

harvest

A NEWSLETTER OF THE BLUE RIDGE AREA FOOD BANK

Fueling Families When Times Are Tough

Serving up Hope and Nourishing Food

PAGE 2

ALSO INSIDE:

Powered-up Pantries Move More Food

PAGE 4

Happy Birthday, Mobile Food Pantry!

PAGE 6



Blue Ridge Area
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Fueling Families

When Times Are Tough

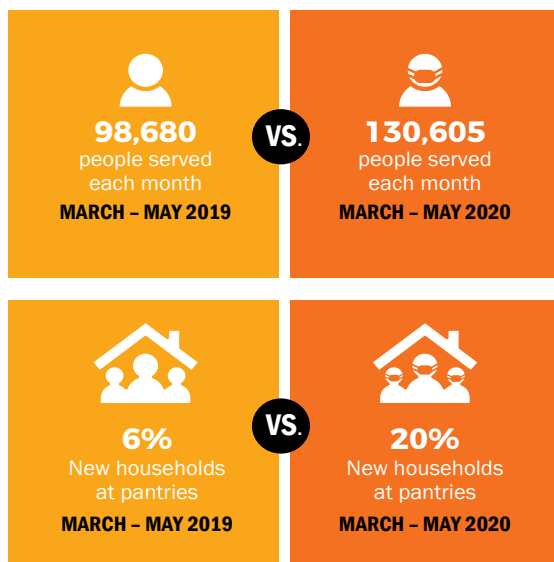
The Food Bank serves up hope and nourishing food

After footage of mass food distributions with mile-long lines cropped up on national TV, many supporters asked how our network's been faring over the past few months. Here's a window into the food-pantry experience as it's unfolding in the Blue Ridge region.



Your Impact During the COVID-19 Crisis

Comparing 2019 and 2020



Although the sun rose just a few hours earlier, the town of Orange is already sweltering, clocking upper 80-degree temperatures by the time midmorning hits. Wet, warm air wraps around Booster Park while vehicles arrive at the scene, forming rows along the edge of a baseball field. It's 8:45 a.m., and the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank's Mobile Food Pantry distribution will kick off in a little over an hour.

Just around the bend, under a pavilion, a pack of volunteers anticipates the arrival of two Food Bank trucks. Today, the trailers will be stuffed with produce boxes, taco meat, organic blueberries, and shredded cheese—enough food to serve 290 households.

Some clients arrive three hours early to snag top spots in a line that's lengthened in the past few months. The rise of COVID-19 has spurred a rise in need: More than 150,000 individuals have filed for unemployment in the Blue Ridge area since March, so the uptick is understandable. Many families have turned to the Food Bank for much-needed relief during an uncertain time.



Navigating a “new normal”

On this particular Tuesday in late July, 12 families new to food assistance are expected to cycle through. One such household is represented by Sherrie Burton, who graciously agrees to share her story: “I’m sure there [are] a lot of people who don’t know [what it’s like at a food pantry],” she says. Her strawberry hair reflects the sun’s warmth. “[You] look around and...see [a lot of people are] going through the same thing you’re going through.”

Sherrie resides in Orange County with her husband, Roy, and two children, ages 16 and 4. Roy, a plumber, previously operated his own business, but his once-steady stream of work dried up along with the economy. Meanwhile, COVID-19 dismantled Sherrie’s in-home daycare service. “I lost all my kids,” she says, referencing the four children she once hosted. Still, she shines with a caretaker’s kindness. (The back of her shirt reads, “My greatest blessings call me Mimi.”)

A family-first mentality

Despite it all, Sherrie refuses to let anxiety hold her back. “We have to keep a smile on our face[s] for our children...so they don’t worry,” she says. To make up for lost income, she took on two new jobs—one as a food server and another cleaning houses. Venturing into others’ homes is “a scare every day,” as she’s left worried about potentially “bringing [the virus] home to [her] family.” Although all the change feels “like a nightmare,” she pushes forward, bolstered by faith and family loyalty. As for Roy, he’s been holding down the house while Sherrie doubles up on shifts.

At a time when providing for her loved ones feels tougher than ever, Sherrie plugs into her personal catchphrase: “Go, God, go.” She worries about her teen daughter, set to enter 11th grade at a new school—during an age of social-distancing mandates. And how can Sherrie best address the needs of her adopted son, a preschooler with autism? She’s decided to “give it to God.” And in relaying the details of her own story, she hopes to encourage others to keep the faith and lean into love.

Setting the table for a brighter tomorrow

With your help, the Food Bank has been able to respond swiftly and flexibly to the health and economic crisis. By July 1, COVID-related expenses had already topped \$1.9 million (90% of those dollars supplied food). And record amounts of food are flowing into neighbors’ homes, as demonstrated by a 30% year-over-year increase in pounds distributed between March and June.

To all Food Bank supporters, Sherrie sends a sincere “thank you.” Without this distribution, she says, the food in her household wouldn’t be as healthy, nor would the produce be as fresh. When she finally steers away from the park, her trunk packed with food boxes, her sights are set on home. The sun glints in an open sky. Her car skates past an ocean of grass. She presses on, propelled by hope.

To learn more about the impact of hunger in central and western Virginia, visit www.brafb.org/hunger-in-our-area.

A Dividend More Valuable than Expected:

The Impact of the Agency Capacity Fund

Imagine you run a large, wholesale business that pumps \$42 million worth of valuable product into the economy every year, yet each retail location in your region is managed by hardworking volunteers.

That’s a pretty apt description of the Food Bank’s work. We rely on the partnership of 203 food pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters to reach people who need food assistance across 25 counties and eight cities. This network helps us move 27.8 million pounds of food yearly.

Strategic priorities: Strengthen the network, increase access to fresh foods

When the Food Bank outlined its strategic priorities back in 2016, chief among them was the goal to strengthen its distribution network, which serves as a nutritional safety net for many neighbors. Another focus was to bump up the volume of healthy, fresh foods distributed—including produce and dairy.

It quickly became clear that we needed to leverage our resources to invest in our partners on the front lines.

You Believe in Helping Others

You donate food, funds, and time to help your neighbors in need—and you are making a difference today. **You can also make a difference tomorrow.**

After you have provided for your loved ones in your will, consider including a gift to the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank. Your bequest is a lasting testament to a cause that matters to you, and you will help us feed families in the future.

Visit www.brafb.org/planned-giving or contact Karen Ratzlaff at 540-213-8404 or kratzlaff@brafb.org for more information. All inquiries will remain confidential.





They needed equipment, technology, supplies, information, and access to expertise to keep their doors open and expand their services.

Thus, we launched the Agency Capacity Fund, a donor-supported effort that's made it possible for the Food Bank to pump more than \$674,000 worth of equipment and supplies into the network over the past four years.

Donor-generated dividends

And the result? A more effective, sustainable distribution system emerged. Today, our network distributes 4.1 million more pounds of food than it did four years ago. In that same time span, the percentage of produce distributed has grown by 19%.

"I want to thank you and all of your donors who make these grants possible. Better equipment creates better experiences for our clients and our volunteers," shared one food pantry director. "More importantly, these changes convey to our neighbors that they do matter and people see them and care about them."

If you want to invest in local organizations working with the Food Bank, consider designating your donation to the Agency Capacity Fund. Learn more: www.brafb.org/our-partners.

Despite Pandemic, Pantries Remained Open

When the reality of a pandemic became apparent, one of our first questions was, "How will we get food into our neighbors' hands—especially if our network partners have to close their doors?" After all, most of our food-pantry partners are operated by senior volunteers who have to look out for their own health and safety.

We believe several key factors have helped stabilize our network since March:

- 1 investments made over time via the Agency Capacity Fund
- 2 adaptations like pre-packing food boxes in warehouses for low- and no-touch distributions
- 3 the dedication of pantry volunteers and community leaders
- 4 a healthy dose of luck

At the height of the crisis, only 12 out of our 203 pantries shut down. In some cases, closure was temporary; the few pantries that have remained closed plan to reopen soon.

These factors made ours one of the most stable networks in the nation. And because of this resilience, the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank never had to resort to superdistributions like the ones that filled nightly TV news broadcasts.

Thank you, partners, for your dedication and support! And thank you, donors to the Agency Capacity Fund, for your foresight and generosity.

The Mobile Food Pantry: Celebrating 10 Years on the Road



Like a proud parent, the Food Bank is celebrating a milestone in the life of one of its children: The Mobile Food Pantry (MFP) is approaching its 10th birthday. Putting a pantry on wheels was a new concept for us in 2010, but we could see that not everyone in need had easy access to traditional food pantries. So, the MFP was born. **Today, we count 10 (of many) blessings and thank everyone who has helped make this program a success.**

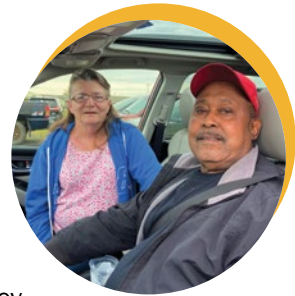


1

The MFP visits 11 locations across our service area, nourishing 3,620 lives monthly. We took our first steps nearly 10 years ago with sites in Albemarle, Nelson, and Buckingham Counties. Later, we identified additional communities with unmet needs and forged partnerships to expand the program.

2

We've helped neighbors push through hardship. Married nearly half a century, Clara and Charlie are accustomed to caring for each other. Clara helps her husband—a Vietnam vet—combat cancer and diabetes by ensuring he takes 30 prescribed pills daily. They know good food is essential, so after years of working two jobs each, they now rely on the Orange MFP for nutritious eats.



3

We've created a space where community flourishes. Because many rural residents lack transportation, clients often pick up food for homebound neighbors. "Even after the truck pulls away, the MFP doesn't necessarily end," says Melissa Wender, MFP program coordinator. "Recipients might [stop] at three places on their way home to deliver food."

4

We've formed tight-knit volunteer teams.

Mobile distributions are energy-filled and efficient. Volunteers and staff rhythmically unload food from the MFP truck then pack goods into clients' cars. Many volunteers are regulars, but newcomers are always welcome. Take Kelly and her sons, Brady and Rudy, who volunteered in Scottsville for the first time in March. Thirteen-year-old Rudy said, "We have food, and we want everybody else to have it, too."

5

We've distributed hope—and lots of produce!

Fresh produce is a guarantee at MFPs, but dry goods, dairy products, and frozen meat are common, too. So, what's on the menu? In early July, Nelson County clients received this nutritious mix: squash, cherry tomatoes, lettuce, potatoes, four-cheese ravioli, and chicken fillets.

6

Flex is what the MFP does best!

When the program first started, clients lined up on foot and carried food back to their cars. Later, to better serve seniors and neighbors with disabilities, we shifted to drive-through distributions. During the pandemic, we've adapted again for safety reasons: Food is pre-packed in warehouses, and clients stay in their cars while masked volunteers fill up trunks.

7

Anyone want to adopt an MFP?

Yes: Rustburg! Mobile pantries were initially intended to offer short-term support. Once community members convened to help underserved neighbors, we hoped they'd launch local pantries. This isn't an easy feat and hadn't happened until this year. Come to the Altar Ministry and Rustburg United Methodist Church recently opened two new pantries to supplant the Rustburg MFP, just months after it launched during the pandemic.

8

No one attending an MFP goes untouched.

The need is in plain sight, but so are grateful clients, generous volunteers, and dedicated staff. Food bankers like MFP Driver Doug Galloway are uplifted by this work: "It feels good [to] make someone happy." Is he worried about risking his own health during a pandemic? "I take precautions, but I know this food is going to those who need it, so you put your own...concerns on the back burner," says Doug, also a volunteer firefighter.



9

The MFP's effectiveness inspired us to develop more mobile programs.

The MFP proved that local delivery is an impactful strategy, prompting us to launch the Neighborhood Produce Market (NPM) in 2018. In urban areas where the NPM operates (Harrisonburg and Lynchburg), traditional pantries are present, but barriers like language differences and limited transportation hamper access. Direct intervention helps us navigate around food-access roadblocks.

10

The spirit of generosity that jump-started the program still fuels it a decade later.

The Better Living Foundation, BIO-CAT, the Charlottesville Area Community Foundation, the MLG Foundation, and The Perry Foundation helped us get our start, funding the refrigerated truck and lots of fresh food. Since then, more than \$1 million has been donated to keep the wheels turning.

Now, (birthday) hats off to all of you for coming along on this ride with us! Learn more about our programs here: www.brafb.org/programs.



Thank you to the following businesses, foundations, and organizations for helping provide relief to people in need—especially during the pandemic. Due to space constraints, we cannot list every donor, but **we are deeply grateful for every gift.** Together, we will rise to the challenge and nourish our community.

- | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| Anonymous | Danone North America | I. J. and Hilda M. Breeden Foundation | Shenandoah Community Foundation |
| Agua Fund | Dubchansky Family Foundation | Janet Stone Jones Foundation | Siochain Foundation |
| Apple Federal Credit Union | Dunkin' Donuts | Jefferson Forest High School Cavalier Theatre | Stultz Foundation |
| Appleseeds Foundation | DuPont Community Credit Union | Journey of Awesomeness | Subaru of America |
| Augusta Health Community Benefit Program | Elizabeth Ireland Graves Foundation | Kraft Heinz | Subway |
| Ball Advanced Aluminum Technologies | Enterprise Holdings Foundation | Kroger - Zero Hunger Zero Waste | Target |
| Bank of America | Farkas Family Foundation | Lewis G. Schaeneman, Jr. Foundation | TE Connectivity |
| Berglund Oak Ridge Toyota | Focused Ultrasound Foundation | Lloyd V. Guild Charitable Foundation | The Clowes Fund, Inc. |
| Better Living | Food Lion Feeds | Manning Family Foundation | The COVID-19 HR Community Response Fund of The Community Foundation of Harrisonburg and Rockingham County in partnership with the United Way of Harrisonburg and Rockingham County |
| Bishop Virtual 5K: Race Against Hunger | Giant Food | MARTIN'S | Thomas C. & Mary Ann Hays Family Charitable Trust |
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| Columbia Gas, a NiSource Company | Harris Teeter | Pacific Life Insurance Company | |
| Community Emergency Response Fund of the Charlottesville Area Community Foundation | Harrisonburg Lions Club | Paul Bechtner Foundation | |
| Community Foundation of the Central Blue Ridge | Harrisonburg-Rockingham Association of REALTORS® | Perdue Foundation on behalf of Perdue Farms | |
| Conagra Brands | Hartfield Foundation | Perry Foundation | |
| Crutchfield | Hershey | Prayer Partners | |
| | Hilltop Foundation | Sheetz | |
| | Home Instead Senior Care | | |
| | Humana | | |

**Reflects some gifts received December 15, 2019–July 31, 2020*

Invite the Food Bank to Speak at Your Group's Virtual Meeting

If your group hosts virtual gatherings and would be interested in learning about our work, consider having a Food Bank representative contribute to the conversation. Submit a request online at www.brafb.org/request-a-speaker, and we'll recruit the right food banker for the occasion.



Fight Hunger While Staying Safe: Become a Virtual Hunger Hero!

Community partnership is a gift that lifts us all. While in-person meetups may be a no-go, that doesn't mean you have to cancel your event benefiting the Food Bank. It's easy to host a get-together online and nourish lives at the same time.

Launch an Online Fund Drive

Online drives are a great way for organizations to engage their employees, members, and/or customers. We can use your logo and co-brand a customized donation page. Every \$1 donated can help provide four meals for neighbors in need.

Start a Facebook Fundraiser

Do you have a birthday or life milestone coming up? What better way to celebrate than by giving back? Let your friends and family know that hunger relief is a cause you support. Facebook makes fundraising simple!

Visit www.brafb.org/hungerhero to learn more.



First Lady Pamela Northam visited the Food Bank in August to announce the We Care partnership and pack a few boxes.

We Care, We Pack, We Nourish

In response to the pandemic, volunteers have helped the Food Bank pre-pack food boxes to distribute to our most vulnerable neighbors. This critical adaptation has helped our pantry partners stay safe and keep their doors open.

Some of the boxes are part of the "We Care" initiative, made possible by corporate sponsorship and state-directed funding through the CARES Act. To boost the Commonwealth's emergency food supply system, Sentara Healthcare took the lead on sponsoring and advancing the effort. Other generous donors include Truist, Northern Neck Insurance Company, Humana, CVS Health, Aetna, The Wawa Foundation, and Tito's Handmade Vodka. The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank was one of seven Virginia food banks to receive the boxes.

We Care boxes provide five days' worth of meals to seniors who are food insecure and individuals quarantined due to COVID-19 exposure. Each box is packed with staples like beans, brown rice, carrots, and more—plus coronavirus prevention tips.

Boxing Meals & Myths

BUSTING



✗ MYTH Problems are so big in the world; I can't make a difference.

✓ TRUTH Simply by showing up, you have an impact. No task is too small to count.

- Each box of food packed equals one family fed. Your support helps us meet immediate needs and nourish lives in real time.



- Actions don't have to be drastic to be meaningful. Change occurs over time, especially when it comes to systemic issues like food insecurity.
- Your presence frees up staff to focus on other important projects. Last years' volunteers served enough hours to equate to 15 full-time staff positions!

✗ MYTH Volunteering will add stress to my life. It's one more thing to manage!

✓ TRUTH Studies show there's a positive correlation between volunteer hours clocked and good mental and physical health. Plus, you can volunteer how and when you want.

- Volunteering equips you to help yourself in ways you may not initially anticipate. Giving back empowers you, and in turn, you can empower others.
- Getting involved helps you feel more connected to your community, aware of its unique needs, and better positioned to create change.
- Worried you won't feel safe onsite or that shift times won't align with your work schedule? We offer remote and virtual volunteering opportunities, too!



✗ MYTH I don't have the right skills to volunteer.

✓ TRUTH You don't need to be a hunger expert or warehouse wiz to make a difference. Just come equipped with a heart for community and a willingness to learn.

- If you're enthusiastic about helping others, you're all set! Everything else can be learned on the job.
- You may have a special skill that could benefit the Food Bank. Are you passionate about advocacy, a tech pro, willing to answer phones, etc.? Check out our Specialized Volunteer openings.

It's not too late to help combat the effects of COVID-19.

We've seen a historic outpouring of support, but we will need your help to keep the momentum pumping for the long term. Please join us in crushing these myths, and stay informed about our volunteer program by visiting www.brafb.org/volunteer.

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Everyone is exhausted, and there's no end in sight. And yet...

Volunteers show up with greater resolve than ever before.

Donors give generously without ever being asked.

Families in need share stories of resilience, despite their fears and losses.

We're all fatigued by the pandemic and the relentless news of surges and setbacks, unemployment and uncertainty. We want this all to be over, but we know that normalcy is many months away for some of us and perhaps years away for those who lost jobs that may take a long time to return.

But through it all, we show up. *All of us.* Food Bank staff, delivering food to pantries no matter what. You, lending a hand or making an extra gift without a second thought. Even our neighbors in need, offering gratitude, warmth, and encouragement for our efforts.

Giving, we all know, is energizing. And at this time, all of us engaged in the work of hunger relief—especially the tireless volunteers at pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, school-meal programs, and senior-citizen centers—need all the energy we can muster.

Thank you for giving and supporting our work in any way you can. We're grateful beyond measure.

Sincerely,



Michael McKee
Chief Executive Officer



Blue Ridge Area
FOOD BANK

A member of
FEEDING AMERICA

NON-PROFIT ORG
POSTAGE & FEES
PAID
BLUE RIDGE AREA
FOOD BANK

P.O. Box 937
Verona, VA 24482



OUR MISSION is to provide nourishing food to our neighbors in need through vibrant community partnerships and passionate public support.

BRANCH LOCATIONS

We serve your community through one of four distribution centers:

Shenandoah Valley Area Branch & Headquarters
P.O. Box 937
96 Laurel Hill Road
Verona, VA 24482-0937
P: 540.248.3663
F: 540.248.6410

Thomas Jefferson Area Branch
1207 Harris Street
Charlottesville, VA 22903-5319
P: 434.296.3663
F: 434.296.9621

Lynchburg Area Branch
501 12th Street, Suite B
Lynchburg, VA 24504-2527
P: 434.845.4099
F: 434.845.6153

Lord Fairfax Area Branch
1802 Roberts Street
Winchester, VA 22604-2342
P: 540.665.0770
F: 540.722.4217

The Many Languages of Food Insecurity

More than ever, the Food Bank is serving individuals and families belonging to immigrant and refugee populations. In fact, at some food pantries, you might hear clients speaking Arabic, Chinese, French, Korean, Russian, Spanish, or Vietnamese.

Two of Virginia's refugee-resettlement services operate in our service area: Church World Service in Harrisonburg and the International Rescue Committee in Charlottesville.

Due to COVID-19, more and more of these neighbors are experiencing hunger; however, many cannot access federal nutrition assistance benefits. It's up to the Food Bank and its network of partner pantries to help. We believe *everyone* should have enough to eat.

