



Blue Ridge
AREA
**FOOD
BANK**

Partnering With Purpose

WINTER 2024

PRINT EDITION

A NEWSLETTER FOR FOOD BANK PARTNERS

Innovation Abounds at Loudoun Hunger Relief

In the heart of Loudoun County, Loudoun Hunger Relief (LHR) is transforming the traditional food pantry model. While offering nutritious options to families experiencing food insecurity, LHR weaves a tapestry of support into its daily operations.

“It’s all about access,” Deputy Director Trish McNeal said. “We try to connect as many people as we can to a variety of services that can help them. This is how we help people find the tools and supports that fit their lives.”

LHR’s growth

Loudoun Hunger Relief started as a collection of faith-based pantries in 1991. After becoming a standalone 501(c)(3), LHR was able to expand and enhance its mission to better meet community needs. And, in September of last year, it opened the doors to its new community service center. The center houses a full-choice food market, as well as other nonprofits offering community services, including Loudoun Literacy, Crossroads Jobs, and Loudoun Volunteer Caregivers.

Currently, LHR operates its flagship food market (available to neighbors



Katherine and her daughter Mary have been coming to LHR for the past two years. “I try to get the best food for my kids,” Katherine said. “And the people who work here are amazing. They make you feel good.”

by appointment), plus two mobile food sites in the eastern part of the county, and supplies food to four smaller pantries across Loudoun County. Its staff and volunteers, without exception, make sure neighbors who visit LHR feel welcomed, and the shopping experience is one of dignity. And there is a big focus on the health of its patrons too, said President and CEO Jennifer Montgomery.

“We are focused on offering fresh produce,” Montgomery said. “To put that in perspective: 10 years ago, we were able to offer 30,000 pounds of fresh produce a year, last fiscal year that grew to 800,000 pounds.”

In total, Loudoun Hunger Relief dispersed 2.4 million pounds of food



FRESH PRODUCE

30,000 lbs
10 YEARS AGO

800,000 lbs
LAST YEAR

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into the community last year, with emphasis placed on sourcing nutritious food options that reflect the unique cultural and dietary needs of guests.

More than food

Food is, and always will be, the core focus of LHR. But, as both McNeal and Montgomery agree, LHR *has to* be about more than food to help guests improve their situations.

“That’s why having conversations with our neighbors is so important,” Montgomery said. “When we learn what people are experiencing in their lives, we make sure they leave with useful information. That could be about rent or utility assistance, employment, or how to apply for SNAP or other benefits. We can’t lower rent for people, but we can give them information on rent assistance.”

Call it wraparound services, or a holistic approach. Both Montgomery and McNeal believe that all food-assistance providers have an opportunity to partner with and bring in other services and resources to help meet more of their guests’ needs beyond food.

“It doesn’t have to be super complicated,” said Montgomery. “All these things can be done at any scale, whether it’s at Loudoun Hunger Relief, or at a small pantry that’s open once a week.”

That doesn’t mean, though, that Loudoun Hunger Relief is perfect.

“Oh no,” Montgomery concluded. “We are learning how to better do this every day.”

To learn more about the great work that LHR is doing, how they got to this point, and what impact these positive changes have meant for their guests, you can reach Jennifer Montgomery at (703) 777-5911, or jmontgomery@loudounhunger.org



Here are a few ways you can enhance your pantry or program’s mission, today:

- Survey your guests to determine what other supports and resources they need beyond food, and make referrals.
- Connect with your local Department of Social Services office and other community organizations to share information and resources.
- Work with Monica Kelley, the Food Bank’s Public Benefits Outreach Manager, to incorporate SNAP application assistance into your services: mkelley@brafb.org
- Let local businesses know you can share their job postings with guests.
- Find other service providers in your community and invite them to offer their programming onsite during your hours of operation.



Above: Jennifer Montgomery and Trish McNeal of LHR. Under their guidance, LHR opened the doors to a new community service center four months ago.



Right: Guests who come to Loudoun Hunger Relief can shop in the newly opened full-choice market. Items include fresh produce, meat, milk, and eggs, as well as shelf-stable items.

The Food Bank Is Listening: New Surveys Give Guests a Voice



The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank is taking a key step toward ensuring its services better meet the needs of its guests with the launch of a new survey initiative that includes multilingual questionnaires. We are seeking feedback from guests across the region, so that improvements are made based on their feedback.

Seeking feedback on Food Bank programs

The first survey, underway at various program sites, features a questionnaire available in both English and Spanish. This accessible format seeks to capture the experiences of a broad range of guests. Individuals are asked to rate the quality and quantity of food, share feedback on accessibility and convenience, and voice any concerns they have.

“The survey is one piece in how we determine how to move forward with programs operated by the Food Bank,” Director of Programs Zach Nissen said. “We feel it’s important to learn from the people we serve if, and how, we can improve. Giving our guests a voice in that decision-making process can have a profound effect on their dignity as well as our insight.”

Seeking feedback for pantries

The second survey is being piloted at six food pantries across the Food Bank’s service area. This guest survey is available in six different languages to reach the culturally diverse communities we collectively serve. By gathering feedback in guests’ native tongues, we aim to break down language barriers and ensure everyone feels comfortable and empowered to participate.

According to Matz, seeking guest feedback will become part of the Food Bank’s standard operating procedure.



This round of surveys will run through the end of February, explained Partner Engagement Manager Jacob Matz.

“After that, participating agencies will receive their results and together we will work on an action plan,” Matz said. An action plan could include reviewing current menus, offering more culturally familiar foods, expanding services beyond food, or connecting guests to the broader pantry community where they live.

According to Matz, seeking guest feedback will become part of the Food Bank’s standard operating procedure. This ongoing “feedback loop” promises to strengthen the Food Bank and our partners’ ability to address individual and community-specific challenges, ultimately leading to a more equitable and efficient distribution of food and resources.

This commitment to inclusivity and responsiveness ensures that the effort to end hunger in central Virginia remains ever-more effective and impactful.

If your pantry is interested in participating in future guest feedback and engagement opportunities, reach out to your partner engagement manager, or contact Jacob Matz at jmatz@brafb.org

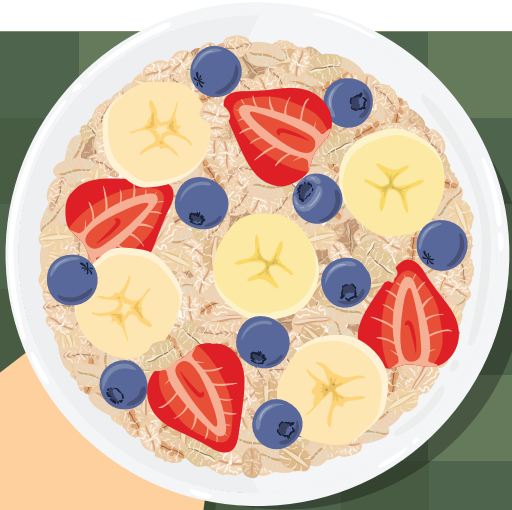
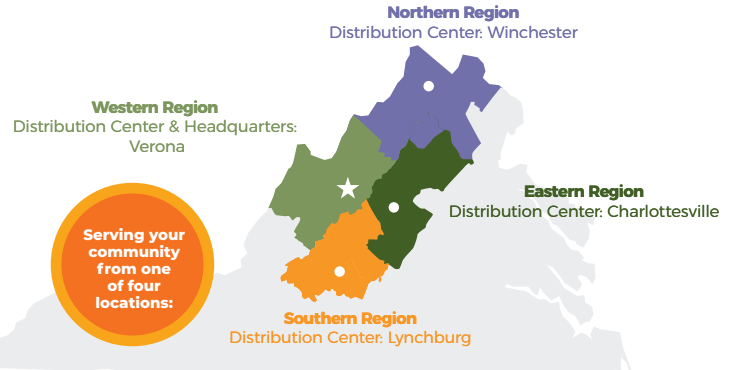


Blue Ridge Area FOOD BANK

Everyone should have enough to eat.



HEADQUARTERS | P.O. BOX 937 | VERONA, VA 24482



Our VISION: Nourishing food and better health—for everyone, every day.

Our CORE BELIEFS: Hunger is unacceptable, everyone deserves access to enough food, food sustains life and nourishes health, and we are called to serve without judgment.

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

Snackables



For recorded trainings, past newsletters, required forms, and other useful resources, check out the Food Bank’s Agency Resources page at www.brafb.org/agency-resources/

Have you participated in our monthly digital Partner Town Hall events? Connect with others who know what you’re navigating to learn, share, and grow together to enhance our collective reach and community impact. **Watch for monthly e-mail invites to attend.** We hope to see you there!

Do you have ideas for communications tools and strategies that can help us all better connect with guests and elevate our mission? Richard Alblas, our new Marketing and Communications Manager, is here to help! You can reach him at ralblas@brafb.org or 434-956-4305.