

Full Plate PRESS

**FEEDING
AMERICA®**
West Michigan

**YOUR LOCAL
FOOD BANK**

Kindness in action:
a volunteer organizes
food at a mobile pantry
for New Buffalo families.



WINTER 2025

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No Matter The Weather**

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Volunteers Cover the Last Mile in Vast Food Distribution effort

Nearly every day, volunteers at fixed and mobile pantries come face to face with the need for charitable food throughout West Michigan and the Upper Peninsula. For four years, they have witnessed the rise in demand that is only expected to increase in the year ahead.

At Feeding America West Michigan, we are deeply grateful for the thousands of people who give their time throughout our 40-county service to serve our neighbors. Through good weather and bad weather, thousands of volunteers cover the last mile of our vast charitable food network. They get food on pantry shelves and into the vehicles of neighbors at our drive-through mobile pantries. The distribution network would fall apart without them.

Volunteers who serve — no matter the weather.

As cold weather sets in, we want to shine a spotlight on the volunteers who serve year-round in all kinds of weather — be it 90 degrees and humid or 10 degrees with



Volunteers at Community Reformed Church in Zeeland kept the line moving on a hot day so fresh products stayed cold.



Volunteers encountered bitter March winds earlier this year at a mobile food pantry at Godfrey Lee High School in Wyoming.

a biting wind. The elements do not deter the bands of committed volunteers who make sure everyone in our community has food.

At the more than 1,600 mobile food distributions each year, volunteers see the long lines of cars before distribution begins. When they place boxes in trucks and on backseats, they also see into the challenges that people in our community are facing.

“You see people having hard times,” said James Bowman, while volunteering at Benton Harbor distribution in June. “Like today, there was a van. The couple was kind of young, and when you opened up the back of their vehicle, they had their bed laid out. They’re sleeping in there. When you see things like that, or you



Volunteers at Calvin Christian Reformed Church in Muskegon bundled up for a winter distribution.

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see really elderly people coming in, you see the need. It is so rewarding to help. You know, if you can help one person, you've done a great thing in my mind."

Volunteers have many reasons for giving their time to distribute food.

- Many cite their faith, saying their service is an expression of their love for their neighbors.
- Others strive to give back to communities that helped them when they needed encouragement.
- Some serve because they remember the times they didn't have enough to eat, and they want to make sure no one else goes through the same hardship.
- Others serve because they know their kindness can spark hope inside someone who is going through a tough time.

"Really, people just need a little love and kindness," said Diane Young, site coordinator

for a monthly mobile pantry in Benton Harbor. "You see how it makes their day. Providing this food and nourishment for their bodies is huge. It's going to make stronger people and, in turn, a stronger community."

When the weather turns ugly, it is usually up to the hosting agency partner to decide if they will cancel a mobile food distribution. Because they know people count on them, they rarely call it off.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer at a local pantry or mobile food distribution site, visit www.feedwm.org/findfood to find the food distribution agencies where you live.



If you are in the Grand Rapids area, learn more about volunteering at our warehouse by visiting:

www.feedwm.org/volunteer.

Our Vast Charitable Food Network



40 counties
1 MISSION

Feeding America West Michigan is the hub of a vast charitable food network that relies on nearly 800 community organizations and thousands of volunteers to get food from our warehouse to communities. We rely on volunteers to carry the food over the last mile — and literally the final steps when they place food boxes into vehicles at drive-through mobile food distributions.

It isn't just a cliché — it really takes all of us working together to end hunger in West Michigan and the Upper Peninsula.

How do we get the food into communities?

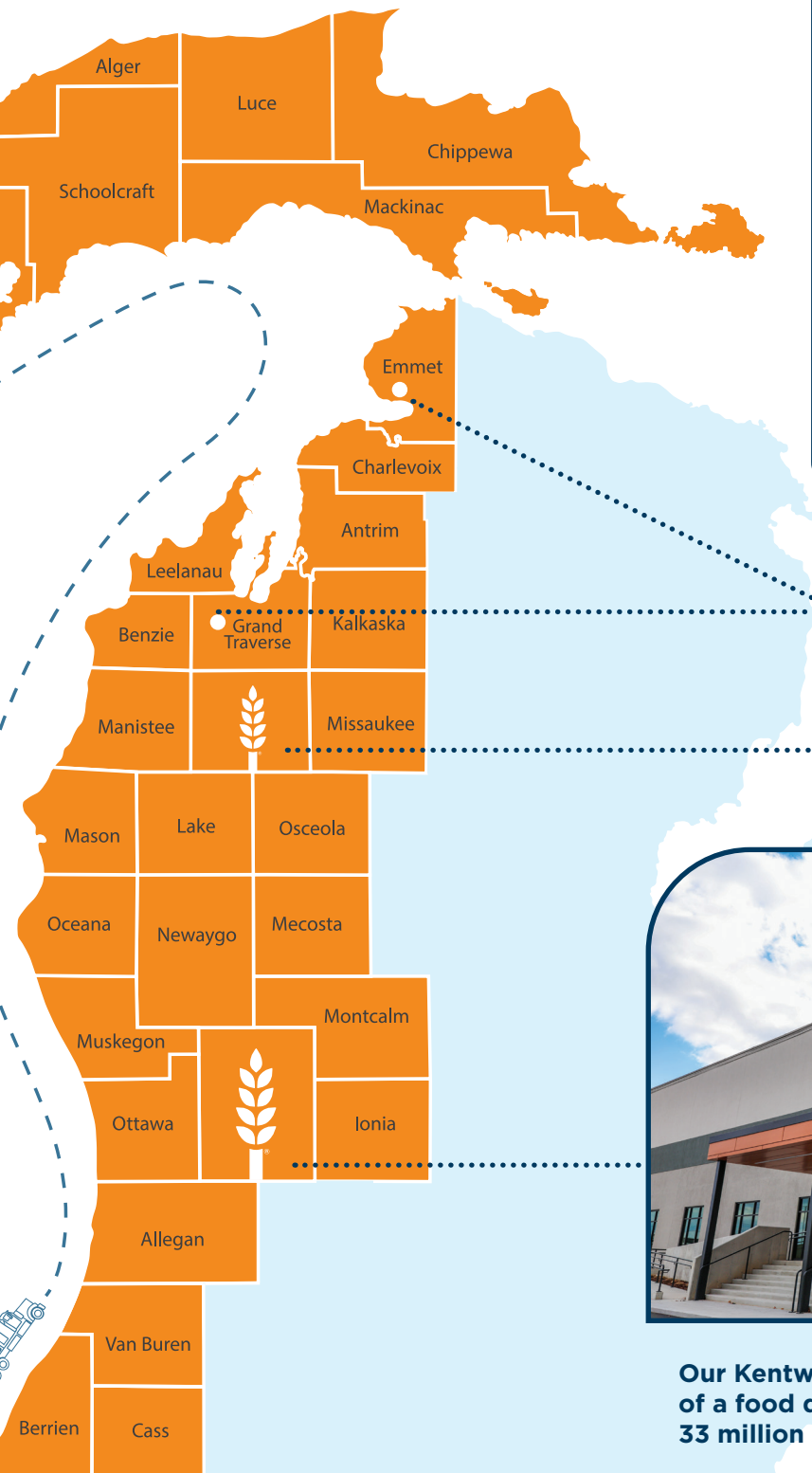
- Pantries located near our Grand Rapids and Cadillac warehouses pick up food directly from the warehouse.
- For fixed pantries outside the Grand Rapids area, we get the food to centrally located distribution sites. Agency staff and volunteers transport the food to their pantries.
- For drive-through mobile food pantries, Feeding America West Michigan truck drivers arrive with enough food for 150-600 families. Groups of volunteers package the food in family-size portions and place the food in vehicles as neighbors drive through.





Where does the food come from?

- Farmers sell and donate fresh products to us.
- Retailers and manufacturers donate products they can't sell.
- The United States Department of Agriculture provides fresh and shelf-stable goods, and the State of Michigan provides funding for purchases of Michigan-made products.
- Donors' financial gifts help us leverage our purchasing power to buy food.



Feeding America West Michigan also relies on affiliate food bank Manna Food Project in Harbor Springs and distribution partner Food Rescue of Northwest Michigan in Traverse City.

The Cadillac warehouse serves agency partners in Northwest Michigan.



Our Kentwood warehouse is the main hub of a food distribution system that pumps 33 million pounds into our communities.



BRIDGE
THE GAP

- ▶ Demand has risen 70.7 percent since 2021.
- ▶ 50,000 more neighbors struggle to put food on the table this year.

Thank you for working with us to Bridge the Gap

Feeding America West Michigan kicked off the Bridge the Gap campaign in August to help the food bank prepare for 2026, a year that we expect to be loaded with challenges.

The challenges ahead are a perfect storm that will place enormous strain on Feeding America West Michigan and food banks throughout the United States:

- Food prices remain high for our neighbors and for us;
- Several of our neighbors will lose government assistance because of tightened eligibility;
- We expect cutbacks and instability of our federal sources of food shipments and warehousing costs.

Thank you for responding to the call to action. Agency partners, volunteers, policy experts, food bank staff, farmers, and donors all came together to spread the word about the challenges and take action.

We especially thank our neighbors who turn to food pantries for support. We thank them for sharing their stories. We appreciate their courage to let us see into their struggle and resilience.

“We’re not out here begging for help,” said Lynda, a neighbor who turned to a mobile food pantry in Luther for support. “We are out here because we can’t afford things with the economy. I work full-time, normally, and now I’m not because of medical reasons, but with what your



“People are so appreciative. Really, people just need a little love and kindness,” said Diane Young, business network resource manager and coordinator of the mobile pantry at Michigan Works! in Benton Harbor.

company or the person who donates gives, it’s helping me to feed and take care of my family. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you very much for what you do.”

In all 40 counties we serve, at least 1 in 7 people have to make choices between paying their bills and buying nutritious food to eat. We project this ratio to become 1 in 6 people beginning in 2026 because of cutbacks in federal food and healthcare assistance. In a handful of counties, the need is already at 1 in every 5 residents.

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A volunteer in Hamilton moves a shipment of potatoes. Volunteers will send a bag of potatoes and other fresh products with each family that attends the food distribution.

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With your support, we are able to fulfill our mission to ensure that everyone in our community has enough nutritious food to eat.

“With the exception of senior citizens, the number of people who seek out food assistance for more than five years is very

small. It’s in the neighborhood of 2%,” said Joseph Jones, chief impact officer at Feeding America West Michigan. “The data shows that SNAP and charitable food assistance are truly gap supports and then people rise out of it. It is usually a bad event or chain of events that gets them needing a net.”

If you haven’t stepped up to Bridge the Gap, please support our work with a gift today. Your gift inspires hope in the people who turn to us. Together, we can build strong communities by nourishing our neighbors.

“When people have enough food on their tables, then what can they do? What happens in their lives?” asked Diane Young, business network resource manager and coordinator of the mobile pantry at Michigan Works! in Benton Harbor. “They can be productive in their jobs. Their children can be productive in the schools ... so providing this food and nourishment for their bodies, it’s huge.”

Help more neighbors access the food they need to thrive.

Donate today
at FeedWM.org
or scan here
to give now! ▶▶



A volunteer at Northland Church in Newaygo helps get food into family-size boxes.



JOIN US

Your support today helps us meet the high demand for food now and in the months ahead. Power us to our goal of \$1.5 million through our Bridge the Gap campaign.



YOUR GIFT HELPS US BRIDGE THE GAP

Every \$1 donated provides up to five meals for our neighbors. Your gift helps us purchase food at wholesale prices to supplement the food donations we receive. Please give today.



YOUR TIME HELPS OUR NEIGHBORS

It takes thousands of volunteers to support our 40-county charitable food network. At our warehouse, volunteers repackage more than 6 million pounds of food for distribution. In addition, thousands of volunteers at local pantries distribute food directly to our neighbors. Please give your time at our warehouse or a food pantry in your neighborhood.



YOUR VOICE HELPS US ADVOCATE

We believe that no one should go hungry. Adequate nutrition is essential for everyone to lead a healthy life. It is especially important for children so they can reach their full potential. Join us in sharing this message with your friends, community members, and elected officials.



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

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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, United Way, and The Food Bank Council of Michigan. The food bank also maintains a four-star rating from Charity Navigator.



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