HELENA FOOD SHARE
Creating a Hunger-Free Community

Community Food Quarterly

FALL 2026

# Finding Hope During Difficult Times

Imagine losing your job, with limited savings that could cover only a couple of months of rent and utilities. You still need money for food, gas, and other essentials for yourself and your young son. Your next steps include navigating the lengthy process of applying for SNAP*, energy assistance, unemployment benefits, and health insurance, all while you search for a job. Food is an immediate need, yet for many families, it becomes the budget item sacrificed to pay pressing bills.

One mom who recently came to Helena Food Share for the first time shared this experience. After losing her job, she began applying for SNAP, spending hours gathering documents and scheduling appointments. She was thrilled to discover Helena Food Share, where she could shop for weekly groceries and stretch her limited food budget. She also enrolled her son in the free and reduced-price school meals program, and he began receiving a weekly Helena Food Share Kid Pack at his school for extra nutrition over the weekend.

Since Congress passed H.R. 1 in July 2025, approximately 7,000 Montanans—including 3,000 children—have lost SNAP benefits, according to the Montana Food Bank Network. Over the past three months, 706 Helena Food Share households reported receiving SNAP benefits in addition to shopping in the Market, compared to 925 households in September 2025.

Another customer recently came to Helena Food Share after facing serious medical issues and losing his SNAP benefits. With too little money for groceries, he was forced to choose which days he could afford to eat, often going two or three days between meals.

His experience illustrates how quickly losing food assistance can turn an already difficult situation into a crisis. For families with children, the consequences can extend beyond the grocery store. Children who lose SNAP may also lose their automatic eligibility for free school meals, leaving parents unaware that they may need to submit a separate application to maintain this important support. At the same time, rising costs for food, gas, rent, and other necessities are stretching household budgets even further. With colder months approaching and heating bills increasing, many of our neighbors will face greater financial pressure.

While Helena Food Share cannot solve all these challenges, our programs provide something families can count on: nutritious food, a welcoming place to shop, and a caring community ready to help. For neighbors navigating an uncertain future, that support can make all the difference.

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**SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, is a government program that provides food benefits to low-income individuals and families to help supplement their grocery budgets. For more details on changes to SNAP, visit* ***mfbn.org/facts*** *or* ***feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/SNAP***





*L to R: Kara Snyder, Nels Wilkins, Jennifer Bagley, Sarah Donnelly, Bob Anez, and Jordan Evertz.*

# Appreciating Our Volunteers

We celebrated our outstanding volunteers at our Volunteer Appreciation dinner in early September. This year, it was held it at the Lewis & Clark Fairgrounds, with barbecue hot dogs and hamburgers cooked by staff, house-made salads, and donated drinks and sweets. While it is always fun to gather around a meal, the real draw is seeing one another outside of work and meeting spouses and other family members.

In addition to sharing our love for those who make Helena Food Share happen each weekday, we celebrated four outstanding people who have volunteered 1,000 hours or more. **Bob Anez, Jennifer Bagley, Sarah Donnelly,** and **Nels Wilkins** each received their embroidered "Silver Apron" to honor this impressive milestone.

Who better to ask than these four about why volunteering is meaningful? Nels told us that working in the Market is as important for his own well-being as it is for the customers. *"I know that many people are in dire straits when they come to Food Share. And I know we are doing good things by being here."* This knowledge brings Nels back each week.

Bob, who joins Nels on Mondays at the boxing station to help customers box or bag groceries and get them to their cars, sees his job as making the shopping experience as pleasant and welcoming as possible. *"What has kept me volunteering the past eight years,"* said Bob, *"is the knowledge that Helena Food Share, its staff and volunteers make an extraordinary difference in people's lives by removing hunger as a daily worry for themselves and their children."* He recalls several instances: *"One customer told me he had not eaten for two days and was so thankful for access to food. I have seen people so hungry they sit outside the pantry and begin eating the food they just wheeled out to their car."* He added, *"One does not have to know a customer's backstory to see in their eyes the relief and gratitude they feel every time they visit the Market."*

Sarah and Jenn volunteer together in the kitchen several days a week. They sort and clean donated produce, making sure it is ready to go into the Market or can be used for meal-prep in the kitchen. They both shared, *"We enjoy looking through all the produce and making sure the salad section is full for customers in the Market."*

These are just four of the 350 individuals and 46 groups who have volunteered already this year to ensure Helena Food Share programs are available to anyone who needs them. Collectively, volunteers have worked over 20,000 hours so far in 2026. These numbers are truly impressive and represent the work of over 12 full-time staff. Just as important, they reflect the care, attention to detail, and kindness required to address food insecurity in our community.

# Beyond the Turkey Challenge: The Gift of a Holiday Meal

> *Thank you, Helena Food Share. We had a great Thanksgiving because of you guys!!*
>
> –Helena Food Share customer comment

This year's Turkey Challenge will take place on Friday, November 20. Many of our readers participate in this annual community event, contributing turkeys, food, and funds at the Lewis and Clark Library. However, do you know what happens **after** the Turkey Challenge?



*Volunteers keep the Market stocked during Thanksgiving distribution.*

The Monday after the Turkey Challenge, and a few days before Christmas, the Helena Food Share Market transforms from its regular layout into two rows filled with holiday meal items. Each row features carrots, potatoes, stuffing, squash, cranberries, onions, rolls, and, of course, turkeys. This two-row setup allows customers to shop quickly and efficiently. Other meat options, such as turkey breasts or chicken, are available for individuals or small families, and sometimes ham is offered when available.

Customers can also pick up their Thanksgiving holiday meal from our wonderful partners at St. Mary Catholic Community instead of from the Market. The church congregation provides holiday meal boxes on Sunday, donated by their community, along with a turkey from the Turkey Challenge.

In addition to the amazing team at St. Mary's, over 400 dedicated volunteers—from businesses, organizations, and families—help in the Market by welcoming customers, assisting with food distribution and stocking, and helping shoppers box and carry their items to their cars.



*Traditional holiday food items are always available.*

Last year, 2,673 of our neighbors could provide full Thanksgiving and Christmas meals for their families, thanks to the Turkey Challenge and the generosity of their community. The gratitude expressed by families picking up their holiday groceries, along with the grace and kindness shown by this community, truly embodies the spirit of the holiday season.

## The Spirit of Giving at Year-End

As the year comes to a close, many donors are considering their year-end charitable giving based on their financial situations. We hope you will consider supporting Helena Food Share as one of your charitable recipients.

We accept donations through various methods, including: gifts of cash made online or sent via U.S. mail; recurring gifts made online or by mail using the enclosed remit; donations in honor or memory of someone—a wonderful way to say "Happy Holidays" this season; contributions through a Donor Advised Fund (DAF), IRA rollover, or donated stock.

For more details on each donation method, please visit HelenaFoodShare.org/Give. If you have questions about donating to Helena Food Share, please contact Tim Joyce at **Tim@HelenaFoodShare.org.** As always, we recommend consulting your financial advisor to determine the best giving method for you.


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*A publication of Helena Food Share*



**Contact Us:**
(406) 443-3663
**To Volunteer:** ext. 106
**To Donate:** ext. 103
**To Get Help:** ext. 110

**Grocery Share Market:**
1280 Boulder Avenue, Helena

**East Helena Mobile Pantry:**
50 Prickley Pear, East Helena

**Office:** 1280 Boulder Avenue, Helena

**HelenaFoodShare.org**

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# Community Food Quarterly

*We believe that by working together we accomplish more.*

## 2026 TURKEY CHALLENGE

### Turkey & Fund Drive

Donate & Learn more at:
HelenaFoodShare.org/turkey-challenge/

**NOV. 20th**

**Goal: 2,800 Holiday Meals for our Neighbors in Need**

Join us at the Library to drop off your food or funds, or you can donate funds online.

