

2023

IMPACT REPORT



Montana
Food Bank
Network

WELCOME TO OUR 2023 IMPACT REPORT



Whenever we introduce Montana Food Bank Network (MFBN), there's something like a flash of instant recognition: Everybody understands the importance of feeding Montanans facing hunger. And especially in the last few years, more and more people appreciate that food insecurity touches more Montanans than they might have previously thought, including working families feeling the pressure of inflation and our state's rising medical, childcare, and housing costs.

Still, not everyone understands exactly what it means to be Montana's only statewide food bank. As the leader of our state's food security network, we support 340 partners, from afterschool programs in rural communities to full-service food pantries in urban centers. Each year, we source, store, and distribute millions of pounds of food to our network partners so they can feed their communities.


Numbers like that tell a powerful story, but they don't tell the whole story. To truly understand the word "network" in our name, you have to understand all the ways we work with all our partners to end hunger in Montana.

In these pages, you'll read about how we've developed a multi-faceted, trust-based relationship with a nonprofit committed to food security, nutrition education, and food sovereignty on the Blackfeet Nation. We don't just provide them with food—we provide them with culturally meaningful options, equipment, and connections to other organizations and funders in our network. As with our network partners across the state, we strive to support them in ways that are truly responsive to their needs and the needs of their community.

You'll also read about how our policy team is collaborating with Montanans who have lived experience with hunger to reach policymakers and shape the legislative agenda. It might not be the first thing you think of when you hear our name, but our partnership with these Lived Experts is a vital part of how we ensure that our advocacy—and our work as a whole—is reflective of the realities of hunger in our state.

Then there are our region's food producers, our Retail Food Rescue donors, our volunteers, and our generous funders and financial donors. Each one is an essential partner in the shared mission we lead. So, as you read our 2023 impact report, I hope you'll understand just how big our work is—and I hope you'll see yourself in it. Because we need everyone's help to end hunger in Montana.

Thank you for joining us,
Gayle Carlson, President and CEO



MFBN is Montana's only statewide food bank and member of Feeding America. MFBN distributes food to over 340 partners that include community food banks, pantries, senior centers, shelters, and schools to end hunger in Montana. MFBN's hunger relief programs include Backpack, Hunters Against Hunger, Mail-a-Meal, No Kid Hungry, Retail Food Rescue, and SNAP outreach. MFBN advocates for long-term policy solutions to strengthen public nutrition programs and address the root causes of hunger. **For more information, visit mfbn.org.**

Our mission

End hunger in Montana through food acquisition and distribution, education, and advocacy.

Our vision

A Montana free from hunger where everyone has equal access to nutritious food.

Our values

- ▶ **Respect.** We interact with dignity, kindness, compassion, empathy, and trust with everyone.
- ▶ **Integrity.** We honor our commitments, acknowledge and address our mistakes, and actively live our mission.
- ▶ **Responsibility.** We strive for excellence and the biggest impact for everyone we serve, wisely and transparently using resources entrusted to us.
- ▶ **Justice.** We recognize and seek to understand past and ongoing injustices that impact food security and consider lived expertise essential to identifying barriers and incorporating solutions into our work.
- ▶ **Equity.** We provide support equitably and with respect to individual needs to encourage all to succeed.

WHEN TRUST GOES BOTH WAYS

When she thinks back to last summer, it's the bison burgers Danielle Antelope remembers.

"Everybody was having such a good time grilling, and it made us feel good to give our participants that kind of food," says Antelope, Executive Director of Food Access and Sustainability Team (FAST) Blackfeet, a Browning-based nonprofit and one of MFBN's 340 network partners.

As an organization dedicated to improving food security, providing nutrition education, and reclaiming and building food sovereignty within the Blackfeet Nation, FAST Blackfeet puts a high priority on the types of food it distributes through its Ȫ́yȪ́•ṕ Food Pantry. That includes healthy, culturally relevant choices for residents of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, where local retail options for such foods are limited and food insecurity touches 69 percent of the population—over five times the state average. Many of the 1,200 households FAST Blackfeet serves each month are multigenerational, so the food they provide must meet the nutritional needs of both children and elders.

"Better food equals better health, and we came to MFBN looking for better food," recalls Antelope. "They were very open to our needs and challenges, even though it meant they had to do extra advocating on our behalf and on behalf of their tribal partners. It really showed me, 'Wow, they're going to make changes if I speak up.'"

Being a responsive partner is at the heart of how MFBN leads Montana's food access network. According to Agency Relations Coordinator Jesse Schraufnagel, it starts with listening and extends to hands-on guidance, tools and technology, peer-learning convenings, and other resources to build the capacity of member agencies. "We want to help them achieve their missions, and that's going to look different with each agency," he says. "If the strength of our network is its ability to serve a wide range of communities across Montana, it's important for us as the only statewide food bank to have a wide range of tools to meet our partners' needs."

Improved access to indigenous local foods is only one way MFBN has worked with FAST Blackfeet to help it achieve its goals. FAST Blackfeet received funds from MFBN to purchase a dehydrator for food preservation and service supplies for nutrition education. And in 2022, the two organizations collaborated on a Feeding America Food Security Equity Impact Fund grant, securing \$250,000 for FAST Blackfeet to purchase six acres of land, hire an architect to design a brand-new facility, and plot the next steps toward transformational change.

"We're proud of the lines of trust and communication we've opened with FAST Blackfeet so that we can have the opportunity to support them in these exciting ways," says Todd Lengacher, Director of Philanthropy. "This is a model for how we can work with our other partners on their terms and meet them where they're at."

Reflecting on the evolution of her organization's relationship with MFBN, Antelope says FAST Blackfeet has gone from customer to partner. "What allows MFBN to make good partnerships is their willingness to listen and their responsive staff," she says. "I've valued the trust going both ways and the relationship being built right."



Emergency support

In the spring of 2023, an electrical fire broke out in FAST Blackfeet's food pantry, leaving the facility unsafe for staff and visitors. MFBN helped get a 53-foot refrigerated truck from six hours away for temporary storage and delivered pre-made food boxes while FAST Blackfeet didn't have the space to assemble them. It also facilitated funding to help them weather the disaster. "MFBN has worked hard to offer support and help," says Antelope. "They really went to bat on our behalf."

HOW MFBN MADE AN IMPACT IN 2023

How does food arrive at our warehouse?

MFBN is the only statewide food bank in Montana. Each year we source millions of pounds of food and store it at our warehouse in Missoula until it can be distributed to our network partners across the state. We receive food from many sources, including regional producers and growers, programs through the United States Department of Agriculture, donations from grocery stores and individuals, and more.



Breakdown of food distributed by pound

RETAIL FOOD RESCUE 9,484,243

PURCHASED FOOD 3,711,989

USDA 1,914,294

DONATED FOOD 1,565,479

Total distributed food in pounds

16,675,914

That's 13,896,595 meals!

What types of food do we distribute?

MFBN is committed to providing our network partners and their communities with healthy and nutritious foods, including regionally sourced dairy, produce, meat, and protein.

Types of fresh food distributed by pound

FRESH PRODUCE 4,455,676

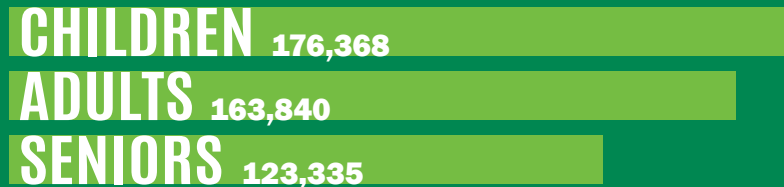
MEAT & PROTEIN 2,670,408

DAIRY 2,463,858

How does food reach those in need?

MFBN relies on our statewide network of partners—including food pantries, schools, senior centers, and other community sites—to ensure that food reaches Montanans when they need it most.

Total visits*



*some individuals have been served more than once

MFBN's advocacy and public policy team also works with community members and legislators on long-term solutions to hunger. Last year, MFBN engaged at the state, federal, and administrative advocacy levels for policies to strengthen SNAP and other public nutrition programs.

Financials

Revenue and public support

In-kind	\$595
Special events	\$83,926
Grants	\$3,736,221
Earned income	\$3,539,933
Contributions	\$2,610,152
Donated food	\$24,898,448
Government	\$567,762
Total	\$35,437,037

Number of network partners supplied

340

Students served by Backpack program

13,198

 / month

Applications supported by SNAP Outreach

361

 ...equivalent to 292,036 meals.

Expenses

Donated food distributed	\$24,978,911
Food distribution	\$5,870,806
Fundraising	\$1,064,684
General & administrative	\$401,590
Public policy	\$472,342
Total	\$32,788,333



HOW LIVED EXPERTS ARE SHAPING THE POLICY AGENDA

Sarah Riddle never imagined herself standing up to speak in front of a roomful of strangers. But she had a story to tell and knew others needed to hear it. “So many people get silenced, and I refuse to be silenced,” she says. “If me telling my story helps one person, it’s worth it.” Amplify Montana helped give her the tools and support she needed to share that story—and to use it to influence positive change.

An initiative of MFBN, Amplify Montana brings together Montanans who have firsthand experience with systemic challenges like food insecurity, poverty, and homelessness as well as the programs designed to solve them. Through listening sessions across the state and a 14-week training course known as the Big Sky Leadership Academy, these Lived Experts share insights and learn how to navigate the legislature and talk to policymakers with a goal of impacting, shaping, and changing policies, procedures, and perceptions of poverty and food insecurity. After completing the Academy, participants can join the Amplify Montana Advisory Board, where they continue to guide the Amplify Montana initiative and inform MFBN’s policy agenda.

In recognition of their expertise—and to remove barriers to participation—MFBN provides honorariums to Amplify Montana participants for their time and contributions. It also provides technology and childcare during meetings.

“If we’re working to end hunger in our state, we need to have the right people at the table,” says Aubrey Godbey, MFBN’s Empowerment Specialist. “And those are the people who are directly impacted.”

“We can bring our expertise on policy and data, but many of us at the food bank don’t have direct experience with food insecurity,” adds Lorianne Burhop, Chief Policy Officer. “We need both of those forms of expertise to find and advocate for the solutions that are truly going to make a difference.”

In her time with Amplify Montana, Riddle has written grant support letters, spoken on the Child Tax Credit at Senator Steve Daines’s office, and joined a White House roundtable on hunger, health, and nutrition. “Every time I turn around, there’s another opportunity,” she says. “This is slow work, but it’s so empowering because I know I’m being listened to and that it matters.”

Laurie Little Dog is a prison reform advocate with a long history of speaking at public meetings. Now a member of the Amplify Montana Advisory Board, she appreciates the trust the program shows the Lived Experts who participate. “We’re used to being treated with mistrust by the system,” she says. “What’s kept me involved is the attitude. It’s not patriarchal—it’s about having more voices out there because a lot of people are being oppressed by the same things. It’s refreshing to see voices of real authenticity in community forums and in the capital.”

As the program continues evolving, Burhop is excited to see policy change driven entirely by Lived Experts. “What are the policy changes that Lived Experts identify and really want to work toward? And how can MFBN support it?”

“Without giving up some of that power and control, it’s easy to tokenize Lived Experts—it can become extractive without really elevating them into positions of authority and decision-making,” explains Carri Cuffney, a program officer at the Headwaters Foundation, which generously supports Amplify Montana. “I see what MFBN is doing as a model for other programs that are interested in working with Lived Experts.”

For her part, Riddle plans to keep telling her story. “I can’t just go on my merry way,” she says. “I’m changed now.”

WHAT'S IN YOUR WAREHOUSE?

What does it mean for MFBN to provide more local, fresh, and nutritious food to communities across the state? Ask Brent Weisgram, and he's as likely to talk about warehouse storage space as he is farmers and producers.

"We're fortunate to have partnerships in Montana and our wider region that put healthy proteins and produce within our reach, but to be able to accept those products when they're made available, we have to have the capacity to store them until we can distribute them," says Weisgram, MFBN's Vice President & Chief Operating Officer and resident logistics expert.

Simply put, more variety requires more space. It also requires more specialized storage. With frozen beef and pork donations coming in from local livestock growers and produce sourced through Feeding America's Regional Produce Co-op and the Western Montana Growers Co-op, cooler and freezer space are particularly important—and always at a premium.

"We're currently pretty limited with our freezer capacity," says Weisgram, "so that's one of the items on our wish list." Likewise, a quarantine room would allow MFBN to accept more raw produce and field product from smaller-scale producers who don't have the ability to wash, bag, and pack items before sending them to MFBN.

As it stands today, MFBN sources tens of thousands of pounds of protein through its collaborations with the nonprofit Producer Partnership, the Montana Farmers Union, and Farmers Union Enterprises—all organizations dedicated to ending hunger and preserving agricultural ways of life. And MFBN's Hunters Against Hunger program is a partnership with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks offering an opportunity for Montanans and out-of-state hunters to donate nutritious, legally harvested deer, elk, antelope, moose, or bison to be processed, donated, and redistributed by MFBN's statewide network partners to those experiencing food insecurity.

Of course, the biggest impact of boosting MFBN's cold storage capacity would be felt by its 340 network partners across the state and the communities they serve. Many of those partners are small operations with limited storage capacity of their own. That means for them to offer more produce or protein to neighbors, they have to rely on MFBN's ability to store and then deliver those products when they're needed.

"It's not just our freezer but a freezer that's an asset to the entire statewide network," says Weisgram. "If we can be their cold storage, it benefits every one of our network partners."



9.6M

Last year, MFBN distributed 9.6 million pounds of fresh food, including 4.5 million pounds of produce, 2.6 million pounds of meat and protein, and 2.5 million pounds of dairy.

Advocating for Montana-grown food

During the 2023 legislative session, MFBN led a collective advocacy campaign alongside food pantries, local food organizations, and other partners to create a Montana Farm to Food Bank program. While the bill did not ultimately pass, the incredible momentum behind it suggests the promise of future efforts to strengthen local economies and increase access to fresh, nutrient-dense foods for neighbors facing hunger.





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Support MFBN today and help us ensure that all Montanans have dignified access to the nutritious food they need to thrive.

