

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**



Women Experiencing Food Insecurity:

Strength in Adversity

Women are strong, compassionate, and resilient. Yet, despite decades of progress in gender equality, American women disproportionately experience hunger and poverty compared to American men. As we emerge from the worst of the pandemic crisis, an elevated need for food assistance is being fueled by inflation and an uneven economic recovery, especially for women and low-skilled workers.

Hunger may be closer than you think.

The cashier ringing up your groceries at your local supermarket, the hospital attendant who cares for you when you're sick, or the friendly attendant at your gas station may be experiencing food insecurity.

We recently met several amazing women at the Verona Community Food Pantry, and two shared their stories of adversity and perseverance.



“When we’re limited, with three kids who constantly eat, [visiting the pantry] really is helpful,” Erika said.

Meet Erika

Erika is a mother of three who has worked in construction. Like so many moms, she stepped out of the workforce to care for her youngest son, Jaxson, age 2. Her husband, Charles, works in a forge. During the pandemic, when work was scarce and risk was high, Erika and Charles would take turns working and watching the kids to keep them safe *and* fed.

“Last year was difficult because it was hard to get any work,” Erika said. “It’s been hard, but we get through it.”

The past year was incredibly difficult for Erika and her family due to the passing of her beloved mother and uncle. COVID-19 has also remained a top concern for the couple, and they take many precautions to protect their children.

Although Charles is working now, money is still tight due to the rising cost of groceries and gas. They visit the pantry occasionally when they feel they really need it.

Meet Laura

Laura, age 66, retired in March 2021 after a long career as a factory machine operator. She cares for her daughter, Angela, who is disabled. They receive Social Security and disability assistance, but it's still hard to get by, especially since her income is reduced.

"We need more food in the house; we've been hungry," Laura said. "It's hard when you come out here and your stomach is growling and you think, 'I need to eat.'"

Angela's phone was hacked twice in the past year and money was stolen from their bank account, so they are on a payment plan to make back payments on rent. "It's really hard to try to catch up. It's a struggle," Laura said.



Laura wishes she could still work, but with 12-hour shifts and lots of overtime, her body just couldn't handle it. "I can't keep up anymore. They push you so hard and want more and more. I can't do it."

What keeps her going?

"I have a lot of love in my heart," Laura said. "I have faith in the world."

How can you help?

Encourage elected officials to expand programs that help women experiencing food insecurity:

- 1 The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC):** Provides nutritious foods, nutrition and breastfeeding education, and health care access for low-income women, infants, and children.
- 2 Commodity Supplemental Food Program:** Provides nutritious food to low-income individuals aged 60 and above, many of whom are living on a fixed income.
- 3 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program:** Helps millions of low-income families through a monthly electronic transfer of funds that can be used to purchase food in the grocery store.

A clear picture of food insecurity among women

Examples of strong women like these—who are working hard but are unable to feed their families without help—are not unusual.

According to the USDA 2020 Food Security Report:



- Rates of food insecurity were higher than the national average (10.5%) in households headed by a single woman (27.7%)
- Very low food security was higher than the national average (3.9%) in households with women living alone (5.1%)
- Very low food security was higher than the national average (3.9%) in households with children headed by a single woman (8.2%)



Food insecurity rates increase for Black, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic women of color. This stems from barriers women face, like income inequality, access to education and health care, and discrimination at home and in the workplace. Women of color, including LGBTQ women, face the intersecting burdens of racism, sexism, and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.



Read more about women who are experiencing hunger in our community. Visit www.brafb.org/blog-chew-on-this/.

A Recipe for Happiness

What makes a happy person, well, happy?



▲ Jaime Kurtz

We turned to a local expert to learn more. Jaime Kurtz, Ph.D., associate professor of psychology at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, has spent much of her career researching this very question. Her studies in positive psychology have culminated in several books, including a 2021 Audible exclusive on “The Psychology of Happiness.” She has presented her research into happiness and how to be happier within “The Habits of Happy People.”

We had a conversation with Dr. Kurtz to find out more about her research, and to uncover the connection between giving and happiness.

Food Bank: Based on your research, happiness includes how you feel now, how happy you are with your life, and how comfortable you are within your relationships, health, and work. How else would you describe happiness?

Dr. Kurtz: There are different definitions depending on who you ask, but this is valid! Another is frequent positive moods, infrequent negative moods, and a high degree of life satisfaction.

Food Bank: The Food Bank benefits from the extraordinary generosity of the communities we serve. How does volunteering or donating to charities help people find happiness?

Dr. Kurtz: These actions can boost your happiness for many reasons. They foster moments of social connection,

fuel a self-esteem boost, put your own problems into perspective, and make you feel more connected to your community.

Food Bank: If someone already donates time or money to a charitable cause, they know the good feeling that comes along with it. How can a person hang on to or grow this feeling of happiness?

Dr. Kurtz: I think there should be a way to add a personal touch. Sending a check is not as gratifying as face-to-face helping. But, of course, checks are welcomed and necessary! Perhaps hearing the specific impact your money has (maybe through a personal story of someone who benefited) can help add that personal touch.

When you volunteer, the good feelings are less likely to wear off because you encounter the people you’re helping.

Food Bank: Any other thoughts on the connection between giving and happiness?

Dr. Kurtz: Giving helps get us out of our own heads. I don’t mean it in a narcissistic way, but we are all a little obsessed with ourselves. Anything that breaks that pattern a little is probably good!

Food Bank: Would you say another way of cultivating compassion for others is mindfulness?

Dr. Kurtz: Yes, particularly a mindfulness practice called loving-kindness meditation. It involves getting yourself in a calm mindset (through a few minutes of deep breathing) and then sending well wishes to various people in your life.

In this season of giving, we appreciate you. Whether you donate money or food, advocate for those who can't speak up for themselves, or give freely of your time, know that you are making a huge difference in your community. Thanks to Dr. Kurtz's research, we also know that these actions are likely to increase your own happiness as well.

As a gift to you, we offer this meditation from Dr. Kurtz to try at home.

Loving-kindness meditation

Imagine someone close to you, who you love and feel warmth for. Think of them and repeat phrases like:

- "May you be happy."
- "May you be healthy."
- "May you be free from suffering."

Then think of someone you feel neutral toward and repeat the phrases with that person in mind. Next, you might think of a difficult person, or someone you dislike, and repeat the phrases with that person in mind. Finally, think of all beings everywhere and repeat the phrases.



Set the Table for a Year of Meals

You can provide a month's worth of meals for a neighbor with a \$30 recurring donation. That's the equivalent of 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 adjust your giving at any time.

When you do, you'll join *The Supper Club*, the growing community of friends who make regular, monthly gifts to help the Food Bank meet the highs and lows of guest demand for food, throughout the year.



SCAN NOW
TO SIGN UP

There's no better time to join *The Supper Club*!

Act quickly for an added benefit. Our friends at **Food Lion** will match the first 6 months of donations from new monthly donors who join *The Supper Club* **by February 28**, up to a total of \$25,000.

It's easy to give monthly:

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

Learn more at www.brafb.org/supperclub

FOOD BANKING 101:

A Deeper Look at Our Pantry Network

Hunger's impact on the Blue Ridge region is vast and deep, but so is the Food Bank and our network.

Whether you're a new supporter or a longtime hunger hero, you have likely heard about the strength of the Food Bank's pantry network, which distributes about 88% of all food going out of our four warehouses in Verona, Winchester, Lynchburg, and Charlottesville.

"When COVID hit, we were deeply moved and inspired to see pantries keep their doors open. At the height of the pandemic, only 12 partners shut down," recalled Tyler Herman, director of partner engagement. "The strength and resiliency of our partners was embodied in the effort and care of thousands of volunteers—many who are older and at higher risk for complications from COVID—who chose to show up and sustain compassion, care, and love for their guests during an unprecedented crisis."



HOW WE WORK



We secure donations of money and food



We safely store and distribute food throughout the 25-county service area

207
Partner pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters

187
Nutrition program site partners

Food Bank Programs

In addition to our pantry network, 187 program site partners help us provide food directly to the most vulnerable populations in our community.

To learn more, visit www.brafb.org/programs

RURAL (where access to food is limited): **Mobile Food Pantry**

URBAN (underserved areas): **Neighborhood Produce Market**

CHILDREN AND TEENS

Summer Kid Packs: food for children and families during the summer months

Good Food School Market: middle- or high-school-based food pantries

Summer Food Service: prepared meals at summer enrichment programs



Who are these local pantries, shelters, and soup kitchens?

Each location operates because their leaders believe that everyone should have enough to eat. But hours, locations, funding, staffing, client base, and services vary across the network.

Staffing and funding

- 67% of pantries do not have paid staff and are run solely by volunteers, who are often older and retired.
- Many pantries operate with fewer than 50 volunteers.
- The larger pantries are more likely to have paid staff.
- 61% are funded by churches and other faith-based organizations.
- 47% of pantries report leadership that includes Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Pantries with paid staff are more likely to have BIPOC leadership.

Serving underserved populations

- 66% of pantries welcome guests that include first-generation immigrants and refugees.
- 71% of pantries are serving guests for whom English is not their first language.
- Pantries with paid staff serve more English-as-a-second-language guests.

Striving to continuously improve and better serve

- 52% of pantries consult or coordinate with other local or regional food assistance providers—about food sharing, services provided, hours of operation, best practices, troubleshooting challenges, and advocacy.
- A vast majority of pantries are open to growing their outreach and mission to serve more people, despite the constraints they have on resources.

**Data described here are based on the 61% of all Food Bank pantry partners who responded to a recent survey.*

What's next for the network?

As dedicated and hard working as pantry staff and volunteers are, there are many people across the region who need food assistance and are not accessing it. Using our own service-related data as well as publicly available data sets, we strive to better understand and respond to the unique needs of different communities across our region.

“We want to acquire more culturally familiar foods, help partners overcome language barriers, diversify the types of organizations we partner with, and support the capacity and capability of food pantries to enhance their services to best meet the needs of their communities,” noted Herman.

How you can support the pantry network

Beyond mission, the common element across the Food Bank and the pantry network is that we all rely on supporters like you to do this work.

If you would like to find your local pantry—to find food or to volunteer or donate funds—visit www.brafb.org/find-help.

Visit www.brafb.org/partners to learn more about our partners and how you can help us continue to invest in this network via the Agency Capacity Fund.



118,300

Individuals served each month, on average



23.9 million

Meals provided

OUR IMPACT

Family BackPacks:

food for schoolchildren and families on weekends and school holidays

SENIORS

Reach: food bags or boxes for homebound seniors and people with disabilities

CHRONICALLY ILL Food Pharmacy: food delivered in a health care or clinic setting to meet specific nutritional needs

Kids Café: meals and snacks in afterschool programs

Senior Food Box (CSFP): food boxes for qualified low-income seniors

We also provide **Emergency Food Boxes** to guests who arrive at one of our four branch locations and need **IMMEDIATE FOOD ASSISTANCE**.



We are deeply grateful to our donors, who inspire us with gifts of their time, food, funds, and voices to help ensure that everyone has enough to eat. Solving hunger is a community-wide effort: we are better together.

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

Paint It Orange owner, Jessica and her 10-year-old son, Wyatt, created handmade bowls to sell during their Empty Bowl fundraiser. This fun event helped bring awareness about hunger and helped provide 1,080 meals.



Friends from **James Madison University** have been hosting an annual food drive for 14 years and have collected enough food and funds to help provide more than 60,720 meals. No matter how large or small, every donation has an impact.



When businesses stand with the Food Bank, we see the difference. **Weaver Insurance & Financial Advisors** partnered with us on their 2nd annual Spooktacular Drive Thru Trick or Treat event. Through the Halloween event and their support of Shop to Stop Hunger, the company helped provide nearly 13,000 meals.

GIVING TUESDAY



Your contribution, which was doubled thanks to matching gifts from **Kroger** and **Wind River Chimes**, helped us raise enough money to provide **1,553,295 meals** for families in the Blue Ridge area who are experiencing food insecurity. Thank you for helping us make this past **#GivingTuesday** the most impactful **#GivingFoodDay** to date!



Through their text-to-give campaign **Torch Hunger**, the **Commonwealth Games** helped provide 6,077 meals during this year's statewide competition. The games are hosted by Virginia Amateur Sports and sponsored by **Kroger**.

THANK YOU, Generous Corporate, Foundation, and Event Partners

Leading by Listening: Meet John Gilbert

As the new Chief Collaboration Officer, John joined the Food Bank in 2021 to lead the Partner Engagement and Programs team, which supports Food Bank partners as they step up to lead in their communities.



"I was drawn to this role and to the Food Bank for many reasons, but the biggest one was the mission," John said. Over the next few months, John will help define what success looks like for the Food Bank network.

"We know that the number of pounds in and out and the number of people served are important things to look at and be proud of, but this only tells part of the story. So how do we show our impact on improving the health and wellbeing of our guests and our communities? And how do we do so in the most accurate and compelling way possible?"

While there is no immediate answer, there is also no shortage of ideas from partners and staff. We look forward to exploring this together! Connect with John at jgilbert@brafb.org or (540) 213-8420.



*REFLECTS SIGNIFICANT GIFTS RECEIVED JUNE 1 TO NOVEMBER 30, 2021

Get Involved

EVENTS AROUND THE REGION

MARCH 7-25 School Food Drive

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

APRIL 17-30 Legal Food Frenzy

Lawyers and legal staff, law students and professors, and judges compete to raise funds for individuals facing hunger in their communities. Family and friends make contributions to support participating firms.



APRIL 20 Great Community Give

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



MAY 14

Stamp Out Hunger

This much-loved event is back after a two-year hiatus! Leave nonperishable food donations at your doorstep on Saturday, May 14, for pickup by your local postal carrier. This is the Food Bank's largest annual food drive.



JUNE

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.

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

VOLUNTEERS WANTED:

Calling Community Outreach Ambassadors

Would you like to help build community by extending the Food Bank's reach? We're looking for ambassadors to represent us at local events and functions, share information about services, and extend our gratitude to supporters.

Community Outreach Ambassadors

should be outgoing, enjoy events and connecting with people, and have a desire to share the Food Bank's story and advocate for issues related to food insecurity and hunger relief. If you are interested, contact us at volunteer@brafb.org.

Interested in lending a hand in other ways? Register for a volunteer shift at one of our four warehouses or at an offsite distribution at www.brafb.volunteerhub.com/.

Your Giving Spirit Can Live on

You believe in helping others. You donate time, food, money to help your neighbors, and you are making a difference today.

You can also make a difference tomorrow.

After you have provided for your loved ones in your will, consider including a gift to the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank.

Your bequest is a lasting testament to a cause that matters to you, and you will help us ensure that future generations of Virginians grow up healthy, not hungry.

Visit www.brafb.org/plannedgift or contact Jenna Dull at (540) 712-7062 or jdull@brafb.org for more information. All inquiries will remain confidential.



Women Top the List.

Sometimes, We Wish They Didn't.

Stand in line at a food pantry, and you'll be among mostly women. Whether single mothers or simply the one available when the pantry is open, women far outnumber men in visits to our partner food pantries.

Volunteer at a food pantry, and you'll notice that positions are filled more often by women than by men. Most of our partner pantries are headed and staffed by women.

Both guests and volunteers have something in common beyond gender; they have stepped into caregiving roles when needed.

During the pandemic, far more women than men withdrew from the workforce to care for loved ones, especially children, grandchildren, or ailing parents. And for women in low-wage jobs in service sectors like retail, working from home was not an option—no work, no income.

With the high cost of child care, a better life is more of a dream than a promise for women with young children. A woman earning \$15 per hour would need to hand over more than one-third of her take-home pay to cover the cost of day care for her toddler and another third or more for housing. That leaves precious little for everything else.

That is, of course, if she has a job to go to.

One young mom visiting our partner Feeding Greene commented that the pantry was her "new grocery store." Not by choice, but by necessity.

We are working toward a day when no one would think of a food pantry as a primary source of food. Until then, thank you for helping us make sure every family has enough to eat.

Gratefully,



Michael McKee
Chief Executive Officer



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Everyone should have enough to eat.



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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

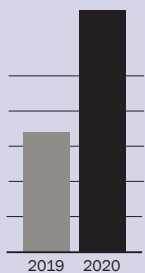
We serve your community through one of four distribution centers:

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
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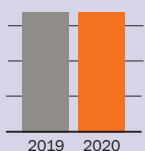
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F: 540.722.4217



PREDICTION

Food insecurity rates would increase in 2020 in the face of the pandemic.



REALITY

Food insecurity levels remained flat from 2019 to 2020.*

The **MASSIVE** government response to hunger during the pandemic coupled with the work of nonprofits was successful in mitigating food insecurity rates.

* U.S. Department of Agriculture's "Household Food Security in the United States in 2020"