



By Tim Linscott

Managing Editor

Sometimes ideas just pop into your head.

Randy Gengenbach of rural Grant applied for a \$2,500 grant through the Monsanto Fund's 'America's Farmers Grow' program.

"My wife took the call we'd received the grant and her first thought was to give it to the food pantry," Gengenbach said. "I had that exact same thought."

On Feb. 11 Gengenbach was presented his check for \$2,500 by Brett Theiler with Dekalb/Asgrow and passed it along to Perkins County Food Pantry board members pastors Russ Gaar, Christopher Heslep and Nora Mendyk.

"We're excited. This money gives us the flexibility to help more people," Gaar said.

The Perkins County Food Pantry helped 15 families in January alone and after a county-wide food drive in December, the pantry is as stocked as it has ever been, ready to meet the needs of those in need.

"The last few months have been wonderful," Heslep said. "This is just the icing on the cake. The community has really come together to help the pantry."

There is one winner per county per year for the grant, which has been awarded annually since 2011 and included 1,289 eligible counties in 39 states.

The program encourages farmers to enter to win the funds, which are then directed to the farmer's nonprofit of choice.

A portion of the funds will be used as seed money to help establish the Perkins County Weekend Food Program (PCWFP).

The program will help provide food on the weekends for youth in need within Perkins County.

Members of the Perkins County Ministerial Association and at-large community members make up the PCWFP committee and will help administer the food through Perkins County Schools.

Plans for the project are still in the early stages and Nicole Long, a PCWFP committee member, explained that the initial plan is to have three backpacks or satchels a week available for students who meet the requirements.

Applications for the program went home last week with students at Perkins County Elementary and the committee will select three students who meet the criteria.

Each Friday the student will pick up a backpack or satchel with enough food for a weekend and return it to school on Monday.

Hopes are to expand the program to include more elementary students as funds allow.

The committee hopes to do some 'dry runs' of the program by the end of the school year to work out kinks in the system before next August. A tentative plan is to have the project run from August through May and help as many elementary students as possible.

"I think when kids are well fed, they are more prepared to learn and they can focus more easily, have more energy and it sets the precedence for the week when you are rested and ready to roll for the week," Long said.

Food in the packs are designed to be 'kid friendly' as to have minimum preparation required and easy enough to make for children to accomplish.

Microwavable meals, cups of fruit and vegetables and various easily-opened snacks would be coupled with coupons for meat and/or milk through Hatch's Super Foods in Grant.

Hatch's has agreed to help with the project in some capacity as plans progress.