

word *of* mouth

Spring 2023

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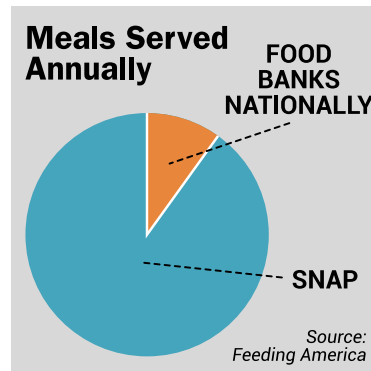


The Evolution of Food Banking

Spring greetings friends!

If you didn't already know it, The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts is one of 200 food banks across the country that are members of Feeding America – the national network of food banks – based in Chicago and Washington, DC. We're lucky to be a part of this network. It's the most impactful national network on hunger and food (in)security both in terms of direct food assistance and on the federal policy front. As a member, last year we received almost \$4.3 million, mainly in donated food and cash grants from national food and fund donors.

That said, The Food Bank and Feeding America acknowledge our critical role to support households facing food insecurity on any given day, week or month is dwarfed by the federal government's impact through one single program alone: the Supplemental Nutrition Food Assistance Program (SNAP). **For every meal all 200 food banks provide annually – over four billion – the federal SNAP program provides 9 meals.**



In the 18 years I've been at The Food Bank, I've witnessed food banks evolve significantly in two broad ways. First, 85% of food banks now engage in SNAP outreach and enrollment assistance. Eighteen years ago, only a handful of food banks carried it out. The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts started SNAP assistance in 2009 with an AmeriCorps*VISTA volunteer. Today, we have four full-time staff who assist more than 1,000 individuals annually to enroll in SNAP, which provides a monthly cash benefit to purchase food at food retailers. Strict income-eligibility requirements restrict SNAP to individuals who need it or risk hunger.

Last year, about 41 million individuals received SNAP – down from the historic high of 47 million in 2013 at the tail end of the Great Recession. A recent report* from the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, which funds and oversees SNAP, summarizes SNAP household characteristics:

- **SNAP targets those in greatest need.** 86% of all SNAP benefits go to households that include a child, elderly person, or person with disabilities. About 92% of all SNAP benefits go to households with income at or below the federal poverty line.

- **SNAP recipients represent different races and/or ethnicities.** White: 37% percent; African American: 26%; Hispanic: 16%; Asian: 3%; and Native American: about 2%. (About 16% of participants are categorized as "race unknown.")
- **Many SNAP households have earned income.** Almost one-third of SNAP households have earned income, though only 20% of households have gross monthly income above the federal poverty line. The average SNAP household's monthly gross income is \$872 and net income is \$398.
- **The vast majority of SNAP households do not receive cash welfare benefits.** Only 4% of all SNAP households, and only 10% of SNAP households with children, receive benefits through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.

The second broad way food banks have evolved is that many more now believe our shared mission should be to end hunger, not simply feed hunger. The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts has long believed this and incorporated it into our mission and strategies.

Thanks to your support, we are making progress on both fronts!

In partnership,

Andrew Morehouse
Executive Director, The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts

word of mouth



The Food Bank
of Western Massachusetts

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* USDA Characteristics of SNAP Households: bit.ly/44gQUEo

New Opportunities: Cultivating for Community Initiative

Now entering its third year, the second Food Bank Farm's newly named **Cultivating for Community** regenerative farming and education initiative is prepping for an exciting and innovative growing season. This 1-acre, 130-bed section of the larger farm saw much success last year, bringing in 304 volunteers to assist in growing 4,252 pounds of organic vegetables (the equivalent of 3,543 meals) that were distributed to the Amherst Survival Center and the First Baptist Church in Amherst. Educational programming was developed, a drip irrigation system was installed, and no-till regenerative farming methods preserved the dark, nutrient-rich soil that the Connecticut River Valley is known for.

Building on last year's highly successful Family Farm Days, The Food Bank is launching a new season of community engagement at Cultivating for Community. Volunteers of all ages will learn about soil management, plant parts and processes, weather and climate, the local farm economy, and food (in)security.

Volunteer opportunities for both groups and individuals have also been expanded to allow more people to participate in growing, maintaining, and harvesting organic vegetables. Additionally, new weekend volunteer opportunities have been scheduled throughout the growing season, including a successful Earth Day clean up in April, and future days for Picnic Table building, and Growing Pollinator gardens. The Food Bank will grow a variety of culturally-relevant vegetables, many of which have been specifically requested by community members. These include cilantro,

habanero peppers, guajillo peppers, jalapeños, okra, sweet potatoes, collards, and more. The farm team will also utilize pollinator gardens and companion planting to encourage helpful insects to thrive on the plot while discouraging pests. One of these techniques is the "Three Sisters" method developed by northeastern indigenous tribes, where corn, beans, and squash are grown together on the same plot. Doing so allows the beans to climb vertically on cornstalks, while the squash plants provide groundcover to preserve soil moisture and deter pests.

Informational signs are also being installed to explain the history of the farm and the conservation land surrounding it, including the recognition of the area's original indigenous caretakers — the Nipmuc and Pocumtuc people. In partnership with the Kestrel Land Trust, public walking trails connect the Food Bank Farm with the Podick-Szala-Cole conservation areas in Amherst. Cultivating for Community also seeks to promote food justice in access to both healthy food and farmland. Systemic racism and economic inequality are prominent causes of food insecurity in the United States. Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) have been systematically excluded from access to farmland and other agricultural resources. The Food Bank's vision for its second farm is to partner with emerging BIPOC farmers and BIPOC-led community organizations to support them to establish viable commercial farm businesses and become owner-operators of their own farms.

For more information about Cultivating for Community and our two Food Bank Farms, check out our website in the [Get Involved](#) and [Learn More](#) sections.

Amanda Reynolds





Gianna Bevilacqua



Lillian Baulding

Moving To Meet the Needs of Our Community

We are on track to move into our new, larger, and greener food distribution center and headquarters in Chicopee this September. Hampden County is the most strategic location available to meet the needs of all the rural, suburban, and urban communities of Western Massachusetts. We are grateful for the support of our capital campaign donors, whose generosity and shared commitment to ending hunger in Western Massachusetts makes this move possible.

Food for Thought

We Are Grateful for Our Amazing Volunteers!

April was National Volunteer Month. We recognize the tireless daily work of our volunteers, from their assistance at events and on Cultivating for Community, to helping in the warehouse, office, and with our partners across Western Massachusetts.

"Their dedication and positive energy bring so much joy to our work. Thank you for your impact at The Food Bank and on our community. We couldn't do our work without you!" – Alex Santiago, Volunteer Coordinator



Gianna Bevilacqua

Linda LeVitre

"I have been a volunteer at The Food Bank for over 10 years and I enjoy the diverse group of people I volunteer with. I also enjoy the flexibility of schedule and the variety of tasks."

Linda Milewski

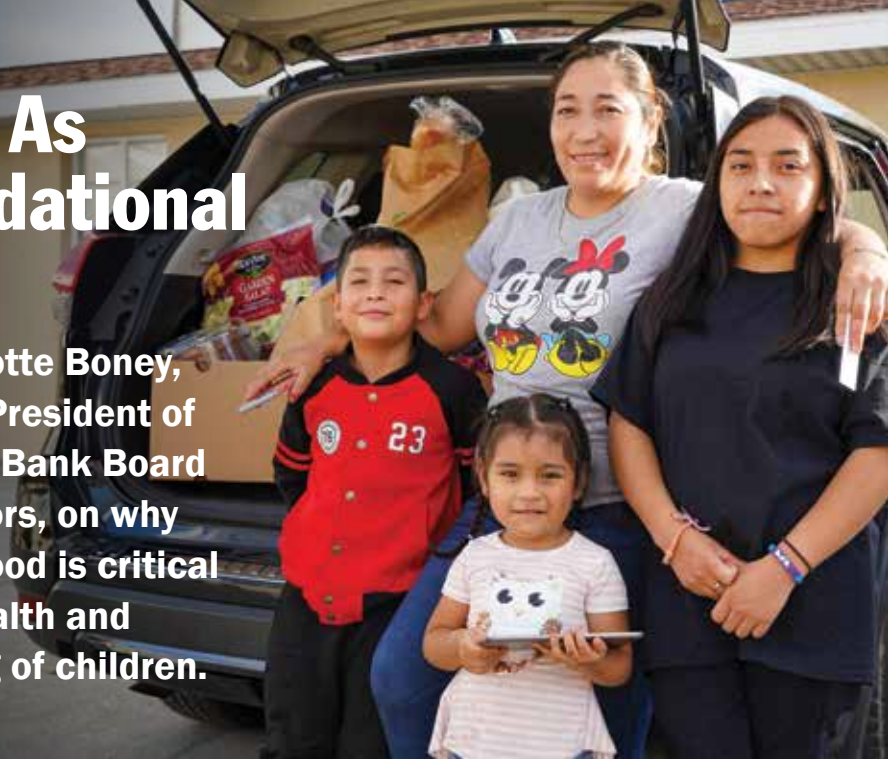
"I have volunteered at The Food Bank for over 21 years! To volunteer is very important to me, especially feeding those in need. Remember, no one should go hungry or feel they have to go without food."



Gianna Bevilacqua

Food As Foundational Care

Dr. Charlotte Boney, 1st Vice President of The Food Bank Board of Directors, on why healthy food is critical to the health and wellbeing of children.



Western Massachusetts has the highest rate of childhood poverty in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. At 17%, this measure, which is itself heartbreakingly high, also fails to count thousands of families who are technically above the poverty line, but still struggle to consistently put food on the table. In her work as the Director of Pediatrics for the Baystate Health network, Dr. Boney posits that closer to 25% of kids walking in the door of her offices face food insecurity or hunger, emphasizing, "The biggest misconception is that it's not that common, when the reality is it's more common than people think."

The ending of life-changing poverty-reduction benefits such as monthly Child Tax Credit payments and Pandemic SNAP benefits is especially disheartening, leaving many families to face the rising tide of food, fuel, and housing costs. School summer vacation is also fast approaching — a time when The Food Bank and its local partners in our region's food assistance network typically see a steep rise in demand due to the summer closure of free school breakfast and lunch programs. Many school districts have some level of participation in a Summer Eats program, which extends free school meals beyond the academic year, but children must eat these meals at specific sites at specific times—most of which are during a parent's workday.

Dr. Boney knows all too well how missing meals with any amount of regularity can cause extensive physical and psychological harm. In addition to the more obvious effects of poor nutrition and a decreased ability to concentrate, medical research in recent decades has revealed how stress caused by the experience of hunger and food insecurity has devastating medical effects of its own.

"Food has everything to do not only with kids' growth and development and their risk for chronic diseases, but also the stress on the family and

their parents — a kid's ability to learn, it touches everything."

At Baystate, Dr. Boney oversaw the expansion of their "food closet" into a full food pantry—member of The Food Bank, which is immensely popular with families who seek services at their clinics as well as the surrounding neighborhood. Ensuring there is enough healthy food available at these food pantries to meet the uptick in need is one of The Food Bank's priorities for the summer, as well as encouraging policymakers to support legislation that would help alleviate childhood hunger, such as An Act Relative to Universal School Meals and The Act to Lift Kids Out of Deep Poverty, among others.



Dr. Charlotte Boney

The health of our children is critical for both their immediate and future health. This is precisely why Dr. Boney has been a lifelong supporter of food banks from the beginning of her career in Rhode Island to today, affirming, "Food is medicine, and you really can't support children and families without food, it's that simple."

Thank You!

The following businesses, organizations and foundations made a gift of \$1,000 or more between January 1 - March 31, 2023.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 4Paws 4Wheels 4Hunger | New England Patriots Charitable Foundation |
| AAA Northeast | Northeast Solar |
| Adams Community Bank | Northfield Mount Hermon School |
| Apex Orchards | Points of Light |
| Arbella Insurance Group | Prentiss Smith & Co |
| Church World Service, Inc | Renaissance Builders |
| Edward L Bernays Foundation, Inc. | Ro Family Foundation |
| EKI Environment & Water, Inc. | ROVI Homes |
| Fair Share Foundation | ShopRite Partners In Caring Fund |
| Feeding America | Springfield School Volunteers |
| Hologic Charitable Fund | Stop and Shop Family Foundation |
| Law Offices of Leighton, Katz & Drapeau, LLC | The Iqbal and Shelby Mamdani Foundation |
| Lions Club of Pittsfield, Inc | Weed Man / Mountain View Lawn Company, Inc. |
| Liquors 44 | Yankee Candle |
| Merriam-Webster, Inc. | |
| New England MCA | |



Public Policy Priorities at The Food Bank

Public education and advocacy play a critical role in advancing food security by raising awareness, promoting policy changes, and encouraging community action. Each year, The Food Bank Board of Directors approves our federal and state public policy priorities. We, then, collaborate with policymakers, people with lived experience, and other stakeholders like you to advocate for policies and investments in immediate food assistance and long-term solutions to the underlying causes of food insecurity and hunger.

Protecting and expanding direct food assistance ensures households who need support can get it through schools, our regions' food assistance network and/or the federal Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and state Healthy Incentives Program (HIP). SNAP benefits are only for income-eligible households and only for food purchases at food retailers. HIP cash benefits are additional monthly SNAP incentive benefits when participants purchase local fruits and vegetables at local farms and farmers markets.

Solutions to the underlying causes of hunger and food insecurity improve household economic stability and minimize the need for direct food assistance in the first place. Investing in individuals and families to achieve economic stability and removing systemic barriers that prevent it is the most effective means to end hunger and achieve food security for everyone.

Food Bank Public Policy Manager Laura Sylvester is confident that with community support, passing these measures this session is possible. Laura is a strong believer that everyone can be engaged in the public policy decision making process that shapes our communities. "We have the resources to end hunger; we just need to make our voices heard loudly enough to create the political will to make it happen."

WE HAVE THE RESOURCES TO END HUNGER; WE JUST NEED TO MAKE OUR VOICES HEARD LOUDLY ENOUGH TO CREATE THE POLITICAL WILL TO MAKE IT HAPPEN.

Bills To Watch in the State House

Direct Food Aid

Critical to the immediate health and well-being of our communities, these bills expand direct access to food either through distributions at pantries and meals at school or through state benefit programs.

**An Act Relative To An Agricultural Healthy Incentives Program
S.85/H.150**

**An Act Establishing the Massachusetts Hunger-Free Campus Initiative
S.835/H.1293**

**An Act Relative to Universal School Meals
S.261/H.603**

**An Act Establishing Basic Needs Assistance For Massachusetts Immigrant Residents
S.76/H.135**

Contributing Factors

These bills address factors that cause people to experience food insecurity and poor nutrition in the first place. This includes economic factors, educational gaps, and infrastructure issues that complicate a person or family's ability to meet their basic needs.

Regional Transit Authority (RTA) Advancement Bill – H.3272/S.2277

The Act to Lift Our Kids Out of Deep Poverty – S.75/H.144

An Act Relative to Food Literacy – S.310/H.601

 To learn more about Advocacy at The Food Bank, visit foodbankwma.org/advocate

Thank You!

The following businesses are the top ten donors of food between January 1 - March 31, 2023.

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Big Y World Class Market | BJ's Wholesale Club |
| Stop & Shop | Costco |
| Coca-Cola | Cumberland Farms |
| C&S Wholesale Grocers | Target |
| Walmart | Performance Food Group |

13th ANNUAL
**WILL BIKE
4 FOOD**

ONE MILE AT A TIME.

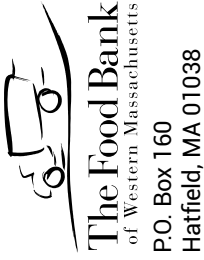
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