A NOTE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, Lori Kratchmer

On a frigid Saturday morning last month, staff were cleaning up after a volunteer event in our warehouse. The doorbell rang. They opened the door and greeted an elderly lady, bundled from head to toe.

Staff immediately invited her inside. They offered her a cup of warm coffee and a chair. She proceeded to share her story. A story heard many times before - a story of the struggles in affording good food once all the bills have been paid and the prescriptions have been filled. Staff listened. They helped her identify food shelves and meal programs located near her home. As she left, the lady thanked them for their help in getting the information she needed. And finding the hope she desired.

There are neighbors in our community seeking food every day. Food that is nutritious. Food that is affordable. Food that is familiar. And the demand continues to grow.

In this newsletter, you will learn about the impact your support gives – the people you help, the nutritious food you provide. You will also learn about our Equity Value Statement and our desire to continue to make healthy and culturally-appropriate foods accessible to everyone. After all, not everyone has the opportunity to ring our doorbell. However, the more we work together, the more people we can reach and give them a doorbell to ring.

As 2017 begins, I look forward to working with you in fighting hunger and nourishing our community. Our task remains challenging, but the hope you provide endures. Together, let’s answer the calls of our struggling neighbors, and help them find the good food they deserve.
Good Foods in the Good Fight against Hunger – it’s been our rallying cry since 2008, when we adopted our Healthy Foods policy.

Yet access to nutritious food is not equitable. For many, good food is not within their reach. Seniors may live too far away from their nearest grocery store or food shelf. Families may not be able to afford the nutritious food available. Children may be served food not familiar to them.

The result? Minnesotans struggling with access to nutritious food are more susceptible to a less-healthy diet and related chronic diseases (such as obesity and heart disease), affecting their overall health and the ability to lead productive lives.

All Minnesotans deserve access to nutritious food. Food that is healthy and familiar. Your support continues to help Minnesotans get the access they need. You help provide affordable options to local families struggling to make ends meet. You help agency partners meet the cultural and dietary needs of their clients. And you help bring nutritious food directly to neighbors who have trouble accessing food sites. All of these efforts are a result of the generous support you provide.

To reflect these efforts and your support, our Board of Directors approved an Equity Value Statement (below) last fall. This statement, coupled with our Healthy Foods policy, speaks to the essence of what we do. With your ongoing support, we will continue to provide Good Foods in the Good Fight against Hunger, AND we will also continue to improve access for local families in getting the food they need and deserve.

**THE FOOD GROUP’S EQUITY VALUE STATEMENT**

Equity is fundamental to our mission to fight hunger and nourish our community. Where we live, how much money we make, or the color of our skin currently influences access to healthy and culturally-appropriate foods. We must address the roots of these inequities so everyone in our community has the opportunity to live their best life. We believe in working with our community and organizations to improve food access and make systematic changes in hunger relief. To do so, we must include equity in all aspects of our work. We invite individuals from different abilities, ethnicities, genders, races, religions, sexual orientations, and socioeconomic backgrounds to take part in and shape our work.

**2016 Equity Work Highlights**

- **33** food shelves received a subsidy from The Food Group for culturally specific foods
- **46** varieties of fresh produce distributed
- **52%** of agency partners utilized healthy recipes from The Food Group
“When it comes to food access, many of our neighbors simply don’t have the opportunities available to others. We must continue our efforts in making nutritious, culturally-appropriate food available to all Minnesotans. In doing so, we can help build healthy communities where everyone has the opportunity to lead productive lives.”

-Samty Xiong, Equity Specialist

A FOOD EQUITY STORY – CULTURAL EQUITY

“You can see the expression on people’s faces from other cultures when they find something that they are familiar with.”

-Cultural Equity Food Shelf Partner

Imagine your family immigrated to Minnesota from a country in Latin America. You blend into our community, appreciating the opportunities to build a brighter future. You also enjoy our rich diversity, and the ability to retain aspects unique to your native land. Each Saturday you look forward to visiting the local mercado, buying food you grew up with – food that is familiar.

Then, you lose your job and your family struggles to make ends meet. You find the nearest food shelf and walk in to get the food your family needs. You feel anxious, knowing your family has particular tastes and your children prefer certain foods. What will you do if that food isn’t available?

As you enter, your worries wash away. A wide variety of food is available. Food unique to the many cultures that make up our community. Food unique to your Latin heritage. Nutritious food your children know and will eat.

This story plays out across our community each day. Minnesota continues to become more diverse, with a rich tapestry of cultures that have their own familiar tastes. But there is a common thread – the fight against hunger.

Your support continues to expand our Cultural Equity Program and its focus to make nutritious, culturally-appropriate food available to all Minnesotans. Your gifts not only provide nutritious foods, but also bring comfort to families worried about finding food that nourishes their unique tastes. Familiar food that we all enjoy.
Take a tour & learn more about our work
Come check out our warehouse and operations. Get an up-close glimpse into our work in action. **Tours take place at 5 pm on:** Wednesday, February 15 and Tuesday, March 14.

RSVP to Emily Eddy White: 763-450-3868 or eeddy@thefoodgroupmn.org

**CHALLENGE GRANT TO EXPAND FREEZER/COOLER CAPACITY**

The Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation has generously offered a challenge grant of $50,000 for us to install a new 4,000 square foot freezer/cooler in our warehouse. They will donate $50,000 if we can match it with $50,000 from new donors as well as increased donations from existing donors in the coming year. We need the funds to expand our building capacity to meet the growing need in the community.

This year marks the fifth consecutive year with food shelf visits over 3 million in Minnesota. We need an additional commercial freezer/cooler to meet the demand for growth of our current programs and distribute additional nutritious food to our partners.

**Will you please consider supporting this one-time project?** Generous support of this capital project will help us unlock this $50,000 challenge grant. With your support we will add new Fare For All sites, serve more households experiencing hunger, and distribute more free and affordable nutritious food.