

harvest

A NEWSLETTER OF THE BLUE RIDGE AREA FOOD BANK

Who Are the “Missing Guests”?

PAGE 2

How Help and Hope Multiplies

PAGE 4

Forging a New Path Forward

PAGE 6



Blue Ridge Area
FOOD BANK

Everyone should have enough to eat.



Who Are We Not Reaching? (But Should Be)

Record numbers of people—even more than during the onset of the pandemic—now rely on food banks and food pantries as a critical safety net. Still, many people are not getting the help they need. Despite the 130,724* visitors we're serving monthly, on average, we know there are still people who need more food, but who don't use our resources.

We wanted to know why, so we asked experts to help us find answers.

THE GOAL: Find, then remove the barriers to food access

Our researchers asked our partners, guests, and “missing guests” to help us understand their challenges. What we found was sometimes surprising, and reinforced our strategic direction.

“Missing guests” are a diverse group. They are working folks, immigrants, refugees, people with

a language barrier, young people, seniors, and people with a lack of transportation or mobility issues. Many times, they are hesitant to ask for help from a food pantry because of stigma, lack of information, or absence of trust.

Missing guests are more likely to be people of color and people living in very rural areas.

“We know there's a complex set of factors influencing one's decision about if, where, and how to seek help,” explains Michael McKee, CEO. “Barriers might be physical like the hours a food pantry operates, the distance one needs to travel to go there, or perhaps the language they speak and, frankly, awareness and understanding about the services available in the first place.”

Social and emotional barriers may also be at play. These include embarrassment, stigma, fear of identification, and fear of judgment.

“Some friends of mine were telling me I should sign up for the food bank. So, that's what I did. And that's a big help to me. That's what I'm here for—to make ends meet.”

— MARY AT THE MOBILE FOOD PANTRY
IN NELSON

Eighty percent (80%) of our guests report learning about food programs by word of mouth. Knowing this will help us plan more effective communications. But it presents a challenge when we've documented more than 50 languages spoken within the Food Bank network.

We also learned that half of the Food Bank's guests say someone at home has special dietary requirements because of their health. When they receive food that is both needed and wanted, guests are more likely to come to a Food Bank program or partner for groceries that they know how to prepare and that will support their health.

*Average number of visitors monthly, July 2022-March 2023.



On the cover: Most guests learn about our services through friends and contacts, like Roxana (pictured in the middle, with two friends she brought to the pantry)



Anne is a mother of 15-year-old twins, one of whom has significant health issues. Anne's own chronic condition prevents her from driving, making managing and caring for everyone more challenging. She's dependent on other people's schedules and kindness to get to a pantry.

The barriers guests face are complex, including:

As Maria Bowman, the Food Bank's Director of Health Initiatives, often says, "Food is nutritious only if it's eaten."

The Food Bank's vision is nourishing food and good health for everyone, every day.

Access to food shouldn't be based on who you are or where you live. We can, and will, do more to help meet our promises. And we will achieve our vision, with your help.

When everyone is well-nourished, the community is stronger, healthier, and more productive.

Read on pages 6-7 how this research informed our strategic plan.





For Every Dollar Donated, Help and Hope Multiplies



KENIA + KIMBERLY



CLETUS



ZANDRA

We met Kenia and her 11-year-old daughter Kimberly at a local pantry. They were excited to cook together with the food they received. Kenia works in a greenhouse, but with inflation driving up the prices of groceries and other necessities, her income is not always enough.

“Everything’s so expensive now,” Kenia said.

Cletus is retired. He can’t choose between food and medicine because, as he says, “You gotta have the medicine.” For him, it’s insulin. This is his third visit to a pantry, and he’s grateful for the food he receives, including green beans, corn, peaches, and frozen meats.

Since a son and two grandchildren now live with Cletus, he says, “It helps out a lot.”

Zandra, a working mother of five whose husband is also employed full-time, embodies the strength required to ask for help.

“Sometimes I don’t have enough food at home. I tell my friends to

come and get food too. [When] you need it, you can go.”

In your neighborhood and other neighborhoods across the Blue Ridge region, tens of thousands of people can’t afford to buy groceries on a regular basis.

Each one has lived experience with hunger, just like Zandra, Cletus, and Kenia.

The Food Bank will always support these neighbors and others like them for as long as it takes them to get back on their feet after a job loss or a health crisis, or whenever they need a helping hand to make ends meet.

How can we sustain this work despite the pressures in our economy? After all, just like you, the Food Bank feels the effects of inflation and food sourcing challenges. Our costs have soared.

The truth is that this vast community safety net—regional in scale but local in impact—works, **because you share what you can.**

For example, thanks to your donations, we can support





hundreds of food pantry partners by supplying plenty of food, healthy produce, and other tangible assistance—most of it at absolutely no cost to them.

Concerned about the health of our guests and equitable access to wholesome food, we're making sure that fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as culturally familiar food items, comprise an increasingly large portion of the food distributed by the Food Bank.

And in the coming years, we will explore how we can help

households find surer footing, with referrals to resources that can help lift them out of a downward cycle.

The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank is driven by our core beliefs that hunger is unacceptable; that everyone deserves access to enough food; that food sustains life and nourishes health; and that we are called to serve neighbors without judgment.

We know you believe that, too.

Thank you for showing up for your neighbors. Thank you for your gifts.

A Quiet Crisis Continues

In March 2023, with our partners, we served more than 154,000 visitors— almost 10% more than our pandemic peak and about 50% more people than pre-pandemic.

The end of pandemic-era SNAP benefits, high inflation, and low-wage jobs are taking a heavy toll on our community. And the charitable food assistance network is strained again.

We're thankful for our loyal donors who continue to give to ensure that families across the Blue Ridge receive the nutritious food they need.

Income + Impact: The Power of a Charitable Gift Annuity



Looking for reliable income in your retirement?

A charitable gift annuity (CGA) is a powerful way to make a gift that pays you back.

A gift to establish a CGA ensures you dependable, fixed income for life. Then, after your lifetime, the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank will use the remainder to provide nourishing food to families in need.

A CGA can also provide tax benefits depending on how you fund your gift. **New in 2023:** You can fund a CGA with your individual retirement account (IRA). The rates of return are the best in 10+ years!

Learn more at www.brafb.org/annuity

We partner with Feeding America to provide CGAs. Contact your financial advisor to learn how a CGA can help you accomplish your retirement and philanthropic goals. Or reach out to Karen Ratzlaff, Chief Philanthropy Officer, at 540-213-8404 or kratzlaff@brafb.org. All inquiries will be treated confidentially.

Nourishing Food and Good Health— for Everyone, Every Day

A RENEWED VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Imagine what your neighborhood would be like if every child, every mother, every father, every senior, *everyone* has the food they need to support their health and well-being.

This vision is possible! Together, we’re already making life better for the tens of thousands of children, seniors, families, and hard-working individuals in central and western Virginia who do not have the food they need to live active, healthy lives.



Cindy, a grandmother raising six grandkids:

“The food is great! But it’s the people (at the pantry) ... they just make you feel like family here. They make me feel loved and they help me. I couldn’t make it without them.”

Every day, food bankers witness the very best in humanity—generous people show up to help other people who are having a tough time making ends meet.

Every day, we hear gratitude from guests. They are thankful for nutritious food, for the knowledge that someone cares, and for the hope of a better day to come.

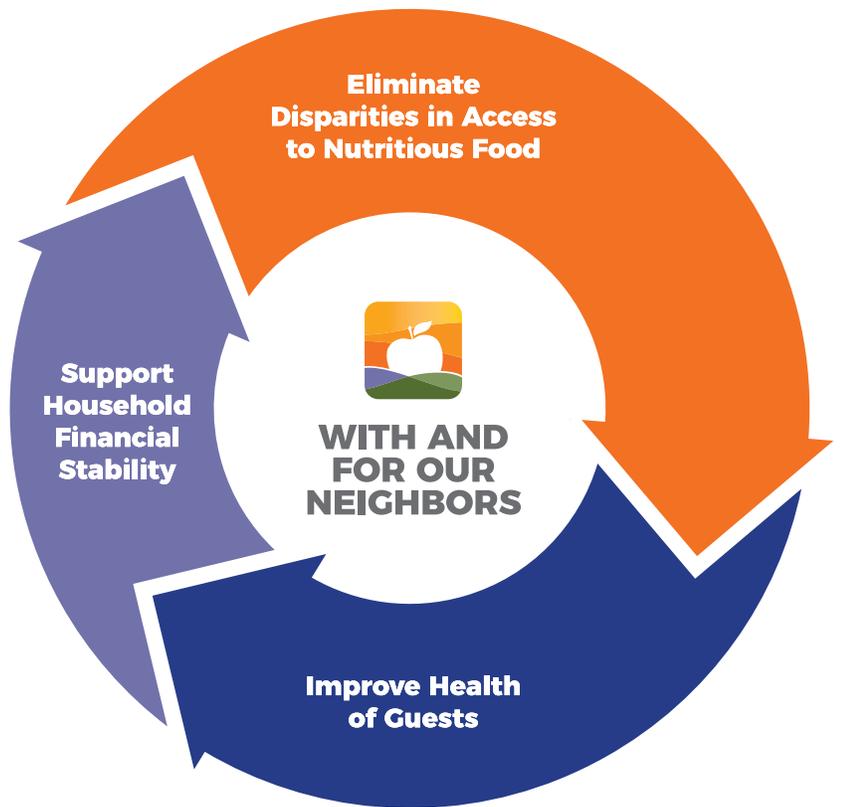
But, after the unfortunate realities of the past few years and despite distributing more food than ever in our 42-year history, hunger is still a reality for many living in the Blue Ridge region.

We are setting out in a bold, new, strategic direction, with and for our neighbors at the center of everything.



GOAL: Eliminate disparities in access to nutritious food

By supporting our current partners and recruiting diverse groups to join our charitable food assistance network, we’ll reach more underserved people. We’ll take action to better connect individuals with services when and where they are needed—and to overcome common barriers that prevent people from seeking help, such as lack of transportation, limited hours of food distribution, and speaking a language other than English. And we’ll be more intentional about asking our guests how we’re doing, to learn from their feedback.



THROUGH A
STRONG AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD BANK,
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OUR COMMUNITY



GOAL: Improve health of guests

Quite simply, food is health. A steady, nutritious diet is especially critical for guests who live in households with special dietary needs and who are managing a chronic health condition like diabetes or heart disease.

We will prioritize access to nutritious and desirable foods that meet the health, cultural, and religious needs of our guests. And, we won't do this work alone—there is an opportunity to participate in statewide food security and health equity collaborations.



GOAL: Support household financial stability

We'll never stop doing what we're good at doing. We believe this Food Bank fills a vital need.

Yet food distribution is not all we can do to improve food security. **We can connect neighbors with other, existing resources that support food security and health** through effective referrals.

Because fewer than one-third of guest households use SNAP (Supplemental

Nutrition Assistance Program), we will improve our ability to help people apply for SNAP benefits. And we'll continue to advocate for stronger government programs that help neighbors with the greatest need.



GOAL: Maintain a strong and sustainable organization

The Food Bank and our partners operate with great efficiency and effectiveness. We are providing more food to more people than at any time in our history, even exceeding pandemic highs.

To grow our impact, this plan's success will require continued investment in data and insights, human resources, communications, infrastructure, revenue and equipment.

Your role in our plan

Whether you've been or are a guest, a volunteer, a partner, a donor, a staff member, an advocate, or some combination of these roles, we're glad you're part of our community.

Thank you for standing with us to realize a better future for everyone.

Expanding Our Impact: New Public Benefits Outreach Initiative

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as "food stamps," helps millions of low-income Americans put food on the table. It's far more effective at reducing hunger than the food bank and food pantry network.

Yet only 72% of eligible individuals and 62% of eligible workers participated in SNAP in 2018, leaving thousands of Virginians without the benefit.

For many, SNAP enrollment is confusing.

We launched a Public Benefits Outreach initiative this spring. Our goal is to provide tools and training to support pantry partners who want to help register qualified guests for SNAP.

Everyone who qualifies will have access to more food.

Monica Kelley, public benefits outreach manager, spearheads these efforts, providing training for partners and application support for guests.



To learn more, visit <https://www.brafb.org/snap-benefits-outreach>

What YOU can do

SHARE YOUR REACTION: CEO@brafb.org.



LEARN MORE: brafb.org/blog-chew-on-this

SCAN HERE

JOIN OUR VOLUNTEER CORPS: See "Get Involved" on page 10.

DONATE FUNDS TO POWER THIS PLAN:

Visit brafb.org/give-now.

SCAN HERE





With gifts of time, food, funds, and voices, generous Food Bank donors help ensure everyone has access to nourishing food and good health. Solving hunger is a community-wide effort. The truth is, we are better when we stand together.

Across our 25-county service area, thousands of financial donors, volunteers, advocates, and friends actively support the work of the Food Bank and make each community stronger.

Here we highlight just a few examples of the many ways you stepped up in recent months. Thank you all!

Second-grade students at **Stone-Robinson Elementary** in Albemarle County took their School Food Drive participation to the next level by hosting a lemonade stand. In just one hour, they **raised \$433** for the Food Bank, the equivalent of **1,732 meals**.



Our friends at **Dupont Community Credit Union** volunteer at the Food Bank multiple times throughout the year, and their “Shred Days” bring in large amounts of food and funding every spring and fall. Additionally, this year they teamed up with the **JMU Softball Team**, donating **\$100 for every home run**. Now: Act by August 31 and DCCU will donate 1% of all grocery charges on their credit card to the Food Bank, up to \$20,000. Details at MyDCCU.com/creditcard.



Food Lion is helping to make sure the Food Bank network is strong. Through their *Great Pantry Makeover*, Food Lion provided much needed shelving, computer technology and a refrigerator to Embassy Outreach Ministries (Front Royal, Va). They are the only pantry in their community open on Friday evenings, improving food access for working families in that area.



With a gift of time, staff from ABC 13-WSET of the **Sinclair Broadcast Group** put together nearly **200 emergency food boxes** to help guests of the Food Bank in Lynchburg.

THANK YOU, Generous Corporate, Foundation, and Event Partners



*REFLECTS SIGNIFICANT GIFTS RECEIVED DECEMBER 1 TO MAY 31, 2023

Welcome to these new Food Bank Leaders!

We are stronger with these talented, hard-working, and intelligent team members in leadership roles.

Ghislaine Lewis

Board of Directors



Ghislaine is an Associate Professor of Communications Studies at Lynchburg College and is Director at Pierce Street Gateway in Lynchburg.

Why does she volunteer her time to fight food insecurity?

"I firmly believe that access to nutritious food is a fundamental right. In the neighborhood I serve through the Pierce Street Community Garden, 40% of our neighbors live below the federal poverty line. When I think of the children affected by these inequities, I can't help but think about ways that we can all get involved to help with food insecurity. Every financial contribution, every volunteer, and every nonprofit, working together, can create substantial change."

Matt Sorensen

Board of Directors



Matt is Vice President of Quad-C Management, Inc. in Charlottesville.

Why did he volunteer for this role?

"I have always felt that food insecurity is unacceptable, particularly in a nation as wealthy as ours. I have been an admirer of the work of the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank since I moved to Charlottesville in 2017. I am honored to join the Board and look forward to utilizing my background in finance to further the mission of the Food Bank."

Dave Kraft

Chief Operating Officer (COO)



Dave Kraft joined the Food Bank in April as COO after a long career in food service, most recently as president of Sysco Virginia. He oversees Food Bank operations, including food sourcing, warehousing, transportation, and logistics for all four distribution centers.

What drew him here?

"I worked for over 30 years for a distribution company, so food service is part of what defines me. I wanted to touch a group of individuals who didn't have such easy access to food as many of us have had. Working for the Food Bank allows me to give back a little of what I've learned while serving those who deserve better access to nourishing food."

Get Involved

Here are some timely ideas that can help you make a local impact this summer or fall.

We hope the stories you've read in this issue of *Harvest* inspire you to take action.

The truth is, we are a community food bank, supported by you and here to serve. And we need many hands and hearts to achieve our shared vision.



VOLUNTEER

Advocate

Make a Gift

Donate Food

Invite a Speaker

FORM A BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP

Share Our Story

Organize an Event

Coordinate a Food Drive

HOST AN ONLINE FUNDRAISER

We believe people should have access to food no matter where they live. That's why the Food Bank sets up mobile distributions to meet people where they are. When you're ready to **VOLUNTEER**, look beyond our four distribution centers. **You can find shifts on our calendar that take you into the field, literally, to greet and distribute food to families and seniors. Bring a friend!**



START HERE

Is your company looking to connect to a meaningful mission? We'd love to explore a **BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP** with you. Your company can sponsor a food distribution or a vehicle (brand visibility!), bring in a Food Bank speaker, volunteer as a team, or ... **Let us know how we can help you achieve your goals, while you help us achieve ours.**



GET INSPIRED

Create and monitor your own **ONLINE FUND DRIVE** like our friends at **Apex Clean Energy** did. By spreading the message to their employees, the Apex community came together to provide almost 42,000 meals while raising visibility about the need that exists locally. **Every \$1 raised helps provide 4 meals, improving food security near you.**



START TODAY

If you don't see a path that fits you, visit our website at www.brafb.org for more ideas. Or email solvehunger@brafb.org to start a conversation.



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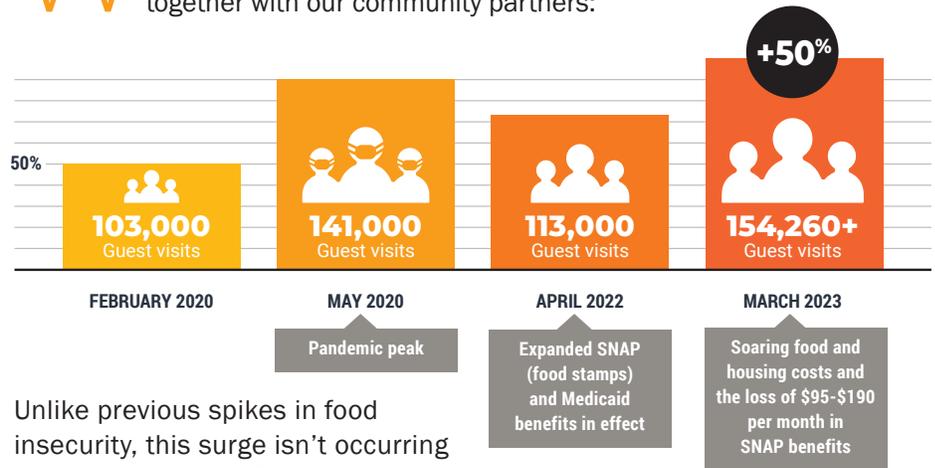
SANDY WERNER

Director of Marketing & Communications

Is this Sustainable?

Finding Our Way Back to "Emergency" Food Assistance

While food banking is all about people, I've been thinking a lot about numbers, especially the numbers of people we serve together with our community partners:



Unlike previous spikes in food insecurity, this surge isn't occurring during a recession. But while the unemployment rate is near historic lows, the cost of living relative to household incomes is at historic highs. Low-wage workers are under water.

So, is this the right time for the Food Bank to focus on more than *emergency* food assistance, as we are doing with our new strategic plan?

Yes it is.

Because we have many "missing guests" (neighbors who need help but aren't getting it), we need to evolve our services to meet them where they are and make sure they have access to food.

Because food insecurity is so closely tied to poor health, we need to make sure the food we and our partners provide to our neighbors will support *good* health and self-sufficiency.

Because food insecurity is the result of financial insecurity, we need to do more to connect our neighbors with resources that will reduce their reliance on us in the long term.

While staying true to our core mission, if we branch out a little in the services we provide, we will be able to return to and protect what we already do well—**emergency** food assistance.

Thank you for supporting our work. Your generosity allows us to become better every day.

Michael McKee
Chief Executive Officer





Blue Ridge Area FOOD BANK

Everyone should have enough to eat.



NON-PROFIT ORG
POSTAGE & FEES

PAID

BLUE RIDGE AREA
FOOD BANK

P.O. Box 937
Verona, VA 24482



OUR MISSION is to improve food security through equitable access to good nutrition and the resources that support health and well-being.

BRANCH LOCATIONS

We serve your community through one of four distribution centers:

**Western Region
Distribution Center
& Headquarters**
P.O. Box 937
96 Laurel Hill Road
Verona, VA 24482-0937
P: 540.248.3663
F: 540.248.6410

**Eastern Region
Distribution Center**
1207 Harris Street
Charlottesville, VA 22903-5319
P: 434.296.3663
F: 434.296.9621

**Southern Region
Distribution Center**
501 12th Street, Suite B
Lynchburg, VA 24504-2527
P: 434.845.4099
F: 434.845.6153

**Northern Region
Distribution Center**
1802 Roberts Street
Winchester, VA 22601-6312
P: 540.665.0770
F: 540.722.4217



CHEW ON THIS

4,215,373
pounds of the food
provided by the Food Bank
this year is a direct result of
the Farm Bill.*

* JULY 2022 - APRIL 2023

The chance to
support the bill
comes only **once**
every five years.

It's time. Raise your voice.

Join our advocacy army urging
Congress to pass the strongest
possible 2023 Farm Bill.

Scan Now

