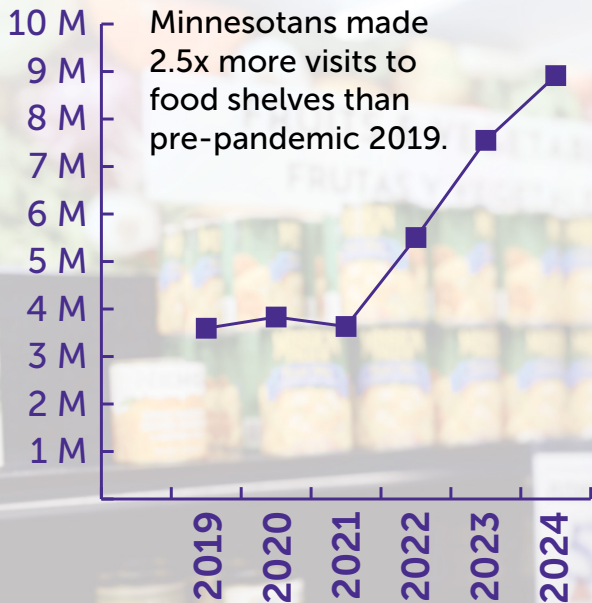


NOURISHING CHANGE

Spring 2025



Thank you for supporting food shelves across Minnesota, like NEAR Food Shelf (pictured here).

Your Support Helps Meet Increased Food Shelf Visits

Minnesotans made over **8.9 million visits to food shelves in 2024**, a record high for the fourth consecutive year. That's 1.4 million more visits than in 2023 and 2.5 times more visits than pre-pandemic 2019.

Food insecurity is a statewide issue impacting Minnesotans of all ages. 53% of visitors were adults; 36% were children; and 11% were seniors. In 2024, Minnesota's 87 counties saw an 18.4% average increase in food shelf visits. The ten counties with the most significant jump included both urban and rural areas.

The Food Group partners with Minnesota food shelves to provide an essential lifeline for

families and individuals feeling the multi-year strain of high food prices and the end to COVID-19 emergency food assistance benefits. As potential cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and other support programs loom, **the need is expected to grow even more this year**. In response, we are collaborating with partners statewide to ensure we are prepared to meet a growing demand for food shelf services.

See the full 2024 Minnesota food shelf visit report on our website.



Scan the QR code for press from sources including the Star Tribune, Sahan Journal, MPR and more!

"It's important to remember that visits to food shelves are more than just statistics. They are a direct response to the challenges many families are facing. Each visit represents a family in need, a child or senior being fed, or a parent struggling to make ends meet."

— Tikki Brown, Department of Children, Youth, and Families Commissioner



Because of you, food shelves will be better equipped to meet the need. *This picture was taken at our first convening in Owatonna, MN.*

"There is nothing more powerful for me in the battle against hunger than being surrounded by my peers who are doing that very same work. My experience at the convening in Owatonna was not just valuable it was empowering. The sharing of collective experiences and discussion about our common challenges with all of us together in the same room has never been more important. I left that day more confident than ever that the work we do to battle hunger is making a difference."

- Dom Korbel, Executive Director of Community Pathways of Steele County

Supporting Food Shelves Amid Growing Demand

As food shelf visits continue to rise, statewide collaboration – across organizations, communities, and sectors – to address the rising need is more important than ever. Some of the ways we are collaborating statewide include through the Minnesota Food Shelf Program (MFSP), regional convenings and virtual trainings.

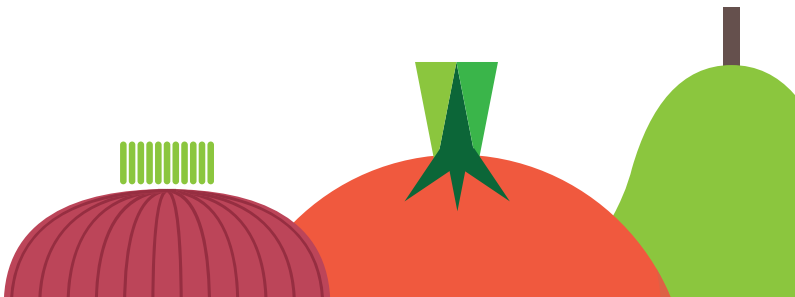
MFSP is state funding that streams through The Food Group to **provide food shelves with financial support needed to purchase food, equipment and cover operational expenses.** This program supported the work of 277 food shelves in 2024 and will continue to help food shelves as the need for their services grows.

One initiative The Food Group began this year, in partnership with the Department of Children, Youth and Families, University of Minnesota Extension and Foundation For Essential Needs, is **bringing together food shelf leaders from around the state** at six regional convenings this spring and summer. The convenings are taking place in Owatonna, Marshall, St. Cloud, Grand Rapids, Crookston

and the Twin Cities to share ideas, build relationships and shape the future of food access in Minnesota.

In response to feedback from food shelves, The Food Group is **hosting a virtual training series for food shelves** covering essential topics like grant writing, financial management, and community engagement this spring. The series aims to empower food shelf staff, board members, and volunteers with the practical tools and skills needed to enhance their operations and better serve their communities.

These are some of the innovative ways The Food Group, along with our community of supporters, are finding to **meet the challenge of the moment, together.**





Over 200 advocates joined together at Hunger Day on the Hill 2025

Championing Statewide Change

In March, The Food Group hosted our annual Hunger Day on the Hill in collaboration with the Partners to End Hunger Coalition, organizations working together to end hunger in Minnesota. More than 200 food access champions from across the state descended onto the Minnesota State Capitol **to meet with legislators and advocate for statewide anti-hunger policies.**

The day began with a program from speakers on key issues relevant to policies impacting food access in Minnesota. Guests included Fairview Health Services CEO James Hereford, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Director of Racial & Health Equity Policy Janelle Waldock, Minnesota Representative Heather Keeler, and Lisa, who has lived experience with hunger.

We also had the honor of hosting Governor Tim Walz who spoke about the importance of Hunger Day on the Hill over the years and why **face-to-face advocacy matters**, particularly with securing free school meals for children in Minnesota:

"Coming to the Capitol for many of you over the years and advocating and going up there and working with representatives and doing the work that was necessary – that's why we got meals for kids. It wasn't just magic. It wasn't a politician, alone. It was all of us, seeing the partnership in this. And we changed the trajectory." – Governor Tim Walz

The day continued as attendees shared lunch, prepared for meetings and took every opportunity to **urge their legislators to put ending hunger at the top of their priority list.**

A big thank you to everyone who attended and sponsored Hunger Day on the Hill 2025!

Fairview



Scan the QR code to visit our website to learn more about statewide advocacy.



Legislative meeting with Rep. Cedrick Frazier.

Volunteer Spotlight

Surly Brewing Co. started “Surly Gives a Damn” to inspire local volunteers to make a positive impact in the community. They began this fifteen years ago with The Food Group and recently celebrated this milestone with us. We’re grateful for their continued support – thank you!



You Met the Spring Match!

Thank you to the many donors who helped The Food Group unlock two matches – an in-kind gift of butter and cheese from Land O’Lakes and a \$25,000 match which shared 100,000 meals with families statewide.



Financially Savvy Giving Strategies

Did you know that charitable giving can be part of a smart financial plan? Talk to your investment, tax, or legal advisor about strategies to increase your charitable impact while also potentially reducing your taxable income.



DONATE STOCK

Donate your appreciated stock to a nonprofit to eliminate potential capital gains taxes and claim a charitable deduction for the fair market value of the asset.



DONOR ADVISED FUND

A donor advised fund allows you to invest contributions for potential tax-free growth and to recommend grants at any time to nonprofits of your choice.



INDIVIDUAL RETIREMENT ACCOUNT

Satisfy your Individual Retirement Account’s required minimum distribution (RMD) through a qualified charitable distribution (QCD), which can help you lower your tax bill and meet your philanthropic goals.

“I’ve donated to the Food Group for a number of years and always made cash contributions. Once I had to make Required Minimum Distributions (RMD) from my IRA I began using a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) to reduce the taxes owed on my RMD and to continue supporting the great work The Food Group does.” – Anonymous Donor

Hope and Resilience: Navigating Uncertainty with Our Core Values

Spring is here, bringing with it a season of hope and renewal. However, this year, those feelings are tempered by the ongoing challenges and unsettling news of funding changes sweeping across the nation. These changes, including drastic cuts to The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), potential cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and support for farmers and anti-hunger organizations, threaten to have devastating consequences for the communities we serve and care about deeply. **Despite these challenges, we remain resilient and committed to our core values.**



Nutrition

Food is a basic right for all individuals.



Local

Everyone deserves access to healthy food, where they live, that they can get to.



Equity

Everyone deserves access to food that are familiar to them and fit their cultural and dietary needs.



Community Engagement

Working collaboratively with other community organizations drives our mutual success.



Systems Change

Operating in a way that supports equity, sustainability and fairness to all builds stronger communities.

We continue to stand firm in our dedication to nutrition, local food systems, equity, community engagement, and systems change. Our support for immigrant farmers – the backbone of our food system – remains unwavering, as we recognize the critical role they play in feeding communities throughout Minnesota. Through statewide initiatives, we will persist in our efforts to ensure that every individual has access to nourishing, culturally meaningful food that meets their unique dietary needs.

Thank you for navigating these challenging times alongside us. Together, we can weather this storm and continue to create a more sustainable and equitable food system for all Minnesotans.

With gratitude and hope,

Sophia Lenarz-Coy
Executive Director

A Mother and Son Build Their Sustainable Farm



Bao and Bai of BaoBai's Harvest

BaoBai's Harvest is a mother-son sustainable and regenerative vegetable farm growing at The Food Group's Big River Farms. When Bao immigrated to the United States, she began planting in her backyard with the knowledge and experience she learned as a child watching her parents work in the fields in Laos. Before long she expanded into community gardening. As the community garden grew, her son, Bai, joined her. The pair embarked on a 15-year journey that eventually led them to expand and create BaoBai's Harvest.

As their mother-son business grew, they needed to learn more about the business side of farming. They knew they wanted to be an organic farm because it aligned with their core values. Bai described the organic symbol as "a way to communicate to people that the

food that we're growing is grown in a certain [sustainable] way."

Bai and Bao were excited to join Big River Farms because "there are systems in place to provide [organic] certification." Bai explained that land access through The Food Group's Incubator Training Program expedited their ability to become a certified organic farm. The Incubator Training Program supports emerging farmers by providing affordable land access, farm infrastructure, business development, and training resources.

"From a very young age, I understood that having access to fresh produce feels very different from produce that is not fresh. And that continues to be an inspiration and motivates me to grow my own food compared to buying food that is not fresh." – Bao

The Food Group is proud to partner with farmers like Bao and Bai in building a more sustainable local food system. By increasing land access for emerging farmers and investing in regenerative farming practices, **we can build stronger, healthier communities statewide.**



Visit BaoBai's Harvest at the Stillwater Farmer's Market this summer and scan the QR code to read their full story on our blog.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- ▶ **Big River Farms Tour in Marine on St. Croix** • Thursday, June 12th, 5-6pm
- ▶ **The Food Group Warehouse Tour in New Hope** • Tuesday, July 15th, 5-6pm
- ▶ **Big River Farms Tour in Marine on St. Croix** • Wednesday, August 20th, 10-11am

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

A special thank you to these businesses for their long-standing support!

