

harvest

A NEWSLETTER OF THE BLUE RIDGE AREA FOOD BANK

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Blue Ridge Area
FOOD BANK

Everyone should have enough to eat.

A member of
**FEEDING
AMERICA**

Social Security Doesn't Guarantee Food Security



Andy, a retiree, enjoys the fresh produce at the Mobile Food Pantry.

You can work hard all your life and still not have enough for the basics.

Even before the annual inflation rate rose to more than 9%, half of the senior population living alone couldn't afford the essentials, according to The Eldercare Index.

The fixed income of older neighbors can increase their risk for food insecurity and creates a disturbing dilemma. Trade-offs are often made between food or medicine and medical care, utilities, housing, and transportation.

We met Andy at a recent Mobile Food Pantry (MFP) distribution in Highland County, where we served 403 individuals in one day. **Almost half were age 60 or older.**

Andy is a lifetime resident of Highland County and a Navy veteran. He worked in construction and carpentry and



The "food desert" in beautiful Highland County has an oasis. The Mobile Food Pantry helps us meet people where they are.

retired from the power company about four years ago. His adult children live on the family land but have long



Above: Robert is providing care for his 6 grandchildren alone.

commutes for work. So, he and his wife help where and when they can, including with the grandkids. He grows his own vegetables, but that’s not enough to get by on, especially in the off-season.

Notably, even in beautiful rural Virginia, Andy lives in what’s called a food desert; the nearest grocery store offering produce and meats is 30 miles down the road. He started visiting the pantry when his church announced the availability of the Food Bank’s services.

And that’s an important point. Pride often stops older people from asking for help. Andy, and guests like him, help reduce that stigma. They can see that *everyone* is welcome, without judgment. So, guests keep coming back thanks to the friendly faces of volunteers, staff, and other guests, not to mention the wholesome food.

About the food he was taking home, he said, “It’s a big help,” and “everything gets used; don’t nothing get thrown away.”

Nutrition Programs FOR SENIORS

The **Reach** program provides nutritious food to seniors with low incomes or who are homebound, as well as to people with disabilities. Reach is funded solely by private donations, and there is no income barrier to this program. Volunteers deliver food bags filled with shelf-stable goods, including dairy and meats, to households that are food insecure. Reach bags can also be picked up at designated sites.



On the cover: We met Fernando at our Neighborhood Produce Market in Harrisonburg.

Other challenges for seniors

- **“Grandfamilies” are a noticeable trend.** More seniors are becoming the guardians of their grandchildren, putting a strain on family budgets. Understandably, food insecurity rates for seniors who are raising grandchildren are substantially higher than for seniors who are not.
- **Disabilities make income challenges worse.** Older adults with disabilities have food insecurity rates four times higher than older adults without disabilities.
- **Lack of nutrition can cause poor health.** Rural seniors, especially minorities and women, are at greater risk of food insecurity, which is linked to chronic illnesses like asthma, diabetes, and depression.

The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank works to distribute nutritious food, which provides far more than mere calories.

The goal of Food Bank partners and programs is to ease the burden for all our guests, including older adults.

Your generous gifts help ensure seniors have easier access to nutritious foods through programs like the Mobile Food Pantry.

The many facets of senior hunger present challenges. Donors, partners, and the community are standing stronger together to help make sure they have enough to eat.



Your gift can ensure that local seniors have enough to eat. Donate at www.brafb.org/give-now.

SCAN TO DONATE!

Senior Food Boxes contain food from the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), the USDA’s only food program specifically for seniors with low incomes. Foods are carefully chosen by the USDA and packed by volunteers at the Food Bank to meet the nutritional needs of qualified participants.

A Lifetime— and More—of Compassion and Generosity



Fred Good and Cheryl Henderson, members of *The Will to End Hunger Society*.

Each day, the Food Bank and our partners and supporters offer help, hope, and dignity to men, women, and children who face impossible choices between buying food and other necessities.

These are choices no one should be forced to make.

For Fred Good and Cheryl Henderson of Harrisonburg, the decision to begin supporting the Food Bank was an easy one.

“No one in this country should go hungry,” explains Fred, who grew up on a farm in Rockingham County and worked as a police officer and salesman for Sysco Foods. A former teacher, Cheryl knows the importance of good nutrition for child development. “We have donated for many years and found the Food Bank to be a well-run operation that uses our gifts the way they are supposed to be used.”

“My heart is for people who are working and are truly trying,” says Fred. The couple, who

recently celebrated 23 years of marriage, agree that food and shelter are fundamental human rights. They also understand that hunger impacts people in multiple ways: physically, mentally, and emotionally. They have logged many hours volunteering with the Blessings in a Backpack program at their church, Massanutten Presbyterian.

The ultimate gift: Joining *The Will to End Hunger Society*

It was an easy next step to decide to include a gift for the Food Bank in their will. Their compassion, coupled with their trust in the organization, motivated Fred and Cheryl in 2017 to share their intent and become members of *The Will to End Hunger Society*.

The Will to End Hunger Society recognizes donors who will make

a future gift to the Food Bank. These gifts require some advance planning but are relatively easy to establish. They can be achieved through inclusion of a gift in a will or a trust, a financial transfer from a bank account at death, or as the beneficiary of a retirement account, life insurance policy, or IRA. We can even help a donor establish a Charitable Gift Annuity to provide income today and a gift tomorrow.

“I can’t think of any better cause to support with a legacy gift.” – Fred Good

To others considering a planned gift, they have a few suggestions: Consider how fortunate you are and look around at the need. Work a volunteer shift. Then enlist a trusted financial advisor to discuss the details.

Lastly, says Fred, “search your heart. If it’s right to make a future gift to the Food Bank, you’ll know it.”

We want to say, “Thank you,” now! It’s easy to let us know that you’ve included the Food Bank in your estate plan. And when you do, you’ll become a member of *The Will to End Hunger Society*.

To learn more about ensuring your legacy of support and leaving a future gift for the Food Bank, please visit www.brafb.org/give/planned-giving/ or reach out to Karen Ratzlaff at (540) 213-8404 or kratzlaff@brafb.org.

ALL INQUIRIES ARE TREATED CONFIDENTIALLY.



Meet These New Food Bank Leaders!

We welcome the energy, perspectives, and talents of new team members who are committed to our shared vision of ensuring everyone has enough healthy food to eat.



Shavone Dudley

Board of Directors, Member

Shavone serves as the Associate Director of Employer Engagement and Recruiting at the University of Virginia Darden School of Business.

“Food insecurity is an important issue to me because I feel that no one in our community should be in a position that they do not have their basic needs met (food, shelter, clothing, water, air) so that they can survive and can live a life of quality. I decided to join the Board as I was at a point in my life and career where I felt that I wanted to be a part of something meaningful that served others and produced an impact.”



Bob Davis

Board of Directors, Member

Bob is the Vice President of Kroger’s Mid-Atlantic Division, covering 109 stores in Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky and Ohio.

“Fighting food insecurity is a passion of mine and the company I work for. Growing up in rural Southwest Virginia, the struggle to make ends meet in our family and my friends’ families left an indelible impression on me as a youth. I’m thrilled to be able to serve on the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank Board and support the mission of providing nourishing food to our neighbors in need.”



Jen Jacobs

Chief Collaboration Officer (CCO)

Jen joined the Food Bank in October after 20 years in the local affordable housing space. Now, as CCO, Jen works with pantry and program partners to generate collaborative, creative, and durable approaches to serving guests and solving food insecurity in our region.

“What I love most about being here is the vibrancy—of the people who work here, the volunteers, the supporters, our program and coalition partners, and our sibling food banks. I am amazed by the talent, the thoughtfulness, and the dedication of everyone I’ve met so far.”



The Food Sourcing Team: Jess Shover and Greg Knight

Securing Nutritious Food for 110,000 People Each Month

And you thought your grocery list (and bill) was large!

A produce box with onions, potatoes, carrots, sweet potatoes, and pineapple. Bags of mixed greens. Cans of corn. Cans of green beans. Ham steaks.

This was the menu at a recent Mobile Food Pantry distribution. Thanks to generous community support we provided more than 200 households facing hunger with nourishing food that day.

This was one distribution on one day. Wonder *how* we acquire the 25 million pounds of food we need each year?

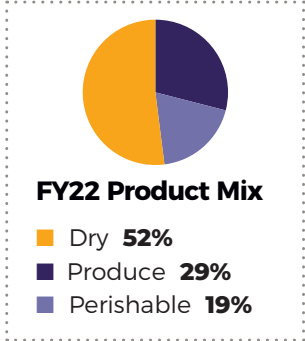
Meet the dream team: Food Sourcing Manager Greg Knight and Food Sourcing Specialist Jess Shover.

Jess says, "When I started in this role, the most surprising aspect was all the different things you have to consider to acquire all the food we need for our partners and guests."

Using science and technology to provide variety and good nutrition

Most of our food is donated or comes from the USDA. Financial donations from our donors enable us to buy the balance of our inventory and improve the nutrient profile, a budget impact of nearly \$2 million this year.

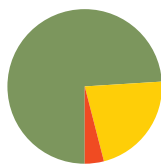
Supporting the health of our community is a Food Bank priority. We are a steady source of food for many guests, so it's important that we offer healthy food rich in nutrients, not just calories.



Nutrient Profile of Food Received

JULY 2021 – JUNE 2022

- Green **74%**
- Yellow **22%**
- Red **4%**



Green = eat often
Yellow = eat sparingly
Red = eat only on occasion; limit

Greg and Jess use an online tool called Nourish to choose nutrient-rich foods. Developed through a partnership between James Madison University and the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank, and soon to be adopted by sister food banks, Nourish draws nutritional information from the USDA Food Composition Database.

Challenges in managing the inventory

Beyond choosing nutritious foods to purchase, Greg and Jess consider many variables to ensure a robust and varied inventory is available when partners need it.

Extra-long lead times for orders, spiking food and transportation costs, declines in product donations from manufacturers, fluctuating numbers of households served, bird flu, and supply chain issues have made the job more challenging of late.

What's a typical day like? Greg and Jess might be:

- **Boosting the fresh produce inventory** by placing an order with local growers.
- **Assuring product quality** by inspecting and tasting a sample of a potential new food product before placing an order.
- **Monitoring food safety** by tracking expiration dates closely.
- **Checking the inventory on hand** to support a program menu, like for Family BackPacks.
- **Ordering a staple like cereal for pantries**, after shopping for the best price from trusted manufacturers and projecting when pantries will need the product.

They can't tell your fortune over a crystal ball or pull a rabbit out of a hat, but Greg and Jess come pretty close to working magic. They are experts at forecasting and securing what this community needs to nourish people and nourish hope.

Food Is Also Culture

When your family gathers, which foods do you like to eat?

We want guests to have access to foods that are familiar to them. This includes immigrants and refugees who typically have limited or no access to federal public benefits like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

The Food Bank has developed a list of priority foods to acquire, based on USDA information and network partner feedback. This includes animal protein, fresh produce, and cooking oils and spices.

Not everyone facing hunger is seeking food assistance, and we aim to find and help these "missing guests." Food Sourcing Manager Greg Knight wonders, "If we have more culturally familiar foods, will we serve more people?"

Thanks to the generous support of major funding partners—**Devils Backbone Brewing Company** and **Kroger**—we'll accelerate the culturally familiar foods initiative this year.



Elisa Veras is a volunteer at Church of the Incarnation in Charlottesville. She helps ensure culturally familiar foods are on hand for guests.



LEARN MORE: <https://www.brafb.org/foodsourcing>





Passionate public support from our donors makes it possible for us to serve those experiencing hunger in our communities. From gifts of their time, food, funds, and voices, Food Bank donors help ensure that everyone has enough to eat.

Across our 25-county service area, thousands of financial donors, volunteers, advocates, and friends actively support the work of the Food Bank and have a positive impact in the Blue Ridge area. We appreciate every one of you! Here we highlight a few examples of the many ways our community stepped up in recent months.

**GIVING
TUESDAY**



With your support, and a matching gift from **Wind River Chimes**, we were able to raise enough to provide more than **1.2 MILLION MEALS** for families in our region on **GivingTuesday!**



After a two-year hiatus, **Blue Ridge Community College** administrators, faculty, and students brought back the Hunger Symposium to raise awareness about hunger in the Shenandoah Valley while collecting food and funds, which will help provide more than **12,100 meals**.



In Winchester, the Shenandoah Valley, and Charlottesville the **Scout's** annual drive collected enough food to help provide **48,149 meals**.

Jefferson-Madison Regional Library and **Liberty University** participated in **Food for Fines**, an overdue book fee forgiveness program where nonperishable foods were donated in place of the normal fines. These foods help replenish the shelves of our local pantries.

James River Day School met their goal of collecting **10,000 donated food items**, to be divided between the Food Bank and other local nonprofits, including Lynchburg Daily Bread and The Salvation Army.

Thank you to the staff of **Sentara RMH Medical Center** who selected the Food Bank as one of their favorite local charities, resulting in **260,000 meals** for local neighbors.

Wegmans is helping the environment while feeding the community. One hundred percent (100%) of the nickel they collect for each paper grocery bag sold is donated to the Food Bank, resulting in about **12,000 charitable meals** for neighbors each month.



THANK YOU, Generous Corporate, Foundation, and Event Partners



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& CLARA S. MILLER
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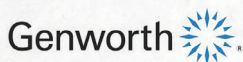


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*REFLECTS SIGNIFICANT GIFTS RECEIVED JUNE 1 TO NOVEMBER 30, 2022

Set the Table and Provide a Year of Meals



A \$30 donation can provide a year's worth of meals for a neighbor facing hunger.

How? Make this gift monthly and you will help us provide 1,440 meals a year.

Or pick any amount that suits you. It couldn't be easier—just set up your automatic donation and let it run! You retain control and can log in online to adjust your giving at any time.

When you do, you'll join *The Supper Club*, the community of friends who make regular, monthly gifts to help the Food Bank meet the needs of our guests for food throughout the year.



It's easy to give monthly

- **Credit card**—auto charge your card, like a subscription service
- **Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT)**—an automatic, secure debit from your bank account
- **Bank bill pay**—set up a monthly distribution to the Food Bank



Visit www.brafb.org/supperclub to sign up or for more information.

SCAN HERE

Get Involved

EVENTS AROUND THE REGION

MARCH 6-24

School Food Drive

Calling young hunger heroes! Students in the greater Charlottesville area join forces annually to help neighbors facing hunger. If you want your school to participate, email Brynna Strand at bstrand@brafb.org.

APRIL 17-28

Legal Food Frenzy

Lawyers, judges, and legal staff, law students and professors compete to raise funds for individuals facing hunger. Who will win this year?



APRIL 19

Great Community Give

Over the course of a single online giving day benefiting area nonprofits, Harrisonburg and Rockingham County residents can help ensure that their neighbors have enough to eat.



MAY 13

Stamp out Hunger

Leave non-perishable food donations at your doorstep on Saturday, May 13, to help stamp out hunger in the Blue Ridge area. This is the Food Bank's largest annual food drive. Local, dedicated postal carriers make it happen, along with volunteers and food donors.



JUNE 10

231 Festival

Come out and join us at Castle Hill Cider for a fun-filled day. In addition to local cider, wine, and beer tastings there will be live music, food trucks, local artisans, and more!



JUNE 17-18

Journey of Awesomeness

Pedal your way to help feed your community. This fun event is committed to riding and raising awareness for food and water insecurity while giving back to the community. All are welcome to join.



Specialized volunteer Ted Haile helps translate materials we share with guests.

So Many Ways to Volunteer

Your professional experience and unique skills could be put to good use as a Specialized Volunteer for the Food Bank.

Maybe you're a data entry specialist or research wiz. Maybe you speak multiple languages or take incredible photographs. Many volunteers have found satisfaction by translating guest-focused materials, editing videos, or helping spread our message as a Social Media Ambassador.

"We can't do the work we do without the support of so many volunteers and the efforts they put forward. Increasingly, volunteers are making an impact in nontraditional ways," says Jennifer Clark-Robertson, volunteer and food drive manager.

Compare your skills and interests with the Food Bank's current list of Specialized Volunteer opportunities. Visit www.brafb.org/volunteer for more information and if you'd like to donate your time or services email volunteer@brafb.org.

It's one more way to support the Food Bank.



Scan to subscribe!

For details on these and other events, visit our website at www.brafb.org/events or call 540-248-3663.

Put some good news in your inbox. Subscribe to our *Come to the Table* e-newsletter. You'll get occasional updates of meaningful impact throughout the year. www.brafb.org/subscribe

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Where Can Dignity Be Found in a Line of People Outside a Food Pantry?

There's a lot to unpack in that question. Our community partners—most, but not all, are food pantries—are bustling with warm, caring, and compassionate volunteers who go out of their way to make everyone feel welcomed and accepted.

But regardless of the welcome they receive it may be hard for our guests to accept where they find themselves, in a food pantry, asking for help to feed themselves and their families.

I imagine the embarrassment I might feel if I were the one in line. Defeat, failure, shame... I'm sure I would do whatever was necessary to care for my family, but I'd likely do it with my head down.

We do see self-conscious sadness in the eyes of some of our guests, especially those who are visiting a pantry for the first time. But we also see resilience, hope, and gratitude, often expressed with an acknowledgment that others live in more distressing circumstances than they do.

Dignity in line at a food pantry is found in the eyes of the people in that line—people of all ages, cultures, abilities, and stories to tell. Working folks, retired folks, single moms and dads, and immigrants and refugees new to our country and community.

Our job—our opportunity, really—is to meet their gaze with warmth and respect and to create an experience that honors their humanity.

We start by calling them our guests and neighbors. Whenever possible, we invite them to choose foods that are right for their families. We're mindful of quality and healthfulness, knowing that the most nutritious foods are also the most expensive in grocery stores. We are called to serve our neighbors without judgment, and we encourage our guests to receive our support without self-judgment.

Last year, the Food Bank served an average of almost 110,000 people each month, together with our community partners. It's common for us to measure the impact of your support by the number of people coming to food pantries. An equally important measure might be how they feel when they leave.

You give more than food. You always have. Thank you.

Michael McKee

Michael McKee
Chief Executive Officer





Blue Ridge Area

FOOD BANK

Everyone should have enough to eat.



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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 22601-6312
P: 540.665.0770
F: 540.722.4217



69% of eligible older individuals in Virginia do not participate in SNAP

(Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program).

Visit the benefits website to see if you're eligible and apply.

If you know someone who may be eligible, please share this information with them.



Scan now!

<https://commonhelp.virginia.gov/access/>

