

National School Breakfast Week

Montana Food Bank Network's (MFBN) Child Nutrition Department organized their second annual photo contest to celebrate National School Breakfast Week. Implemented by Congress in 1989, National School Breakfast Week occurs the first week of March to celebrate school breakfasts and their impact on a student's ability to thrive. Through our partnership with No Kid Hungry, MFBN has focused on increasing participation in school breakfasts. When students are fed, they are ready to succeed in their school day.

Our photo contest was launched in 2024 to recognize school nutrition professionals and the efforts they put into fueling minds for the school day. This year, 24 schools entered their top breakfasts for our voting process; from Colstrip to Noxon and Sheridan to Savage, we covered the state to find the yummiest breakfast.

After the entries were in, MFBN staff voted to funnel the options down to just five for voting at a local school. Potomac School, grades kindergarten through 8th, voted on their favorite breakfast from the five finalists: Bainville, Sun River, Whitefish, Geraldine, and Trego. It was a close race, but Bainville earned the victory with their smoothie bowl breakfast! Bainville School's Head Chef Natasha Matlow and two Nutrition Staff Members made mixed berry smoothies topped with bananas, berries, coconut flakes, chai seeds, and a peanut butter swirl along with a slice of peanut butter chocolate oat bread, boiled egg, and ham patties. All participants were gifted with posters to hang proudly in their school, showcasing their honorable mentions in MFBN's 2nd Annual National School Breakfast Week Photo Contest.



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CEO CORNER



If you were asked to sum up your strongest characteristic in one word, what would it be? Curious, honest, dependable, compassionate ... each of us has a strength that carries us through even the toughest times. For agencies providing essential food to neighbors in need, this strength is “resilient.”

Over the years, food banks, pantries, and other emergency food providers have demonstrated their ability to withstand and recover quickly from difficult conditions. Resilience may look like stepping up to meet increased demands when a community faces a crisis, quickly adjusting methods during a pandemic to serve everyone safely, or adapting when facing budget cuts so that no neighbor is turned away from receiving needed assistance.

As you will see from the articles in this newsletter, food banks and pantries provide more than just food. They serve as the voice of their neighbors to ensure that other forms of assistance are not reduced or eliminated by educating policymakers and key community leaders. They assist neighbors by connecting with public assistance programs that provide affordable housing, medical care, and

childcare. And, more importantly, they offer a compassionate friend that listens to their concerns without judgment.

If you are looking for moments of resourcefulness and encouragement, look to your community food pantry or reach out to Montana Food Bank Network. Volunteer, donate, organize a food drive, or attend our fundraising events. Everything you do will be gratefully appreciated and do more than you will ever know.

We all need heroes in our lives for inspiration and to witness good in the world. As the statewide food bank, we at Montana Food Bank Network are honored to serve our heroes — 330 Network Partners — to ensure that no Montanan goes to bed hungry. We encourage you to join us so you can witness resiliency at its best and be a part of the solution.

With appreciation,

Gayle Carlson
President and CEO
Montana Food Bank Network

ADVOCACY Update

It has been a very busy time for MFBN's Advocacy Team! On the state level MFBN has advocated for several bills, including SNAP, school meals, SunBucks, and a farm to food bank program.

MFBN advocated against two bills that aimed to limit the foods that can be purchased with SNAP (SB 354, HB 902). These bills would have not only stigmatized those using SNAP and made their grocery shopping experience harder, but they also would have posed a challenge for grocers accepting SNAP, which could have possibly worsened food deserts and food insecurity in



From left to right: Representative Ryan Zinke, Senator Tim Sheehy, Sophie Albert from North Valley Food Bank, MFBN's Advocacy Specialist Kiera Condon, Representative Troy Downing, and Senator Steve Daines.

Hunters Against Hunger

Over the last six months, MFBN worked with Fish Wildlife and Parks to encourage hunters to donate their harvests to our Hunters Against Hunger program (HAH). This program allows hunters to donate legally harvested game to participating meat processors which is then stocked at nearby pantries — all free of charge. Funded through donations, the meat processors are reimbursed for their hard work processing and packaging the game into one-to-two-pound packages. This season, small business meat processors received over \$116,000 for their work resulting in over 40,500 pounds of fresh wild game meat being distributed to 23 of Montana's counties. This included 468 deer, 92 elk, 18 antelope, and 3 moose! Moving forward, MFBN hopes to continue to grow this special program to get more nutritious protein to Montanans in all corners of the state.



MAKE-A-WILL MONTH

August is Make-a-Will Month, and we're encouraging our entire community to make their wills to make an impact — for their futures, their loved ones, and for Montanans facing hunger. By documenting your wishes in a will, you can protect the individuals in your life, plan for all of your assets, and even include an optional gift to Montana Food Bank Network to build your legacy with us. You will help Montanans for generations to come. We've partnered with FreeWill because their secure online resource can help you create your will within 20 minutes for free.

Scan the QR code below to get started!



Montana. MFBN testified in Helena several times to prevent these harmful bills, and we were successful!

MFBN advocated for HB 551 which aimed to increase school meal eligibility. Our Child Nutrition team worked closely with Representative Melissa Romano to make sure this measure would be as effective as possible. Thanks to all those who advocated and Representative Romano's valiant effort, HB 551 is waiting to be signed by the Governor! We have also been hard at work advocating to restore SunBucks (Summer EBT) funding in HB 2. SunBucks is an integral part of keeping kiddos fed during summer months. When the House Appropriations Committee attempted to strike the funding, MFBN worked hard to educate on the importance of this program. Our voices were heard, and the funding was restored!

MFBN advocated for HB 649, sponsored by

Representative Shelly Fyant, which would have established a farm to food bank program, enabling pantries to use grant money to purchase foods from Montana producers. Unfortunately, this bill died on the House Floor. However, MFBN is looking to the future to support a similar program. This is just one of the many advocacy opportunities coming up!

As the Montana Legislative Session comes to a close, MFBN has been busy advocating on the federal level to protect SNAP and Medicaid. MFBN's Advocacy Team was recently in D.C. and met with our federal delegation to stress the importance of protecting SNAP and a strong Farm Bill. We plan to continue to utilize these relationships as the House goes through Budget Reconciliation. MFBN's Advocacy Team continues to strengthen our relationship with state and federal lawmakers, our partners, and neighbors by advocating for a hunger-free Montana.

MFBN BUILDING Project Update

MFBN's new facility is scheduled to be completed, with staff moving in, this September! Interior painting is complete, warehouse shelving and racking systems are installed, and the parking lots are paved. Our Campaign for Bigger Impact will increase our food storage and food distribution to our network of food banks, pantries, shelters, senior centers, and schools across the state. We can't wait!



Make your donation and join our Campaign for Bigger Impact by visiting mfbn.org/campaign-for-bigger-impact.



MFBN LICENSE PLATE Stand Up Against Hunger



Help us end hunger in Montana by choosing Montana Food Bank Network's "Stand Up Against Hunger" license plate the next time you purchase or renew your vehicle registration. Every license plate helps provide enough food for at least 80 meals for our neighbors experiencing hunger. Ask for MFBN's license plate at your local DMV today!



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