

FOOD BANK

OF THE ROCKIES™

Answering the Challenge of Hunger



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FOOD BANK
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Finding New Ways to Meet Rising Need

There has never been such a thing as a “normal year” in the world of food banking, but the challenges presented to us in the last few years have been nothing short of extraordinary. During fiscal year 2023, inflation rates hit levels not seen for over 40 years. Remember when the cost of eggs spiked to \$5, \$6, even \$7 a dozen from their usual average of a little over \$1? Keep in mind what that did to your grocery bills, then think about the thousands of dozens of eggs Food Bank of the Rockies purchases to provide to our clients. Eggs, produce, milk, protein, grains, canned vegetables: All of these increased in price, sometimes drastically, causing our monthly food-purchasing costs to soar.

Besides inflation, another huge factor in this budget bump was the increase in need we are seeing throughout the communities we serve. Over the past year, the number of people seeking food from our mobile pantries has increased by an average of 50%. Many of our Hunger Relief Partners are seeing a 100–200% increase (or more!) in the number of people seeking food assistance.

Why this surge in need now?

- On March 1, 2023, SNAP Emergency Allotments ended. This meant that a family of four was suddenly receiving \$360 less on average each month to purchase food.
- The increase in Social Security benefits in January 2023 pushed many older adults into a higher income bracket, which lowered their SNAP benefits. This has resulted in a wave of people aged 60+ applying to receive a monthly EverGreen Box™, a program of Everyday Eats. So many people have applied that, for the first time ever, we’ve had to implement a waiting list.
- Medicaid proof of eligibility was reinstated on April 1, 2023, meaning millions of people who received Medicaid during COVID lost health insurance.

The list could go on and on. With so many major changes in assistance programs and the spike in cost of living, “normal” challenges have gotten even harder for hundreds of thousands of our neighbors in Colorado and Wyoming.

To meet this historic need, we have innovated, grown, and adapted. We opened the new Western Slope Etkin Family Distribution Center in Grand Junction last winter, tremendously increasing our capacity to serve our neighbors across the Western Slope. We launched a new strategic plan that will guide us through the upcoming years and focus our efforts on finding the best ways possible to serve our communities. We continue to broaden and diversify the foods we offer thanks to our Culturally Responsive Team’s efforts to dialogue with the communities we serve to find out how we can meet their needs. And we are constantly listening to and asking our Hunger Relief Partners, clients, staff, and community partners about areas in which we can improve, then doing the work to make those improvements.

We marked our 45th anniversary in 2023 — a milestone that is both significant as well as telling. Food insecurity is not a new problem, nor is it a problem that will be resolved anytime soon. But as we continue to grow and adapt to the needs of our neighbors experiencing hunger, find new ways to bolster the work being done to address the root causes of hunger, and advocate for better systems to assist anyone who needs a hand, we take steps toward a better, more equitable future. Thank you for joining us on this journey.



Christina Bowen

Christina Bowen
Board Chair



Nick Benham

Nick Benham
Immediate Past Board Chair



Erin Pulling

Erin Pulling
President & CEO



Fiscal Year 2023

THESE NUMBERS ILLUSTRATE THE SUSTAINED HIGH NEED FOR FOOD AND INNOVATIVE SUPPORT



21% OF PEOPLE SERVED WERE CHILDREN

Clients Served 367,685



Total Pounds of Food Distributed

81,992,270

Meal Equivalent for Pounds Distributed

66,277,085



Meals Distributed on Average Per Day

181,500

Percentage of Pounds Distributed that was Fresh Produce



31%

Service Area Covered

150,000
SQUARE MILES

Largest food bank distribution area in the contiguous U.S.



Volunteer Hours Logged

112,967

The equivalent of 54 full-time employees





When Food Bank of the Rockies opened its new Western Slope Etkin Family Distribution Center in Grand Junction in December 2022, it featured one very special piece of equipment: a commercial-grade food dehydrator. The dehydrator is significant for a variety of reasons, including being the only one of its kind among the 200 food banks in the Feeding America network. Most importantly, though, it provides another avenue to support our community with nourishing fruits and vegetables. Palisade peach chips? Yes, please.

How We Help

Hunger cuts across demographics and borders, indifferent to the past or future chapters of a person's life. Food Bank of the Rockies meets individuals in the present, ensuring that anyone who needs it gets the nourishing food they need to thrive.



GENEROUS SUPPORTERS

FUEL EVERYTHING WE DO

Where Food Comes From

Over 96% of funding goes directly into our hunger-relief programs and supports all of the ways we attain food to distribute to our community members.



Sorting and Packing Food for our Neighbors

Each year, more than 18,000 volunteers help us sort, pack, and get food into the hands of our neighbors across Colorado and Wyoming. We could not do this work without their dedication and generosity!

Distributing Food to our Communities



We deploy 70+ refrigerated semitrailers each month to urban and rural communities throughout Colorado and Wyoming to bring food directly to where it is needed most.

The 800+ pantries, programs, and relief organizations we support through food and resources to nourish people experiencing hunger in their communities.

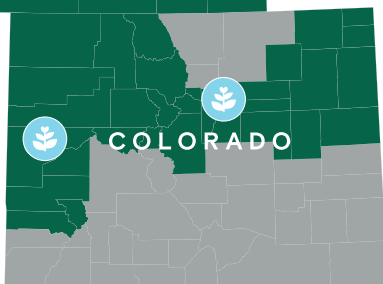
Specialized programming for after-school, summer, and weekend meals for children.

Monthly food boxes administered by the USDA at no cost to income-qualifying older adults at least 60 years of age.

Weekly food boxes delivered to patients who screen positive for food insecurity to help improve health and nutrition.



WYOMING



COLORADO

Looking Ahead

We are hopeful for a day when Food Bank of the Rockies is no longer needed and everyone has enough nourishing food and resources to thrive. But until then, we will keep pioneering more impactful, fulfilling ways to meet the needs of our community members.





Odessa Oldham has been heavily involved in the worlds of ranching and agriculture from a young age. As the food sourcing manager for Food Bank of Wyoming, the Casper-based distribution center of Food Bank of the Rockies, Odessa's goal is to use her connections across the state to source more protein and produce from local growers and distribute it to Wyomingites experiencing hunger. "I want to have a system in place that is collaborative with all the different food systems across Wyoming, where we can work together as a state to support each other and support our neighbors," she said.



Just like hunger doesn't stop due to poor weather conditions, Food Bank of the Rockies continues to support our neighbors with mobile pantries year-round thanks to drivers like Tammy Pendergrass.

FOOD BANK
OF THE ROCKIES™

Recognizing the Need

The Hardships of Hunger,
and How We Can Help





When we talk about serving our neighbors, it's likely that a different image pops into each of our heads of who those neighbors are. Like everything in life, who we see as being a neighbor is impacted by who we are: where we live, who we spend time with, where we came from, our jobs and experiences and ambitions.

But no matter who you picture when you hear the word “neighbor,” food insecurity affects individuals just like them. From newly arrived individuals from across the world, to people who have called Colorado home their entire lives: these are all our neighbors, and Food Bank of the Rockies seeks to nourish them with familiar, nutritious food.

The past few years have challenged everything most of us know – or thought we knew – about food insecurity. After surviving the depths of COVID, last summer we faced the highest inflation rates in over 40 years. Organizationally, Food Bank of the Rockies is still spending roughly three-times more to purchase food every month than we were pre-pandemic. We are also seeing a 40-60% increase in demand for food services at our mobile pantries.

The causes of this sustained increase are complicated. Interest rates, food inflation, economic factors like poverty and unemployment: It all plays a role.

But what exactly is food insecurity? That's an important question to explore in order to fully understand its significance and what we can do to help alleviate its impact on people's lives.

Food insecurity is a vast and complicated public health issue that negatively impacts the lives of more than 9% of the population in Colorado and more than 10% of the population in Wyoming. It is linked to numerous negative mental and physical health outcomes and disproportionately affects lower-income households thereby reinforcing and exacerbating existing disparities in quality of life for historically marginalized communities.

While hunger and food insecurity are broad societal issues that affect Americans across all demographics, it would be irresponsible to talk about food access without acknowledging that, too often, our country's most vulnerable communities are the ones that have the hardest time getting enough to eat.

Poverty and economic instability are deeply intertwined with food insecurity. Hunger has been shown to disproportionately affect historically marginalized communities at significantly higher rates. Communities with mobility difficulties such as older adults, people with disabilities, and people living with chronic diseases are also more likely to experience food insecurity.

In the USDA's report Household Food Security in the United States in 2021, researchers surveyed a wide range of individuals throughout the U.S. to identify demographic trends relating to food insecurity. In analyzing their findings, they discovered a strong connection between food insecurity and income, with 32% of households with annual incomes below the official poverty line experiencing food insecurity, compared to just 5% of households whose incomes were at or above the poverty line.

Food insecurity and hunger reinforce and worsen pre-existing inequalities experienced by historically marginalized communities of color. This can be attributed to structural racism and discrimination. Households with members who identify as Black, Indigenous, or a person of color are more likely – exponentially so in some cases – to be food insecure than their white counterparts.





Food insecurity is especially harmful to children, putting them at higher risk for anemia, asthma, hospitalization, developmental challenges, and more.

A report from Feeding America indicates the following food insecurity disparities by race:

- 8.1% of White individuals live in food-insecure households
- 15.8% of Latino individuals live in food-insecure households
- 19.3% of Black individuals live in food-insecure households
- 23.5% of Indigenous individuals live in food-insecure households

Another demographic to consider when exploring food insecurity is age. In children and older adults, the physically and mentally debilitating effects of prolonged food insecurity can have especially deleterious effects on health outcomes.

According to Feeding America, infants and toddlers that experience food insecurity are more likely to face conditions like anemia and asthma, and more likely to be hospitalized because of those conditions. These children are also more likely to experience developmental issues with language and motor skills, as well as behavioral and mental health challenges.

Older adults experiencing food insecurity consumed less key nutrients than their food-secure counterparts, according to Feeding America, and were also much more likely to experience the following negative health outcomes:

- 64% more likely to experience heart attacks
- 71% more likely to experience congestive heart failure
- 74% more likely to experience diabetes
- 78% more likely to experience asthma
- 262% more likely to experience depression



So, what can we do to help the problem of food insecurity?

Food banks, food pantries, and other hunger-relief organizations act as a first line of defense against food insecurity by providing access to nourishing, nutrient-rich foods to people who need it most.

A 2016 study by the Journal of Community Health states that “food banks have the potential to improve food security outcomes when operational resources are adequate, provisions of perishable food groups are available, and client needs are identified and addressed” – three factors that are critical to our mission at Food Bank of the Rockies.

Hunger-relief organizations like Food Bank of the Rockies, our 800+ Hunger Relief Partners, and federal food assistance programs like SNAP are working to turn the tide of food insecurity in the United States. Through programs like Food for Kids, Mobile Pantries, the Culturally Responsive Food Initiative, and EverGreen Boxes™, a program of Everyday Eats, we strive to meet the needs of our neighbors where and how they need us most.

By supporting Food Bank of the Rockies, you can support these programs and relieve hunger in your community. 🌱



TOP: Food Bank of the Rockies is seeing a 40–60% increase in demand for food services at our mobile pantries, the result of high inflation, poverty, unemployment, and many other complex issues.

BOTTOM: Food insecurity reinforces pre-existing inequalities experienced by historically marginalized communities of color due to structural racism and discrimination.





Tailoring our Programs for our neighbors

Listening and Responding to the Communities We Serve

Imagine you're a young parent, new to the United States. You speak a language other than English, aren't familiar with the area in which you live, have a spouse who works full-time, and are trying to navigate the complexities of finding a place to rent, securing reliable transportation, and getting enough food to feed your quickly growing kids.

What you need — what you want — is food. Familiar, nourishing food that feels like home and keeps your family full. After searching online, you come across Food Bank of the Rockies and find a place near you

that offers free food. You go the next day to see what it's all about. What do you want to see — need to see — at that moment?

It's scenarios like this one that Food Bank of the Rockies' staff and 800+ Hunger Relief Partners think about daily and actively work to find holistic approaches to not just address the needs of our neighbors, but anticipate them. To do this, we are constantly innovating, tweaking, and trying new things to engage our communities and partners and go beyond providing "just food."



ADDRESSING CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The individuals Food Bank of the Rockies supports are just that: individuals. To best support each of these people, we have implemented several programs in recent years.

Helping our Hunger Relief Partners cultivate deeper understanding and awareness of the communities they provide services to is the Building Belonging Program, an initiative made possible thanks to a generous grant from Kaiser Permanente. The program offers training on how to be a culturally responsive organization, funds to obtain foods desired by community members, and funds for such things as real-time translation services to address barriers to access.

In 2023, the Building Belonging Program surveyed 766 neighbors at 19 mobile pantry sites to learn even more about food preferences in our communities.

“In the next year, these surveys and insights will support our efforts to align our distributions and food-ordering practices to adhere to the dietary and cultural food preferences of each community we serve,” said Ashley Newell, director of programs at Food Bank of the Rockies.

What this looks like in real time can be seen through Food Bank of the Rockies’ Culturally Responsive Food Initiative (CRFI), which makes dozens of food items that have been requested by neighbors available to partners to order from us.

This year, two new cultural food preference lists were published by the CRFI team in response to partners


serving newly arrived neighbors from Afghanistan and Ukraine. Additionally, we expanded our Latino food preference list to highlight the desires of our Mexican, Venezuelan, Cuban, and Colombian neighbors. Twelve cultural food lists are currently in use.

“We diversified the [Latino] list because we know how important it is for us to acknowledge the differences between these groups,” said Culturally Responsive Representative Carlos Lerma Altamirano. “It is important for us to take the time to research, talk to our neighbors, and make time to create these lists to show that we are truly listening to the needs of our communities.”

“

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- Carlos Lerma Altamirano

A photograph of a man standing in a large warehouse aisle. He is wearing a grey long-sleeved shirt, blue jeans, and a dark beanie. He has his arms crossed and is smiling. The aisle is lined with tall metal shelving units filled with cardboard boxes and pallets. The floor is polished and reflects the overhead lights.

Food Bank of the Rockies’ transportation team, led by Director of Fleet and Transportation Anthony Salazar (Zar), plays a crucial role in getting food to our neighbors efficiently and safely.



By listening to the people who use our services and the Hunger Relief Partners who directly interact with them, we can not only improve our sourcing methods and increase the food choices available to our partners, but also improve the lives of our neighbors.

STRENGTHENING OUR PARTNERSHIPS

In addition to supporting our Hunger Relief Partners in getting culturally responsive foods, Food Bank of the Rockies also strives to assist our partners in other key ways.

We continuously inquire of our 800+ partners about what they want and need to fill their pantries and support their neighbors. In fiscal year 2023, we took this one step further and organized a series of partner networking sessions to include them in the decision-making process of what foods we order on their behalf.

“Hunger Relief Partners are on the front lines of providing for community members experiencing hunger,” said Cindy Mitchell, vice president of programs. “They know their neighbors’ needs on a personal level. Food Bank of the Rockies’ objective is to support our partners and the people they support and not make assumptions that we know best.”

We cannot do any of our work without our robust network of dedicated partners across Colorado and Wyoming, and we will continue to find ways to engage with and support them however we can.

FOOD TO SUPPORT HEALTH

We all know that the food we eat can have a drastic impact on our well-being. But for individuals experiencing food insecurity, the choices available to them — due to budgetary restrictions, mobility limitations, and more — can be severely limited, exacerbating pre-existing health conditions or even causing new ones.

To help our neighbors access the foods they need to support their health, Food Bank of the Rockies in late 2022 launched the Healthcare Box Program. As of September 2023, we partner with six healthcare providers around the Denver metro area and have 241 participants in the program.

“Nutrition security means having reliable access to enough high-quality food to avoid hunger and stay well,” said Blake Bigger, healthcare partnership coordinator at Food Bank of the Rockies. “We are proud to partner with these providers to make nutritious food more accessible to patients experiencing food insecurity and support the overall health of our community.”

Participants in the Healthcare Box Program have to screen positive for food insecurity and be diagnosed with a complex medical condition such as cardiovascular disease or diabetes. Each week for one year, the individual will receive a box of food and fresh produce tailored to their medical needs with the help of a registered dietician. Participants also receive nutrition education and recipes with every box.

Valerie is a program participant who has been receiving food boxes since July 2023. She has type 2 diabetes and is in recovery from COVID-19, for which she was hospitalized for over seven months. She said the food and the people involved with the program have been integral to her health and well-being.

“The food is exactly what I need for my diabetes and has really been a blessing,” Valerie shared. “Plus, everyone I’ve interacted with from Food Bank of the Rockies is so friendly and compassionate. It’s all been wonderful. If 100 was the highest score, I’d give the program a score of 101. I’ve really benefitted greatly, not just from the food, but also from the people. It makes such a difference.”

While the program is still in its pilot phase, Food Bank of the Rockies plans to grow it in upcoming years in order to be a resource to even more neighbors in need of nourishing food. 🌱

From building more cultural awareness in the foods we source and provide to Hunger Relief Partners, to providing training and funds for partners to best support their communities, to reaching people experiencing food insecurity where they are at this moment in their journey, Food Bank of the Rockies strives to be more than a distributor of food. We seek to be a resource and educator, provider and supporter, so that one day, we no longer need to exist.

IN FISCAL YEAR 2023:

11% of food distributed was for the Culturally Responsive Food Initiative

1.6 million pounds of locally grown food was purchased and distributed

58% of food distributed came from the Food Rescue Program

947,000+ pounds of vegetables and fruits were distributed each month at no cost to Hunger Relief Partners

Giving in Different Ways with the Same Intention at Heart

Whenever a special occasion takes place in the lives of Eileen's friends or family members, they know what to look forward to from her.

"I'll text the grandkids to check their email, because otherwise I know they won't look at it," she said, smiling.

"Email is too slow for them!" chimed in Eileen's husband, Joel. "If it were on TikTok, then they'd see it."

The email Eileen is referring to will be from Food Bank of the Rockies saying that she made a donation in honor of whomever is celebrating a birthday or anniversary, recovering from surgery, or mourning a death. She makes these honorary donations weekly.

"Food security is very important to me, especially for children," said Eileen, a retired pediatrician. "The thought of people in our community who don't have the food they need, kids who are experiencing hunger: it's just awful."

"Food is such a basic need," added Joel. "Hunger adds injury to insult when you're already in a place of hardship."

While Eileen and Joel choose to recognize the people they love through their donations, monthly donors David and Mariann Catanuto's support of Food Bank of the Rockies aligns with their desire to teach their kids the value of giving back.

"Toward the end of the first year of the pandemic, I saw an ad on TV about food

“

Food is such a basic need. Hunger adds injury to insult when you're already in a place of hardship.

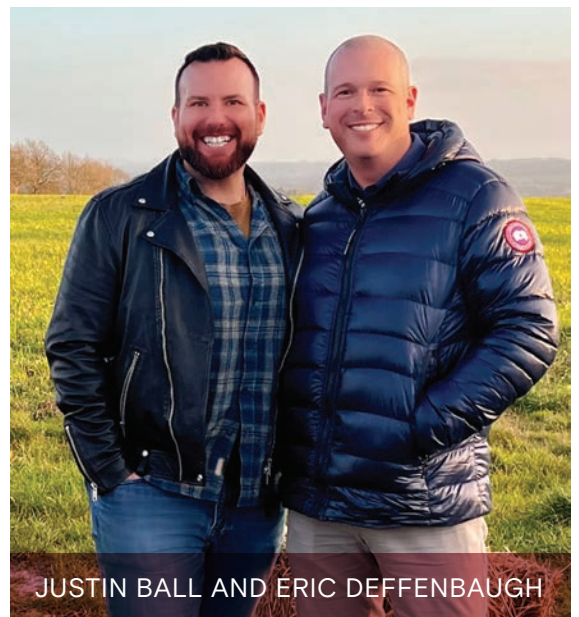
- Joel

insecurity," David said, going back to the first time he and his wife decided to give to the Food Bank. "I just started crying. So many people were losing their jobs and were uncertain about their future. I had been fortunate enough that my job wasn't affected, and I just said, 'Alright, we're giving to the Food Bank.'"

David's father lost his job when David was a teenager, and thinking back to that time he says he realized how dire things could have gotten.



THE CATANUTO FAMILY



JUSTIN BALL AND ERIC DEFFENBAUGH



“I was oblivious to it then, but we were definitely living paycheck to paycheck,” David recalled. “We are all so close to being food insecure or unhoused.”

For Justin Ball and Eric Deffenbaugh, choosing to include Food Bank of the Rockies in their estate plan was rooted in several things. First, both believe that having access to nutritious food is critical to everything else in life.

“Food is the starting point for so many other things,” shared Justin. “It’s something more basic even than a human right.”

It was also important to them that the organizations they supported be active builders of community support systems.

“The impact we can have in supporting the Food Bank feels like a multiplier to me,” said Eric. “The quantity and quality of food that’s getting to people is really impressive.”

Added Justin, “I think one of the biggest pieces for me is the Food Bank’s reach — how the community being served includes all of Wyoming, the Front Range, and the Western Slope. But even with such a huge reach, there are still programs like the Culturally Responsive Food Initiative that meet people where they’re at and stay true to who they are. That is also really important.”

Overall, Justin and Eric wanted to be sure that their legacy continues to invest in the things they value after they’re gone, which led them to choose to give through their estate plan as members of the Heirloom Circle, Food Bank of the Rockies’ planned-giving program.

The driving forces of community building and legacy also motivated BluEarth



We are all so close to being food insecure or unhoused.

– David Catanuto



BLUEARTH RENEWABLES AND CLEARWAY ENERGY



The quantity and quality of food that’s getting to people is really impressive.

– Eric Deffenbaugh

Renewables and Clearway Energy to support Food Bank of Wyoming, the Casper-based distribution center of Food Bank of the Rockies.

BluEarth is a developer, owner, and operator of wind, hydro, and solar facilities located throughout North America. Often, these projects are located near smaller towns, and BluEarth places an emphasis on finding ways to strengthen the communities they’re in. “If we’re coming in and building a facility, we want to make sure we’re also giving back to that community,” said Erin Jenken, manager of communications for BluEarth Renewables.

After choosing two sites in Carbon County, Wyoming, for wind projects, BluEarth asked the community where they needed support. Food Bank of

Wyoming came up right away. After a few years of making regular donations, the company ramped up their support this year and, in partnership with Clearway Energy, sponsored the mobile pantry in Rock River for six months.

“We feel like it’s a good spot to put our money,” said Erin. “Part of the reason this partnership has grown in the way it has is because we were able to make sure our money ends up in the community, that Rock River is seeing the impact. And with the mobile pantry, we know it is.”



If we’re coming in and building a facility, we want to make sure we’re also giving back to that community.

– Erin Jenken, BluEarth Renewables

One-time gifts, monthly donations, estate planning, corporate partnerships: these are just a handful of the ways people can support Food Bank of the Rockies. Every gift of any size helps nourish neighbors experiencing food insecurity and strengthens our communities. 🌱

Making a Difference One Shift at a Time

Dedicating their time, energy, and compassion to helping their neighbors experiencing hunger, our volunteers play an integral role in fulfilling Food Bank of the Rockies' mission.

Each year, we are blown away by the dedication and generosity of our volunteers. Last fiscal year, volunteers donated 112,967 hours across our distribution centers, which is the equivalent of more than 4,190 days and the work of 54 full-time employees. And that doesn't even include the countless hours donated by our mobile pantry volunteers who work diligently to order, organize, and distribute food directly to our neighbors.

You can see the need out there. It is a privilege to be able to help people.
- Don Novotny

We are incredibly grateful to all of our volunteers who choose to spend their valuable time furthering our cause of igniting the power of community to end hunger. As a way to show our gratitude, each year we select a handful of individuals and groups to highlight as our volunteers of the year. These are the people who do countless tasks to ensure Food Bank of the Rockies is able to get nutritious food onto the tables of anyone who needs it. They never ask for recognition, but deserve all the accolades in the world.

I hate seeing good food go to waste, so making sure it gets to people who need it is really important to me.
- Jon Fahey

This year's Denver distribution center volunteer award recipients are Don Novotny, Jon Fahey, HealthONE, and The Monday and Thursday Group. On the Western Slope, we recognize Arlena Wood, Tom Ashlock, and the Safe and Abundant Nutrition Alliance (S.A.N.A.).

What started in 2006 as a monthly opportunity to volunteer with his daughter is now a multiple-times-a-week occurrence for Don Novotny, the 2023 Betty Van Hook Memorial award recipient. This award is given to an individual who emulates the spirit of Betty Van Hook, a long-time volunteer who gave her time to helping feed her neighbors even while she was battling cancer.

"I enjoy giving back to the community," shared Don. "You can see the need out there. It is a privilege to be able to help people. I think if everyone did a little bit more, it would make things easier for everyone."

That same sentiment drives the individuals who comprise The Monday and Thursday Group. This committed group of 15 shows up twice a week at the Denver distribution center, and their steadfast dedication led us to create a new award to honor them: the Community Group of the Year award.

The ability to give back, the positive atmosphere, and the ability to stay active are all reasons why I volunteer.
- Arlena Wood

The 2023 Corporate Group of the Year brings their passion for nourishing their neighbors directly to their community. In 2019, HealthONE's North Suburban Medical Center extended their commitment to people's health beyond medical care to include another basic need — food — through a monthly mobile pantry. In 2022, the site provided food to 918 households.

Additionally, in 2022 HealthONE employees volunteered 235 hours at the Denver distribution center. (Melissa Osse, Vice President of Government Relations at HealthONE, is a current board member of Food Bank of the Rockies.)



Rising Volunteer of the Year Jon Fahey began volunteering with the Food Bank in August 2021. Since then, he has donated more than 525 hours – the equivalent of nearly 66 full-time work days.

“I never had to worry about having enough food to eat; I can’t imagine what that’s like,” he shared. “I hate seeing good food go to waste, so making sure it gets to people who need it while also helping others is really important to me.”



DON NOVOTNY



JON FAHEY



I volunteer to give back, to stay active, and to meet people.

– Tom Ashlock

On the Western Slope, Arlena Wood was recognized as Volunteer of the Year due to her steadfast commitment as a volunteer since she moved back to Grand Junction in 2018. “The ability to give back, the positive atmosphere, and the ability to stay active are all reasons why I volunteer,” Arlena said.

A volunteer with Food Bank of the Rockies Western Slope since November 2022, Tom Ashlock was chosen as this year’s Rising Volunteer of the Year. “I volunteer to give back, to stay active, and to meet people,” he shared.

Group Volunteer of the Year award recipient S.A.N.A was established in 2017 when Pitkin, Eagle, and Garfield counties united together to address the problem of food insecurity in their communities. S.A.N.A. has 61 members total and, since February 2020, has overseen the mobile pantries in Rifle, Glenwood, and El Jebel. After each pantry, many of the volunteers load up their vehicles and deliver food to older adults or people without vehicles.

With every hour donated, every box packed, and every pallet of food distributed, there are fewer people experiencing hunger in our community. Thank you so much, volunteers. We couldn’t do this work without you. 🌱



HealthONE



SAFE AND ABUNDANT NUTRITION ALLIANCE (S.A.N.A.)



THE MONDAY AND THURSDAY GROUP



TOM ASHLOCK



ARLENA WOOD

Finding Support During Times of Need



Fato
Denver, CO



Mara
Lakewood, CO

The produce piled atop folding tables in New Freedom Park is almost as vibrant as the clothing and more than 20 languages of the people gathered to collect it. Organized by Kaizen Food Share, a Hunger Relief Partner of Food Bank of the Rockies, this weekly food distribution focuses on providing culturally responsive, familiar foods to the majority refugee and immigrant population that inhabits this area of East Denver.

Fato, who is originally from Kenya but has lived in Denver for 20 years, attends the food distribution at the park weekly.

“This helps a lot,” Fato shared. “Especially if SNAP has run out for the month or you haven’t gotten your paycheck. Especially if you have kids — they always want to eat! People tell other people about it. We help each other.”



This helps a lot, especially if you have kids — they always want to eat!



We struggle, but thank goodness for resources like this.

Two hours before her local mobile pantry opened for the morning, Mara pulled into the parking lot and secured her place in line. While her husband works full-time, Mara also works: taking care of their children and researching all available resources to help their family get by; her husband’s salary is just enough so that they can’t qualify for SNAP benefits.

“Every month we’re struggling. As soon as we’re saving the little we have, after we pay the bills and rent and everything, we are like, okay, well, this is just for gas,” said Mara.

In addition to getting food from Food Bank of the Rockies’ mobile pantries each month, Mara also knows where to go for diaper donations and other assistance. “Everything keeps going up in price, and every penny we earn goes to necessities,” she said. “We struggle, but thank goodness for resources like this.”



Anyone can experience food insecurity. Hunger cuts across demographics and borders, indifferent to the past or future chapters of a person’s life. Food Bank of the Rockies meets individuals in the present, ensuring that anyone who needs it gets the nourishing food they need to thrive.



Daryl and Marjorie
Palisade, CO

The first thing Daryl does when he and Marjorie pull to the front of the line at the EverGreen Box™, a program of Everyday Eats, distribution in Palisade is crack a joke. The two are all smiles as the 35-pound box of food and a bag of fresh produce gets loaded into the backseat of their car.

“We come here every month to get food,” said Daryl. “It comes in real handy; it’s nice to have. It feeds us and is very appreciated.”

The EverGreen Box™ Program is intended exactly for people like Daryl and Marjorie: retired, living off of a fixed income, and in need of nourishing food to support their well-being. Funded by the federal government, the food distributed via these boxes helps income-qualifying individuals aged 60 and older get their nutritional needs met without worrying about finances.



The food comes in handy. It feeds us and is very appreciated.



Delina and Ellie
Casper, WY



It helps supplement my income and our diets.

Delina works at the YMCA of Natrona County in Casper as a yoga instructor, and visits the food pantry there almost every week. Her bubbly 5-year-old, Ellie, usually accompanies her.

“It helps supplement my income and our diets,” Delina said. “It’s also fun to try new stuff — we get things here that we normally wouldn’t look for or think to buy. Ellie loves fruits and veggies, and being able to get those here helps a lot. Neither of us can eat dairy, either, and there are usually good options for us here. Plus, everyone is so friendly!”

On average every week, the YMCA of Natrona County provides food to 200–300 people, all sourced from the Food Bank. What began several years ago as a single table with food and snacks for kids has grown into a full-blown community distribution site, serving as many individuals and families facing food insecurity as possible.



On Tuesday, September 12, chefs from several of Denver’s most revered restaurants took an evening away from their kitchens to donate their time and efforts to Food Bank of the Rockies’ second-annual Gather & Sow event. One of those chefs was Dana Rodriguez of Work & Class, Super Mega Bien, Cantina Loca, and Casa Bonita. Originally from Chihuahua, Mexico, Rodriguez grew up without running water or electricity. At Gather & Sow, she gave back to her community through her culinary talents, with all proceeds from the event benefiting the Food Bank’s programs to nourish our neighbors.
/ Photo by Steve Peterson

FOOD BANK OF THE ROCKIES

Partnering Through the



Once a month, a group of Grand Junction High School students put aside homework and extracurriculars to donate their time as volunteers at the Food Bank of the Rockies mobile pantry that takes place at their school. Most of the students are members of the Interact Club and Riverside Education Center at the high school — groups that became involved with the mobile pantry almost a decade ago. “It feels good. I like to help people,” said Camille, a junior. Added Caden, “I enjoy it. It gets me outside, and I like talking to the people. I’m a people person.” / Photo by Sean Boggs



Establishing Roots and Branching Beyond Food

Nestled at the foot of a craggy mesa in Palisade, Colorado, exists an Eden bursting with the area's most prized produce: peaches. The lush tree canopy and colorful fruit contrast dramatically with the surrounding desert landscape; the scene feels akin to a mirage. But after a few minutes of listening to Rancho Durazno co-owner Gwen Cameron explain the benefits of this spot to grow organic peaches, nectarines, apricots, plums, cherries, Charentais melons, and pluots, the oasis makes sense.

The key to this location comes from Debeque Canyon, which is just north of the farm. In the spring, the breeze coming from that canyon brings with it warmer air temperatures that keep the fruit blossoms from freezing most of the time — even just a couple of degrees can mean the difference between a full crop and a failed one, and crop loss due to frost is still one of the farm's greatest challenges.

“Peaches are the most cold-hardy stone fruit you can grow in Colorado,” explained Gwen. “But even so, spring frost is the

biggest continuous challenge we face. For every 30 minutes the fruit spends below critical temperature, we lose 10% of our crop.”

Rancho Durazno, which is Spanish for “Peach Farm,” was founded by Gwen's parents in 1983. Since then, it has grown and evolved into its current state: approximately 40 acres across two locations on the far east end of the Grand Valley. The farm has been a partner of Food Bank of the Rockies for the last decade, selling peaches in bulk to the organization to distribute to clients

Rancho Durazno is one of 30 agricultural producers across Colorado and Wyoming that Food Bank of the Rockies purchases food from to nourish our neighbors and support our local economy.





I'm a firm believer in people helping people. This is an investment in our community on the Western Slope and in Colorado. It feels good to know we're helping people.

- Janie Van Winkle



via mobile pantries and Hunger Relief Partners, and, most recently, to dehydrate at the new Western Slope Etkin Family Distribution Center.

“Food Bank of the Rockies has helped me several times over the years when all my peaches ripened at once,” said Gwen. “When peaches get ripe, they need to move quickly, or they’ll go bad. There’s also not much of a market for imperfect-looking peaches. I’m hoping the Food Bank’s dehydrator program will help with that, too.”

Across Colorado and Wyoming, Food Bank of the Rockies partners with dozens of local growers and producers. These relationships are beneficial on multiple levels. The Food Bank serves as a dependable buyer for smaller producers who otherwise might have difficulty branching into new crops or competing with larger growers. The products get into the hands of neighbors experiencing food insecurity who face barriers of access such as cost or location. The local economy gets a boost thanks to the steady stream of income received by growers.

These partnerships go beyond fruits and vegetables, too. Van Winkle Ranch joined the ranks of the Food Bank’s agricultural partners early in the pandemic, and they established a consistent arrangement in January 2021. The ranch has between 500 and 600 cows and sells directly to customers from its location in Western Colorado. It is also close to being able to ship beef to buyers across the country. But selling to Food Bank of the Rockies goes beyond just having another consistent customer.

“There are so many cool things about this partnership,” said Janie Van Winkle, a fourth-generation rancher. “Selling locally means the cows become a really important piece of our community, providing high-quality protein for people who need it. There’s also a huge economic

piece: Every cow sold and processed in Mesa County puts \$600-\$800 back into the local economy every year.”

Almost three years into the partnership, Janie said she feels proud that her family can help their neighbors through their livelihood.

“I’m a firm believer in people helping people and that sometimes life can get out of our control and people end up needing help,” she said. “This is an investment in our community on the Western Slope and in Colorado. It feels good to know we’re helping people.”

While Food Bank of the Rockies’ central mission is to nourish our communities with nutritious food, more is needed for people to live a full life. That’s why the Food Bank partners with organizations like WeeCycle, which distributes essential items for newborns and toddlers; government and community organizations that provide such services as job training, housing assistance, and medical aid; and PetSmart Charities and Colorado Pet Pantry to provide pet food to clients with animals.

“Pets are part of the family,” said Erin Myerchin, senior account manager for food industry partnerships for Feeding America, the nationwide network of food banks, food pantries, and community-based organizations of which Food Bank of the Rockies is a member. “Sometimes a pet is a person’s only family. People are so excited to see the pet food at distributions — it means both they and their pet will have the food they need.”

Supporting local producers, partnering with organizations that offer wrap-around services, and sourcing the highest quality items possible are just a few of the ways Food Bank of the Rockies ignites the power of community to nourish our neighbors and serves as a good steward of every donation we receive. Thank you for helping us fulfill our mission. 🌱



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Taking Action Against Hunger, Together

We are looking ahead to the next several years with one goal in mind: Ensuring all of our neighbors have enough nutritious and familiar food to thrive. Achieving that goal will require persistent innovation in our programming and strategic operations, especially as we anticipate a continued increase in need in the communities we serve.

Directing our efforts is our new strategic plan, which was implemented in spring 2023. The pillars of this plan include:

Nourishing our communities

Be a leader in providing equitable access to nutritious, culturally responsive food to meet the unique needs of our neighbors experiencing food insecurity.

Amplifying the collective voice

Strengthen our expertise on and be a vocal advocate for ending food insecurity, and amplify the voices of neighbors experiencing hunger and our Hunger Relief Partners that serve them.

Shortening the lines

Partner with community organizations that address the root causes of hunger to increase neighbors' access to needed services and decrease the need for food assistance.

Integrating our commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity

Create systems to embody our values of diversity, inclusivity, and equity in every interaction with the people who conduct, partner with, make possible, and receive services from our work.

Strengthening our foundation

Build a high-performing food bank that brings our values to life through a focus on investment in our staff and partnerships, sustainable operations, and a data-driven culture for continual improvement.

Food insecurity exists in every community, from the poorest neighborhoods to the most affluent. Making difficult decisions between having enough food to eat and paying for all of life's other necessities is an unfortunate reality for many of our Colorado and Wyoming neighbors.

The good news is that we can answer the challenge of hunger together. Thank you for your dedicated support to help us nourish our neighbors. Thanks to you, we can continue looking ahead with hope, perseverance, and strength.



FOOD BANK OF THE ROCKIES™



Give today at foodbankrockies.org/GiveAR