



# Network News

SPRING 2021



In collaboration with Mixed Blood Theater, volunteers distributed culturally connected produce to residents of the Cedar-Riverside area at free food pop-ups last summer. Families received fresh fruit and veggies, as well as a variety of proteins and jasmine rice.

## HOW YOU PROVIDE CREATIVE SOLUTIONS TO MEET EMERGENCY NEEDS

**Food has the power to heal.** That has never been more apparent than in this past year when we experienced the isolating effects of a world health crisis. We have had to find creative ways to get the right food to people so that they can maintain good health and well-being and know that they are seen and not forgotten.

The crises of COVID-19 and the 2020 uprising exposed longstanding disparities and inequities in the food system—including in the hunger relief network. With your support, team members at The Food Group tuned in even more closely to what was happening in the community and brought **collaborative and creative solutions to local hunger.**

### NEW PARTNERS WITH SHARED VALUES

“The intensity of the events of 2020 triggered a mutual aid movement in emergency hunger relief,” says Maria Bonilla, Agency Relations Specialist. We connected with a new group of hunger relief partners that shared our values of **access, equity and dignity** in providing food and caring for each other. Maria explains that many grass-roots associations started emergency food programs and broke down barriers that people were experiencing in accessing food. For example, they offered food sanctuaries or “free stores” where no application forms were required.

Your contributions provided groceries and meals to more than **forty new partner organizations** that lacked fundraising

capacity and did not have a budget to purchase food for their visitors. And those partnerships are continuing into 2021 thanks to you.

Equally important was the delivery of both **culturally connected and locally sourced foods**, including masa flour, fufu flour, wild rice, fresh vegetables, fruits and herbs, eggs, meat and poultry, and much more. “Sourcing and purchasing local foods creates lasting relationships, builds resilience, and boosts the local farm economy,” says Danielle Piraino, Produce Programs Coordinator.

### CREATIVE SOLUTIONS IN CHALLENGING TIMES

Another example of the win-win of collaborating was providing labor and transportation to harvest and glean food from the Dream of Wild Health farm and deliver it directly to the Gatherings Café where daily meals are prepared and delivered to Native American elders using culturally connected foods. You fueled this essential nutrition service for a vulnerable community with your generous gifts.

Maria and Danielle agree that they are beginning to see changes in the food system and in emergency hunger relief that make them even more hopeful about the future. Maria says, “We have stayed centered on our values and taken collective responsibility to care for each other and create a stronger, healthier community.”

# Your commitment creates a brighter future

A Message from the Executive Director



The arrival of spring holds so much promise—hope for a bountiful growing season, for more time outdoors, and for renewal. This spring marked the one-year anniversary of the pandemic and we reflected on its immeasurable impact. We missed time with loved ones and celebrating milestones. It has been hard, and we still face a long recovery and many unknowns about the future.

The long-term effect of COVID-19 is deeper and broader on those with lower income, and the recovery will be slower. Hit especially hard are communities of color, low-wage workers, those who lost jobs, seniors, and people with health issues.

**You continue to inspire me with your generosity in the face of all the challenges.** Your commitment to delivering nutritious, culturally connected foods to those who need them most is a sign of hope. You keep us moving forward with **equity, access, nutrition, and local foods** at the center of our work. You will see those values reflected in the stories in this newsletter.

While we gradually emerge from isolation, now is not the time to rest, thinking all will return to “normal.” Now is the time to instead **re-imagine a food system that works for everyone**. We cannot go back to how things were before March 2020.

For our whole community to recover and flourish, we need to build more equitable access to good foods, farmland, and capital. We must do better to ensure that hunger is no longer endemic and commit to ending the disparities in Minnesota that have gone on far too long.

Your continued support provides resources for new and emerging hunger relief partners and BIPOC farmers, supplies more culturally connected foods, relaunches the Twin Cities Mobile Market and a remodeled Fare For All and joins our voices to advocate for a more just and equitable food system.

**Together, we will provide food for today as we create change for tomorrow.**

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sophia".

Sophia Lenarz-Coy • Executive Director

## Your generous donations have provided

# 11.3 MILLION EMERGENCY MEALS to

265 Hunger relief partner organizations  
since March 2020.

## Thank you!



# Celebrating our amazing volunteers



Best Buy volunteers assembled nearly 600 food packs for Fare for All, our affordable grocery program, in under two hours. Amanda (pictured) was grateful to be back in the warehouse giving her time to the community.

April marked Volunteer Appreciation Week, and we have much to appreciate. We are gradually bringing back larger groups of volunteers to our warehouse to resume the larger scale packing events we hosted pre-pandemic. Thanks to everyone who has helped over the past year and watch for more opportunities this summer.



*With gratitude and best wishes, we bid a happy retirement to Dan Johnson, Volunteer Program Coordinator for the past five years. Thanks for your incredible dedication, Dan!*

## Local Fire Department Extinguishes Hunger

Joel Nelson, Assistant Fire Chief at West Metro Fire & Rescue in New Hope, has witnessed a huge surge of people coming to the fire department looking for food resources since COVID hit.

He has learned you don't know what someone is experiencing just by what you see. "These are people whose world has changed. Their income levels have changed. By helping them with some food maybe they can keep their homes and their automobiles until things turn around. Many of these people would have been donating to a food drive before the pandemic, and now they are receiving from them."

West Metro Fire & Rescue has partnered with The Food Group for ten years by hosting a food drive every March. Each year they coordinate with six local retailers to collect donations. Since 2011, they have collected and contributed **22,720 pounds of food and \$39,638** to local food shelves.

West Metro Fire & Rescue is grateful to every supporter who makes their drive a success, year after year. Thank you, West Metro Fire & Rescue, for your commitment to extinguishing hunger in our community!



Nelson (left) and members of the West Metro Fire & Rescue crew.

## Twin Cities Mobile Market update: Back on the road

In spring 2020, the Twin Cities Mobile Market had just come on board with The Food Group when the pandemic required a pivot from retail food to providing free emergency food to impacted neighborhoods. Your support supplied free food through contactless delivery to partner housing sites until we could safely relaunch the mobile market.

We are pleased to share that beginning this May, we have resumed a schedule of weekly visits to a group of apartment buildings in Minneapolis and St. Paul.

This market on a bus (pictured on envelope) conveniently brings affordable and fresh fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy, grains and other high-quality groceries directly into neighborhoods around St. Paul and Minneapolis that don't have easy access to full-service supermarkets, grocery stores or food shelves.

**To set up a Food and Cash Drive for your group or organization, contact Talia at 763-450-3869 or [tmiracle@thefoodgroupmn.org](mailto:tmiracle@thefoodgroupmn.org).**

## Partner spotlight

Thanks to these donors who are generously supporting our commitment to community-led emerging hunger relief partners.



MEDICA®



Blue Cross® and Blue Shield® of Minnesota and Blue Plus® are nonprofit independent members of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.

## In the news: recent media coverage

**The Food Group is featured in a Twin Cities PBS Original series, "At the Table,"** in partnership with the Cargill Foundation. The series addresses the social and systemic issues within our food environment. They examine questions like "Does your neighborhood affect your eating habits?" "How much money do farmers make?" and "What does hunger in the U.S. look like?" To view the series of short films, go to [tpt.org/at-the-table](http://tpt.org/at-the-table).

### Creating better access for BIPOC farmers

Naima Dhere, (pictured) member of The Food Group's board of directors, and executive director of the Somali American Farmers Association, shares her vision for helping farmers of color access land and run farms that are economically viable in, "Black farmers take root in Minnesota" in the April issue of Mpls St. Paul Magazine. Go to [mspmag.com/arts-and-culture/black-farmers-take-root-in-minnesota](http://mspmag.com/arts-and-culture/black-farmers-take-root-in-minnesota) to read the story. Naima participated in the Big River Farms training program for three years.



### 2020 Impact Report available online

The annual report to donors for fiscal year 2020 is now available online at [thefoodgroupmn.org/getinvolved/2020impactreport](http://thefoodgroupmn.org/getinvolved/2020impactreport). You can view a digital or pdf version of the report. The 2020 Impact Report shares stories of how you made a difference during 2020 through your financial support. If you have questions or comments about the report, contact Emily Eddy White at 763-450-3860 or [ewhite@thefoodgroupmn.org](mailto:ewhite@thefoodgroupmn.org).

ONE IN NINE



MINNESOTANS IS EXPERIENCING HUNGER.

Up from one in eleven in 2019.



### Thank you SpringForwardMN donors!

We are grateful to everyone who designated contributions to The Food Group during SpringForwardMN, May 1-11. You contributed a total of \$59,000 dollars, including \$24,100 in matching funds, providing more than 118,000 urgently needed meals.

Special thanks to our match donors:



### Ways To Give



The Food Group depends on your donations to relieve hunger in our community. Please see form for giving options.