



Network News

WINTER 2021



Students and volunteers prepare food for distribution at the St. Kate's/CSJ Food Shelf (Photo provided by St. Kate's)

COVID RELIEF: HOW YOUR DONATIONS SUPPORT FOOD SHELVES

"I wouldn't have survived without assistance. Thank you!" This sentiment was expressed by more than one visitor to an emergency food distribution in 2020.

As the pandemic started to unfold, the ramifications for organizations providing hunger relief quickly became clear. With the surge in unemployment, lost wages, struggling businesses, sudden isolation, measures to flatten the curve, online schooling and so many ripple effects, our hunger-relief partners experienced a sudden, historic spike in emergency food needs.

The stress was compounded in June, following the unrest in response to the murder of George Floyd. Whole neighborhoods lost grocery stores, restaurants, and their usual sources of food.

In both cases, you responded by contributing money quickly and generously to ensure that everyone who needed help would have access to foods that are both nutritious and culturally connected. You provided hospitality and compassion in the form of safe, outdoor, drive-through emergency food distributions, curbside pick-ups, hot meals, bag lunches, and home delivery "door drops."

Behind the scenes, we were in close contact with our food shelf partners to learn what they needed. **Your donations sent more deliveries from our food bank to our partners quickly**, and financially supported food shelves and meal programs with "COVID funds" that served as vouchers for the food they needed. Even as supply chains were challenged, our team overcame obstacles and created new relationships with food producers, including several in Minnesota.

This streamlined, innovative approach worked! Here are a few comments from the food shelves and meal programs we serve describing the impact of the COVID relief funding.

- The COVID funds made a huge impact on the **variety and amount of fresh produce, meat and hygiene supplies** we can offer our families, and helped us keep up with the increased need.
- [The COVID support freed up funds so] we **were able to obtain a truck** to deliver food to outlying communities, to rescue

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TRENDS WE HEARD FROM OUR FOOD SHELF AND MEAL PROGRAM PARTNERS:

- An increase in need anywhere from 2 to 4 times more than usual.
- Many first-time visitors.
- Loss of volunteers due to health concerns.
- Need to quickly change the model of food delivery for safety and with fewer helpers.
- No sign of a decrease in the historically high hunger rate.

YOU ARE APPRECIATED! Notes of gratitude from our food shelf partners

- "Thank you for making these funds available and easy to access."
- "We appreciate this support as well as the wider impact of your program, supporting a healthier community and planet."
- "Thank you not only for food, but your moral support!"
- "Chi-Miigwech (thank you in Ojibwe) for being so supportive. We appreciate your partnership."
- "You give your best for people who are used to receiving seconds. Thanks for thinking of the little guy, the least, last and left out. Our partnership makes a big difference in the lives of thousands."

Let's begin 2021 with renewed commitment

A Message from the Executive Director



With the beginning of a new year comes the opportunity to reflect on the past and prepare for what is to come. Words cannot adequately describe the dramatic challenges we all faced in 2020. The food landscape in our communities has been shaken. More people than ever have found themselves without access to the healthy, culturally relevant foods they need. And yet, as a community, we have come together.

During a time when socially distancing guidelines prevent us from physically gathering, **the unity and support I have witnessed have been inspiring.** Faced with historically high need and unprecedented challenges, you have stepped up to provide food to so many. Because of you, we provided more nutritious food to the community than ever, as you will read in this newsletter. Thank you!

Although I have never been one to create personal New Year's resolutions, one goal is clear as we enter 2021: We must together resolve to not go back to normal once COVID-19 passes, but instead to **build something better.**

With your support, we have expanded our food distribution models in the community, engaged with new grassroots partners and prioritized sourcing local and culturally specific foods. These things must continue as we work together to ensure that our communities have a food system that works better for those who have been historically marginalized. Because of your continued commitment, we can use the hard-fought lessons learned to shape our strategies moving forward. And soon, I hope, we can gather in person together again. Cheers to a brighter 2021.

With gratitude,



Sophia Lenarz-Coy
Executive Director



RECORD IMPACT IN 2020

More Than
9.8 MILLION MEALS

to families facing hunger, an increase of 3 million meals from 2019



Number of agency partners (food shelves and meal programs) served in 2020: **250**

New partners in 2020: **40**



More Than
2.1 MILLION POUNDS OF FRESH PRODUCE,
an all-time high

1.2 MILLION POUNDS, OR 4 TIMES

the amount of culturally specific and locally sourced food than in 2019



Emerging Needs, New Collaborations

In 2020 we added more than 40 new partnerships to distribute food. These new community and BIPOC-led (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) partnerships emerged to reach individuals who have historically been left out of the traditional hunger relief system. A key priority in 2021 is to grow these new partnerships with a focus on culturally specific foods to reach more families fighting hunger.

Huge Food And Cash Drive Has Incredible Impact

Thank you to the Anoka and Minneapolis stakes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) for providing a giving opportunity to ensure our neighbors facing food insecurity can count on nutritious essentials to supplement their meals this winter. In December, supporters raised more than **\$30,000** in cash, generating **61,334 meals**. They also collected **21,000+ pounds** of essential food items, including flour, vegetable oil, pasta, rice, canned tomatoes, peanut butter, tuna, and mandarin oranges. From collecting food and raising funds to purchasing food to be packed by volunteers into essential food boxes – LDS provided support every step of the way.



Youth volunteers from LDS

Have you remembered The Food Group in your estate plan?

A local small business owner reached out to us last summer to ask how to include us in his estate plan. “Walter” says, “I have always felt that the need for good food is a basic need for a healthy life. And I realize that there is always a high demand from those who don’t have that luxury.”

Walter has contributed to The Food Group for more than ten years, and felt it was time to take the next step by directing his assets where they will make a lasting impact on his priority causes.

It’s easy to name The Food Group as a beneficiary. Just include our name, address, and Federal Tax ID number in your will or any other transferable asset where you name a beneficiary: The Food Group Minnesota, 8501 54th Avenue N, New Hope, MN 55428; Tax ID 41-1246504.

Your thoughtful legacy will reach countless people by providing food and allowing us to create solutions to hunger that will impact the community for years to come. If you have questions or would like more information, contact Gay Gonnerman, 763-450-4219 or ggonnerman@thefoodgroupmn.org.

COVID RELIEF: HOW YOUR DONATIONS SUPPORT FOOD SHELVES (continued)

- food from local stores, and to pick up our food from East Grand Forks.
- We always have a tight budget, so it was amazing to purchase hygiene products, diapers, and fresh fruits and vegetables with the extra funds.
- **We were able to stock our food shelf** for our downtown supportive housing properties. This helped our participants access food despite health, mobility, and financial challenges cause by COVID.
- The funding from donors allowed us to order **more culturally sensitive foods** and distribute them safely to our diverse student population.
- We were able to expand who our food distribution reaches. And because we received these funds for food, we were able to **purchase a freezer**, which is awesome!

On behalf of our partner food shelves and the thousands of people you reach with your contributions, thank you! We appreciate you and we pledge our continued support for our partners and the people they serve.



Volunteers at CAPI USA food shelf (photo provided by CAPI)

YOU DOUBLED THE IMPACT OF YOUR GIFT THANKS TO THESE SPONSORS AND YOUR GENEROSITY



Special thanks to Luther Automotive Group and Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation for offering challenge grants and matches in November and December!

Thank you to all the donors who gave to help us successfully meet the matches and double your impact!

Thanks to Blue Cross Blue Shield

of Minnesota for supporting our partnerships with local food shelves to promote policy, systems, and environmental change.



Blue Cross® and Blue Shield® of Minnesota and Blue Plan® are nonprofit independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association



Latter-day Saints youth volunteers sort deliveries for our food shelves.

In the News

For a complete list of recent stories featured in the media visit: thefoodgroupmn.org/news/pressmedia

December 22, 2020 Star Tribune: More Minnesotans visited food shelves in 2020 than any year on record — and the need is expected through 2021

December 20, 2020 FOX9 KMSP: The Food Group doubles its food distribution to help families in Minnesota and Wisconsin

Minnesota Twins Community Fund

In November, The Minnesota Twins staff, volunteers, and season ticket holders, partnered with the Latina Youth Leadership Academy and The Food Group to pack 1200 boxes of emergency food at Target Field. The story was featured on elminnesotadehoy.com and other local media outlets. The link to the video is on our press page.



Pictured: Sophia Lenarz-Coy, Miguel Ramos, Director of Diversity and Inclusion for the Minnesota Twins, and Angel Maldonado, Driver at The Food Group.



Choua Yang and Xou Her are farmers at Big River Farms. They are pictured with their children.

Enjoy locally grown organic food from our own Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) this summer

Joining Big River Farm's CSA is one of the most meaningful ways you can support small, local farmers from diverse backgrounds. Our CSA program supports farmers who continue to face systemic barriers to accessing the resources needed to establish successful farm businesses.

CSA members enjoy an abundance of high quality, fresh produce grown by farmers at Big River Farms. CSA members are granted access to 18 weeks of organic produce shares from mid-June through mid-October.

Sign up now! Learn more and join today www.bigriverfarms.org