In July, 2011, volunteers from throughout southwest Nebraska and northeastern Colorado joined together in Imperial, Neb. to package more than 225,000 meals for starving children in third-world countries.

This year, organizers want to take that number to 500,000 meals during this year's Feed My Starving Children (FMSC) event planned in Imperial July 24-28 at the Crossroads Wesleyan Church.

Last year's event was organized by members of the Southwest Nebraska Meals for God's Children (SNMFGC) committee.

Dick Banks of Imperial, committee chair, said the response to last year's event proved so overwhelming, they wanted to take it to another level this year.

He said more than 1,100 volunteers from throughout the region helped package meals that go to needy children in nearly 70 countries world wide.

To meet this year's 500,000 meal goal, he estimated more than 2,200 volunteers will be needed over the five-day event, expanded from four days last year.

Last year, the committee set their goal at packaging 200,000. With donations exceeding costs, they expanded the event to package 225,000 meals.

$30,000 challenge matching grant available

To meet this year's goal, Banks said they will need to raise $110,000 to cover the expense of the meals.

This year, the cost of meals has dropped from 24 cents each to 22 cents.

While $110,000 may seem a daunting figure, more than $40,000 has already been raised before the official fundraising campaign has kicked off, Banks exclaimed. Of that, about half was carried over from last year's event.

In addition, Banks said an anonymous donor has made a $30,000 challenge grant available through June 1, 2012.

If additional donations can total $30,000 by June 1, those donations will be matched dollar-for-dollar.

Banks noted that if they can meet the challenge grant, they will certainly raise the money needed for this year's event.

Banks said people believe in helping others less fortunate than themselves—"that's basic to our human existence."

He noted this region has experienced unprecedented success due to the strong ag economy and FMSC provides a way to give a little back.

Banks said they see the event as a way to bring the community together and break down denominational barriers. "We want to create a sense of community through this." Hopefully, this event can become an annual July activity that brings everyone together, Banks said, just like the fair does in August.

Since SNMFGC organized the first-ever FMSC event in Nebraska last year, five more groups have held or will hold events this year.

Locations include McCook, Oxford, Kearney, North Platte and Holdrege in Nebraska.

People wanting to make donations to the Imperial event can send them to FMSC, PO Box 91, Imperial, NE 69033. Checks should be made out to FMSC and can include the event #1207-38.

For more information, to volunteer or inquire about donations, people can contact Banks at 308-883-0397 or any of the other committee members.

They include James Marlatt at 308-882-6386, Paul Hickman at 308-882-5607 or Rhonda Hickman at 308-414-1406.

People can also go the MobilePack tab on the FMSC website at www.fmsc.org for more information or to make donations. If donations are made on the website, donors should note event #1207-38 to insure donations go to the Imperial event.

Holyoke Enterprise April 12, 2012