A message from Lori

Fighting hunger isn’t easy. **2017 marked the 7th consecutive year of at least 3 million visits to food shelves across Minnesota.** We continue to help our neighbors get the good food they need, but new challenges threaten the work we do.

One challenge is the federal tax reform legislation passed by Congress and signed by our President last December. In raising the standard deductions we can claim, fewer of us will itemize our deductions. As a result, those who don’t itemize won’t have the opportunity to deduct charitable donations on their 2018 returns. Industry experts believe this will affect giving, and estimate charitable gifts nationwide may decrease by 4.5%.

The new reforms also force our government to consider budget cuts. One proposed cut affects the people we serve. The House of Representatives is set to vote on a federal budget that cuts $150 billion in funding to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). **The effects will be devastating for millions of Americans, including 476,000 Minnesotans who rely on this program to help put food on their tables. If passed, these cuts will put greater pressure on our community to help those who need it most.**

I’ve spoken with those who give. Some say the reforms won’t affect their giving. They give because they can. They don’t care about the tax benefits. They care about our community, and know neighbors need our help. Others are acutely aware of the proposed budget cuts, and they’re letting their voices be heard. They’re calling or writing their legislative leaders to let them know how they feel.

Fighting hunger isn’t easy. But fighting hunger is vital to a healthy community. I believe having access to nutritious food is a basic right for all individuals. Together, let’s meet this challenge in the coming year. Our community and neighbors are relying on us.
Looking at the Year Ahead

2018 is upon us! Here are some things we’re already working on as we begin the new year. There’s much to do, yet always guided by the values we share.

Food is a basic right for all individuals

In 2018, we’re taking a close look at our network across Minnesota and western Wisconsin. We want to make sure we’re serving our neighbors who need it most. We continue to search for food deserts – those neighborhoods and communities where nutritious food is simply not available. As we find them, we’re working with partners to help provide greater access to those looking for the good food we all deserve.

Everyone deserves access to healthy food

Today, more than one of every five pounds of food given to our partners is fresh produce. In 2018, we look to do more. We’re increasing the number of gleaning projects to collect more fresh produce from area farms and orchards. We’re also looking at ways to continue our work in processing a portion of the produce we collect, so it can be distributed to partners during the winter season.

With Big River Farms recently joining us, we’re destined to expand our thinking on how to take healthy food access to new levels. In the coming year, we’re excited to share with you our plans to nurture local immigrant and historically under-represented farmers, helping them make locally grown, organically-certified produce more accessible.

Everyone deserves access to foods familiar to them

Our community is becoming more diverse. Last year, you helped us distribute nearly 400,000 pounds of culturally appropriate foods to 36 food shelf partners serving clients with diverse cultural backgrounds.

This year, we’ll continue to provide the types of food these partners need. And we’re also helping them better understand the growing diversity in our community. New cultural competency workshops are being scheduled, so staffs have the opportunity to explore how different cultures view the world around us. These workshops also help hone skills and strategies to manage bias, and better serve our changing community.

These are just some of the things we’re doing in 2018 to provide good foods in the good fight against hunger. To stay current on all our news, read our blog on our website (www.thefoodgroupmn.org).
Last month, Minnesota Food Association, a program of The Food Group, hosted the 13th annual Emerging Farmers Conference (formerly the Immigrant & Minority Farmers Conference). The 2-day conference served 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. The conference provides education and resources, relationship fostering between farmers and community partners. Participants are empowered to lead change in their communities through healthy food access, education, and economic opportunity.

This annual conference is unique because it is planned by farmers and for farmers with a continual emphasis on removing barriers to participation, and farmer-to-farmer learning. Most workshops are presented or co-presented by farmers, and the keynote speakers this year were Hmong farmers Blia Tou Thao and Phua Yang Thao of Thao’s Garden in Wisconsin.

Beyond the farmers who attend, the conference is recognized by many in the community as an asset to supporting local agriculture, and this year’s special guests included Senator Amy Klobuchar (via video welcome) and Assistant Commissioner for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Andrea Vauble. Workshop topics included: how to grow the best tomatoes, farm business planning, goal setting, and marketing.

The Emerging Farmers Conference is free for all farmers and language interpretation is available in Spanish, Hmong, Karen, Bhutanese, Vietnamese, and Somali.

The conference remains free for farmers due to the generous, ongoing partnership of conference sponsors. 2018 sponsors included Midwest Sustainable & Organic Education Service, USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service, and University of Minnesota Extension.

SUPPORTER SPOTLIGHT

Target Foundation and Tennant Company Foundation have both been long-standing partners of The Food Group. Supporting our work through general operating funds, they ensure our lights stay-on, our trucks and coolers are running, and all of our programs have enough food to distribute. Thank you for helping us fight hunger and nourish our community!

HELP LOCAL FARMERS THROUGH COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE

Join our farm’s Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and help transform our local food system. Like all CSA farms, we offer members a share of our harvest in exchange for pre-season support. Full shares & half shares are available with multiple pick-up locations around the Twin Cities. All of the produce is certified organic. When you purchase a share, you help support local farmers and The Food Group’s work at Big River Farms, plus you get weekly, delicious, organic produce!

For pricing, to learn more, or sign up visit: www.thefoodgroupmn.org/csa
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help us fight hunger

Join us for an individual volunteer shift in our warehouse:

Every Tuesday 9 to 11 am throughout February, March & April

Select Wednesdays 5 to 7 pm
February 14, March 14, & April 11

Contact Dan Johnson to sign up:
djohnson@thefoodgroupmn.org | 763-450-3860
or visit thefoodgroupmn.volunteerhub.com

stay connected

Come tour our warehouse and operations. Get an up-close glimpse into our work in action.

Upcoming tour dates:
February 22 at 10 am & 5 pm
March 12 at 10 am & 5 pm

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