

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.





Cinda



Sherman

A Lifeline for Seniors in the Blue Ridge

For many seniors, the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank is more than a food provider—it's a lifeline. As the local population ages, the challenges associated with food insecurity become more pressing.

The Food Bank addresses these challenges, offering crucial support to aging adults facing difficult situations.

When it's hard to get around

Seniors with disabilities experience food insecurity at more than twice the rate of their peers without disabilities. Physical limitations make grocery shopping, meal preparation, and

transportation to food distribution sites increasingly difficult.

Sherman, a former truck driver, is on disability after a heart attack and stroke. On a fixed income and receiving \$23 per month in SNAP benefits, he turns to the Mobile Food Pantry in Buckingham County for help. "I would recommend it, especially if you're on a fixed income and don't have many resources," he said.

Race plays a factor

Black and Latino seniors are more than twice as likely to experience food insecurity as white seniors. Addressing these disparities is a strategic priority for the Food Bank.

When kids live in the home

While multigenerational living can provide emotional and financial benefits for the household, seniors often prioritize their family's needs over their own health and nutrition. In fact, the presence of children in a home doubles the risk of food insecurity. Caregiving responsibilities stretch limited resources, forcing difficult choices between essentials like medication, utilities, and food.

Cinda, a retired nurse, now raises her two young grandnieces. "With grocery prices rising and with the children I'm raising, I just needed extra financial help," she shared. She relies on Central United Methodist Church in Staunton to provide nutritious meals for her second and sixth graders.



The Challenge of Senior Hunger: A Closer Look

In the Blue Ridge, **1 in 10** neighbors lives with food insecurity.

Why are seniors especially vulnerable?



Food deserts: Many live in areas with limited access to nutritious food.



Low SNAP (formerly Food Stamps) participation: More than 100,000 eligible Virginia seniors aren't enrolled.



Fixed incomes: Rising costs for groceries, healthcare, utilities, housing, and gasoline stretch already tight budgets.

Delivering more than food—supporting health

The Food Bank offers two nutrition outreach programs designed for seniors:

Reach provides food boxes filled with shelf-stable goods, including dairy and meats, to seniors with low incomes, individuals who are homebound, and people with special needs. There is no minimum income requirement to participate in the Reach program.

Senior Food Boxes contain food chosen by the USDA for the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) for seniors with low incomes. Nutrition education and recipes are often distributed with the food.

Both programs are supported by Food Bank volunteers and also serve as vital social touchpoints for seniors. Volunteers and staff can check in with seniors, offering much-needed social interaction and helping alleviate the isolation many older adults face.

Together, with donors, partners, volunteers, and staff, we deliver more than food to seniors.

How the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank helps older adults

Reach: Providing food boxes to seniors, homebound individuals, and those with special needs, with no income requirement.

Mobile Food Pantries: Distributing food in rural areas.

SNAP outreach: Making enrollment easier and advocating for higher benefits.

Senior Food Boxes (CSFP): Providing USDA-selected items for income qualified individuals, often provided along with nutrition education and recipes.



All of these efforts help older adults stay healthy longer, reducing hospitalizations and nursing home admissions. Every older Virginian should have the nutrition they need for a healthier future.

Learn more about how the Food Bank helps seniors at www.brafb.org/seniors.

If you know a senior (age 60+) needing food assistance, contact reach@brafb.org.



To Find Meaning and Connection: Volunteer

Hundreds of thousands of Virginians experience food insecurity each year. Food banks and food pantries* are often their lifeline, providing nutritious groceries, meals, and additional resources to bridge the gap.

Unfortunately, the demand is huge, leaving many charitable food organizations stretched thin and in need of extra hands.

You can be part of the solution, helping to sort, package, and distribute food to those who might otherwise go hungry. Each task you complete impacts lives. Even an hour of sorting canned goods or distributing fresh produce can translate into a nutritious meal for a family.

Building a stronger, connected community

When you volunteer for this cause, you become part of something larger than yourself. You work side by side with people from diverse backgrounds and circumstances, united by a common goal. These shared experiences foster genuine connections, bring people together, and break down societal barriers.

We create opportunities for empathy and understanding. You can meet people dealing with real challenges, and you come to understand the complexities of poverty and hunger. This understanding broadens your perspective and also strengthens community bonds, creating a place where everyone feels valued and supported.



“I like meeting new people each time while I help my community.”

– Food Bank Volunteer

Growing personally and professionally

Volunteering at the Food Bank or a food pantry is more than just “giving back”—it’s a chance to develop skills and experiences that can be both personally and professionally rewarding.

Volunteering fosters patience, resilience, and leadership. Whether you’re serving meals or organizing shelves, you’re actively improving your ability to work as part of a team, solve problems, and show compassion. Volunteering can be transformative, giving you a sense of purpose and fulfillment.

You might find yourself learning about supply chain management,



“I really liked the idea of helping and feeling like I was contributing. I also really liked the explanations given for how some of the processes work. It helps to understand the why behind doing what you’re doing and how the process works. What a great facility that is well run!”

– Food Bank Volunteer

handling inventory, translating materials, coordinating logistics, or helping with event planning and community outreach. These skills are valuable, and they look great on a resume.

How to get started

Typically, no special skills are needed, just a willingness to help, some time to give, and a compassionate heart.

Learn how to join the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank team, here: www.brafb.org/volunteer

Or call a local food pantry or other site and ask how you can help. Start by locating one near you, here: foodfinder.brafb.org

**"Food pantry" is a stand-in phrase in this context because the need for volunteers exists at many hunger-relief organizations, including soup kitchens, shelters, health clinics, and program sites like mobile food distributions.*



When you can't volunteer but still want to help

If you're unable to volunteer, consider donating food or money, or organizing a food or fund drive with friends, family, or co-workers. Every bit of support adds up, and there are many ways to get involved. Start here:



www.brafb.org/get-involved

**You can make a difference,
one meal at a time.**

Income + Impact: The Power of a Charitable Gift Annuity



Looking for reliable income in your retirement?

A charitable gift annuity (CGA) is a powerful way to make a gift that pays you back.

A gift to establish a CGA ensures you dependable, fixed income for life. After your lifetime, the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank will use the remainder to provide nourishing food to families in need.

A CGA can also provide various tax benefits depending on how you fund it, which includes the option to fund it using your individual retirement account (IRA).

Learn more at www.brafb.org/annuity

We partner with Feeding America to provide CGAs. Contact your financial advisor to learn how a CGA can help you accomplish your retirement and philanthropic goals. Or reach out to Karen Ratzlaff, Chief Philanthropy Officer, at 540.213.8404 or kratzlaff@brafb.org. All inquiries are treated confidentially.

Innovative Partnerships Ensure **Mission Success**

We don't achieve our mission alone, and we never have.

The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank collaborates with hundreds of organizations, expanding access to food in vulnerable communities.

Partner innovation and diversity are strategies to meet a key strategic goal of the Food Bank: Eliminating disparities in access to nutritious food.

Meet a few of the 20 new partners we welcomed into the Food Bank partner network in the last year.



“This food offers us a window into the world of a person or household. In the last eight months, we have helped 25 people get a job. The impact of our partnership with the Food Bank transcends just food.”

— Shawn Hunter,
Founder and President
Lynchburg Peacemakers

Lynchburg Peacemakers

www.lynchburgpeacemakers.org

Lynchburg • Established: 2023

The Lynchburg Peacemakers is an anti-violence organization promoting peace through conflict resolution, education, and community engagement.

“We do most of our work in impoverished neighborhoods where people live with unmet social needs,” Founder and President Shawn Hunter of the Peacemakers said. “Naturally, we found many of them experiencing hunger.”

To address the need, they opened a food pantry last year inside their Conflict Resolution Center.

“It’s been a huge success,” Shawn said. “On average, we help around 100 people a week get the food they need.”

When people come in for food, it’s a chance to start meaningful conversations about other needs.

Bread Across Borders

Charlottesville · Established: 2020

Almost five years ago, Palestinian native Hisham Ashur was asked to take over the bread pick-up at a local bakery and distribute those donations to local families. Not long after, he was asked to do the same with grocery donations from a local Food Lion. Before long, Hisham was delivering bread and fresh produce to families across Charlottesville.

As a community organizer, he continued to build his network to help feed anyone in need, and he now delivers food to 25 households weekly. In April 2024, he became a partner of the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank.

“It’s very important to me that the Food Bank found me,” he said. “I want to do more, but I’m just a one-man organization. Getting help from the Food Bank, and being recognized that way, helps me a lot. My goal is to one day deliver to 50 households. So, I’m halfway there.”



Food Sharing Is Caring

www.foodsharingiscaring.org

Charlottesville · Established: 2023

Food Sharing Is Caring in Charlottesville is the brainchild of founder and Executive Director Edisa Fific, who along with John Green operates the nonprofit as full-time volunteers.

While volunteering at another organization, Edisa noticed many of her neighbors were food insecure. After starting the nonprofit with John, they soon became a Food Bank partner.

“We are able to get access to the healthy food we want to distribute, and the Food Bank always goes above and beyond to help us.”

Now, just over a year into their work, Food Sharing Is Caring is serving around 2,500 people every month in Tonsler Park and three housing complexes, offering a lifeline for many.



Longstanding Partnerships Are Also Innovative



FISH of Clark County, with funding from a Blue Ridge Area Food Bank Partner Impact & Innovation grant, purchased a refrigerated truck to bring food directly to the community. Working alongside the Department of Social Services and a nutrition educator, they meet people where they are, even on Saturdays. “I partner with a lot of groups—I try to reach into as many pots as possible so we can better serve them,” said Pantry Director Ann Cushman.



The Lifeworks Project/River City Bread Basket, led by Adriene and A.J. Young, serves Augusta County and beyond. With the Food Bank’s Partner Impact & Innovation grant, they expanded from home-delivery services to opening a pantry in an underserved area of Waynesboro. A.J. Young shared, “The Food Bank has been instrumental—our biggest cheerleader. Without them, we couldn’t do this.”



At the Food Bank, we witness heartwarming, heroic acts that take place every day.

Hunger Heroes are inspired to take action to end food insecurity. A Hunger Hero exhibits bravery and empathy, and generously sets an example for others to follow. Food Bank volunteers, partners, advocates, donors, staff, and guests are our heroes.

We appreciate every one of you and your support of the Food Bank to make local communities stronger and healthier.

Here, we highlight just a few examples of Hunger Heroes who stepped up to make a difference in recent months.



The **Pacific Life Foundation** is strengthening the social safety net and supporting Lynchburg families living with food insecurity. Their five-year financial commitment to the Food Bank is providing **750,000 meals** in the Lynchburg region, helping families achieve greater security and stability.



Community credit unions center “community” at their core and demonstrate a commitment to giving back and serving others. Three such organizations—**Dupont Community Credit Union**, **Navy Federal Credit Union**, and **UVA Community Credit Union**—have collectively, through financial gifts, food donations, and volunteer hours—provided more than **845,000 meals**.



For the past decade, every week during the academic year, students at the **UVA Challah for Hunger** chapter have kneaded and baked challah bread to help feed their community. The sale of these delicious loaves has so far raised more than **\$53,000** for this Food Bank, making a difference—one person and one loaf of bread at a time. To learn more and order your challah, visit www.challahatuva.org.



Brenda is a guest and a volunteer with a wealth of lived experience and a deep commitment to helping others. As co-founder of **Feed My Sheep** in Gordonsville, she connects people with needed resources and also volunteers at Food Bank partner pantry Good Samaritan.

“It’s tough times for everybody right now, that’s for sure. And I’ve met so many people who are just trying so hard,” she told us. A senior who receives SNAP benefits, Brenda regularly picks up nutritious food from Good Samaritan as well as the Food Bank’s Mobile Food Pantry in Orange.

At Feed My Sheep, Brenda takes on many roles. Recently, she’s been teaching others how to grow their own food in the organization’s community garden—a role she finds especially rewarding.

Having experienced homelessness and raising children as a single mother, Brenda said, “I have a heart, having been there... and I have wisdom, having walked through things, that I can impart.”

THANK YOU, Generous Corporate, Foundation, and Event Partners



I. J. AND HILDA M. BREEDEN FOUNDATION



MANNING FAMILY FOUNDATION



UVA Health



WOODFOREST NATIONAL BANK

*REFLECTS SIGNIFICANT GIFTS RECEIVED JUNE 1 TO NOVEMBER 30, 2024

A Notable Milestone: 40 Years Serving Lynchburg

This year, the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank marks 40 years of service in the greater Lynchburg area, including Bedford, Amherst, Appomattox, Campbell, and Nelson counties.

Since opening in 1985, the Lynchburg warehouse—the Food Bank’s fourth and final branch location—has distributed more than 95 million pounds of nourishing food. Today, thanks to the energy and reach of many local organizations, donors, and volunteers, the Food Bank and our partners offer relief to more than 30,000 guests in the area each month, on average.

In 1985, *The News & Advance* reported the first donations to the Lynchburg branch included many mission-focused items like pasta, yogurt, baby food, canned vegetables, and salad dressing along with some unusual items like Star Wars cookies, cat food, men’s bikini briefs, and pantyhose. We can gladly report that today’s product mix is far more healthful.

The 40th anniversary in Lynchburg stands as a testament to the power of local collaboration, compassion, and a shared vision to ensure that everyone has enough to eat.



JOIN US TO CELEBRATE

YOU'RE INVITED TO AN OPEN HOUSE

March 26, 2025

11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. (Remarks at 12:30)
501 12th Street, Lynchburg
All are welcome.
To learn more and register visit
www.brafb.org/lynchburg40

We serve your community from one of four distribution centers, located in Lynchburg, Charlottesville, Winchester, and Verona (headquarters).



Get Involved

We hope the stories you've read in this issue of *Harvest* inspire you to take action.

We are a community food bank, supported by you and here to serve. And we need many hands and hearts to achieve our shared vision.

Looking to get involved? Here are some timely ideas that can help you make a local impact in the coming months.

Advocate

VOLUNTEER

Form a Business Partnership

Invite a Speaker

DONATE FOOD

Share Our Story

Organize an Event

COORDINATE A FOOD DRIVE

Make a Gift

HOST AN ONLINE FUNDRAISER

On your mark! The Charlottesville 10-Miler is March 22. You can make a difference by running or volunteering on behalf of the Food Bank, which is a proud beneficiary of this year's 50th anniversary race. To learn more, go to www.brafb.org/10miler



Giving food makes a big difference. Contribute to an established food drive like **Stamp Out Hunger on May 10.** More at www.brafb.org/events



Take inspiration from Gillian Saunders. She has hosted a food and fund drive every year since she was six years old. Start your drive at www.brafb.org/drive



How can you get involved in a way that fits you? Visit our website at www.brafb.org/get-involved, call **540.248.3663**, or email solvehunger@brafb.org to start a conversation.



Walk in Their Shoes

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Imagine you've worked hard all your life—40 to 50 years in jobs that paid just enough to cover your bills. You rarely had anything left at the end of the month to put into savings, but your work ethic was a source of pride and dignity and a lesson you passed along to your children.

Now at age 70, your Social Security benefits don't cover your basic living expenses, much less emergencies like unexpected medical bills, a car repair, or broken water pipes in your home. Always self-reliant, you now need help with the bare necessities.

You finally work up the courage to apply for SNAP, formerly called food stamps, at the Department of Social Services, but you learn that due to your meager Social Security check you qualify only for the minimum SNAP benefit of \$23 per month.

How would you feel?

Anxious, disheartened, and ashamed? If so, you'd be in the company of thousands of our neighbors.

Even though food insecurity is growing among seniors faster than any other age group, only one-third of seniors who are eligible for SNAP participate in the program. Why so few? Lack of awareness, confusing paperwork, and the stigma associated with receiving public benefits top a list of hurdles that seem too big to overcome, especially for just \$23 per month.

That is why the Food Bank has launched an outreach campaign to educate seniors about SNAP, conduct eligibility screenings, and assist them with applications. And it's why we are partnering with the Federation of Virginia Food Banks and other leading nonprofits to advocate for a minimum SNAP benefit of \$50 per month for seniors in the state.

Please join us. Help us convince our elected officials in the Virginia General Assembly to boost SNAP benefits.

Sincerely,



Michael McKee
Chief Executive Officer



The Food Bank needs your help to urge elected officials to make sure seniors with low incomes have the nourishment they need to thrive. Scan the QR code or visit www.brafb.org/seniorsnap to become an advocate.

SCAN NOW





Blue Ridge Area

FOOD BANK

Everyone should have enough to eat.



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FOOD BANK

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



SCAN HERE

◀ To change your mailing information or preferences, send an email to donorservices@brafb.org.

OUR LOCATIONS

We serve your community through one of four distribution centers:

Western Region Distribution Center & Headquarters
P.O. Box 937
96 Laurel Hill Road
Verona, VA 24482-0937
P: 540.248.3663

Eastern Region Distribution Center
1207 Harris Street
Charlottesville, VA 22903-5319
P: 434.296.3663

Southern Region Distribution Center
501 12th Street, Suite B
Lynchburg, VA 24504-2527
P: 434.845.4099

Northern Region Distribution Center
1802 Roberts Street
Winchester, VA 22601-6312
P: 540.665.0770

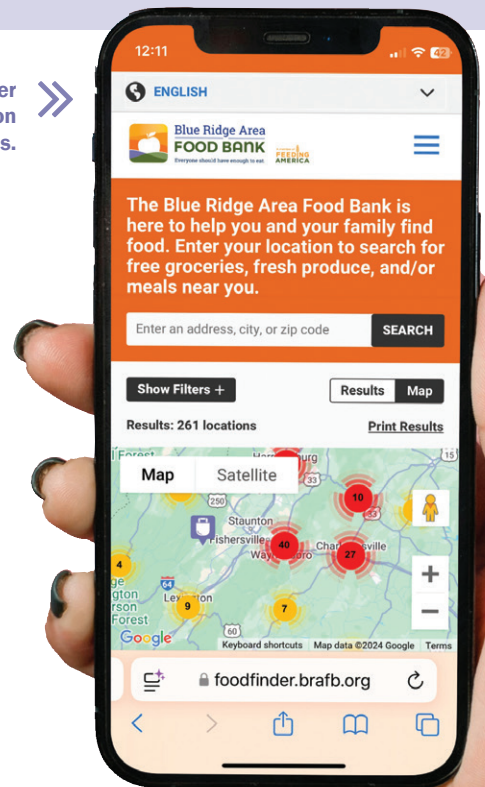
Need Food Assistance?

Or Want to Help Someone Who Does?



Visit <https://foodfinder.brafb.org> or scan this code to use the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank's **FOOD FINDER**

The Food Finder includes translation in 13 languages. >>



Find free groceries:

Enter your location to see nearby food pantries and programs.



Volunteer locally:

Find a nearby food pantry partner or program, then contact them to learn how you can help.