

A person wearing a black hooded jacket, a grey knit hat, a yellow backpack, and red gloves is walking away from the camera on a snow-covered sidewalk. They are carrying two large clear plastic shopping bags and a roll of paper towels. The background shows a residential street with snow-covered trees and parked cars. The scene is captured in a cinematic style with soft lighting and falling snow.

# word *of* mouth

WINTER 2024

**FOOD  
BANK**  
OF WESTERN  
MASSACHUSETTS

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# FOOD BANK

OF WESTERN  
MASSACHUSETTS

## word *of* mouth

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# Dear Friends,

It's evident that as a society, we are falling short and not acting wisely or compassionately when a significant number of people consistently face food insecurity because they cannot afford their next meal. A telltale sign of the scale of our challenge and collective impact is the monthly number of individuals seeking food assistance across the four counties in our region. Recent data reveals that more than 110,000 individuals receive food assistance from our region's food assistance network in a single month, marking a 29% increase from the low point of about 83,000 in February of last year – still unconscionably high in the most powerful country in the world.

The Food Bank provides healthy food daily when and where it is needed most so that struggling households can carry on with their lives and pursue their hopes and dreams. In the last twelve months, we provided the equivalent of about 10.8 million meals. Approximately half of this food was paid for by federal and state governments, about \$1 million by private grants and individual donations, and the rest of the food was donated.

That said, SNAP vastly surpasses our impact. SNAP provides nine meals for every one meal that is provided by all 200 food banks combined across the country. Subject to strict income eligibility requirements, households receive SNAP benefits on electronic benefit transfer cards, which can be used only to purchase food. Approximately, 1.1 million Massachusetts residents, or 15% of the state population (1 in 7), currently receive SNAP benefits<sup>1</sup>. More than 51% are in families with children, older adults or disabled individuals. More than 33% are working families. In the four counties of Western Massachusetts, 224,000 individuals receive SNAP in 87 communities. SNAP put food on their tables, and it also stimulates tremendous economic activity. **Case in point: the Food Bank assisted 568 households to enroll in SNAP this year, resulting in the equivalent of a little more than 1 million meals over a 12-month period and an economic impact of \$1.7 million in the region.**

The Food Bank is dedicated to leveraging effective government policies and investments to confront food insecurity and end hunger. Harnessing the power of government for the public good, the Food Bank also engages in public education and advocacy to advance solutions to many underlying causes of food insecurity and hunger. By working with communities and policymakers across our entire region, effective government policies and investments are passed and implemented that strengthen families and communities.

Thank you for all your support of our mission. Together, we end hunger.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Morehouse". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Andrew Morehouse  
Executive Director, Food Bank of Western Massachusetts

<sup>1</sup> [fns.usda.gov/pd/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap](https://fns.usda.gov/pd/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap)

# Connection With Compassion

**P**eople facing food insecurity often experience daunting choices seeking food assistance. There are many community-based organizations that provide resources with varying eligibility criteria for federal and state nutrition programs. These programs are often laden with archaic rules, exceptions, stipulations, and frequent changes- and then there are the questions of how to enroll.

While the Food Bank works hard to make information accessible, ultimately it is impossible to anticipate every question that could arise. For many people, navigating these complexities alone can be frustrating and time-consuming, and personalized support is needed.

The Food Assistance Navigation team at the Food Bank was created for this purpose. Our three full-time staff navigators connect with individuals through a referral system, accessible independently or through a medical provider or case worker. Navigators answer individuals' questions about nearby food pantries and meal sites, the Food Bank's Mobile Food Bank and Brown Bag: Food for Elders sites, as well as federal SNAP and WIC programs.

At the heart of the program is a personal touch – someone who is there to help. Alan Dallmann, Hunger Solutions Manager at the Food Bank, describes people being surprised and deeply appreciative when they get that first call from a navigator: “We always hear, ‘Wow, I actually talked to a person, I didn’t just get sent to a website,’ and we follow up with people.” Alan is not surprised; he works with an incredibly dedicated and talented team.



The Food Bank FAN Team: Alan Dallmann, Johanna Farrell, Damaris Arroyo, Sary Torres.

Conversations about services often go beyond food assistance. Connecting someone with food assistance can free up money to pay for medications or rent. Conversely, connecting someone with services like utility assistance can make budgeting for food more feasible. The Food Bank also partners with 413 Cares, a comprehensive database and referral platform of support services across Western Massachusetts. “Through 413 Cares, we connect households with other services that address the underlying causes of hunger – affordable childcare, job education, fuel assistance, housing, and more,” explains Dallmann.

“We are everything; problem solvers, resources,” says Navigator Damaris Arroyo, “it means a lot to people – sometimes they want to come thank us in person.”

“It’s hard, but I love my job – we love what we do.” added Navigator Joanna Farrell.

Food Assistance Navigation is poised to lend a hand up to even more people in 2024 with more healthcare organizations looking to take advantage of effective and personalized referral systems such as ours.

➔ To learn more about support services across Western Massachusetts, please visit [413cares.org](https://413cares.org)

# THANK YOU!

The following businesses are the top ten donors of food between Oct. 1, 2023 and Dec. 31, 2023.



# THE 14th ANNUAL **MARCH** for the **FOOD BANK**

with MONTE BELMONTE



Together, we raised an astounding  
**\$517,194**  
exceeding our \$500,000 goal! Your support  
has enabled us to provide more than  
**1.5 million meals**  
to the community.





# Thank You



for a



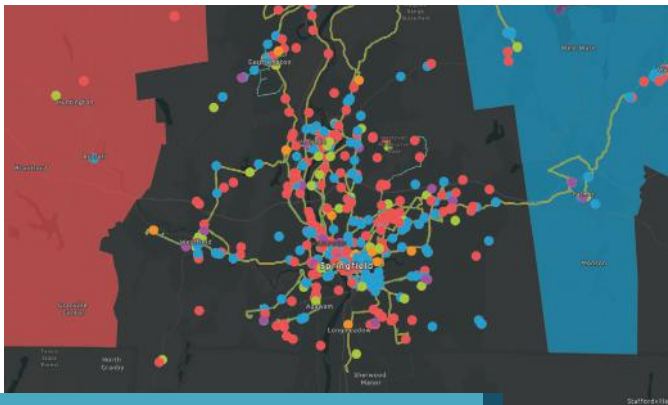
# March To Remember!



# Mapping the Gap With Ride WMA

**A**ffordable and reliable transportation for individuals facing food insecurity is a key concern at the Food Bank as we confront the underlying causes of hunger. A 2019 USDA study found that 46% of individuals living in the United States with low incomes and without cars live more than a half mile from a grocery store. Reliable and frequent public transportation is crucial, since the alternative involves time-consuming treks combining public buses with long walks, bike rides on busy streets, and/or costly rideshares. These transportation challenges extend beyond food access, creating obstacles to employment, medical care, education and more.

To help identify gaps in the region's public transportation, the Food Bank is releasing Ride WMA. This new mapping tool was commissioned by the Food Bank, funded by Transportation 4 MA (T4MA) and Feeding America, and developed by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission. The tool tracks the region's public transportation options in relation to grocery stores and places of



A snapshot of the RIDE WMA online interface.







employment, higher education, and medical care. Included in the map are the bus routes of all three major Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) that operate in Western Massachusetts. The tool also highlights the area's often-overlooked micro-transit options that are especially effective in rural towns.

The map can help the public better understand how well their communities are being served by public transit, answering questions like:

- *How well is my neighborhood connected to jobs with second and third shifts?*
- *Are people in my community able to access places for food and health care services without a car?*
- *If I visit my doctor's office near the end of the day, does the bus run late enough to take me back home?*

For advocates, finding these gaps in public transportation is crucial to demonstrate the need for funding to expand public transit. Too often, transportation funding gets stuck in a negative feedback loop that prevents necessary improvements. Inadequate services lead to low ridership, which can lead to funding cuts. Funding cuts result in route and hour cuts, which drives down ridership even more. People who rely on public transportation are then forced to cobble together increasingly fewer options to get from one place to another.

This exact phenomenon occurred on a large scale in Boston during the pandemic,<sup>1</sup> but it can be harder to identify in Western Massachusetts with its dispersed geography and multiple transportation providers. The Ride WMA tool aims to break this negative cycle by visualizing the existing gaps and improving strategic planning for the future.

Looking for ways to advocate for better public transportation? Urge your state representatives to support the RTA Advancement bill.



To view the transportation mapping tool, visit [pvpc.org/RideWMA](https://pvpc.org/RideWMA)

1. MBTA Service Cuts Not Necessary, T Advisory Board Says. — wbur.org, Dec.4, 2020

Last December, the Food Bank hosted the grand opening of our new, larger, and greener home in Chicopee.

We look forward to all the innovative ways our new location will help us fulfill our mission.



Food Bank Board members, staff, network partners, and capital campaign supporters gathered at the Food Bank in December.







Congressman Richard Neal, Chicopee Mayor John Vieau, and Massachusetts State Senator Adam Gomez.



Congressman Jim McGovern being interviewed.

**Your support and partnership made this incredible accomplishment possible!**





# Confronting College Hunger

In recent years, the Food Bank has been developing new ways to support a population often overlooked by traditional food assistance programs: college students. Last year's passage of the Hunger Free Campus initiative in Massachusetts was a major first step towards getting funding to kickstart new programs. At the end of 2023, another step was taken as we welcomed several college food pantries into the Food Bank network.

In 2019, a HOPE Center study<sup>1</sup> found that 37% of the state's public university students were food insecure. This has a direct impact on their wellbeing. Studies in the American Society of Nutrition<sup>2</sup> and the Community College Journal of Research and Practice<sup>3</sup> document that students facing food insecurity experience poorer sleep, higher stress levels, and lower grades than their peers.



1. The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice at Temple University, "2019 #RealCollege Survey Results," 2020

2. Elzein et al., "The Prevalence of Food Insecurity and Its Association with Health and Academic Outcomes among College Freshmen," 2017

3. Maroto, Snelling, and Linck, "Food Insecurity among Community College Students: Prevalence and Association with Grade Point Average," 2015

Knowing that the best way to reach students is where they live, study and work, this Food Bank partnership has been years in the making. The Food Bank has worked closely with many local colleges with SNAP support and information, but unfortunately, we were unable to formally welcome a college-run pantry as a member. After years of strategizing, the Food Bank created a new membership model for college pantries and started accepting applications this past fall.

“When I got the news I jumped on the opportunity,” said José Lopez-Figueroa, director of Springfield Technical Community College’s Center for Access Services, or CAS. CAS, like many other college resource centers, focused on addressing non-academic barriers to education, and was looking for a way to keep the pantry consistently stocked without exhausting the center’s funding resources. As members of the Food Bank, Five College pantries now have access to free Food Bank food provided by the Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program and other sources.

The Food Bank’s added resources, along with outside grants, enabled CAS to revamp its food assistance model. CAS introduced an online ordering system where students can order food and pick it up from secure, temperature-controlled lockers whenever it is most convenient – all at no cost to students. For the roughly 300 students CAS serves, most of whom are working adults with families, Lopez-Figueroa believes it will be a game changer. No longer will it be a choice between food or textbooks; his goal is “Let’s eliminate the *or*, let’s get an *and* in there.”

## College Food Pantries in Western Mass.

SPRINGFIELD TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE:  
**Ram Mini Mart**

MASSACHUSETTS COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS:  
**MCLA Food Pantry**

GREENFIELD COMMUNITY COLLEGE:  
**Corner Market**

BERKSHIRE COMMUNITY COLLEGE:  
**Campus Cupboard**

SPRINGFIELD COLLEGE:  
**Pride Pantry**

*...with more expected to open this year!*

For hours & locations, please visit [foodbankwma.org/college](http://foodbankwma.org/college)

# Meet the 2024 Food Bank Board!

The Food Bank welcomes our new members and our newly appointed officers to the 2024 Food Bank Board of Directors. These appointments reflect the Food Bank's commitment to diverse voices and strong leadership to carry out its mission to feed our neighbors in need and lead the community to end hunger in Western Massachusetts.

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President: **Charlotte Boney, M.D.** | Baystate Health

1st Vice President: **Willette Johnson** | Springfield Public Schools (retired), Coalition of Experienced Black Educators

2nd Vice President: **Omar Irizarry** | Massachusetts Department of Mental Health

Treasurer: **William Harju** | USA Hauling & Recycling

Clerk: **Shannon Yaremchak** | Partners for Community

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**Ann Barker** | Quonquont Farm

**Suzanne Beck** | Northampton Chamber of Commerce (retired)

**Ileana Carrion** | Massachusetts Department of Public Health

**Mary Feuer** | Community Health Programs

**Erica Flores, Esq.** | Skoler, Abbott, & Presser, PC

**Joesiah González** | Home City Development, Inc

**Xiaolei Hua** | PeoplesBank

**Andrea Leibson** | Franklin County Community Meals Program (retired)

**David Lusteg** | Merrill Lynch

**Johanna Maldonado** | Stop & Shop Supermarket

**George Newman** | Big Y World Class Market

**Bishop Bruce Shaw** | New Hope Pentecostal Church

**Willie Spradley, Jr.** | Mass Mutual (retired), Manage Your Health and Wealth LLC

**Ariana Williams** | Baystate Health

**Beth Young** | Big Y World Class Market



# THANK YOU!

The following businesses, organizations, & foundations made a gift of \$1,000 or more between Oct. 1, 2023 and Dec. 31, 2023.

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Bob's Discount Furniture	Lia Toyota of Northampton
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Public Giving	Three Friends Charitable Fund
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Hot Table LLC	Weed Man Lawn Care
Innovative Industrial Properties	Well Sense Health Plan

Cultivating for Community and Kestrel  
Land Trust are partnering to bring you  
Family Farm Days again this spring  
and summer!

# family farm days



Food Bank Farm trail tours and lessons about healthy soil and regenerative farming practices. Open to kids and adults alike.



For details & directions to our Hadley location, see:  
[foodbankwma.org/family-farm-days](https://foodbankwma.org/family-farm-days)



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