

Network News

Summer 2023



Going Deeper with Community Engagement

"Food is my source of comfort, and if it's really good, it makes me glad to be alive." – Community member

Centering community voice is a core value at The Food Group. Last fall, we decided to go deeper. In September we began a community engagement process with Imagine Deliver to strategically inform our food systems work. Hundreds of mobile market shoppers, food shelf visitors, and farmers engaged with us through surveys, interviews, conversations, and focus groups, sharing ideas to build a more equitable food system together.

Our community shared that food access is connected with all basic needs and wellbeing. Many folks also shared insights around dignity and autonomy, food solutions as a collective effort, food as a tool for healing, and the need for housing and land access for long term food stability.

Community Informed Changes

We heard from our community what is important, and now The Food Group is leaning in to invest by:

- Grounding our programs in autonomy and dignity
- Strengthening partnerships with community-led housing and health groups
- Developing a community advisory committee
- Growing land access solutions for farmers
- Creating continuous feedback loops in our programs
- Exploring advocacy toward systemic change

As we work to fight hunger and nourish our community, we are profoundly grateful for community wisdom and support. We are energized to continue putting community solutions into action together!

Why Food Access is a Growing Issue in Minnesota



Food shelf visits in our state are still at record highs. At the peak of the pandemic, it was easy to understand how more people in our community were experiencing hunger than ever before. We saw and felt firsthand job loss, health disparities, and major disruptions to our daily lives. But when the staggering number of food shelf visits in 2020 paled in comparison to the number of visits in 2022 (5.5 million), many were stunned.

While the past few years have carried major setbacks for food equity, there have also been unprecedented wins. This May Minnesota approved \$5 million in funding for food shelves and agreed to provide free school meals for all Minnesota students. Today we have hope. I've included a timeline below to outline recent events impacting food access in our state—for some communities more than others.

I am motivated by the many ways you support our work and especially mindful of our strength when we build change together.

Sophia Lenarz-Coy



A Tale of Two Years: Our Food System in Flux

The timeline below outlines events impacting food access in our state—for some communities more than others:

2021

April: Daunte Wright is fatally shot by a police officer. Pursuing unrest exacerbates existing food access disparities for Black and Brown communities in Minneapolis.

December: The Child Income Tax Credit expires, driving monthly household income down an average of \$600/mo.

2022

August: The Consumer Price Index for food at home reaches a high of 13.5%.¹ The average monthly cost of groceries for a family of four rises to \$1,362.

December: USDA-sponsored commodity food in MN falls from 23 million pounds in 2020 to just 9.8 million pounds, cutting free food available to food shelves by more than half.

2023

February: Minnesota reaches a high of 5.5 million food shelf visits, an increase of 1.9 million from the previous year.²

March: Three food retailers in the North Metro announce closures, leaving only 2 grocery stores for more than 70,000 residents. The closures worsen food access inequities in an area long impacted by systemic racism and grocery flight.

April: Emergency SNAP benefits end, reducing monthly assistance for a household of four by 38%, from \$510 to just \$313.³



Impacts of Grocery Market Redlining in the Twin Cities

Access to fresh food and affordable grocery is a challenge for many in urban neighborhoods across the US. In the Twin Cities alone, 12.5% of residents live in food insecure areas.¹

Urban areas also tend to be more diverse, meaning that Black and Hispanic neighborhoods have fewer grocery options and an abundance of fast food. This is not by accident. **Redlining is a discriminatory practice denying or limiting services to residents in certain areas based on race or ethnicity.**

With grocery store redlining, supermarkets prioritize profit, operating in wealthier suburban neighborhoods at the expense of lower income city spaces. This means residents in places like Ramsey and Hennepin county, where 30-40% of residents identify as people of color, have fewer grocery store options than suburban counties like Wright and Carver county, where only 10-13% identify as people of color.²

Sources: 1) UMN Food Security Dashboard 2) MN Compass

On a neighborhood level, grocery access disparities for Black and Brown families are even greater, exacerbating long term health consequences for entire communities.

Twin Cities Mobile Market offers a reliable grocery access point in urban neighborhoods and communities impacted by redlining. The Market models a neighborhood grocer with fresh produce, quality proteins, and culturally connected products at intentionally low prices. The Market visits 24 sites every week, growing reliable access to groceries in Black and Hispanic neighborhoods.

When you support The Food Group, you grow immediate availability to fresh, quality food for families in our community. AND you are growing a more equitable food system where everyone, no matter zip code or race, can access fresh food and affordable groceries.

This is food for today and change for tomorrow.



Scan the code for an inside view of the Mobile Market from UCare and WCCO!



Local Businesses and Corporate Partners Help Fuel our Work

We rely on strong partnerships with businesses to bring us closer to our vision of an equitable, hunger-free, local food system. Thanks to these supporters and to everyone who invests their time and resources in this important work – including you!

Monthly Nourishers Circle

“It really isn’t that difficult to give what you can afford to give.”

– Elizabeth LaFontsee, donor since 2005

Join our Monthly Nourishers Circle to share nutritious meals for children, families, and seniors every day! Automated monthly donations make giving easy for you and help make local, culturally connected foods more reliably available for your community. **Become part of the Circle: thefoodgroupmn.org/donate**



Events

Big River Farms Tour

September 12, 10-11 am: Join us at Big River Farms in Marine on St. Croix for a tour of our organic incubator farm.

Volunteer Outside

Now – October: Summer is the best time to glean at local farms, reclaim unsold veggies at the Minneapolis Farmers Market, or weed with growers at Big River Farms.

Help a Farmer

October 11, 4-7 pm: Volunteer with your local farmer at Big River Farms! Join farmers for a variety of land-based tasks like harvesting, weeding, and farm maintenance.

Get Involved and RSVP: thefoodgroupmn.org/events



The Fare For All Local Meat Pack is Back!

We are featuring local growers and producers this August! Local sourcing builds stronger connections with community, reduces our carbon footprint, and ensures fair pay for farmers and food producers to grow our local economy.

Learn more about Fare For All, a program of The Food Group, and get yourself a pack at: thefoodgroupmn.org/fare-for-all