



*Creating a Hunger-Free
Community*

Pantry Times

October 2021

The Face of Hunger: Working Families

For anyone facing food insecurity, when their paycheck isn't enough to cover an unanticipated medical expense, a rent increase, new childcare costs or a car repair, life can become overwhelming. Many who rely on Helena Food Share for food support are working families who need help during difficult times.

Elizabeth, who recently moved with her family to Helena for her husband's new job, shared her story while shopping one day. Because Elizabeth stays home to care for their two children, they rely on one income to meet their expenses. To make ends meet, she periodically comes to Helena Food Share. Life became more challenging last month when their apartment complex had a severe fire. Woken in the middle of the night by neighbors, she and her husband were able to gather their two children, a pet and a few critical items before the flames engulfed their apartment. Fortunately, everyone in the building got out safely.

In a 2014 study, Feeding America* looked at the common challenges working families face

in meeting their basic needs. These included limited hours on the job, changes in employment status, and competing household expenses.

Cody is a customer currently facing these challenges. His job at UPS recently changed from full-time to part-time. He is grateful he can rely on Helena Food Share to help stretch his paycheck until he has additional work. Cody added, "Being able to come to the pantry really helps when things are tight so I can cover my bills, especially rent."

With changes in the job market over the past year and a half, these challenges will likely continue. Last month, the U.S. Census Bureau announced that the median household income in 2020 decreased 2.9% between 2019 and 2020, and the official poverty rate increased by 1.0%.

Because of the generosity of our community, Helena Food Share is here to help when our neighbors face income

challenges and unexpected life events. Before she drove away, Elizabeth shared her gratitude for her family's and neighbors' well-being, and for the firefighters who worked to keep everyone safe that fateful night. Her positivity was infectious. When asked what Helena Food Share means to her, she shared, "It's humbling to know there are people out there willing to give up their earnings to help others. They don't have to do it but they do, and it's that love that makes the world go round."

* [FeedingAmerica.org/research/hunger-in-working-america](https://www.feedingamerica.org/research/hunger-in-working-america)



A local mom shops for nutritious food with her son at Helena Food Share's Lewis Street Pantry.

A Passion for Gardening and Changing Lives

The love of gardening is a seed once sown that never dies. —Gertrude Jekyll



Carroll College student volunteers tending plants in the High Tunnel garden



Mandy Blohm, Garden Coordinator

The love of gardening was sown early for Helena Food Share Garden Coordinator, Mandy Blohm. Mandy, who joined the staff this spring, began her gardening journey as a child in her grandmother’s garden where a passion for growing plants and a green thumb were passed down to the younger generation.

Mandy brings a well-rounded background to Helena Food Share. Her degree in biology, her upbringing and work in agriculture, and her passion for conservation helps Mandy cultivate a thriving Helena Food Share garden and find ways to make it more sustainable. Her first project was to install an irrigation system that would conserve water and distribute it when and where it’s most needed. This was especially

important during the warmer than usual days this past summer.

As of October 1st, the garden has produced over 653 lbs of food for customers. Providing fresh and healthy food options for those in need is a primary goal of the Helena Food Share garden. The fruits, herbs and vegetables are available for customers in the pantry and at the weekly Farm Stand, which provides an opportunity to shop for locally grown produce, similar to shopping at weekly farmer’s markets.



Garden bounty shared at the weekly Farm Stand

Education is another role of the garden program. Staff is preparing now for next season, when the garden will serve as a teaching space for customers. Mandy and other gardeners will demonstrate how to grow a home garden that can provide food for their families. Staff will

also host cooking sessions with tips to create healthy meals from local produce.

Goals for the future include a demonstration orchard, which will be planted this fall. As the trees mature, their fruit will be available to customers at the Farm Stand and in the pantry. The small orchard will also become a part of the garden’s education program.

Mandy tells us that the success of the garden program rests on the volunteers who work in the Helena Food Share garden and those who share produce from their own gardens. “None of this would be possible without our amazing volunteers who help plant, tend and harvest the garden. Also our donors have played a big role in the abundance of this year’s harvest by donating plants and materials for the garden as well as funds for purchasing what we need.”

For a full list of fruit, herbs and vegetables grown this year in the garden, visit our website at HelenaFoodShare.org/get-help/our-garden/

How Food Gets to Helena Food Share

Providing food to those in need is made possible through the generosity of donors, the work of staff and volunteers, and Federal food programs. Here's a quick look at the many avenues in which food comes to Helena Food Share for distribution through our pantries and other food support programs such as Kid Packs, Emergency Packs and Senior Commodities. **Over 2 million pounds were provided in FY21.**



Donated Food

- Grocery Rescue from 17 area stores – **872,868 lbs**
- Montana Food Bank Network – **122,061 lbs**
- Individual Donations at the Pantry – **68,202 lbs**
- Wholesale Distributors – **28,397**
- Food Drives – **17,253 lbs**
- Helena Food Share and Community Gardens – **5,479 lbs**
- Hunters Against Hunger – **2,129 lbs**



Purchased Food

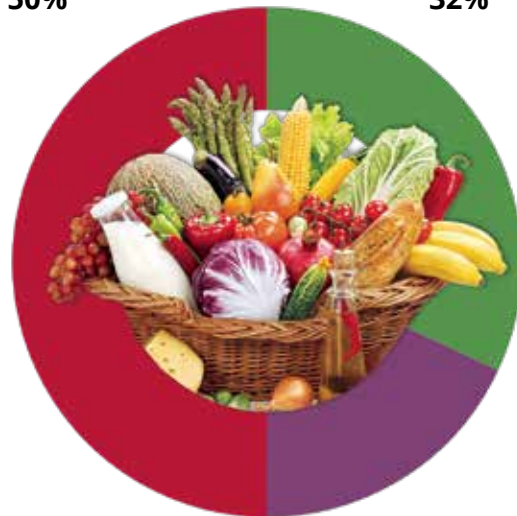
- Montana Food Bank Network – **173,941 lbs**
- Wholesale Vendors – **163,591 lbs**
- Local Grocers – **43,162 lbs**
- Montana Growers and Producers – **31,682 lbs**



Federal Food Programs

- Farmers To Families – **399,777 lbs**
- The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) – **208,898 lbs**
- Senior Commodities – **110,040 lbs**

Donated **50%** Purchased **32%**



Federal Food Programs **18%**

Food amounts are from FY21

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October 2021

Pantry Times is a publication of Helena Food Share.

Contact Us: (406) 443-3663
To Donate: ext. 104
To Volunteer: ext. 106
To Get Help: ext. 110

Our Pantries:

1616 Lewis Street, Helena
 50 Prickley Pear, East Helena

Office: 1437 Helena Avenue

HelenaFoodShare.org



This fall, the **Town Pump Charitable Foundation** is matching donations made to Helena Food Share, up to \$50,000. **Make your donation soon and double the impact of your gift!**

Use the enclosed envelope to mail your gift or give online at HelenaFoodShare.org/Give.





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HelenaFoodShare.org

**VIRTUAL
TURKEY
CHALLENGE**

Join us in the spirit of human kindness and help our neighbors have a nutritious and joyful holiday:

HelenaFoodShare.org/turkey-challenge/

This year, give a
VIRTUAL turkey
and we'll take care
of the rest!

**NOVEMBER
19th**



**Will Match
Up To \$10,000
Donated
NOV. 19**

