Kernels

INSIDE THIS ISSUE
Summer 2020

A Note From the CEO p. 2
You’re Helping an Older Volunteer p. 3
A Family Has Food Because of You p. 4-5
Your Gift Makes Help Available p. 8

You are building community and helping neighbors in need when it matters most.

VTFOODBANK.ORG
Humbled, overwhelmed, and profoundly grateful. That is how we all feel here at your Vermont Foodbank about the support you’ve provided to the COVID-19 Hunger Relief Fund. The need we’re seeing in the community is unprecedented in the Foodbank’s history. Tens of thousands of people are out of work and household incomes are plunging. For many neighbors, the only thing between an empty cupboard and dinner on the table is the partnerships making food available in our communities.

I’m hearing stories from people attending free, fresh food distributions, visiting partner food shelves and meal sites, or driving through the federal Farmers to Families food box distributions being operated by the Vermont National Guard. It’s frightening, and it’s very real.

Your generosity is powering the Foodbank’s COVID-19 response. You’re making sure that kids and families have enough to eat whether they’re home from school, laid off, or in quarantine. And you’re supporting Vermont’s local agricultural community, as the Foodbank works with local businesses and family-run farms to connect people to the freshest food possible. **It’s you who has allowed the Foodbank to make sure food is in your community food shelves and meal sites.** Our promise is to be part of the solution as long as the need exists. **Together we can make it through.**

Thank You!

John Sayles
CEO
Jo is a recently retired art teacher living in southern Vermont. She works part time in a local store, but it’s not enough to make ends meet. Thanks to you, food is one less thing she has to go without.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been hard on everyone here in Vermont, but for older adults who live alone and face food insecurity, the difficulties run deep.

“I collect my social security, that comes third of the week. When that comes in that covers my rent,” says Jo, a life-long Vermont resident. “So I’m afraid to buy food. I’m afraid I don’t have money to pay my electric and my phone bill and TV.”

Recently retired after years working as an art instructor at a local elementary school, Jo is now living alone and works part-time at a local store to make ends meet. She loves her job and notes how it keeps her connected to her community, saying that customers often ask after her on the days she’s not working. But her irregular schedule often conflicts with free produce distribution events, and her paycheck isn’t always enough.

“I’m probably just skimming by with my bills, which leaves me not very much money to buy food,” Jo says.

Jo knows how to stretch her meals. She recently cooked a whole chicken dinner with roasted sweet potatoes and butternut squash. She brought a plate to her sister and, after that, she expects the leftovers to last two or three days.

Despite her own challenges with food insecurity, Jo still helps her neighbors in need by dropping off food items at the local soup kitchen. Even that has become difficult during the pandemic. “I can see it,” she says of the increased need for food assistance in her town.

**But things are changing for Jo, thanks to you.** With your support, we were able to help Jo sign up for 3SquaresVT (formerly known as food stamps) and make sure she also receives a box of pantry staples every month.
A family has food through tough times, thanks to you

Michelle is a parent who rebuilt her life after escaping a violent relationship and fighting to keep her kids. She launched her own successful business, working up to 60 hours a week to provide for her family. Then, the pandemic hit. On top of the financial hardships she is experiencing right now, she and her son have been sick and — last we spoke — were being tested for COVID-19.

“Three years ago, I restarted my whole life and my business. My [cleaning] business just took off. Everything was going really good.” Michelle says, with pride, “I actually just got approved for a loan for a car for the very first time in my life.”

Then the coronavirus pandemic reached Vermont. “Every cleaning that I had planned and booked all the way to the end of April canceled and changed everything. So my whole income just was gone.”

“I immediately went out and spent the last of my money on seeds and planting soil and stuff for the chicks that I had already planned on purchasing. I tried to keep the little bit of money I had left, I tried to keep my propane on.”

Because Michelle was unable to pay her rent in March and April, she was served an eviction notice. “I was thinking people in the neighborhood might want cucumbers or tomatoes [from the garden], and of course, the eggs from the chickens. All of that is going to have to change and get uprooted now.”

Michelle shares that the pandemic has changed how her family eats. “I used to shop at the co-op a lot. I also used to buy more healthy food.” But now she is shopping differently: “I went to [the store] and bought anything that’s edible, that’s cheap. I’ve started running out of things the past week because I spent so much of my money that I had left, anything I could, on food when this all happened.”
Thanks to your support, Michelle learned about how to get help from her local food shelf. We also helped her apply for 3SquaresVT (formerly known as food stamps), which provides funds to purchase groceries and is the most effective federal program for reducing hunger.

The prospect of being evicted has been really stressful, but Michelle chooses to look on the bright side: “I should be advocating for people that are in similar situations. It really is making me want to be more in touch with my community on a regular basis. And reach out to my neighbors and talk to them. We should have a system, that foundation, where if the financial part falls, we can still survive. We’re strong people.” As her first act of advocacy, Michelle wrote to her legislators.

“With all the hours we put in, we shouldn’t even have to flinch or worry when a crisis comes up that our families would have to be homeless or possibly not fed.”
As an anti-hunger organization, the Vermont Foodbank understands that systemic oppression and racism are root causes of inequities in health, hunger, and economic opportunity, and we’re committed to change. To learn more about the Foodbank’s equity work and racial justice commitments, visit: vtfoodbank.org/equity.

You’re making Vermont produce accessible to all neighbors while supporting family farms.
Local sweet potatoes end up on more plates, because of you

Laughing Child Farm is a family-run Vermont farm that lost their large-scale buyers when colleges closed due to COVID-19. Because of the incredible way you’ve stepped up to support coronavirus hunger relief efforts, an additional 10,000 pounds of their homegrown sweet potatoes are on the way to neighbors in need.

Timothy and Brooke own and operate Laughing Child Farm, a sweet potato farm in Pawlet, Vermont, along with their four kids. “We are now the extracurricular activities,” says Timothy when he talks about having all the kids home, since schools closed in March, while running the farm. “Whereas before, this time of year everybody would be at softball, we’d be running around doing all sorts of after-school programs, but that’s not happening anymore. We’re the after-school program.”

When the coronavirus outbreak closed colleges, Laughing Child Farm lost their largest market. Timothy explains, “As soon as the colleges shut down the college market just went — our sweet potato sales just dropped right off.” As part of an effort to support Vermont farmers while increasing food distribution to meet the unprecedented surge in need, the Foodbank was able to step in and purchase some of these potatoes — an act made possible thanks to you. “The Foodbank coming in and buying an additional 10,000 pounds was helpful,” shares Timothy. “That was important.”

For the past few years, the Foodbank has contracted with Laughing Child Farm to provide nourishing, locally grown produce to people facing hunger around the state. Timothy says this contract helps in a lot of ways: Pre-planning allows the farm to save money, more product allows for higher grading standards and better quality potatoes, and for the potatoes that don’t meet the high bar for market? They get picked up and distributed statewide through the Foodbank’s gleaning program.

“The social aspect of the farm is important to us,” says Timothy. “So we’re very thankful that we can make a living, that we can pay our employees well, and that [the sweet potatoes] are accessible to all Vermonters is also important to us. It makes us feel very thankful that the Foodbank is stepping in, that the donors step in, and help with that.”
As we begin to recover from the immediate COVID-19 emergency, Vermont Foodbank is seeing alarming and unprecedented signs of increasing food insecurity for people and families living in Vermont. **Food shelves, meal sites, and produce distribution events are experiencing up to an 800% increase in attendance.**

Right now, extra unemployment benefits at the federal level are expiring. Many people who lost their jobs due to the pandemic will exhaust any savings they had, if they haven’t already. **We expect that food insecurity is going to increase for the next 12-24 months.**

The most recent data from Feeding America, released in mid-May, estimates the number of food insecure people in Vermont has increased by 46% and that child food insecurity in Vermont has increased by 60%.

The pandemic shed light on thousands of people who have long lived in poverty in Vermont. It has also caused neighbors and families, who have never before worried about putting food on their table, to face that very reality for the first time after losing their jobs.

No person living in Vermont should be worried about how they will get the food they need to be healthy.

You can help today by making a gift so that food is available when it’s needed and not a moment too late.

**A gift of $50 can help provide a month of meals for someone in need.**