By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

Volunteers are still needed for the Southwest Nebraska Meals for God's Children "Feed My Starving Children" event, to be held in Imperial July 24-28.

This is the second year the volunteer-driven event will be held at the Crossroads Wesleyan Church. Last year 1,100 volunteers packed 227,000 meals for children around the world, although the goal was 225,000 meals.

This year the goal is 500,000 meals. Volunteers hand pack meals specifically formulated for malnourished children. The meals are sent to over 70 countries.

The packs are distributed to orphanages, schools, clinics, refugee camps and malnourishment centers.

Feed My Starving Children (FMSC) is a non-profit Christian organization. It first came to the attention of four Imperial residents in 2005.

That's when Dick Banks, James Marlatt and Paul and Rhonda Hickman traveled to Minneapolis to participate in packaging meals at one of FMSC permanent packing sites.

Later on, FMSC began a MobilePack event system, where supplies are shipped to towns and

cities across the United States, and volunteers visit those towns to pack the meals.

Banks said “That’s when we became involved. It’s a good thing for FMSC.”

At this year’s event in Imperial, about 2,200 volunteers will pack food in 18 sessions, which each last two hours.

Banks said there will be seven packaging cells, more than the five last year, so the food can be packaged faster.

Each cell or unit is staffed by 20 people, meaning 140 volunteers are needed each session.

The packs are a rice/soybean combination, or manna pack. The pack contains a vitamin- and mineral-rich, chicken flavored powder, vegetable flakes, soy granules and white rice. Each pack provides six meals.

The cost to pack 500,000 meals is $110,000, Banks said. Most of that money has been raised, with some money left over from last year’s event seeding the fund.

Banks said any donations left over can be used the next year, sent to another event, or sent to FMSC.

“It’s not about the money. It’s about feeding kids and the volunteerism,” he said. Someone can write a check for a donation, but “This is an event where a person can go one step further and get involved.”

Banks said volunteers are coming from Estes Park, Colo., Kansas, McCook, North Platte and more. “It will be interesting to see how far people travel,” he grinned.

Many different church groups, youth groups, families and businesses sign up to participate. Some include the event in their vacation plans.

Persons who aren't sure about standing on their feet for two hours are assured that there are jobs for them to do, Banks said.

Sessions run from 2:30-9:30 p.m. July 24; 12 noon to 9:30 p.m. July 25-27, and 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. July 28. They are two hours each.

You don't have to be a Christian to participate, he noted. "You can be blue, pink, purple, yellow. I don't care," he stated.

"You will never ever possibly know who you helped" by being a volunteer. "I have met lots of generous, kind, caring people" while working with FMSC, Banks noted.

As a farmer, Banks said he was challenged to lead the event by God, who said "'I want to move you outside your comfort zone.' That's when you exercise your faith."

Banks encourages people to join the event at the Wesleyan Church, which was chosen because of the space and facilities required by FMSC.

Interested persons may contact Banks at (308) 882-0397; Marlatt at (308) 882-6386; Paul Hickman at (308) 882-5607 or Rhonda Hickman at (308) 414-1406.

Registration may also be made at www.fmsc.com under the MobilePack "Imperial" site.