from March of 2019 leading up to the adoption of the consolidated pantry system the summer of 2019. First and foremost, the Food Bank wants to ensure that Clients receive the freshest, highest-quality perishables and non-perishables, along with other hygiene products. With the departure of several Pantry Coordinators, timely distribution from pantry sites started to become an issue. The lay time between Food Bank delivery and pantry distribution can result in loss of product. In its new format, Clients drive right up to the Food Bank’s delivery truck and boxes are loaded into their car; meaning it’s as direct and fresh as possible.

Another consideration in the merger is the ability to deliver fresh items instead of just non-perishable. Some of the former pantry locations do not have sufficient refrigeration or freezer capabilities. Some Clients at those pantries were limited to non-perishable items. For perishable items like fruits and vegetables, not all clients were able to receive them as only so much could be stored on site due to capacity limitations. With the new system, we can proudly provide more meats, dairy products (cheese, milk, etc.) and fresh produce to areas where the local pantries were unable to do so before.

Lastly, part of the discussion of the merger was the operating costs associated with logistics. With several of the pantries being within a few minutes’ drive of one another, the cost of transportation, paired with the limitation of two drivers from the Food Bank, was significant. Each month, roughly $1,200 is spent on fuel for transportation alone. The cost savings from unifying these pantries will be reallocated towards providing fruits, vegetables, dairy, and other items that may have not been made available before due to pantry refrigeration limitations.

In conclusion, we are able to provide fresh and non-perishable goods to all clients involved in this unification in a more direct, timely manner. This new system allows for the Greater Washington County Food Bank to have improved quality assurance for fresh distribution in these areas. For the small minority who are unable to attend the Grace United Methodist Church distribution, proxy systems are in place to allow a pre-approved individual to pick up on behalf of a client. More information is available on our website on the pantry page. We are excited to be able to better serve the community in this area for 2020 and beyond, to ensure no one goes to bed hungry.