



Full Plate PRESS

THE NEWSLETTER OF
FEEDING AMERICA
 West Michigan

4 WAYS YOU CAN TAKE ACTION



DONATE:
\$10 = 40 MEALS



VOLUNTEER:
 In one hour, you can help us distribute up to 200 meals.



ADVOCATE:
 Tell people in your community about our mission and let them know why you think it's important.



CONNECT:
 Find us on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok and YouTube @feedingwestmich. You can also find us on LinkedIn.

FBI-FWM-20633




2023 ISSUE 1

LEARN MORE ABOUT US

Serving local families in need since 1981, Feeding America West Michigan reclaims millions of meals' worth of safe, surplus food from various sources. With the help of countless volunteers, the food bank sorts, stores and distributes this food through a network of hundreds of hunger-relief partners to fill neighbors' plates instead of landfills. The food bank's service area consists of 40 of Michigan's 83 counties, from the Indiana border north through the Upper Peninsula.

Feeding America West Michigan is a member of Feeding America, The United Way and The Food Bank Council of Michigan. The food bank also maintains a 4-star rating from Charity Navigator.

 864 West River Center Drive NE
 Comstock Park, MI 49321

 FeedWM.org

 616.784.3250



IN THIS ISSUE

Senior Food Box Pilot Program Recap

▶ Page 2

Reflecting on Our Roots

▶ Pages 4-5

Senior Neighbors Share Their Stories

▶ Page 6



Senior Food Box Pilot Program Recap

In 2021, Feeding America West Michigan piloted a senior food box program called Golden Groceries. The program provided seniors in need with two boxes containing 50 pounds of shelf-stable, supplemental groceries during the month. The boxes were distributed in partnership with local agencies.

Participants were surveyed throughout the pilot, which gave us crucial insights.

IMPORTANT TAKEAWAYS

Participants enjoyed the program.

- 🍎 96% enjoyed eating the included canned produce items, and 94% said the food tasted good.
- 🍌 53% of clients from one agency and 94% from another said Golden Groceries helped them eat more produce each month.
- 🍊 At one agency, 62% of clients surveyed after the program said their health was good or better, compared to 39% prior to the program.

Participants would like a wider variety of food. Many particularly desired a greater variety of fruits and vegetables.

Participants could use more food. We learned they would like more food to decrease the number of trips they need to take to a grocery store or to another hunger-relief program such as a food pantry—which costs gas and time.

Although 86% of program participants reported having access to a grocery store, over a third said they couldn't afford to purchase a sufficient amount of fruits and vegetables. If a future iteration of Golden Groceries could provide more food, seniors would be able to stretch their food budget further during the month.

Participants desired additional resources. Some suggestions for those resources were nutrition guides or information about food pantries near them.

NEXT STEPS

Unfortunately, our current space isn't equipped to make necessary improvements. Due to inadequate space and volunteers at our current facility, the food bank is not continuing or expanding the program—yet. If it makes sense for our partners, clients and staff, we will consider revisiting this program once we move into our new facility. Right now, renovations to that facility are being funded by our Nourish Tomorrow advancement campaign. Until then, our team is reflecting on what we learned from the pilot so we can improve the program going forward.

In the meantime, we've partnered with hunger-relief programs providing senior food boxes through a federal program, the Commodity Supplemental Food Program. Depending on the needs of our clients and partners, we may choose to expand our work with CSFP, as opposed to Golden Groceries, in order to sufficiently meet the needs of seniors in our community. Either way, we will rely on the funds raised through the Nourish Tomorrow advancement campaign to expand services to seniors in need.



KEY SENIOR FOOD BOX PILOT STATS

1. Cost was found to be the No. 1 barrier to accessing fresh produce.
2. 65% said the experience was “good” or “very good.”
3. 72 was the average age of participants.
4. 96% said they know how to eat a well-balanced diet (compared to 88% prior to the program).
5. 94% of participants at one partner agency said they were eating more fruits and vegetables because of the program.

Grandville Senior Neighbors Supports Senior Well-Being With Monthly Food Pantry

Grandville Senior Neighbors is an organization dedicated to enhancing the lives of seniors in their area by providing numerous essential services focused on promoting well-being. Once a month, they open their food pantry for seniors in the area to come pick up a variety of food and essential items they may need. Sherri, the coordinator, says many of the seniors who come to get food from the pantry are low income.

“If you're on Social Security and a low budget, you have a constant amount coming in. So when prices rise, you don't have as many funds to purchase food. The food pantry has been able to help them with that.”

In addition to food, the senior center also stocks their pantry with toiletries, personal care and other essential items.

Laurel showed up to the pantry and left with some much-needed items, such as spaghetti sauce, frozen meat, cereal and toiletries. She came with her husband, and after getting the items they wanted, they looked forward to making meals they enjoy.

“[My husband]’s the cook of the family, and he’ll make spaghetti or chili for the two of us.”

She has been coming to this organization for about four or five years, and really enjoys her time spent there.



Fred, a senior who lives with his daughter, is also a regular visitor to Grandville Senior Neighbors. He moved in with his daughter and her family after his son's recent passing, as his wife is also deceased and he could use the comfort of family. While he often eats with his family, he still likes to get some food for himself, so he showed up to the pantry to get some frozen meat and items to make sandwiches.

“I'm [getting food] just for myself, and if the kids want some I'll share with them, since they share with dad.”

Apart from the pantry, Senior Neighbors offers various activities for seniors to participate in. Fred has attended for years, and tries to come in a couple days a week. He often plays games or exercises.

“I've made some nice friends here.”



Reflecting on Our Roots

The creation of Feeding America West Michigan is rooted in carrots. Back in 1980, Rev. Don Eddy called a meeting to discuss the idea of a West Michigan agency resembling Gleaners Community Food Bank in Detroit. This idea sparked when Eddy saw a truckload of perfectly good carrots being composted on a farm in Grant. That day, he asked the farmers to stop dumping and told them that he knew a lot of people at risk of hunger who could really benefit from the carrots.

In 1981, Feeding America West Michigan was founded as West Michigan Gleaners, Inc. From the very beginning of our organization's history,

gleaning was a central component of its work to end hunger.

Today, Feeding America West Michigan still makes use of food we glean from local farms. While there are now many other avenues in which the organization gathers food, gleaning—when food bank staff and volunteers go directly to farmers' fields to harvest crops that would otherwise not be utilized—continues to play a part in increasing food security and eliminating food waste.

One recent gleaning opportunity took place at Heffron farms, where Feeding America West



The truckload of carrots in 1980 that began this organization.



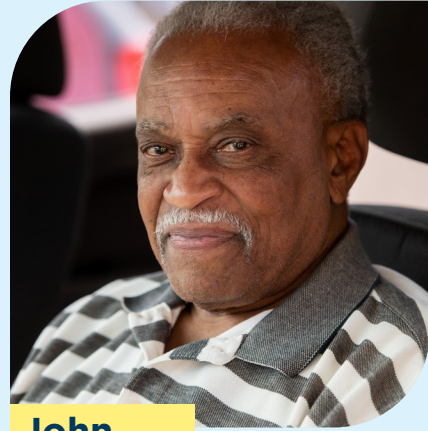
Michigan volunteers harvested pickling cucumbers. About 5,000 pounds were gleaned, and these cucumbers were quickly distributed by Mobile Pantries—giving neighbors facing hunger the opportunity to enjoy farm-fresh vegetables.

Another opportunity to glean took place at the Riveridge orchard, where volunteers from Farm Bureau and Sam's Club came together to pick apples from trees that were on their third round of harvest. According to the workers at Riveridge, the apples from this orchard normally go into grocery stores, but due to a bountiful year, there were extra that they were

not going to sell. Volunteers gleaned 17,627 pounds of Gala and Red Delicious apples, which in turn gave many neighbors facing hunger access to seasonal, fresh fruit. Situations like these are great opportunities for farmers to connect with Feeding America West Michigan so that perfectly good produce is not left to waste.

There are many more examples of how gleaned produce has been utilized by Feeding America West Michigan, from cherries to lettuce and more! Farm-fresh foods continue to be beneficial for fulfilling our commitment to nourishing our neighbors experiencing hunger.

Senior Neighbors Share Their Stories



John

John is a retired senior with nine grandkids. With the food he gets from Mobile Food Pantries, he is able to share with his family as well as his neighbors.

“[The neighbors] always enjoy what I give them. It’s just neighbors helping neighbors.”

One of his granddaughters is vegetarian, and he is glad he can get food from the Mobile

Pantries that work for a range of dietary needs.

“I get the food and tell [the grandkids] to come over,” John said. “It helps a lot for them. I don’t believe in letting nobody starve.”

He knows he can always rely on the Mobile Food Pantry program in times of need.

“I know it’s always going to be here.”



Mary

For Mary, “it was hard to ask for help. I was used to helping.”

Mary worked in pediatrics, orthopedics and oncology during her 20-year nursing career, but lung and heart disease diagnoses made it impossible to continue.

She still needed income, so she found a job at a grocery store, but the pay wasn’t as good and sometimes her hours would get cut.

She never thought she’d need the

services of a food pantry, but “when I ran into difficulties, they were here, and they’ve been here for me ever since.”

The pantry offers fresh fruits, vegetables and meat, which help Mary, now 73, stay healthy. The pantry staff has gotten to know her since she began coming three years ago. By taking care of her, they remind her of the power of helping others.

“They’re like nurses,” she said.



Cindy

Sixty-four years ago, Cindy walked out of her Sunday school class declaring, “I’m gonna marry my friend Stevie here.” Now, the two have been married for 39 years since reconnecting after Stevie came home from the Air Force.

Stevie is not the only military member in Cindy’s family; her father was in the Coast Guard and her sons are part of the Marines and Army Reserves. When she was younger, Cindy remembers experiencing hunger due to the limited funds they were given on a military budget. On top of that, there were no food pantries to help out.

“If you were out of food, tough bologna, you were out of food.”

Currently, Cindy is retired and helps take care of her daughter’s four children. With prices rising, it’s difficult to feed the whole family.

“It’s increased so badly we hardly eat any meat because it’s just so expensive.”

She found out about the Mobile Food Pantry program by driving by one day, and wishes more people were aware of it.

“It’s a great program. It’s for anybody that could use food.”

Meet a Food Banker: Abby LaLonde

What do you do at the food bank?

I am the Community Impact Manager, and my team works with agency partners, community organizations and neighbors in need. My job consists of developing new partnerships as well as supporting existing partnerships by facilitating collaboration and sharing best practices for hunger-relief work.

How did you end up in your current role?

My background is in farming and horticulture research and I worked on a couple of farms and with MSU Extension. I wanted to try a different part of the food sector, so I looked for jobs in Grand Rapids and found a front desk role open here. I fell in love with everything I learned about how the food bank operates, and I went on to work as a part of the Programs team. After working with Programs, I jumped on the opportunity to have more of a leadership role with my own department, and it has been especially exciting to get to do so much community outreach.

What is a memory that stands out to you?

When we first went into lockdown at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, our team really stepped up. So many people here dedicated extra time to make sure we continued to get all of the food out that we needed to. It was really clear from the beginning that the food bank would always be there—it was not going to shut down and we would keep going. It was really inspiring and it showed our resiliency.

What is your favorite part of your job?

I love talking to our partners that are doing an amazing job serving their communities. We always come back with new ideas to share with



other groups. I also really enjoy talking to our clients. My favorite part is going out and talking to folks and actually hearing what’s going on in the community.

Why do you fight hunger?

Food is the baseline for a lot of things within families. Food can be something that brings people together, it can be a source of joy and it can be a source of nourishment and energy. That makes it a vital part of a family or a community. The more we can do at the food bank to offer food so that people can have those experiences, feed their children and support their families in whatever way they need to, the better.

What do you like to do in your free time?

I really like being outdoors. I like camping, hiking, backpacking and other outdoorsy things. I also like to read. One of my favorite places to go hiking is the Manistee National Forest.

What is one of your favorite springtime recipes?

In the springtime, I’m making spring rolls. My favorite is with tofu, peppers, lettuce, rice noodles and a spicy peanut sauce.