Working together, nothing is impossible

With 2022 in the rear-view mirror, I could say that change is the only constant. Yet there are two additional constants I see:

One is your support for the Vermont Foodbank’s work to ensure that everyone in Vermont has access to enough nourishing food every day.

Another is your Vermont Foodbank being here and making every effort to keep food on our neighbors’ tables in the most effective and efficient way possible. That means working with our partners in every community, directly distributing food across the state, sourcing from local farmers and producers, and advocating for policies that keep people fed today and work toward a stable economic future to end hunger, once and for all.

The Vermont Foodbank is a service organization in the truest meaning of the word. This issue of Kernels highlights all the ways your support lifts our great little state and all of our people. Working together in service, nothing is impossible. My gratitude is as boundless as your generosity.

Thank you!

John Sayles
CEO
Retired and caring for a grandchild, Katherine shares that it can be difficult to meet monthly expenses. Thanks to program application assistance that you support, Katherine now has help purchasing groceries each month and can enjoy favorite meals with her granddaughter.

“The struggle is REAL to make ends meet in retirement in Vermont!” says Katherine. “I am a caregiver to my 13-year-old granddaughter and a little dog, HRH Xing Xing, that I adopted in China in 2013.” Katherine worked for IBM for many years, and then as a teacher in an international school overseas. She is now retired and lives in South Burlington.

“Staying healthy and safe from the increasing crime in our area is our greatest concern. Also, being able to meet all expenses each month to stay in our home,” shares Katherine.

So, Katherine got in touch with the Vermont Foodbank for assistance applying for 3SquaresVT, a service that you help support. 3SquaresVT (also called SNAP and formerly “food stamps”) is a program that provides money to purchase groceries each month.

“Receiving 3SquaresVT has impacted the quality of our lives tremendously,” Katherine explains. “We are able to buy enough fresh fruit, vegetables, dairy, and meats that we enjoy.”

Being able to buy the foods you love, when you want, is nourishment that supports mental, spiritual, physical, and emotional health. It means people can enjoy their food and the experience around it. “We always celebrate Chinese New Year,” says Katherine. “Our favorite dishes are dim-sum, hong xiao rou, jiao-zi, and Mongolian beef noodle soup.”

Everyone should not only have access to enough food but to food that is personal and meaningful. 3SquaresVT allows for individual food preference and choice, and everyone who is eligible is approved. There is no cap on the number of people who can receive benefits, which means that by receiving benefits, nobody is taking resources away from anyone else. People choose to access 3SquaresVT for many reasons — and the Foodbank is here to help.

“Our family suffered greatly when we suddenly had to return home from overseas,” says Katherine. “Don’t be ashamed to ask for help when you need it.”

If you are interested in sharing your story, please visit vtfoodbank.org/share-your-story. To learn more about 3SquaresVT, visit vtfoodbank.org/3svt.

*Photo substituted to protect privacy.
“You don’t know how much this means to me… Most of my meals come from Dollar General. These veggies are much healthier for me, especially since I have diabetes.”

– Older adult visiting a produce event

“This cost of food is rising fast, and wages are not rising at the same rate. Inflation is at a 40-year high, and food prices are among the highest increases. Just because people are back to work does not mean that hunger is over. The Foodbank is an important safety net…”

– Meredith, testimony given to the Vermont state legislature

Hundreds of people engaged in advocacy with the State of Vermont to help secure funding that was used to feed neighbors across the state and to support important policies like Universal School Meals.

Your support enabled more free food direct distributions to help meet increasing hunger in Vermont last year; 252 fresh produce events served a total of 88,717 households.

Last year, you helped the Vermont Foodbank give out 492 grants and more than $3 million in funding to support and amplify the work of community partners of all sizes to improve food access throughout Vermont.

Cedar, from Vermont Garden Network (VGN), leads a tomato planting demonstration for VGN’s new mobile classroom, which visited more than 20 affordable housing sites last summer to support community gardening. VGN received a grant from the Foodbank, which facilitated the purchase of the mobile classroom van.
Last year, you helped provide 12,479,011 pounds of food to neighbors experiencing hunger. Of that, 4,078,396 pounds were fresh fruits and vegetables.

“Sometimes this food is the difference between a meal and no meal. With prices going up, it is nearly impossible when you are on a fixed income…”

– Neighbor receiving food

This past year, 691 volunteers dedicated 8,523 hours to support neighbors accessing nourishing food — the equivalent of just over four additional full-time staff members.

“I enjoy seeing how my time with the Vermont Foodbank impacts the community and how appreciative everyone is that utilizes the services provided.”

– Ashley, Foodbank volunteer

You helped connect communities with Vermont-grown food, and kept dollars in the local economy, by supporting more than $2.4 million in purchases from more than 323 local farms this year. In addition, 37 farms donated gleaned produce for distribution to neighbors across Vermont.

“I am so grateful for the connection and relationship the Foodbank has fostered with local farms as a means to not only nourish our communities but also support our local farmers.”

– Kelsey, Foodbank staff member
On the road with Dan

In many ways, Vermont Foodbank drivers are at the heart of what makes this a statewide organization. Making sure neighbors have the food needed to stay well-nourished is the core work of the Foodbank — and it’s people like Dan, and you, making it happen.

One of Dan’s favorite things to do is drive — and he’s been driving trucks for 33 years. For the past six, the Vermont Foodbank has been lucky to have Dan delivering nourishing food across the state.

Dan grew up in Vermont. He has been married for 40 years to his “best friend,” has two kids, two granddaughters, and a great-grandson. When he’s not at work, Dan likes camping, grilling, watching auto racing at Thunder Road, and baseball — he umpires through the summer.

Every morning Dan gets up at 4:00 a.m., has coffee, and heads to the Foodbank, where he loads his truck with the day’s deliveries before hitting the road. Dan typically spends 6-7 hours driving each day and has regular routes.

“I like being on the road,” shares Dan. “You get to know people.”

On this day, Dan’s first delivery is four pallets for the Craftsbury Food Share. Then it’s down Route 14 with two pallets for the Hardwick Area Food Pantry. Much of the food the Foodbank sources (with your support!) is relocated to food shelves and other food access points that help distribute it in local communities.

Dan says it’s important for people experiencing hunger to know they’re not alone. “There are a lot of people in Vermont who do,” he explains, “And the Foodbank is there to help.”

Next, Dan delivers a pallet of kid-friendly food to Hardwick Elementary School. This food will be sent home with kids to ensure their growing bodies are nourished when school’s out. “It’s a good thing you’re doing,” says Dan, as he maneuvers a power jack off the truck. “The kids need it.”

The last stop of the day is a church parking lot, where Dan distributes food boxes for older adults. Many of the folks picking up food know Dan by name and take time to check in on his day, joke around, and share gratitude. “People are always saying thank you for all we do,” says Dan.

Food is available for neighbors in every Vermont county, thanks to you and Foodbank drivers like Dan.
The mission of the Vermont Foodbank is to gather and share quality food and nurture partnerships so that no one in Vermont will go hungry.
As we look ahead to what the new year might bring, we are forced to acknowledge that the increased need for charitable food statewide is more than a temporary surge.

In the past year, 2 in 5 people in Vermont have experienced hunger — an increase from previous historic levels at the peak of the pandemic.

Meanwhile, the Vermont Foodbank has seen a steady and sizeable drop in the large food donations we rely on to share with our partners and neighbors facing hunger across the state. With government food support pulling back at the same time, the Foodbank is needing to buy more food to meet the sustained high level of need.

We have budgeted for 201% more purchased food this year than pre-pandemic. But the truth is, given the high price of food due to inflation and increased fuel costs affecting food delivery, these dollars won’t go as far.

With record numbers of people turning to the Vermont Foodbank and our network of local food shelves and meal sites to help keep food on the table, we’re doing everything we can to make sure folks have enough of the food they need and want. But in order to ensure everyone in Vermont has enough to eat today and long-term, we can’t do it alone. We need help — help from the state and federal government and community members like you.

Here are a few ways you can support your community and make sure that nourishing food is available to neighbors statewide:

- Volunteer with Vermont Foodbank or your local food shelf or meal site. You can find a list on our website at vtfoodbank.org.
- Help advocate for state and federal policies that ensure all are fed. Sign up for advocacy alerts at vtfoodbank.org/advocacy.
- Donate to Vermont Foodbank or your local food shelf or meal site. And, if you’re able, consider providing steady, reliable support to neighbors in need by becoming a monthly donor.

Most importantly, if you find yourself in need of help feeding yourself and your loved ones, please reach out or visit our website at vtfoodbank.org.