

NOURISHING CHANGE

Winter 2025



Ashley and
her family
pictured here.

Your support is engaging community members impacted by hunger to create long-term solutions in our community.

Creating Lasting Change Through Lived Experience

As we navigate these challenging times, Ashley is one of the many Minnesotans who found herself turning to emergency food programs when she, her husband, and her young child were experiencing homelessness. Though they eventually secured affordable housing, they struggled to afford groceries. In her search for support, Ashley found The Open Door Food Pantry in Eagan, a partner food shelf of The Food Group. It was there that she learned about our Lived Experience Cohort.

The Lived Experience Cohort empowers participants who have faced food insecurity to influence public policy and advocate for lasting change. Through this program, Ashley became an advocate and met with elected officials and even testified at the state capitol.

As food shelf visits in Minnesota surged by 26% in 2024 – totaling nearly 9 million visits – the demand for food assistance continues to grow. Even with the support and efforts of organizations like The Food Group

and The Open Door, many still face challenges due to high inflation and food costs. This is why programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are critical to supplement the assistance households receive through food shelves, easing the pressure on local food systems while also stimulating the local economy.

Your support of programs like SNAP, direct food distribution, and initiatives such as the Lived Experience Cohort are helping **create lasting change and build a stronger, more resilient community where all Minnesotans have the healthy food they need to thrive.**

"I understand firsthand the challenges of food insecurity. Working with the Lived Experience Cohort, I've been able to advocate for policy changes, like those surrounding SNAP, to improve access to food for all." -Ashley, Lived Experience Cohort Member

See more stories like Ashley's on our website!

Protecting Food Assistance Programs in Unprecedented Times

In November of 2024, The Food Group led an initiative that invited Minnesotans to eat on the daily \$5.16 per day SNAP budget for three days. This SNAP Challenge was intended to raise awareness of the importance of SNAP and provide solidarity to our community members who face the immense challenge of living on a limited food budget each day.

WHAT IS SNAP?

SNAP stands for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and is the largest federal nutrition assistance program, supplementing the food budgets of low-income families so they can purchase food that meets their needs.

Leaders and partners from the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), People Reaching Out to People (PROP) Food Shelf, Neighborhood House, The Open Door Pantry, Valley Outreach, and more joined us for this three day challenge, including Minnesota's Lieutenant Governor, Peggy Flanagan.

Following the challenge, many participants shared the difficulty of living on \$5.16 a day for food. Executive director of Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid, Milo Mumgaard shared his reflections, "I had time and skills to plan this

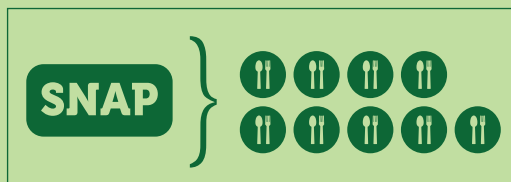
out, was able to go to a fully stocked discount grocery stores that was actually near me and cooked it all up in a modern kitchen with a big fridge ready to store all kinds of leftovers. Not necessarily something low-income families have, for sure."

We're grateful for federal and state nutrition programs like SNAP, but there's still much work that lies ahead to provide support for our community and strengthen programs that address food insecurity. So ...where do we go from here, and how can you get involved?

The Food Group is already taking actions to improve SNAP at the state level and also to protect it federally. You can sign up for our Action Alerts to become an advocate for anti-hunger policies by getting updates on policy efforts and easy ways to contact your elected officials to make a difference. You can also volunteer your time or make a donation to The Food Group to support long-term solutions to hunger and change. Together, we can create a more just and equitable food system. *Did you participate in the SNAP Challenge? Take action now to tell your legislators about your experience and urge them to support efforts to fight hunger this legislative session!*



For every meal the network of food banks and food shelves provide, SNAP provides NINE meals.



Scan the QR code to sign up!



Providing Food for Today Through Our Twin Cities Mobile Market

Twin Cities Mobile Market (TCMM) is The Food Group's grocery store on wheels, bringing affordable, nutritious foods directly to neighborhoods that don't have access to full-service supermarkets. Each year, we serve nearly 10,000 customers at more than 20 sites around St. Paul and Minneapolis, where anyone can shop for a full selection of fresh fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy, grains and other high-quality groceries.

Our newest site, Crest Apartments, located in Brooklyn Center, MN was selected, in part, because two big box retailers and several grocery stores had closed their doors in the Northside neighborhood – stores that people living in the area had relied on for groceries. This new TCMM site is our most diverse yet in terms of age groups served with residents ranging from school-aged children and their grownups to senior citizens. It has also served more people than any other TCMM site.

This new site was started in partnership with the University of Minnesota as part of a program expansion for a National Institutes of Health (NIH) grant. Through this grant we are collaborating to better understand the impact of mobile markets on diet quality, food insecurity, and food purchases in underserved communities through research and data collection.

"My favorite thing about the bus is that it comes right in front of my building... And the produce is priced right, not too expensive." - Jamie, a resident of The Crest Apartments





Sustaining Impact All Year Long

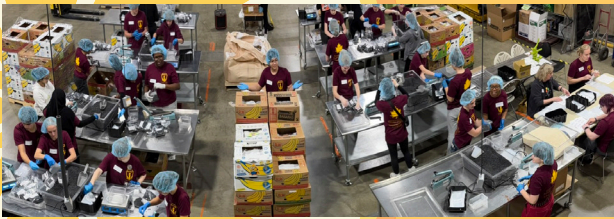
We are grateful to our Monthly Nourishers - donors who contribute to The Food Group year-round. Monthly donors play a vital role in sustaining our work and ensuring long-term impact.

Kelsey Lundberg, a Monthly Nourisher of The Food Group, shared with us why she gives each month: "I've supported The Food Group for over 17 years because they're a local organization that truly listens to the community. They recognize that food access is more than just a necessity—it's a cornerstone of health and well-being."



Join our Monthly Nourisher Circle to sustain your impact throughout 2025 and beyond! Scan the QR code and under "**type of gift,**" mark "**recurring gift.**" All monthly gifts are processed on the 15th of each month and you can cancel at any time.

Thank You Volunteers



During our "Pack to the Max" event that took place on Give to the Max Day,

111 volunteers packed 13,545 lbs.

of food for our community! Individuals and groups from the University of Minnesota, US Bank, Maple Grove High School Honors Society, and State Farm Insurance packed black beans, popcorn, jasmine rice, and holiday packs for Fare for All.

A special thanks to **Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan** for volunteering in our warehouse this past November while participating in the SNAP Challenge!

IN 2024

You shared over **7 million meals** with families in need.

Over 65% more local food.

Over 23% more culturally connected food.

Thank you for sharing twice the meals!

340,000 meals shared + the matches = 680,000 meals shared in total

Thank you for helping us reach our fundraising goals this past holiday season. With the help of matching contributions from the Manitou Fund, Ameriprise Financial, Edge Fall Protection, and many generous individuals, the number of meals shared with our community was doubled!



Meeting the Urgent Needs of Today While Building Change for Tomorrow

As we begin the new year and reflect on how to meet the immediate needs of our community today while fostering lasting change for the future, we at The Food Group recognize that both are essential to advancing our vision of a more just and equitable food system. **None of the progress we've made would have been possible without the unwavering support of you – our dedicated partners, volunteers, and donors.**



With your partnership, we are meeting the urgent needs of today by:

- Making state funding available to over 275 food shelves in all 87 counties through the Minnesota Food Shelf Program.
- Continuing to make quality, culturally connected food available to food shelf partners across Minnesota and western Wisconsin as demand for food shelf resources remains at record levels.
- Connecting low-income families and seniors with nutritious affordable grocery options in communities across Minnesota through our Fare For All and Twin Cities Mobile Market programs.
- Assisting callers statewide on our resource phone line for immediate food help.
- Bridging the gap between hunger and healthcare to ensure patients in need have the resources and support they need to access nutritious food.

While building lasting change by:

- Monitoring changes to federal nutrition assistance programs due to the upcoming farm bill that may impact Minnesotans who rely on federal anti-hunger programs.
- Supporting nine different bills in the Minnesota legislative session. From increasing funding to food shelves to increasing the minimum SNAP benefit for seniors from \$23 to \$50 a month, our Partners to End Hunger Coalition works at the state level to advance programs that will help low-income Minnesotans for years to come.

We understand the critical role that public policy plays in supporting the charitable food system for the long term, particularly given the current high demand. At the same time, we recognize the importance of ensuring access to nutritious, high-quality food for those in need today. In all our efforts, we strive to embed our values of equity and community voice, ensuring that our programs – both immediate and long-term – are shaped by the community's insights and contribute to a more just and equitable food system for everyone in our state. **Thank you for sustaining this work and for continuing to press for long-term change.**

With gratitude,

Sophia Lenarz-Coy
Executive Director

"The importance of healthy food for someone's quality of life cannot be overstated. The Food Group is unique in their ability to both provide immediate help in communities as a food bank and lead public policy efforts with long term benefits for those in need; that's why I'm a donor." -Andrew, A Donor of The Food Group and Board of Director



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

► **Upcoming Warehouse Tours:**
Visit our New Hope warehouse for a behind-the-scenes tour to see your support in action.

Tuesday, February 18th, 5-6pm

Wednesday, April 16th, 10-11am

► **Donor & Friends Volunteer Night:**

Bring a friend and join us in our New Hope warehouse for a food-packing project, tour and refreshments!

Thursday, March 26th, 5-7pm

► **2025 Hunger Day on the Hill:**

Help put ending hunger at the top of the Minnesota Legislature's to-do list!

Tuesday, March 11th

RSVP for the events by emailing Mai Kaying Yang at myang@thefoodgroupmn.org

Another Powerful Year for the Emerging Farmers Conference

This past November marked the 19th Annual Emerging Farmers Conference, an event that serves to advance the success and sustainability of farmers who traditionally face barriers to the education and resources necessary to build profitable agricultural businesses, including immigrant farmers and farmers of color.

250 FARMERS TRAVELED FROM 15 different states

and

41 Minnesota counties to learn & connect through intentional, farmer-centric activities



Workshops were simultaneously interpreted into 7 different languages

29 farmers received support for travel & lodging



This year's Emerging Farmers Conference will celebrate 20 years, and take place Nov 7-8, 2025, in Brooklyn Center, MN. Scan the QR code to learn more!



In the words of farmers who attended, "[The conference] is an amazing opportunity to be able to meet other emerging farmers, build connections, and get access to resources," and "This conference is different from other farming conferences that I have been to. It is centered in ways that matter to me and scaled to folks who don't have a lot of land access."

