

# Nourishing Change

Spring 2024

Community participant at South Saint Paul Fare For All site. Fare For All is one of the programs the HelpLine can connect folks to as a food resource.



## Expanded Programs Include HelpLine

With The Food Group and Hunger Solutions joining forces, our services for people experiencing hunger and

food insecurity have expanded. The Minnesota Food HelpLine is one of the programs added to The Food Group since March 1. The HelpLine has existed since 2009 to help callers navigate the various programs and resources available to Minnesotans who find themselves in need of food help.

### Minnesota Food HelpLine connects callers with food resources

Najma Omar and Michelle Tamayo answer calls on the Minnesota Food HelpLine, providing eligibility and enrollment assistance for programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) and connecting callers with immediate food resources including local food shelves, meal programs, farmers markets, discounted grocery programs such as Fare For All and Twin Cities Mobile Market locations, and more.

Since 2020 and the crisis of COVID, the need for guidance from the Minnesota Food HelpLine has increased 190% from 5,318 callers in 2019 to **15,456 callers in 2023**. Today, Najma and Michelle regularly hear from seniors with limited mobility and transportation who need somewhere to turn to for help with food. Now that many pandemic emergency programs have ended, food shelves have limited capacity to provide delivery services which helped enormously throughout the height of the pandemic. While food shelves offering delivery still exist and have expanded over the years, Najma and Michelle hear from callers that appointments are limited, particularly when a caller is in a crisis and needs support right away.

For years, seniors have been the fastest growing population to use local food shelves in Minnesota. In 2023, seniors made 873,866 visits. Living on a fixed income while food prices and day-to-day expenses skyrocket makes it challenging for seniors to keep food on their tables. That is where the **Minnesota Food HelpLine** comes in to help bridge the gap between seniors experiencing food insecurity and resources that can assist them.

## Minnesota Food HelpLine Assists Thousands in 2023



Minnesota Food HelpLine Calls:  
**15,456**

**3,205**

callers were screened for SNAP eligibility



**1,979**

callers were assisted with the SNAP application and had their questions answered

**4,070**

callers were referred to additional food resources like a food shelf, farmers market, or meal program





# Spring = Anticipation + Hope

For me, spring is a season of anticipation. As we do the work of planting seeds and nourishing the soil, we don't yet know what will grow. But it is the preparation in this season that yields the abundance later. Similarly, after many months of planning, The Food Group is eagerly anticipating the expanded impact that will come from joining forces with Hunger Solutions.

As of March 1, The Food Group has taken on the innovative and effective work of Hunger Solutions. We now support food shelves **statewide**, coordinate the **Minnesota Food Helpline** to connect individuals directly with food support, and have a team of policy experts that can help advocate for **long term solutions** to create a more just and equitable food system.

Our shared values, long standing partnership, and mutual respect have laid a strong foundation for combining forces. And with food shelf visits still at record levels, it is imperative that we continue to look for new ways to expand our impact and increase our sustainability.

**Thank you** for your continued support. With your help, The Food Group can continue growing our program areas to meet changing community needs.

This spring, we are planting many seeds for long term system change. With your continued partnership, we are confident that these seeds will grow and flourish. Together, we can provide food for today and inspire change for tomorrow.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sophia".


Sophia Lenarz-Coy  
Executive Director



Members of the staff and board of The Food Group gathered in St. Paul for the annual Hunger Day on the Hill on March 13. The day's activities engaged 200 volunteers with their legislators to advocate for anti-hunger policies. The event took place just two weeks after Hunger Solutions became a part of The Food Group.



# Long-time donor leaves impactful legacy



***"My mother was a generous person and cared a lot about her community,"*** Laura Stackhouse says of Elinor Ogden. ***"She supported and volunteered for many organizations throughout her life. She understood how hunger was at the root of many issues."***

Elinor was a donor to The Food Group for more than thirty years. *"We never imagined that she would leave us such a generous bequest,"* says Emily Eddy White, director of advancement.

Yet in 2023 a check arrived from Elinor's estate. ***"Her gift makes a difference in so many ways!"*** Emily says. ***"It helped us carry out our mission of fighting local hunger and working toward change."***

*"Elinor was like many of our donors,"* Emily explains. *"She was a faithful supporter for many years and quietly chose to designate part of her estate to us. We are so grateful!"*

A designated bequest is a meaningful way to leave your legacy and make a significant gift that will fight hunger and nourish our community for many years to come. To plan your lasting impact, you can:

- Leave a bequest to The Food Group in your personal Will or trust.
- Access FreeWill, a free online estate planning tool that allows you to designate part of your assets to charity. Go to [freewill.com/thefoodgroupmn](https://freewill.com/thefoodgroupmn) to get started.
- Make The Food Group a beneficiary of a brokerage account, IRA account, 401(k), insurance policy, or annuity. You can simply add "The Food Group Minnesota" as a beneficiary to your account.

**If you are planning to make a legacy gift to The Food Group we would appreciate hearing from you.** If you've already planned your gift for The Food Group and would like to inform us, please complete the form found at [freewill.com/record/thefoodgroupmn.com](https://freewill.com/record/thefoodgroupmn.com)

## Questions?

**Contact Kelsey Ohme**, Senior Donor Relations Officer - Individual Giving at [kohme@thefoodgroupmn.org](mailto:kohme@thefoodgroupmn.org).

## Meals Provided:



Oct-Feb, total meals provided = **579,336**, an increase of almost 60% over the same time last year

Number of Hunger Day on the Hill advocates = **200**



Number of food shelf & meal program partners in Minnesota = **546**

## How joining forces expands our reach

With Hunger Solutions joining The Food Group our number of hunger relief partners has grown.

We now support:

- 477 "Brick and mortar" food shelves and college campus programs
- 68 Meal Programs
- 100 Outreach programs (Fare For All, Twin Cities Mobile Market, other pop-up distributions)
- 5 Tribal programs

For a total of **650 partner sites** across Minnesota!

# Innovative partnership expands opportunities



One of our newer partners is Route 1, a resource hub for emerging BIPOC farmers based near Hamel, MN. It's an impactful relationship that gives local farmers the opportunity to offer their produce through our online market for community food shelf partners.

Marcus Carpenter started Route 1 in 2022 to help solve food insecurity within BIPOC communities in Minnesota and support the development of BIPOC-owned businesses in the farming and agricultural industries.

**"We help them grow great food, and we support the communities where they deliver that food,"** Marcus says.

Farm culture is in Marcus' blood. His great-grandmother bought land in Arkansas in 1914 (along Route 1), hers was one of the largest Black-owned family farms in the region.

"I spent time as a young person really understanding and learning the farming values of hard work, persistence, and integrity, and all those things that you get from being a farm kid."

In the history of land ownership, **"Black, brown and Indigenous farmers are exponentially affected by lack of resources. We help them grow great food,"** Marcus says.

In their first year Route 1 supported 31 area farm families, 70 percent of whom are immigrants from Western Africa. **These farmers grew approximately 50,000 pounds of fresh food**, 90 percent of which was bought by The Food Group to distribute to partner food shelves.

"The Food Group was literally the tip of all the energy and the fuel that made that happen," Marcus says.

"Our partnership with Route 1 has contributed to our values-driven work to **increase access to culturally relevant food, support BIPOC farmers, and connect the community with locally grown, affordable produce,**" said David Peeples, director of programs at The Food Group.

You can support Route 1's work by buying directly from their farmers markets in Hamel and South Hopkins beginning in June. To learn more visit [route1mn.org](http://route1mn.org) or follow them on Facebook at Route 1 Minnesota.





# Appreciating our Volunteers

Volunteers are a crucial part of The Food Group community. Last year **2,193 volunteers** gave **16,257 hours of their time** to help us build a better food system! Though we always strive to share our gratitude, we made an extra effort to say thank you during Volunteer Appreciation Month in April.



General Mills was one of 26 volunteer groups who helped in our warehouse during the month of April. Thanks to everyone's generous help, we packed and sorted nearly 90,000 pounds of food in just one month!

To schedule your volunteer experience, go to [thefoodgroupmn.org/volunteer](https://thefoodgroupmn.org/volunteer)

## A Team Effort to Fight Hunger

Breck Upper School students have been volunteering with The Food Group every Wednesday the past two school years to pitch in wherever they are needed, whether sorting donated food, breaking down cardboard, stuffing envelopes, or cleaning projects. A huge shout out to this student team for their flexibility and commitment to fighting hunger and nourishing our community! **Go Mustangs!**



Ann Desrochers, one of our regular Thursday night volunteers, enjoys a fresh-baked pizza at our Volunteer Open House appreciation event in April.



# Calendar of Events

## Virtual Update:

**Adding new program areas with statewide impact**

**Thursday, May 16**

8:30-9 am

**Tour our warehouse and volunteer space**

**Tuesday, May 21**

11 am-Noon

**Tour Big River Farms**

**Wednesday, June 26**

10:30-11:30 am

RSVP for all of the above events to  
[myang@thefoodgroupmn.org](mailto:myang@thefoodgroupmn.org)

## Moving Together Toward Change

It takes a village to find sustainable solutions to equitable food access. Along with our network of donors, volunteers, partners, and community members, we are grateful to these businesses for their long standing support of our work toward change:



## You met the match!

Thanks to your generosity during our spring fundraising campaign, we were able to provide **TWICE** the meals and unlock **\$24,000 in matching funds**.

Thank you to our donors and match partners for their support!



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