



COVID-19 RESPONSE

Where We Stand
One Year Later

MARCH 2021



A LETTER FROM OUR CEO

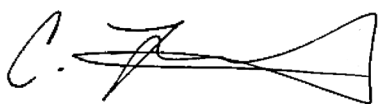
Though last year clearly included hardship and loss, there was light. Anguish was met with activation, and heartache was buoyed with hope. While COVID-19 has proven to be an enduring crisis that is unprecedented in our lifetimes, what has also been demonstrated—with the kind of force and fortitude that changes lives—is the collective empathy and generosity of people in our country to help their neighbors when they need it most.

Before the pandemic, every community in the U.S. was home to people facing food insecurity, and unfortunately that continues to be true. Moreover, since March 2020, millions more people have struggled to put food on the table. We estimate that approximately 42 million people—one in eight individuals in America—could experience food insecurity in 2021 due to the ongoing economic fallout from COVID-19.

Heeding the call to make sure families in the U.S. have equitable access to the nourishment they need, more than 1 million people, filled with care and concern like you, have responded since March 13, 2020, and made a gift to help the Feeding America network of food banks provide food to families. Together, with your support, the network distributed more than 6 billion meals to neighbors facing hunger last year.

We have reason to be proud of what we've accomplished together. And, we are well positioned to do more to address the significant need that continues—so we're accelerating our work to address disparities and advance solutions to reach people and communities that have been inordinately impacted by food insecurity, including rural communities and communities of color. We know the hunger crisis poses great challenges but with your continued support, it is solvable. Every gift—each a ray of light—works together to help neighbors in need. The impact of the pandemic will be long-lasting but with your partnership, we can achieve an America where no one is hungry.

Your partner in the mission to fight hunger,



Claire Babineaux-Fontenot
Chief Executive Officer
Feeding America



THE FEEDING AMERICA NETWORK HAS:



Provided
6.1 billion meals
in 2020



Increased food
distribution by
more than 53%
from April through December 2020
versus the prior year



Distributed
530 million meals
per month March through
December 2020 compared to
363 million meals the same period
the prior year

As volunteers loaded food boxes into a car at a Second Harvest Food Bank of Central Florida (Orlando, FL) drive-thru distribution, a young boy said, **“Dad, are we going to eat today?”** The man began to cry and simply said, “Yes,” telling the volunteers his family had not eaten in three days.



THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HUNGER IN THE U.S.

Due to the ongoing economic fallout from the pandemic, we estimate **1 in 8 people could experience food insecurity in 2021.**

13 million children could face food insecurity in 2021.

Network food banks and partner agencies have become accustomed to the new level of increased demand: an average increase of over **55% more people throughout the pandemic compared to pre-pandemic.**

Food banks are innovating to meet unprecedented need with new distribution and outreach models, but significant challenges remain.



I'm sure everyone says this, but I never thought it would be me needing help. I used to donate to food pantries ... I hope someday I can pay it forward again.

Matt, a neighbor served by Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona (Tucson, AZ)

AN ENDURING CRISIS WITHIN A CRISIS

We've all seen the sobering images of the miles-long lines of cars at drive-thru food distributions. At some sites, people slept in their vehicles overnight to ensure they would return home with food for their families. During the first months of the pandemic, approximately 4 in 10 people were seeking charitable food assistance for the first time—including past Feeding America donors and network food bank volunteers.

Millions more individuals are now facing hunger, in addition to the 35 million people who were experiencing food insecurity before the COVID-19 crisis began. The Feeding America network continues to grapple with and seek solutions to the harsh truth that food insecurity will not vanish once the economy rebounds. After the Great Recession, it took about 10 years for food insecurity to return to pre-recession levels.

Due to the pandemic, the levels are once again elevated. Though the unemployment rate has come down from its April 2020 high, the number of initial claims for unemployment benefits has continued to hover below one million per week, according to the Department of Labor. For millions of people we serve, it will be a long road to achieving food security and financial stability—as that was not their reality even before the pandemic.



Generous contributions to Feeding America's COVID-19 Response Fund have enabled more than \$326 million* in direct support to be awarded** to network members.*** Through thousands of local community partnerships nationwide, including food pantries and meal programs, grantees report:

90% distributed food boxes at drive-thru or walk-up mobile pantries

68% offered expanded food pantry hours and distributions

64% provided home food delivery

*Including cash and food/other. **Through Feb. 23, 2021.

***Including food banks, distribution organizations and state associations.



This was a nightmare that no one ever imagined we would have to confront in our lifetime. However, there was no time for pity. We had to get to work to helping families.

Montgomery Area Food Bank (Montgomery, AL)

THE IMPACT OF YOUR GENEROSITY

So much remains uncertain for the months and years to come, but one thing we know wholeheartedly: **Our mission to end hunger in the U.S. cannot be achieved without your support.** It was the generosity and care of people like you that lifted Feeding America through the most challenging times at the onset of the pandemic.

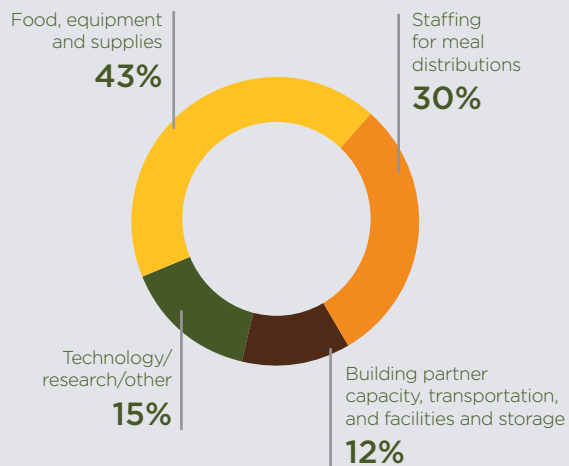
The devastating ripple effect of the virus exacerbated the ongoing hunger crisis in America, leaving millions more neighbors in need of help to feed their families. All this, just as every member food bank was collectively enduring a perfect storm due to COVID-19: critical gaps in funding, food, volunteers and distribution.

Feeding America established the COVID-19 Response Fund on March 13, 2020—48 hours after the World Health Organization declared coronavirus a pandemic. Every dollar raised through the fund helps the Feeding America network of 200 food banks and 60,000 food pantries and meal programs provide equitable food access and reach people disproportionately affected by the pandemic. As of Feb. 23, 2021, more than \$326 million in grants has been provided to the food bank network to support COVID-19 response efforts. This includes \$263 million in cash funding and \$63 million

of additional direct support such as food, transportation and personal protection equipment.

Every food bank in the Feeding America network has remarkable stories of gratitude, hope and resilience—made possible because of donors like you. Your gift helped food banks—trusted institutions embedded in their communities—urgently respond to the needs of their neighbors by reinventing operating models, including touchless drive-thru distributions, no- or low-contact operations and scheduled online pick-ups to meet the surge in demand. **Many members launched traveling/mobile pantries to meet people where they are and address transportation challenges facing people in need.** A woman named Maria made four separate trips in one day to a Houston Food Bank (Houston, TX) mobile market to pick up food for four families in her apartment complex.

HOW YOUR SUPPORT HELPED FOOD BANKS RESPOND



In Massachusetts, where Feeding America’s research projected the highest rate of food insecurity in 2020 for both overall individuals and children, The Greater Boston Food Bank (Boston, MA) helped organizations set up new mobile markets, including at a local YMCA, to get food to more people like Keith, who lost his job at the start of the pandemic. A self-employed single dad, Keith said he suddenly had to worry how he was going to pay his bills and put food on the table for himself and his 7-year-old son: “This food saves me so much money at the grocery store and it helps pay bills. The bills don’t stop, so this little bit helps. A couple meals go a long way.”

Thanks to COVID-19 response funding, many member food banks have invested in the long-term success of their partner networks, including increases in delivery, warehouse operations, and critical refrigeration and cold-capacity storage. Ozarks Food Harvest (Springfield, MO) awarded walk-in freezers and coolers to eight partner agencies, allowing them to increase the amount of frozen food they can order and store for neighbors like Shelly, who said, “Our family greatly benefits from the frozen meat that is made available and stored in the walk-in freezer. It really helps with our food budget and being able to use funds for more fresh produce.”



Food banks also helped fill the gap when some agencies were forced to close or suspend

distributions due to COVID-19-related safety concerns or significant declines in volunteers following shelter-in-place-orders. For example, City Harvest (New York, NY) partnered to open 32 emergency food distribution sites in high-need neighborhoods, particularly where community food programs shut down due to the pandemic. More than 16 million pounds of food have been distributed at the locations.

Some members hired temporary staff, who have proven so crucial to the organizations’ COVID-19 response that they will become permanent hires in the next fiscal year. To bridge the loss of its usual volunteers, Heaven’s Table Food Shelf, a partner agency of Second Harvest Heartland (Brooklyn Park, MN) recruited a new volunteer workforce—people who had been laid off—to launch a menu-style ordering system to safely serve people while they waited in their cars. When neighbors drive up, an order form is placed on their windshield, and each family selects what food best meets its needs, diets and tastes. The forms are fulfilled by volunteers stationed inside the food pantry and then the food is rolled out on carts to load into the neighbor’s vehicle.



I never dreamed we could be that family that was struggling ... The coronavirus pandemic is a reminder that as humans, we all need love, and as the human race, we are all in this together.

A neighbor served by Food of Central & Eastern North Carolina (Raleigh, NC)

In August, North Country Food Bank, Inc. (East Grand Forks, MN) held a mobile food distribution in a school parking lot. **Several children leaving school took notice and rode their bikes over to join the line. They said their families needed food and asked if they could have a box.** A volunteer explained that each box weighed 35 pounds and he wasn't sure if the children would be able to get the boxes home on their bikes. When a teacher who was volunteering saw this, she loaded the kids and their food boxes into her SUV. After driving the students to their homes to drop off the food, she then returned the children back to school so they could retrieve their bikes. "Thank you," said one of the boys as he was leaving. **"This food helps more than you know."**

Your help made it possible for food banks to rapidly innovate and establish new relationships, as they worked to ensure populations at high risk of hunger, including seniors, could remain safely at home and still receive the nourishment they need. Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma (Oklahoma City, OK) partnered with Oklahoma City's public transportation network to deliver meals to homebound seniors across the metro area. One woman over the age of 70, said she and her husband, who have been isolating in their rural home, received a food box on their porch and it was much needed. A staff member followed up with her by phone and was able to assist her in submitting a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) application to help provide additional food for the couple.

Food banks made programmatic shifts due to COVID-19, including an increased focus on online outreach and remote assistance. Roadrunner Food Bank (Albuquerque, NM) developed a pilot program to train volunteers to help respond to the increased volume of calls from people seeking food and to provide neighbors with SNAP application assistance, right from their own home. The Feeding America network enabled 164 million SNAP meals from April to December 2020 through SNAP application assistance efforts.

Food banks still face incredible need for food in light of supply chain disruptions and operational challenges.

However, members continue to demonstrate resolve and resourcefulness, purchasing food to replenish rapidly depleting inventories, tapping into their networks of new and existing food donors and suppliers to secure food, and utilizing federal resources that provide additional food to network food banks.

For network members like Virginia Peninsula Foodbank (Hampton, VA), purchasing food was imperative, as it meant meals could be pre-packed in emergency food boxes and reach people like one service member, who said he'd been waiting on his first military check and "living off of cookies and water for two days" before he learned of the food bank.



Photo credit: Robin F. Pendergrast

To respond to the increased need, the network found new ways to source more food. Feeding Kentucky (Frankfort, KY), a partner state association, sourced food produced by Kentucky farmers, which had the dual benefit of increasing access to nourishing food for the people they serve while supporting Kentucky producers who had excess product as a result of the pandemic.

Increased delivery volumes of purchased and procured food presented new operational challenges, as food banks needed to immediately store and transport the items. Capital Area Food Bank (Washington, D.C.) formed a new partnership with a hotel chain that provided extra storage at one of its local properties to stage some of the 771 truckloads of food the food bank has purchased since April—almost 26 times the amount they purchased the whole year before.



I want my kids to know that we will do anything for them. I don't want them to see us struggling. This helps a lot.

Richelle, a neighbor served by Care and Share Food Bank (Colorado Springs, CO)



Photo credit: Lori Cannava



PROVIDING FOOD EQUITY AND ACCESS

COVID-19 has highlighted and exacerbated economic and health disparities in the U.S.—leading to an overall increase in food insecurity. The Feeding America network is dedicated to providing food to people who need it, with a focus on equitable access for people and populations disproportionately impacted by hunger, including Black households nationwide and rural communities in the South. To advance this work, your continued partnership is imperative.

Thanks to your generosity throughout the pandemic, the network has been able to innovate and bolster food access, with focused attention on individuals who have been historically disadvantaged and/or adversely affected by racial, ethnic and class inequities.

For example, when the pandemic began, Wichita Falls Area Food Bank (Wichita Falls, TX) had just three weeks of food left on its shelves. With the help of donors like you, the food bank was able to add mobile pantry sites in rural areas that were previously underserved due to resource and transportation constraints. On the first day at one of the new sites, cars lined up for half a mile, and a staff member shared: “One thing we were surprised by is how many people came on foot and on bicycles, showing us that transportation is an issue for folks living in this food desert.”

Your support helped food banks improve infrastructures of partner agencies so that more food could be stored and distributed to underserved communities. Lowcountry Food Bank (Charleston, SC) invested in

seven partner agencies and its regional food center—helping to resolve the “extremely inadequate” capacity to deliver nourishing food to high-need areas, including Black communities. “[We are] now able to deliver large quantities of healthy food including perishable food items to these agencies to serve more people,” said a food bank staff member.

Montana Food Bank Network (Missoula, MT) provided organizations already serving Native American communities across the state—Flathead Food Bank and Family Service—with tools to increase capacity and service. Funds helped purchase additional storage space for Flathead Food Bank, enabling it to respond quickly when the Blackfeet Nation implemented a shelter-in-place order for its residents with only a 48-hour notice. Flathead Food Bank delivered over 42 pallets of food and toiletry supplies before the order started, ensuring that reservation residents would have access to enough food and supplies during the shelter-in-place order. Family Service developed a new outreach program



to connect with both Native American and rural communities, thanks to increased staffing and transportation capacity provided by grant funds.

Golden Harvest Food Bank (Augusta, GA) purchased refrigerated and frozen storage to help its partner agencies distribute more perishable and frozen product. In 22 of the 25 counties served by the food bank, more than 25% of the Black community faces poverty—and in some counties, the rate is even higher. The food bank said: “Since these kinds of foods are in highest demand among the people we serve, this investment will help us to provide a dramatically improved level of service throughout our service territory. This is especially important as we consider the long-term effects of the pandemic and the economic dislocations resulting from quarantine.”

Many food banks reached out to local faith-based and community groups to expand mobile distributions and pop-up pantries to reach more people disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

Maryland Food Bank (Baltimore, MD) formed a partnership with a local church, whose congregation and community largely identify as Latino. Together, they served people like Wilfredo, who was evicted from his house and living on the street. Thanks to a friend, he learned of the Back Up Boxes of food distributed by the church. The food pantry coordinator shared: “Wilfredo came to pick up food and requested for us to pray for his situation. We gave him clothing, assisted on a place for him to stay with his wife, and he is now working. Thanks to the food drive event, he now has hope.”

Through collaboration with community organizations, food banks have also been able to glean better insight into culturally appropriate foods and other ways to better serve people in need.

Blue Ridge Area Food Bank (Verona, VA) created “How to Find Food” documents. Working with immigrant-focused community organizations, the food bank identified what content non-English speakers needed to access food assistance from its network, including information on where pantries are located, who can get help and the food typically available. The food bank hired translators to interpret the documents into 10 languages: Spanish, Pashto, Dari/Farsi, Russian, Vietnamese, Arabic, Swahili, Mandarin, French and English.

Your support enabled food banks to regrant funds to help their respective networks boost operations to provide more meals to neighbors in need. United Food Bank (Mesa, AZ) regranted funds to help enhance tribal partners’ hunger-relief work, including the Nalwoodi Denzhone Community, which serves the San Carlos Apache Indian Reservation. The food bank also engaged tribal farmers and food producers to build native self-sufficiency and create new markets for native agriculture. For agencies on tribal lands that were closed, the food bank worked with tribal leadership to hold distributions, serving more than 2,400 households.

When schools across the country closed due to the pandemic, millions of children who normally eat free or reduced-price meals at school no longer had access to that nutritious food. Within 24 hours of school closures, Food Bank of Northern Nevada (Sparks, NV), in partnership with a local school district, devised a new



plan to distribute meals to children in a grab-and-go format. The food bank served over 534,000 meals for children March 17 through June 12—a 55% increase in meals served compared to a normal school year—and helped people like Angelica, a single mom of two. During the shutdown, she was not receiving any income. She is back to work, but now her income is less, and she is trying to catch up on bills. She said the school pantries and drive-thru distributions have given her “hope in knowing” she will have food for her kids.

With seniors at high risk of contracting COVID-19, food banks have been diligent in finding innovative ways to make sure they safely receive the food they need.

Treasure Coast Food Bank (Fort Pierce, FL) delivers groceries to people like Eleanora, who lives in a senior living community where many residents are on limited incomes and otherwise would forgo nutritious food for a large portion of the month without the food bank’s visits. “After they come, I can walk through the halls and smell

all kinds of cooking,” Eleanora said. “People celebrate. We are very grateful that you come and take care of us.”

For many rural communities, accessibility was a longstanding obstacle for food banks. **With your support, network members were able to buy new, dependable trucks to replace aging vehicles and expand outreach to people in rural areas.** For East Texas Food Bank (Tyler, TX), new vehicles helped provide millions of meals to people like Beth, a single mom with a 4-year-old son and 2-year-old daughter, who said: “Providing enough food for them every day is a struggle. When the stay-at-home orders began due to coronavirus, it made getting food even more difficult for us. The store was often out of supplies, and even if they had everything, I couldn’t always afford what we needed with rising prices ... The food boxes we receive here have been very important to us.”



Do you know what it’s like to think about food all the time? Now, imagine my babies. They shouldn’t have to feel that pain in their tummy because their mom doesn’t have a job. There is no reason in this cruel world for any child to suffer from hunger. And you—you and your team are helping stop that. If I could hug you, I would.

A mother, served at a Redwood Empire Food Bank (Santa Rosa, CA) food distribution school site



Photo credit: Robin F. Pendergrast



ADVOCATING FOR LEGISLATIVE HUNGER-RELIEF ACTION

While the COVID-19 health crisis will one day wane, the fallout from the pandemic will bear many long-lasting repercussions, including food insecurity. **Federal government action is essential in the fight against hunger.**

SNAP benefits are the most efficient and effective way the federal government can respond to the food insecurity crisis; for every one meal provided by the Feeding America food bank network, SNAP provides nine. After taking office Jan. 20, 2021, President Biden signed an executive order to increase Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) benefits for low-income households with children by 15%—translating to an additional \$100 every two months for a family with three children. President Biden is also calling on the Department of Agriculture (USDA), which oversees the SNAP program, to allow states to increase benefits to individuals.

On Jan. 29, 2021, USDA Food and Nutrition Service released new P-EBT guidance that will allow states to provide P-EBT benefits to children in childcare settings and make it easier for states to establish a program for this school year that helps struggling families.

In December, Congress passed legislation that included a 15% increase in SNAP benefits through the end of June 2021. While we strongly support the legislation's increase in benefits, we remain concerned that the economic crisis and increased need will continue beyond June.

In March 2020, states were provided the flexibility to provide extra emergency SNAP food benefits to

neighbors in need in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. Unfortunately, the law was interpreted to exclude nearly 40% of SNAP households with the lowest incomes who already received the maximum benefit. The recently signed executive order provides a pathway to allow states to increase SNAP benefits delivered through emergency allotments. It also works toward revising the Thrifty Food Plan—the basis for determining SNAP benefits—to better factor in the economic realities that families in need must navigate today when accessing their next meal.

While these are positive steps toward providing hunger relief for millions of people, these new measures will take time to implement, making it even more imperative to include immediate investments in food assistance in upcoming legislation and through food purchases to ensure that the Feeding America food bank network can continue to meet the sustained demand.

PICTURED ABOVE: On the Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service in January, President Biden volunteered at a food-packing event hosted by Feeding America network member **Philabundance** (Philadelphia, PA), marking the president's commitment to making hunger a top priority for his administration.



THE ROAD AHEAD

As the vaccine rollout continues, the labor market will improve and more economic opportunities will emerge. However, economic recovery will not equate to overnight food security for all. Without the help of compassionate donors like you, families will be forced to make difficult choices, such as paying rent or buying groceries. Your continued support is vital to helping the Feeding America network meet the persistent need.

In spring 2020, Feeding America conducted a COVID-19 impact assessment to understand the pandemic's impact on the network. We used the results to identify five priorities to advance positive outcomes for the people we serve.

WE ARE FOCUSED ON:

- Sourcing more nutritious food, tapping new supply sources, to ensure food banks have enough food
- Accelerating community impact by advancing equity initiatives that build network capacity to equitably distribute food
- Transforming how we meet our neighbors' needs by increasing their ability to access the food they need and offering pathways to financial stability
- Strengthening federal nutrition programs by enhancing partnership with and the role of federal and state governments in increasing food security
- Maximizing this moment of heightened attention on our nation's hunger crisis to rally even more people to join us in the fight to end hunger

To serve everyone in need, we must grow and implement new strategies that ensure equitable access to food and resources. With the help of partners like you, we will strengthen the capabilities and capacities of the network. For example, Feeding America is providing

support to help the network throughout the pandemic and beyond. In January, we launched CHARGE 2021, a six-month initiative to provide member food bank leadership teams with intensive and targeted tools, resources, information and spaces to connect so they can make critical decisions about how to navigate the ongoing pandemic and plan for the future of their organizations. As part of the initiative, last April, 150 member food banks received direct fundraising support, including real-time counsel and follow-up resources tailored to the needs of each food bank. The knowledge gleaned from those conversations helped create a new network resource, *Fundraising in Times of Crisis Playbook*. Monthly webinars were established to support members' food-sourcing efforts to help them identify and efficiently maximize local donation programs. Additionally, as new product sourcers came on board across the network, they received one-on-one support to help them work with donors under COVID-19 restrictions.



The acute level of food insecurity our neighbors are experiencing makes it more important than ever to provide these transformative solutions to end hunger.

Inter-Faith Food Shuttle (Raleigh, NC)



YOUR SUPPORT IS CRUCIAL

Since the onset of the pandemic, and despite complex challenges and extraordinary demands, the Feeding America network has responded with resilience, innovation and, most of all, determination to help provide more than 6 billion meals to neighbors in need in 2020. Your support was—and urgently remains—crucial to help member food banks respond to the overwhelming demand.

While COVID-19 has shone a brighter light on the issue of hunger in the U.S. than ever before, our work is far from over. That's why we're accelerating our efforts to address disparities and advance solutions that focus inordinately on people most impacted by food insecurity. As the past year has reinforced, when we stand together, tremendous change can abound as we work to ensure all of our neighbors have the food they need.



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Our systems, finances and people have been challenged in ways we had never considered ... What we've learned, or perhaps simply been reminded of, is that we belong to a community of committed individuals and nimble organizations that can move mountains when called upon.

Second Harvest Foodbank of Southern Wisconsin (Madison, WI) partner agency,
Badger Prairie Needs Network



So many people need these distributions as a lifeline. The stories of fear and uncertainty are many. The quest for relief drives families to the distributions. Once there, many have found more than food. Both those giving and those receiving leave with the greatest gift—hope.

Second Harvest Food Bank of North Central Ohio (Lorain, OH)