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This year’s farms-to-families produce distributions expand on past collaborations with local farmers, food co-ops, and gleaning partners. Donations have multiplied the volume of produce available during a year when both farmers and food shelf guests appreciate the extra support.

“The pandemic created great uncertainty for the farmers in our program, with many of their usual markets gone or scaled back,” says Laura Mirafuentes, Big River Farms director. “At the same time, there’s a high interest in local food. The additional funding we’ve received from donors during the COVID-19 crisis has double the impact, helping our farmers through purchase of their produce, and providing fresh food to our food shelf and meal program partners for their guests.”

New Oil Christian Center in the Camden neighborhood of Minneapolis is a new partner since the COVID-19 emergency onset. Pastor Bruce Carpenter and his wife Brenda are leading the small congregation to prepare and provide 3000 meals each week, mostly to homeless adults and families in temporary shelter, and to seniors with medical conditions or mobility challenges. Learning that they could get fresh farm food at no charge through partnership with The Food Group and Big River Farms was “a match made in heaven,” according to Bruce. Volunteers use the church’s commercial-grade kitchen to prepare meals that are delivered to distribution sites on their “Soul Good” food trailer. "We deliver hot, well-balanced meals so our guests can eat healthy food," he says. "We so appreciate these deliveries from the farm," Brenda adds. "And our volunteer cooks are trying new foods and finding new recipes like sautéed turnip greens!"

This year also happens to be a good growing year, so there is a bountiful harvest. Farmer Wa Kou Hang is pleased to participate in the initiative. “Organic produce should be affordable and cheaper than conventional produce because we manage soil fertility naturally. Supporting good health is one of our core operating farm business principles. I am happy to be part of organic producers who can participate in Farm to Food Shelf. Our produce will reach low-income families who have limited access to quality organic produce,” he says.

“It’s amazing to have this funding to allow our farmers to get the healthy food to lower-income homes and people who most need the food, and still pay the farmers,” Laura says. "I look forward to the continued growth of this partnership!"
Such a time as this
A Message from the Executive Director

“Such a time as this” is a phrase I think about a lot these days. As we continue to face challenges unlike any of us have ever seen, we are presented with an opportunity to reimagine “normal.” COVID-19 has forced us to confront many tough realities that have existed for a long time. For many families, putting food on the table has long been a challenge—especially for communities of color in Minnesota. And yet, at such a time as this, we have a chance to do better.

I am inspired by our community’s generosity– you are giving your time and money to get food to those who need it most.

I am heartened that we are engaging more deeply in tough conversations: conversations about where our food comes from and how we can better support local farmers.

Conversations about systemic racism and inequities in the food system. Conversations about real and lasting ways to lift people out of poverty. While none of us has all the answers, with collaboration, vulnerability and courage, I believe change is possible.

You have responded quickly and generously to rapidly changing food needs in recent months. You have increased our purchasing power to buy food from farmers of color, supporting their businesses and providing beautiful, healthy produce to folks who otherwise would not have access to it through our Farm to Food Shelf initiative. You have expanded our ability to procure culturally relevant foods, knowing that accessing familiar food is important to promote health. You have increased our capacity, moving double the amount of food in and out of our warehouse since April.

You have been amazing partners during these difficult days. Together, we have the resilience and the resources for such a time as this. Thank you for your ongoing commitment and investment in the work of fighting hunger and nourishing our community!

With gratitude,
Sophia Lenarz-Coy
Executive Director

Call to Action: Volunteers Needed!

The need for emergency food has increased, and we need your help more than ever to feed people in need. Volunteer shifts are Monday through Friday, 9-11 am and 1-3 pm, along with 4-6 pm shifts on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Your help is truly appreciated!

Individuals who meet the age and health guidelines can sign-up through our volunteer hub at thefoodgroupmn.volunteerhub.com. To schedule a group of up to 14 volunteers please contact Dan Johnson: djohnson@thefoodgroupmn.org.

Volunteers are screened upon arrival according to health guidelines. Volunteers are required to wear masks and are always spaced six feet apart. Our work areas are sanitized before each shift.

From the beginning of April through mid-July volunteers contributed over 2,700 hours, packing 575,000 pounds of food for our neighbors. You can support the community by helping!

Hope to see you soon!

Donor Spotlight: Entrust Datacard

Entrust Datacard hosted a Virtual Food Drive and raised over $9,000 to help with the emergency response to the COVID-19 virus as well as the severely limited food access due to grocery stores destroyed or closed due to the unrest following the killing of George Floyd. Since our partnership began thirty years ago, Entrust Datacard has given nearly $39,000 towards the fight against hunger in our communities. We are grateful and proud to partner with a company who values giving back.

“At Entrust Datacard, giving back to the communities where our employees live and work is an important part of who we are. These are challenging times for many people around the world and we feel it is important to offer our support, especially around the Twin Cities where we are based. Our team really stepped up for the virtual food drive, donating more than $9,000. I am humbled by the generosity of my colleagues and proud of the impact we are making.”

Matt Stern
Senior Vice President of Business Development at Entrust Datacard

To create your own Virtual Food Drive for your employee team, worship community, or organization, contact Talia at tmiracle@thefoodgroupmn.org.
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Volunteers prepare for community food distribution at Powderhorn Park, Minneapolis.

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Volunteers contribute nearly 7,000 hours in a year to help distribute food.

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Your Support in Action

Since March 1

3,600,998 meals provided
80% increase in outgoing deliveries to food shelves
31 new agency and program partners
3,000 volunteer hours preparing food for distribution

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**Racial Equity and Hunger: What is the connection?**

Q: How is equity woven throughout The Food Group's work?

A: The Food Group focuses on distributing culturally specific and connected foods and working with partner agencies to increase cultural competency. The staff participate in equity and anti-racism training and development and have formed the IDEA Council to advance ongoing goals and strategies for Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Action both within and outside the organization. Our complete equity statement is posted at thefoodgroupmn.org/who-we-are/mission-and-vision.

Q: What do we mean by equality and equity?

A: Equality is providing the same level of support, regardless of circumstances, need and historical trauma. This results in unequal outcomes. Equity provides targeted support to communities by acknowledging these realities, therefore achieving equitable outcomes.

Q: What is racial equity?

A: Racial equity focuses on achieving equitable outcomes for communities of color by providing support proportionate to the historical trauma and structural racism that each community of color has experienced.

Q: What is the connection?

A: The BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) community is disproportionately impacted by hunger. According to the Racial Equity and Hunger Network, communities of color are consistently 2-3 times more likely to experience hunger than their white counterparts. This disparity has only grown during COVID-19.

Q: How is equity woven throughout The Food Group’s work?

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**Thank you, Corporate and Foundation Partners for your COVID-19 Relief!**

**Sit Investment Associates**

**Cargill**

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**Farmers at Big River Farms harvest onions.**

**Pastor Bruce and Brenda Carpenter of New Oil Christian Center**

**Wa Kou Hang grows organic produce at Big River Farms.**