

word *of* **mouth**

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To Address Regional Food Insecurity, Become Part of the Solution

No one in our region, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts or the United States should be food insecure. Most everyone would agree with this statement yet as a society we have different views on how to achieve it. I am often asked, “Shouldn’t the goal of The Food Bank be to solve hunger and put yourselves out of business?” Believe me when I say, nothing would make us happier. Solving hunger isn’t easy when society cannot agree on its causes, much less how to address them.

Limited financial resources due to job loss, underemployment, minimum or near-poverty wages, disability, accident, divorce, (systemic) racism, and many other circumstances often, together, contribute to food insecurity. Even with the economy improving, many households and communities will continue to be left behind because economic growth is never even and historically does not “raise all boats.” To make matters worse, food prices may continue to increase more than the six percent last year due to supply chain obstacles.

At The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, our two-fold mission is “to feed our neighbors in need and

lead the community to end hunger.” Households struggling to make ends meet cannot wait for us to “end hunger.” They need healthy food now—today, tomorrow, next week. For this reason, we make available the equivalent of about a million meals of healthy food every month for those who need a hand up. True to our history, half of the food we provide is rescued from the food industry and would otherwise go to waste.

The Food Bank is able to do this in partnership with dozens of local farmers and many more dozens of retail and wholesale food businesses. Similarly, 170 partner food pantries and meal sites work tirelessly to distribute this healthy food to anyone who needs support to overcome obstacles faced often that are beyond their control. These frontline faith-based and non-profit members of our region’s emergency food network continue to demonstrate their important role when our economy fails to provide for everyone in society.

Over the last seventeen years, I’ve witnessed state and federal governments increase funding for the regional food banks like ours to purchase more food in response to greater demand for food assistance,

A Western Massachusetts where no one faces food insecurity and everyone has access to nutritious food.



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especially during the Great Recession and now during the era of COVID.

The Food Bank is grateful for this investment which is essential to meet the immediate need. We also acknowledge this approach will not achieve food security sustainably and efficiently for all, much less “end hunger.” Only effective government intervention in our free-market economy can do this at scale through public policies and investments that level the playing field for everyone, especially during periods of economic crisis. SNAP and school meals are but two examples of this kind of effective intervention. These programs need to be strengthened.

Still, there is much more to be done to support households living in poverty and near poverty as they strive to achieve economic stability. An example is addressing the perverse “cliff effect” that strips people of public assistance when they get a job or wage increase. Far too often, these households are left with fewer resources to help them afford market rent and utilities, food, and other expenses. They revert to public assistance and are trapped in a cycle of poverty. Smarter public policy would continue to support them until they are more economically stable and no longer need benefits.

The pandemic and the media coverage of it have exposed the disproportionate impact economic downturns historically have on people of color and people of lower incomes generally. At The Food Bank, we lead the community in advocating for food security and promote solutions that address the underlying causes of hunger in our region, including institutional racism and funding inequities. The policies we promote help advance our “end hunger” mission.

Many other non-profit organizations across our region are also leaders, working creatively with residents to advocate for and provide other critically

important services and resources in their communities. The Food Bank is honored to work with and learn from many of them to strengthen households and communities.

The Food Bank is at a turning point in its history. The need for food assistance continues, but our infrastructure is no longer adequate to meet the challenge. In the last three years, we have had to decline close to one million pounds of donated food for lack of space at our current warehouse in Hatfield.

After many years of planning, we purchased land in Chicopee, launched a capital campaign, and designed our future, larger, and greener food distribution center and headquarters. This spring, we plan on breaking ground on our future home, completing construction in about a year and moving into it by the summer of 2023. In the decades to come, our new home in Hampden County, which has the largest concentration of people living with food insecurity, will enable us to carry out our two-fold mission more effectively and in closer partnership with people with lived experience.

Fortunately, the community has rallied behind us these last two years of the pandemic and over the last forty years since our founding in 1982 in a church in Springfield. We invite everyone to join us under our big tent to support our two-fold mission. Start by visiting our website (foodbankwma.org) to learn more about us and our capital campaign. Then, become part of the solution!



Andrew Morehouse
Executive Director
The Food Bank of Western
Massachusetts

The following businesses, organizations, and foundations made a gift of \$1,000 or more from October 1 and December 31, 2021

Amherst Knights of Columbus
Council 1619 Inc.
Antonacci Family Foundation
Arcana Chapter No. 50 O.E.S.
Atkins Farms
Berkshire Brewing Company Inc.
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts
Bob & Lori Ruland Giving Fund
Bob's Discount Furniture
Charitable Foundation, Inc.
Boston Mutual Life Insurance Co.
Boston Rare Maps
Breckinridge Capital Advisors
Caroline Blanton Thayer Charitable Trust
Carr Property Management, Inc.
Cecchi & Sons, Inc.
CoBank
Cooper's Dairyland of Northampton
Cotton Tree Service
Dean's Beans Organic Coffee Company
Delap Real Estate
Development Associates
Doherty, Wallace, Pillsbury & Murphy, PC.
DoorDash
Enterprise Rent-A-Car Foundation
Fair Share Foundation
Fallon Community Health Plan
Farm Credit East Cares
Feeding America
First Church of Christ in Longmeadow
FirstLight Power Resources
Freedom Credit Union
Greenfield Cooperative Bank
Greenfield Savings Bank
Greenleaf Foods
Gulfstream Aerospace Corporation
Hawks and Reed
Health New England
Highland Street Foundation
Holyoke Community College
Holyoke Pediatrics Associates
I.L. Cohen Foundation
Innovative Industrial Properties
INSA
Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation
Irving And Sulamith Blackberg
Charitable Foundation
Keybank National Association
Kittredge Foundation
Law Offices of Leighton, Katz & Drapeau,
LLC
Legacy Counsellors, P.C.
Leo S. Walsh Foundation
Linde Family Foundation
Lions Club of Pittsfield, Inc.
Ludcke Foundation
Lydia B. Stokes Foundation
Mark Fleury's Cleaning Service
MassMutual Foundation
Merrill Lynch - Private Client Group
MGM Springfield
Michael B. Kohut and Shirley A. Maciaga
Charitable Fund
MountainOne Bank
National Grid Foundation
New England Patriots
Charitable Foundation
Newell Brands Community Fund
Northeast Solar
Old Creamery Cooperative
Panera Bread
Peak Performance Roofing LLC
PeoplesBank
Performance Food Group
Pilot Precision Products
Prentice Foundation, Inc.
Price Chopper's Golub Foundation
River Valley Market LLC
S.L. Gimbel Foundation Fund
Sacajewea Charitable Foundation
Savage Arms Inc.
Smithfield Company
State Street Fruit Store
Stop & Shop
Storey Publishing
Summit Behavioral Wealth, LLC
Szawlowski Potato Farms
The Greenroom Resource
The Iqbal and Shelby Mamdani
Foundation
The Paul and Phyllis Fireman
Charitable Foundation
Tree House Brewing Company, Inc.
Trinity Health
UMACC
UMass Memorial Health Care, Inc.
Unitarian Universalist Society
of Greater Springfield
Warner Farm
Way Finders
Webber & Grinnell Insurance
Weed Man / Mountain View Lawn
Company, Inc.
Wellnesscapes
Wheeler & Taylor, Inc.
Whole Foods Market
SOA Fund
Yawkey Foundation



Forty years of partnering to feed, lead, and strengthen community

The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts has partnered with our community for forty years. Volunteers, government, household and business donors, local farmers, food pantries, meal sites, individuals with lived experiences, and YOU. Together, we have done so much and are ready for the years ahead.

170 PANTRIES & MEAL SITES

THANK YOU!

187,968,086 MEALS IN FORTY YEARS

BROWN BAG: FOOD FOR ELDERERS

FOOD BANK FARMS

MOBILE FOOD BANK

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN LOCAL FARMERS



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*“If somebody helps you,
You have to pay it forward”*

Megan Edson, co-owner of Sunnier Days Construction, LLC in Greenfield, moved quickly as she instructed an inexperienced team of volunteers on how to assemble two greenhouses at The Food Bank’s new farm in Hadley last summer. She was patient as she taught individuals, with little or no construction experience, how to carefully measure distances before they drilled into metal poles and coupled them together to build the frames for greenhouse walls. The project was on a tight, two-week completion schedule as rainy weather and a muddy farm road delayed progress. However, Edson took time away from her work to explain why she and husband Mike Hubbard—experts at greenhouse assembly—were volunteering their *own* time to support The Food Bank.

“I’m a firm believer that if somebody helps you, you have to pay it forward and give back,” Edson said.

The Food Bank purchased the two 30 x 48-foot greenhouses in late 2020 with funds from a Massachusetts Food Security Infrastructure Grant. Since the structures would need to be assembled onsite, securing the services of an experienced company was crucial.

“When we reached out to Sunnier Days,” recalled Amanda Reynolds, Senior Community Engagement Coordinator at The Food Bank, “Megan and Mike were passionate about helping. They offered to support us with everything we needed if we could organize volunteer groups. We happily accepted their offer.”



◀ Megan Edson, co-owner of **Sunnier Days Construction, LLC**

of the community farm—soon to be in its second growing season—so that we can also teach students about food insecurity and no-till farming.”

Edson expressed how much she enjoyed working with the volunteers who learned quickly and were enthusiastic. She also reiterated that offering support to address food insecurity helps everyone in the region.

“Any one of us can be in the position of needing food assistance at some point in our lives.”

Last year, The Food Bank distributed the organic vegetables from the community farm to partnering food pantries and meal sites in Amherst and will do so again this growing season. The much larger portion of the new 142-acre Food Bank Farm is being cultivated by Lakeside Organics in Hadley and Atlas Farm in South Deerfield. Most of their organic harvest will be distributed to Springfield Public Schools for student meals, and Mobile Food Banks in all four counties of Western Massachusetts.

“We’re really grateful for Mike and Megan’s support and guidance on the greenhouse project,” Reynolds concluded. “These structures will be a part of the farm’s legacy for many years to come.”

“Anyone can volunteer their time to help someone in need,” Edson added. “If you can donate your time or other kinds of support, do it. It will make you feel good. It’s really rewarding.” ♦

Edson recalls that conversation with Reynolds as well as the one she had earlier with her husband when they decided to volunteer for The Food Bank.

“Mike knows my history,” she said. “I’m now going to get a little emotional, but there was a time in my life when I was a single mom with two kids and needed help. We didn’t starve, but there were definitely times when I didn’t know how we were going to make it. I’d come home from work to find food that my neighbors would put on my doorstep. I’ll never forget that, and now I want to help families like mine who are struggling to make ends meet.”

The couple’s willingness to give back to the community will soon have a deep impact on *new* neighbors they may never meet who will be fortified by the nutritious produce grown in the greenhouses. This spring, the structures will be used to grow seedlings for a small community engagement portion of the farm.

“Megan and Mike helped provide a welcoming learning space for our volunteers,” stated Reynolds. “They also helped us continue the expansion



Forty Years of Partnering to Feed, Lead, and Strengthen Community

The Food Bank is commemorating its 40th year partnering with the Western Massachusetts community to provide healthy food and advance long-term solutions to food insecurity in the region. Partnership has been at the forefront of how The Food Bank operates since its inception as a collaboration of invested community members who saw the pressing need for greater food security in their communities. Member pantries and meal sites, household and business donors, legislators and local officials, and the families and individuals we serve ARE our partners in our mission to feed our neighbors in need and lead the community to end hunger.

The Food Bank has expanded its services since the early days when it first distributed surplus chili from a parking lot in Springfield. During all these years, we have never wavered from our mission.

40 Facts About The Food Bank

Here are the first facts about our history that we'd like to share:

August 1981

The Food Bank's first office space at the Springfield Catholic Diocese's Chancery
73 Chestnut St., Springfield

January 1982

Gifted our first storage space at
36 Chestnut St., Ludlow
Council on Aging Auditorium

Holds its first 2 food distributions in an adjacent parking lot.

January 1982

Then called **The Western Massachusetts Food Bank** incorporated as a nonprofit.

February 1982

Catherine D'Amato is hired as employee and becomes executive director later in year for the next 13 years.

What's happening this year?

Throughout the year, we will share news about our future goals and special events, along with points of interest in The Food Bank's history in "Word of Mouth" as well as on our social media channels.

Thank you for 40 years of partnering with us to provide millions of healthy meals to households in the region experiencing food insecurity. There is much to do, with no easy solution in sight. However, with your support, we know that we can continue our work to achieve our vision of a Western Massachusetts where no one faces food insecurity and everyone has access to nutritious food.



1982

Our earliest members include:

- Amherst Survival Center
- Franklin Area Survival Center (Formerly Greenfield Survival Center)
- Springfield's Open Pantry
- Alianza DV Services Inc. (Formerly Womanshelter/Compañeras)

July 1982

New home in old tobacco barn turned office space in Hadley thanks to an interest-free loan from the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts. Operated out of the rented space for the next 5 years.

April 1984

The Food Bank launches its "Brown Bag: Food for Elders" program in Hampshire County, a distribution that continues to this day and has expanded to all four counties in Western Massachusetts.

February 1983

After one year of official operations, The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts is regularly feeding 3,000 people in the area, partnering with a reported 165 agencies.

March 1987

Move to new warehouse in Hatfield



◀ Megan Schuck
Senior SNAP Coordinator

SNAP is also often seen as a “handout” to some people, and they have a hard time putting their pride aside to ask for assistance.

What is your favorite SNAP fact?

In 2021, our team assisted over 1,000 individuals to access SNAP benefits and other resources to become more food secure.

How has the pandemic changed how your team provides services?

For the better part of the last two years, we worked from home, completing SNAP applications over the phone. It was a struggle to reach individuals who are in need of SNAP benefits without being at sites face to face. During this time, we relied heavily on sending flyers and educational materials to our community partners and member food pantries and meal sites. In the fall, we were able to visit community sites in person. Due to the Omicron surge, we reverted to remote outreach again.

Tell us about your initiatives to address college hunger.

As a team, we have informational sessions at local colleges. The most important role that we play is ensuring students understand SNAP eligibility requirements. We start by making sure we coordinate with and educate the relevant student outreach offices at community colleges and universities. We are also in constant communication with the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance which administers the federal SNAP program in the Commonwealth.

What barriers prevent people from applying for safety net benefits like SNAP?

A barrier we see often is that many people do not have transportation of their own and cannot afford bus passes.

Many people also really struggle with having permanent housing. They must secure an address from a willing family member or friend. Most of the same population must use their scarce resources to obtain a Massachusetts ID to qualify for SNAP and other public benefits. ◆

SNAP Q&A

What does the SNAP team do?

Our team provides application assistance for federal cash benefits to purchase food at grocery stores. We provide in-person assistance on a weekly basis at several community centers and monthly visits to the Hampden County Jail in Ludlow. We are available to complete SNAP applications and answer questions through our SNAP hotline and internet Google SNAP campaign.

What motivates you to work on the SNAP team?

Our team is cohesive and stable because we have robust and supportive leadership. Each day we are all working for the same common goal to provide food security for those who need it—mostly children and elders.

What is the biggest misconception about SNAP benefits?

Most individuals are under the impression that the application and vetting process are tedious and full of red tape. There is an audible sigh of relief among many individuals once the process is completed. They say it was much easier and faster than expected.



53,105 MEALS

**GIDEON PORTH
ATLAS FARM**

63,726

**FOR OUR NEIGHBORS IN
WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS**

**POUNDS OF
PRODUCE**

THANK YOU FOR PARTNERING WITH THE FOOD BANK OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

“ I’m so happy to partner with The Food Bank for all these years and am honored to receive the award for another year. You guys do amazing work and I’m grateful to be a part of it .”

**Gideon Porth, Owner
Atlas Farm LLC**

On the front cover: The quiet beauty of winter on Atlas Farm.
Photo: Atlas Farm



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AMERICA



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