

Nourishing Change

Winter 2026



Rising Food Costs Shrinking Federal Support

Groceries ↑ 3.2%*

Protein staples ↑ 6%*

Federal free food ↓ 32%

SNAP cuts expected to affect 32,000 Minnesotans.

*Midwest Consumer Index

"My need for support has increased in the last year... I don't know what I'd do without this food shelf." – Sharin, Food Shelf Participant

Your generosity ensures food shelves have nourishing food and resources to support individuals like Theresa at NEAR Food Shelf, a partner of The Food Group.

What's Driving the Need Across Minnesota

When Sharin's home flooded last year, she suddenly found herself in a vulnerable spot. With a big family and rising grocery costs, she turned to her local food shelf in Blaine – Hope for the Community, a partner of The Food Group.

Sharin's story illustrates a state-wide trend: a growing need for food support fueled, by rising grocery costs, cuts to federal hunger relief programs, and fear during the recent ICE operation that is keeping some from accessing the food they need.

Last year, Minnesota food shelf visits remained near the record set in 2024 of 8.9 million visits. This plateau shows that families are still turning to food shelves at historically high levels.

In Alexandria, Outreach Food Shelf Executive Director Bernice Wimmer is

witnessing an increase in need firsthand.

"We're seeing about a 20% increase in people coming," she shared. "You go to the grocery store, and you come out with four items and it's 30 bucks...it is very scary."

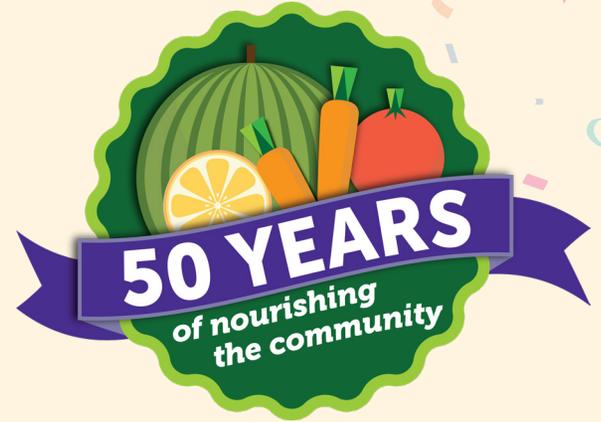
For seniors like Virginia Lee, a fixed income doesn't stretch as far as it used to. With rising grocery costs and cuts to federal programs like SNAP, daily life can feel overwhelming:

"I'm retired now, and my monthly check doesn't go up, but my bills and food costs sure do."

Thanks to your support, we're responding rapidly to meet the rising need statewide while staying true to our values – ensuring equitable access to nutritious, local and culturally connected food. Together, we are building a hunger-free Minnesota.

Recognizing Fifty Years!

This year marks fifty years of fighting hunger and nourishing our community. What began in 1976 as Hennepin County Emergency Food Shelves distributing food to fifteen local partners from the Sabathani Community Center has grown into a statewide force for hunger relief, nutrition access, and food systems change. **Thanks to your generosity, our reach has grown from the Twin Cities to statewide, expanding our impact and helping more Minnesotans access nourishing, local, and culturally connected food.**

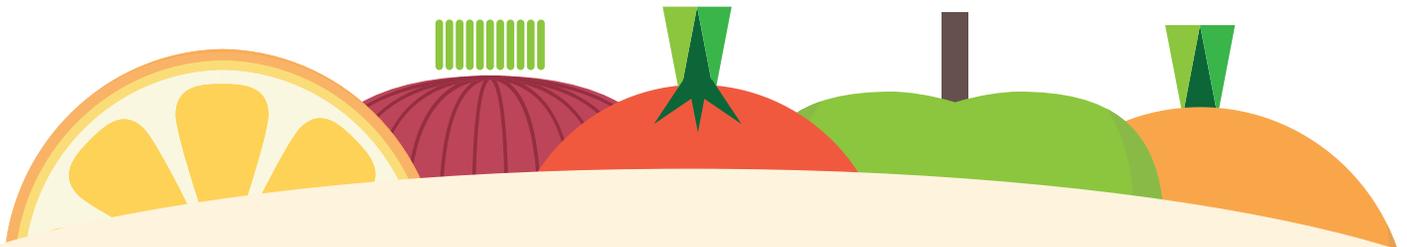


Meeting the Moment: Food Access for Immigrant Communities



Increased federal immigration enforcement across Minnesota recently created new barriers to food access for immigrant families. Communities of color already face higher rates of food insecurity, and many of our food shelf partners are reporting a significant decline in visits from neighbors who no longer feel safe seeking support.

Working in partnership with local food shelves and trusted, community-led organizations, we have been responding by distributing nourishing and culturally connected foods through innovative food distribution models. These efforts ensure families can continue to access nutritious food with dignity and without fear. We remain committed to ensuring all Minnesotans have equitable access to the food they need and deserve and that fear is never a barrier to nourishment or community well-being.



Reflecting on The Last Fifty Years

- 1976** • Hennepin County Emergency Food Shelves founded.
- 1977** • Food distribution begins to 15 Hennepin County food shelves.
- 1986** • Renamed Emergency Foodshelf Network.
- 1996** • Food distribution expands across the Twin Cities metro.
- 1999** • Mobile Food Shelf launches, serving residents of subsidized housing.
- 2002** • Fare For All joins the organization, expanding access to affordable groceries.
- 2007** • Organization adopts a strong focus on fresh produce and culturally connected foods.

Your Rapid Response Made a Difference

When SNAP benefits were delayed during the government shutdown last fall, your swift support ensured our neighbors weren't left without food. Because of you, thousands of Minnesotans had access to nutritious food when they needed it most.

Here's what you made possible:



67,200 pounds of food packed & distributed thanks to **493 volunteers**.

1,468 households received discounts through our affordable grocery programs.

14 additional truckloads of free, high-demand staples were delivered to food shelves.

\$3.8 million in emergency grants distributed to food shelves and Tribal Nations in partnership with the Department of Children, Youth and Families.

90% increase in food shelf requests answered through our Minnesota Food HelpLine.

1,165,714 pounds of food distributed to food shelves in October and November as part of our ongoing, day-to-day efforts to keep the hunger relief system stable for families.

Thank you to the record number of volunteers who came together to pack food and strengthen our community response efforts!

Twice as Many Holiday Meals – Thanks to You! **873,763 total meals for our community**

Your generosity unlocked our year-end matching gifts, doubling the impact of every dollar you gave. Thanks to you, our match partners, and many generous individuals, more families enjoyed nourishing holiday season meals.



- 2013** • Named #1 local hunger relief organization focused on health and nutrition by Philanthropy Partners.
- 2014** • Emergency Foodshelf Network becomes The Food Group to reflect our growing mission and impact.
- 2015** • Distributes a record 1 million pounds of fresh produce; acquires produce rescue program.
- 2016** • Receives Minnesota DHS Commissioner's Circle of Excellence Award.
- 2017** • Minnesota Food Association (now Big River Farms) becomes a program of The Food Group, expanding our work across the food system.

Reducing Winter Hunger, Together



Minnesota winters can turn a simple trip to the food shelf into a significant challenge

for neighbors with limited mobility. For Detra, who uses a wheelchair and is raising two young children, having food delivered directly to her building removes a major barrier – ensuring her family can access nourishing meals, even in the harshest weather.

Reliable access to nutritious food makes a tangible difference

in Detra’s daily life. “The food shelf is a big help to get fruits and vegetables,” she shared. “I try to prepare as much healthy stuff as I can so we can eat at the table as a family. If I eat it, I know my kids are eating it. That’s how you introduce fruits and vegetables to kids – when they see you eating it, too.”

Through the High Rise Mobile Food Shelf – a program of East Side Neighborhood Services and a long-time partner of The Food Group – **fresh, nutritious, and culturally connected foods are delivered** twice a month to 52 low-income apartment buildings across

Hennepin County. This model ensures families like Detra’s **can access food reliably and minimize barriers such as limited mobility, health issues, or transportation challenges.**

As Carolina Elizondo, Director of Programs at East Side Neighborhood Services shared, “Without partners like The Food Group, ESNS Food Programs would not be able to consistently offer culturally familiar items like halal meats, eggs and fresh produce. By providing recognizable ingredients, our goal is to empower individuals to nourish their household in ways that are meaningful and will make them feel good about the food and their visit to our food shelves.”

Your generosity provides culturally connected staples and fresh ingredients, helping neighbors eat well even in the coldest months – and feel seen, respected, and cared for. Together, we’re helping more households face the challenges of accessing food in the winter with dignity.

- 2020** • Twin Cities Mobile Market joins the organization, expanding access to affordable groceries.
- 2021** • Distributes a record 1.7 million pounds of culturally connected foods.
- 2024** • Hunger Solutions joins The Food Group, expanding our hunger relief programs and adding policy work.
- 2024** • Launches Agrisolar pilot in partnership with US Solar; receives national recognition with the Environmental Initiative Award and the Solar Farm of the Year Award.

50 Years Together: Honoring Our Past, Shaping the Future

As we kick off our fiftieth year, I am inspired by the resilience of our community and reminded of the challenges so many Minnesotans continue to face.

At the heart of this work is the simple belief that when we work together, we can do better.

By connecting, sharing food and resources, and innovating, we have been able to respond to the evolving needs of our communities. Over the years, that has meant:



Ensuring food shelves are stocked and our neighbors can access nutritious and culturally connected foods.



Bringing more affordable food options directly to neighborhoods.



Empowering emerging farmers through sustainable farm programs – building a stronger, more resilient food system for generations to come.



Expanding our focus to policy and advocacy, allowing us to better understand the lived experiences of our neighbors and deepen partnerships across Minnesota to create lasting change.

As we look to the future, rising costs and federal uncertainty continue to strain families across Minnesota. Yet these challenges underscore the power of partnership and collective action. Together, we will meet these challenges and create a local food system that works for everyone – today, tomorrow, and for decades to come. **Thank you for partnering with us to provide food for today and create lasting change for tomorrow.**

With gratitude,



Sophia Lenarz-Coy
Executive Director



2025 Impact at a Glance

6.3 million
meals shared

1.5 million
pounds of fresh
produce distributed

26%
increase in affordable
grocery participation

1.2 million
pounds of culturally
connected food
distributed

13,008
households
connected to
food resources
through
our Minnesota
Food HelpLine

\$5 million
secured for food
shelves and Tribal
Nations statewide

2.5 million
pounds of local
food distributed

25
emerging farmer
teams supported

Donor Spotlight: Supporting Community, Year After Year



Nearly forty years ago, Allan Ferber first learned about The Food Group when colleagues at the Federal Reserve Bank organized a volunteer shift to pack food. When he couldn't join, he felt compelled to contribute in another way and chose to donate.

His desire to help others began during his service in Vietnam, where he witnessed families living in makeshift shelters on the streets. "At first I gave to organizations that brought food and clothing overseas," he recalls. "But then I realized there's great need here at home too. Around the holidays especially, I think of all the kids who need food and essentials."

Over the years, supporting The Food Group has become a deeply held priority.

"It's something I want to stick with forever," he says.

Looking ahead to the next fifty years, Allan's hope for The Food Group is simple and wholehearted: **"Continue to do what you can and help where you can. You're doing great work."**

We're so grateful for partners like Allan – *and you* – who are committed to fighting hunger today and creating change for tomorrow and the decades ahead.

Celebrating Twenty Years of The Emerging Farmers Conference



The keynote panel facilitated by The Food Group's Farm Director, KaZoua Berry featuring farmers Oredola Taylor, Hope Flanagan and Rodrigo Cala.

Last November, we celebrated twenty years of collaboration with local, state, and federal partners to host the annual **Emerging Farmers Conference.**

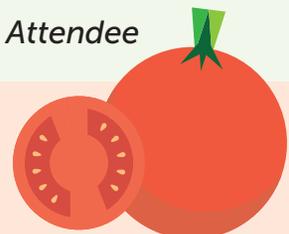
For two decades, this gathering has advanced the success and sustainability of farmers who too often face barriers to the education and resources needed to build profitable agricultural businesses and strengthen our local food system.

The twentieth anniversary conference brought together **260 farmers and 360 total attendees.**

"This was awesome. The hands-on Instruction was invaluable." – Farmer Attendee



Calendar of Events
Visit **EVENTS** on our website to RSVP.



Hunger Day on The Hill
March 16, 9:30am

Hunger Trends & The State of Food Access
March 3, 5-7pm

Virtual Update
April 9, 8:30-9am