

Nourishing Change

Fall 2024



Thank you for connecting people across Minnesota with fresh and nutrient-dense foods — while also supporting local emerging farmers and producers.

Celebrating Harvest Season With Local Food For Every Table

Your support of The Food Group is ensuring more people in our community can access healthy and culturally familiar foods — while supporting local emerging farmers and producers.

The Food Group's Local Food for Every Table program began when we saw a need to bridge the gap between food shelf and affordable grocery participants and local food producers to expand access to affordable, high-quality foods.

"The need for affordable nutrient-dense food was increasing, and we wanted to connect these two groups," said Snow Aukema, The Food Group's sourcing manager.

Local Food For Every Table uses charitable donations and combines them with The Food Group's institutional buying power to source locally grown produce and other items from farmers and producers located in the Midwest. Those foods are then distributed to our food shelf partners and via our affordable grocery programs, Fare For All and Twin Cities Mobile Market.

Your support of Local Foods For Every Table connects families in our community with more variety, more local produce, and more culturally connected products.

"Local sustainable organic produce is important to us. I know The Food Group's Big River Farms invests in farmers that identify as Black, Indigenous, and people of color. It's really community supporting community. And with that we see a difference in quality in the food we share with our neighbors."

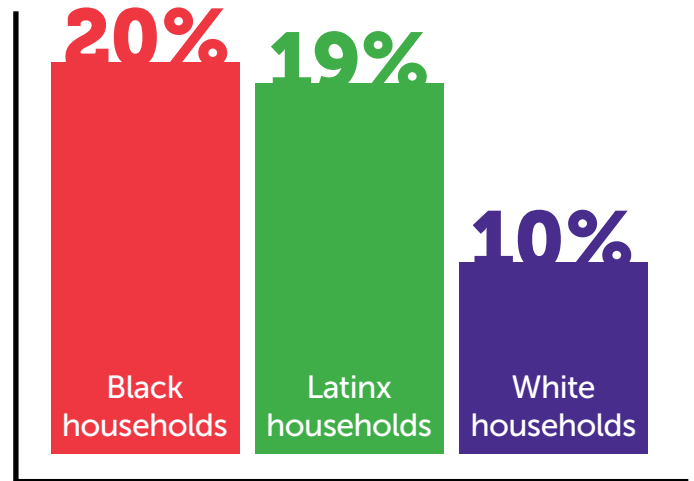
-Cassie, Director of Food Support, Neighborhood House

Continued on page 2

Did you know?

Over 20% of Black households and 19% of Latinx households report food insecurity, compared to 10% of White households.

The Food Group is focused on sharing culturally connected produce and other staples so more people in our community can eat local foods that are familiar and nutritious.



Examples of How Local Food For Every Table Works

Emerging farmers involved with our Big River Farms program can sell their produce to Local Food For Every Table, which we distribute to local families most in need. For the emerging farmers, it's very impactful. These are new businesses, and the partnership helps them make sales in their first year.

Fare For All, one of our affordable grocery programs, regularly includes locally grown and produced products in its monthly meat and produce packs. In September, they featured a special meat pack containing only locally produced items.



"Locally grown and culturally connected produce is a way to support a dignified experience for visitors of food shelves in our community."
-Snow Aukema, Sourcing Manager, The Food Group

A Passion for Creating A Climate-Smart Hunger Relief System



William (Bill) Wernz and Ann Hart Wernz were introduced to The Food Group in 1998 through Dorsey & Whitney LLP – where Bill spent 19 years of his career as an attorney before retiring. Reflecting on their 26 years of support, Bill shared, “We have supported The Food Group for many years because they serve such a great need so well.”

Bill and Ann share a passion for fighting local hunger and helping the environment – and recognize the link between the two causes. Bill has put that passion to work by helping The Food Group research the addition of solar panels to the roof of our warehouse - an ongoing project we continue to pursue.

When asked about their long-time and growing support of The Food Group, Bill shared, “We have increased our support in recent years because of The Food Group’s extraordinarily thoughtful approach to their mission. They support locally grown crops that are specially chosen to fit the diverse appetites of those they serve. They are actively exploring ways to fulfill their mission in a way that is climate-friendly and smart.”

Plan A Legacy That Fights Hunger & Nourishes Your Community

National Estate Planning Awareness Week is October 21-27 – a unique opportunity to have meaningful conversations with your family about estate planning and planned giving.

These conversations can be surprisingly uplifting and help you enter the holiday season with peace of mind and purpose. To help you break the estate-planning ice, here’s a checklist of questions you can discuss with your loved ones:

Guardianship: Who would you want to care for your children (or pets)?

Financial Management: Who would you want to help manage your finances?

Health Decisions: Does your medical power of attorney know your health concerns and wishes?

Readiness and Willingness: Are the chosen family members or friends aware of these roles and willing to take them on?

Legacy: What causes, like The Food Group, do you want to support through your legacy?

Planning Resource




Scan to learn more.

The Food Group’s trusted partner **FreeWill** offers a free online service to make creating your plan quick and straightforward. You can address key questions (like those above) and create a lasting legacy with The Food Group to fight hunger and nourish your community.



An Expanded State-Wide Impact

Earlier in 2024, Hunger Solutions — our trusted, longtime partner organization in the anti-hunger space — officially became part of The Food Group. This is an especially exciting time for us, because this deeper level of partnership comes with new, complementary hunger relief programs and advocacy experience for even greater impact in serving our community members experiencing hunger.



By joining forces, The Food Group now has an expanded statewide impact — serving every county in Minnesota and several in western Wisconsin — and can work more deeply on systems change related to food and hunger.

Fighting hunger. Nourishing our



Minnesota To Invest In Creating A More-Climate Smart Local Food System

The Food Group recently welcomed Governor Walz and several Democrat and Republican state leaders as they announced a \$200 million investment from the U.S. Environment Protection Agency to reduce climate pollution in Minnesota and improve our local food system. We look forward to seeing the impact this funding will have on building a more climate-smart anti-hunger system in Minnesota.

Get Involved

MN SNAP Challenge

Step Up to the Plate, Minnesota!

November 25th-November 27th

You are invited to experience living on the average Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefit amount of \$5.16 per day. Learn more about the challenges faced by low-income individuals and families in accessing nutritious food.

Register today!



Scan the QR code to learn more.

Did you know?

In 2023, a monthly average of 447,000 Minnesotans were enrolled in SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as food stamps).

Supporter Spotlight



A huge thank you to these partners for their investment in fighting hunger and nourishing our community!

Register To Vote

Now through election day (in-person voter registration is available in MN). Scan to learn more and find your polling station.



Volunteer

Sort and pack food, help at Big River Farms, rescue fresh produce from local farms, orchards, and farmers markets, and more.

Learn how you can help build a stronger food system! Visit thefoodgroupmn.org today, and go to Get Involved.

A Climate Smart Approach To Anti-Hunger Work

I love September - fresh school supplies (even as an adult), baking, harvesting the garden, and cooler weather. But lately in Minnesota, the cooler weather I associate with this time of year isn't guaranteed. We know there is a difference between climate and weather, but also, data shows that we can expect warmer autumns moving forward. For the farmers in our Big River Farms program, these climate-driven changes to typical weather patterns make an already difficult job even harder. From several years of drought, to a very wet spring this year, the emerging farmers we work with are dealing with unpredictable trends that drive down yields.



At The Food Group, we envision a more just and equitable food system where everyone has the healthy food they need to thrive. To achieve that, we need to be more climate-smart in our food systems approach. One of our goals is to minimize the climate footprint of our work, while simultaneously increasing equitable access to food and farmland.

With your help, we are implementing several climate-smart solutions:



Produce reclamation: With the help of dedicated volunteers and generous local farmers, we are harvesting high-quality, local produce from fields that would otherwise go to waste.



Sourcing from local farmers and producers: By increasing our local sourcing partnerships, we are shortening delivery routes and reducing pollution.



Cleaner transportation: We are looking for ways to upgrade our transportation fleet and are excited to have two propane-powered school buses for Twin Cities Mobile Market, thanks to the generosity of many individuals and corporate partners.



Advancing sustainable farming: We educate and support emerging farmers to ensure that sustainable farm practices, soil health, and water quality are considered.

As we look ahead, there is so much more we can do in partnership with you. This coming year, The Food Group will continue exploring climate-smart infrastructure, specifically looking at the feasibility of installing solar panels on the roof of our New Hope warehouse.

THANK YOU for supporting a values-based approach to getting good food where it is needed most in our community. I am grateful for your support.

Sophia Lenarz-Coy
Executive Director

WE MET THE MATCH, THANK YOU!

66,000 meals shared with families across our community

Wow! A huge thank you to our many supporters who helped us unlock a \$16,500 matching gift from our board of directors. Your support, combined with the generosity of our board of directors, helped us share double the number of meals – 66,000 in total – with families most in need across our community this fall.

The Food Group's AgriSolar Farm



Thank you for creating opportunities for emerging farmers to grow healthy food for our community using climate-smart approaches, like AgriSolar - the practice of farming under and around solar panels.



Upcoming Events

- ▶ **Tour The Food Group**
 Tuesday October 29th, 5pm
 Thursday November 14th, 10am
 Wednesday December 18th, 5pm
Visit The Food Group's New Hope warehouse for a behind-the-scenes tour to see your support in action.

- ▶ **Virtual event**
 Thursday December 12th, 8:30-9am
Learn more about the current state of hunger in Minnesota and The Food Group's anti-hunger work.

RSVP for the events by calling 763-450-3860 or emailing info@thefoodgroupmn.org

Growing Good Food That Is Good for Our Environment

The Food Group continues to be excited about the potential of our pilot project exploring AgriSolar - the practice of farming under and around solar panels. By leveraging AgriSolar, The Food Group is expanding land access for emerging farmers and increasing access to affordable, long-term land leases.

We are currently piloting this project at our AgriSolar Farm in Big Lake, MN - in partnership with US Solar - for annual vegetable production. This work has been recognized and received national attention, including Solar Farm of the Year at the 2024 Solar Farm Summit in Chicago.

One of our farmer partners, Lillian, is growing produce at The Food Group's AgriSolar Farm. Lillian recently shared,

“*I grew up in Kenya, where farming was a way of life for my family. From a young age, I learned the art of farming from my parents, which ignited my passion for growing food. After moving to America, I started gardening in a community garden, and over time, I expanded into larger-scale farming. I now farm at The Food Group's AgriSolar Farm in Big Lake and in Lino Lakes, where I grow crops between the solar panels. I grow organic vegetables such as carrots, kale, and collard greens. I take pride in selling my fresh produce directly to my local community. Farming is not only my livelihood but also my passion—it connects me to nature and allows me to give back to the community by providing healthy, organic food.”*

The Food Group sees great potential for dual land use of solar and agriculture to support emerging farmers, create a more climate-smart local food system, and deepen our impact.



SCAN ME

Read a recent story on our AgriSolar work in the Sahar Journal.