

## BUILDING CAPACITY THROUGH *Collaboration*

In March of 2021, philanthropist MacKenzie Scott gave a gift to Feeding America that seeded the Food Security Equity Impact Fund (FSEIF). Since then, other individuals and foundations have joined to grow this fund to support communities of color and rural communities known to be disproportionately impacted by food insecurity.

In 2023, MFBN and FAST Blackfeet collaboratively applied to the first round of funding from the FSEIF. We are delighted to share that FAST Blackfeet was awarded \$250,000 to build capacity in support of improving food security, providing nutrition education, and reclaiming food sovereignty within the Blackfeet Nation. Thanks to Feeding America, the focus of these funds will go towards purchasing property in Browning that will become FAST Blackfeet's new facility and their forever home.

This July, one of our MFBN team members joined Danielle Antelope, Executive Director of FAST Blackfeet, in Houston for the first annual Food Security Equity Impact Conference. During the conference, we learned how a dozen other organizations utilized their funds, including inspirational and revolutionary projects happening in remote coastal towns in Hawaii, vacated lots in Philadelphia, and rural seed bank farms in Puerto Rico. The projects are as varied and rich as the diversity of locations, demographics, and circumstances. Throughout each project, however, runs a consistent theme: communities coming together to confront and combat the root causes of food insecurity with energy, a collaborative spirit, and innovation.

At the conference, Danielle was one of a few leaders invited to make a longer presentation. She is a powerful speaker whose fierce determination for strengthening



Danielle Antelope, standing at the front and to the right, with members of the FAST Blackfeet team.

her community, and passionate storytelling of her people, led once again to a tearful standing ovation. As Danielle shared her story, it became abundantly clear why her grandmother gave her the native name of “comes in singing.”

MFBN is thankful to be in partnership with Feeding America and FAST Blackfeet, who together, through the FSEIF, are enacting community-led solutions that support food justice and equitable access initiatives. We extend our congratulations for FAST Blackfeet's recent second-round FSEIF award, and we look forward to working with Danielle and FAST Blackfeet as they tackle the exciting challenges ahead.

## CEO CORNER



**No matter the size  
of the gift, you  
make a difference.**

The holidays are not only a time filled with celebrations, family, and good food, but a time we take a moment to give thanks for all the blessings in our lives. One of my family's traditions growing up was to go around the holiday table and say one thing for which we were thankful. As I got older, my gratitude list grew longer, but I also became more aware of how many households struggled to meet their basic needs, let alone be thankful for the abundance my family enjoyed. I knew I had to do something to change that.

Throughout this newsletter, you will read about the different programs and services that MFBN offers — from advocating for those experiencing food insecurity, to providing meal boxes to households in extremely remote areas of our state. None of this would be

possible without our network of over 360 hunger-fighting partners. But more importantly, none of this could be done without you.

I only wish we could share with you the smile on a child's face when they receive their BackPack bag, or the appreciation in the eyes of a senior when a meal box arrives at their doorstep. Then you, too, could see that no matter what size your gift is, you make a difference.

Thankfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gayle Carlson".

**Gayle Carlson**  
President & CEO  
Montana Food Bank Network

## Big Sky LEADERSHIP ACADEMY & AMPLIFY MONTANA

MFBN has completed its very first Big Sky Leadership Academy (BSLA). Congratulations to the nine individuals who graduated from our 14-week program this summer! BSLA is part of Amplify Montana, our broader effort to better engage, learn from, and follow the lead of individuals with lived experience of food insecurity. Individuals who have experienced food insecurity, poverty, or the challenges of navigating the social safety net truly are experts in these areas. The voices and ideas of Lived Experts are critical in developing effective and sustainable solutions to hunger. The participants of BSLA learned how to use their stories and voices to encourage policy change around food and nutrition.

One of this year's graduates said it best: "Big Sky Leadership Academy equips people with priceless leadership abilities. By fostering both professional and personal growth, the program gives participants the skills and information they need to have a positive influence on their communities and beyond."



BSLA graduates with their certificates standing with Aubrey Godbey and Liliana Silver, MFBN's Empowerment Specialist and Policy intern.

MFBN recognizes the need to engage Lived Experts as a vital piece of our work to end hunger in Montana. Without the voices and experiences of those most impacted by food insecurity and public assistance programs, true change cannot happen. We look forward to continuing to develop BSLA and welcoming a new cohort next year.

**To learn more about Amplify Montana and how MFBN is engaging with Lived Experts, visit [mfbn.org/amplify](https://mfbn.org/amplify).**

# Farm Bill – ADVOCATING TOGETHER FOR A BETTER MONTANA

This year brought one of MFBN's most important advocacy opportunities – the Farm Bill. The Farm Bill is federal legislation that authorizes numerous food and agriculture programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and USDA commodity programs. The Farm Bill directly impacts food systems and food security in our country. MFBN's advocacy team is working to uplift priorities for SNAP, commodity programs, and other nutrition programs with our members of Congress. Congress is expected to pass a new Farm Bill in 2024.

As negotiations for the Farm Bill ramped up last summer, MFBN's Amplify Montana initiative connected three Montanans who have personal experience with food insecurity to Feeding America's Elevating Voices Summit in Washington, D.C. There they built advocacy skills, networked, and discussed policy solutions to hunger. They then met with Montana's congressional offices to share how federal nutrition programs have impacted their lives.

In August, MFBN hosted a roundtable in which congressional staffers gathered in Helena to hear from food pantries, Lived Experts, and other stakeholders about the importance of strong federal nutrition programs in the upcoming Farm Bill.

Montana's members of Congress heard from MFBN again in September when we visited their offices in Washington, D.C. We shared feedback from MFBN's member agencies



about the strengths and challenges they see with nutrition programs in their communities.

In September, we also hand-delivered thousands of postcards to Montana's senators, to send a clear message: SNAP matters in Montana! The postcards had hand-written notes from people across Montana sharing why SNAP is important to them and their communities.

We expect the Farm Bill to come together in 2024, and we'll keep advocating for a bill that protects nutrition programs and strengthens food security in Montana.

**Visit [mfbn.org/actioncenter](https://mfbn.org/actioncenter) to learn more about MFBN's work on the Farm Bill and how you can become an Anti-Hunger Advocate.**

## Mail-a-Meal: FOOD INSECURITY MEETS INGENUITY

Our Mail-a-Meal Program, started in 2014, offers vital support to rural Montanans lacking nearby food assistance options. We recognized a pressing need in 2013 when we identified that many rural counties were without food pantries. We asked the question, "Could we mail a box of shelf-stable food directly to our neighbors' doors?" In response, we began shipping 30-pound food boxes directly to our neighbors' doorsteps via UPS. This innovative approach addressed challenges like transportation barriers and high food costs. The food boxes cater to senior diets, featuring low-sodium, low-sugar, high-fiber, and whole grain options. The program has expanded recently as we continue to identify more communities in need. In 2022, we provided 2,769 food boxes to 37 Montana counties, supplying 73,840 meals, with a significant focus on senior households. **We rely on generous donors to sustain and grow this program, which extends food access to more food-insecure Montana communities. Your support enables us to make a meaningful impact on the lives of our neighbors in need.**

To learn more about MFBN's Mail-a-Meal Program, visit [mfbn.org/mail-a-meal](https://mfbn.org/mail-a-meal).



Building Mail-a-Meal food boxes in MFBN's warehouse.

# Ways to Give



Winter welcomes the season of giving as the holidays approach and reminds us of the importance of helping our neighbors in need. There are many ways you can give to MFBN, and each way strengthens the roots of your community in a meaningful way.



## By Mail

You can mail a check or money order to our address at 5625 Expressway, Missoula, MT 59808.



## Online

Donate online with a credit or debit card using our secure online form by visiting [mfbn.org](https://mfbn.org).



## Give Monthly

Become a part of MFBN's Sustainers Circle by setting up a recurring gift today. Sustainers can be set up on our donation page or by phone at (406) 721-3825.



## Donor Advised Funds (DAF)

Through a DAF, you have the flexibility to recommend how much and how often money is granted to MFBN. You can recommend grants that make an immediate impact or use your fund as a tool for future charitable gifts.

You can also create a lasting legacy by naming MFBN as a beneficiary in your fund. By visiting [mfbn.org/get-involved](https://mfbn.org/get-involved) you are able to utilize DAF Direct as a cost-effective and convenient way to donate by recommending grants from your DAF to MFBN.



## Montana Community Foundation

The Montana Community Foundation has chosen us as one of their fund recipients. Set up planned giving or a one-time donation at [mtcf.org](https://mtcf.org).



## FreeWill - Planned Giving

Leave a legacy gift to MFBN — whether in your will or another part of your estate — to ensure your assets are put to their best philanthropic use. We've partnered with FreeWill, a free online estate-planning tool, to make it simpler than ever to create or update your legal will and start your legacy with MFBN.

To learn more about FreeWill or other ways you can leave a legacy gift, visit [mfbn.org/planned-giving](https://mfbn.org/planned-giving) or contact Bill Mathews, Chief Development Officer, at (406) 215-1777.

You can make a difference in communities across Montana by giving to MFBN this holiday season. Visit [mfbn.org/get-involved](https://mfbn.org/get-involved) to find out more.

## MFBN License Plate – STAND UP AGAINST HUNGER

Help us end hunger in Montana by choosing the Montana Food Bank Network “Stand Up Against Hunger” license plate the next time you purchase or renew your vehicle registration. Every license plate helps provide at least 100 meals for our neighbors facing hunger. Ask for the MFBN license plate at your local DMV today!



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**FEEDING  
AMERICA**



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