



Network News

WINTER 2022



Volunteers Boua and Melody from the Asian Media Access youth dance team helped run the event and offered Hmong-English interpretation.



Rice and rice noodles are especially popular, along with quail eggs, mock duck and bamboo shoots.

Partnership Promotes Wellness

Partnerships with local organizations are central to our work. Providing culturally connected food to our partners helps people feel seen and know that they belong.

The Food Group teamed up with Asian Media Access (amamedia.org) in December to support a festive family wellness event. Led by Ange (AN-gee) Hwang, the mission of Asian Media Access (AMA) is to "connect the disconnected." Asian Media Access is one of The Food Group's 265+ community partners and one of our 31 Cultural Equity partners. The event included culturally connected food, sanitary supplies, a resource fair, vaccinations, flu shots, and holiday toys for kids.

Culturally specific foods matter

Ange says, "We are glad to have the support from The Food Group to provide the Asian foods. A lot of times it's hard for our community to access familiar food, so they eat food they're not used to. **The support from The Food Group for specific dietary needs makes a big difference.**"

More than 500 people attended the open house event, held at the Cora McCorvey Health & Wellness Center in Minneapolis. Asian Media Access teams up with hosts all around the Twin Cities as part of their effort to reduce geographic barriers to services.

A highlight was a variety of Asian foods obtained especially for the event by The Food Group, provided by your donations. "This event aligns perfectly with our priority of supporting Black, Indigenous and People of Color-

led organizations, and with our emphasis on culturally connected foods," says Nathan Hesse, Agency Partner Specialist with The Food Group.

A collaborative approach to better food access

Ange founded AMA in 1992. She wanted to bring an Asian perspective to a community organization. She says, "The design of the western way of thinking is linear. But our Asian perspective is more holistic, and relationship-based and less regulated. We notice cultural barriers. We bring a different perspective to the way programs are designed."

AMA works with other food shelves and grassroots agencies looking beyond traditional models to provide access to food wherever people live. "We show up when and where we are needed," Ange says. **"We are being innovative and creative to reach people where they are."**

Ange continues, "We want to demonstrate good faith to support the community and continue to spread good faith. Our values are to take what you need and leave some for others." She hopes to continue this type of event on a more regular basis.

Nathan adds, "We appreciate this newer partnership, and the energy and vision Ange brings, and we look forward to supporting their goals moving forward." Your contributions keep these partnerships thriving. Thank you!

Moving forward in 2022

From Sophia Lenarz-Coy, Executive Director



2020 was a year like no other. Or so we thought. Until 2021 arrived with its own unique challenges.

Like many of you, I envisioned a sprint. I never anticipated we'd be running a marathon. From climate change—affecting the way we grow and consume food—to rising food costs and inflation crippling the very community we serve, what we once thought was unprecedented is now the precedent.

The constant change requires enormous energy and resolve. It affects the people we serve and our staff who are constantly adapting to that change.

The race is strenuous, but so rewarding. Every mile brings with it change, innovation and even inspiration.

Our partners, volunteers, and donors show up every day, unwavering in your commitment to bring good food to people who need it most. When the pandemic nearly put the brakes on the Twin Cities Mobile Market, we figured out a way to safely deliver good food to people who couldn't get to a grocery store. When traditional hunger relief models faltered, we **eliminated barriers to accessing food** by following our community partners' lead. When weather patterns swung wildly, our farmers continued to grow culturally relevant food and we found markets for their produce.

In 2021, you distributed **1.7 million pounds of culturally specific food**, more than tripling the volume of 2019. And with supply chain issues impacting how we source good food, you still provided **two million more meals** to families than just two years ago. All of this is thanks to your generous support and continued commitment.

If the last two years have taught me anything, it's that "normal" doesn't exist. And that's okay. We will **keep looking ahead and leading the way with optimism.**

My wish for 2022 is to stay in the race, keep up the pace, and continue the pivotal work we started when the pandemic began, deepening our connection with communities who understand the importance of a just and equitable food system. **Thank you for your role in making that possible.**

With gratitude,

Sophia Lenarz-Coy
Executive Director



You Provided
8 MILLION MEALS
In 2021



Laborers Union collects food and funds



Members of the Laborers Union LiUNA, hosted their annual food and cash drive in December, collecting \$7,225 and 1,633 pounds of food. Coordinator Dwight Engen says, "We are so glad to help out every year. It is our honor to do that." The effort is supported by a team of volunteers, pictured here.



Centering Community Voice

One of our core values is "centering community voice" in our programming. We asked our team what centering on community voice looks like in action.

What is it and why is it important?

KaZoua Berry, Big River Farms Program Manager, explains it like this: "We try to elevate community voices because our programs and services are for the community. For us to be effective and to understand their needs, they have to have a seat at the table." It can be easy to think we understand the needs in our community, but without asking those we serve, programs end up with gaps and inequities.

"A lot of hunger relief organizations' work started as an act of charity," reflects Maria Bonilla, Agency Program Manager. "But that's not good enough. We really need to listen and gather input before we make decisions."

What does "Centering Community Voice" look like?

At The Food Group, it means hosting community conversations that create a safe space for people to be open. Through our partnership with Marnita's Table (marnitastable.org), our staff has learned "Intentional Social Interaction" facilitation methods that encourage conversation across difference.

Staff also engage with community groups through social media or in person to understand needs and learn where communication gaps exist. "We're growing relationships," explains Community Engagement Coordinator, Sean Hurdle, "It takes time and patience."



Youth from Organic Oneness (organiconeness.org), one of our Emerging Partners that facilitated a summer youth service program in South Minneapolis as part of our Food Shelf Leadership Development program. Projects included youth gardens and murals painted by youth.

After engaging in dialogue, the real challenge is to adjust our programming to respond to what we've heard. Here are some recent outcomes:

- In 2021, we established a hotline for people to call to track down the Twin Cities Mobile Market after hearing many community members didn't have Internet access, where the schedule was posted.
- We reduced the number of growing season classes for farmers after they expressed that they didn't have time to attend until after the harvest.
- We directed your donations to support our Emerging Partners after learning finances were their biggest barrier to meeting community need.

We will continue to listen and learn as needs change in the new year, and we look forward to reporting back on how we adapt and grow.

We appreciate our corporate, foundation and government partners. We received recent financial support from:



Thank you
to Luther Auto and the Mort
and Merle Kane Philanthropic
Fund for their Holiday
Campaign matching gifts.



Events

Tour & Volunteer Night

Please save the date and join us at our food warehouse in New Hope on **Tuesday, March 22, 2022, 5-7 pm**. We will provide a tour from 5-5:30 pm and then from 5:30-7 pm pack and sort food for the community. We are limiting volunteer groups to 15 people or less and require masks as part of our COVID safety protocols. Kindly RSVP to info@thefoodgroupmn.org or 763-450-3868.

Introducing: Virtual Coffee with Sophia

Thursday, March 3 • 8:30-9:00 am

While we continue to limit in-person visits to our office, you are invited to an informal conversation on Zoom with Executive Director, Sophia Lenarz-Coy.



It's an opportunity for you to hear more about your impact and bring your questions for informal dialogue. Please join us!

RSVP to info@thefoodgroupmn.org

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES



To sign up for volunteer events, go to thefoodgroupmn.org/volunteerhub.com

This winter and spring we need volunteer help to sort and pack food for the community. Sign up for a two-hour shift. Contact our Volunteer Team at volunteer@thefoodgroupmn.org or 763-450-3889 – with questions.



Scan code to learn more about volunteering at The Food Group.

Donor Stewardship is Top Priority

The Food Group has a 45-year track record of providing hunger relief, food access, farmer education and more. We steward your donations carefully for the greatest impact in our community.

Here are a few key measurements that illustrate our commitment to putting your support to work to fight hunger and nourish our community.

- In fiscal year 2020, less than 6% of our budget was devoted to administrative and fundraising expenses, exceeding charity standards.
- We are rated a 4-star Charity by Charity Navigator (charitynavigator.org) and we meet The Accountability Standards® of the Minnesota Charities Review Council (smartgivers.org).
- We partner with the Minnesota Department of Economic Opportunity to distribute free food for low-income families and seniors through the USDA program known as TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program) and are reviewed annually.
- Our annual reports, audits, and IRS 990 forms are posted on our website for easy public access at thefoodgroupmn.org/news/resources.

Thank you for your extraordinary support during these difficult times for our community. Our mission is more critical than ever.



Thank you for volunteering with us throughout all the seasons, as the

instability of the pandemic continues to impact the lives of children and families here in our community. By showing up, our community can rely on The Food Group as a consistent source of healthy, nutritious food! You help us to serve as a grounding force that people can count on, no matter the weather.