

Kernels

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INSIDE THIS EDITION

**Uplifting Our
Neighbors** Uplifts
Us All

Even When Closed
Off, Communities
Come Together

**Cooking and
Caring** for the
Kingdom

Dreams for a
Holiday Table



Vermont Foodbank
vtfoodbank.org

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Uplifting Our **Neighbors** Uplifts Us **All**



As humans, we seem hard-wired for hope and gratitude—especially around the holidays.

Cascading events over the past three years have increased life's hardships for many Vermont neighbors. First COVID-19's disruptions, followed by inflation (particularly in housing, food, and fuel), and then this summer's catastrophic floods.

During the pandemic, federal and state governments stepped up in ways that improved people's lives: rental assistance, additional 3SquaresVT supports for food purchasing, the child tax credit, and other programs made a measurable difference. However, as those programs expired over time, the positive impacts on people's lives quickly faded. Then came the floods.

In the face of these ups and downs, your Vermont Foodbank and our statewide partners are seeing higher numbers of neighbors at our doors than ever before. **At this time of year especially—a time of giving, and sharing love—I'm heartened by the coming together**

of communities, neighbors, friends, and strangers to help one another... once again.

Donors like you helped make sure the Foodbank was ready to spring into action after the floods. Vermont state government is engaging more with hunger relief. Community-based volunteer efforts have been reinvigorated as we rebuild (and rethink) our communities. For that, I am grateful.

As we enter the holiday season, let's all consider how uplifting our neighbors uplifts us all. Now, more than ever, that's true. People experiencing food insecurity are the same neighbors building and rebuilding Vermont's communities. **With your continued support, let's join together, lift spirits, and make sure everyone can celebrate the season with gratitude and festive, nourishing food.**

John Sayles
CEO



Even When Closed Off, **Communities Come Together**

In July of this year, Vermont was battered by rainstorms and catastrophic flooding. Washouts and landslides severed roads between many rural towns. Despite being closed off, the Foodbank network—that you help support—came together to support neighbors who, in many cases, lost everything.

“We’re here from 10:00 to 2:00 on Wednesdays,” Dana, a volunteer with Onion River Food Shelf in Marshfield, said. “There might be one person waiting. [After the flooding], there were eight or nine households waiting.”

“I can only imagine...that there are going to be more and more families because of the damage to homes,” Dana said.

The increase in need for food was clear five miles up the road at Neighbors in Action, the food shelf in Cabot. Cabot and Marshfield, along with neighboring Plainfield, were essentially cut off from the rest of the state.

One week after the flood, a steady stream of village residents, volunteers, road crews, and first responders flowed in to pick up prepared meals and boxes of food. Orchestrating it all was Cindy, a volunteer coordinator. Prior to the floods, Cindy said they would put together about 275 food boxes every two weeks for the community. That changed once flood waters from the Winooski River devastated the town.

“You want to know how many people we’ve fed? A lot,” Cindy said, pausing for a minute before saying they’d put together 1,700 meals and more than 1,500 sandwiches in just one



Food is available statewide to neighbors who need it—through natural disasters, the holiday season, and the everyday—because of help from you.

week, in the wake of the flood. “We don’t count a sandwich as a meal,” she explained.

Cindy noted that they don’t turn anybody away and they’ve been feeding people from neighboring towns as well.

With so many people affected it will be tough, but doable, to continue making sure neighbors have enough to eat every day—especially during the holiday season—thanks to your support and the strength of the Foodbank network.

“Our next food share is next Wednesday and...I’m a little bit scared,” Cindy said. “We do about 275, and then if we have to make boxes we just keep making boxes. You just gotta do what you gotta do to feed the people, that’s my thing.”

Cooking & Caring for the Kingdom

Neighbors are cooking up festive, delicious dishes with the free food they bring home, thanks to friends like Velma and you.

What do you get when you mix ingenuity, community-mindedness, and wisdom that comes with age? You get Velma, a 79-year-old, quick-witted grandmother who's been helping people facing hunger in the Northeast Kingdom (NEK) for over four decades.

"I've been having fun doing soups for the people next door who are sick," says Velma. "So take 'em over a soup, and they can have toast with it or they can have crackers with it."

The cooking Velma does for folks in and around Derby isn't the only way she's helping friends and neighbors. **Velma has also taken it upon herself to create and share recipes**

that align with the foods available through a federal food box program for older adults (called Commodity Supplemental Food Program) and the Foodbank's free produce distributions, made possible through your support. It's part of her goal, Velma says, to help people understand the benefits of cooking with what's on hand and using every bit of those ingredients.

Velma's Holiday Poppy Seed Slaw

1 10-ounce package thinly sliced coleslaw mix **or** ¼ head of cabbage, thinly sliced
¾ cup dried cranberries
¾ cup sliced almonds or chopped walnuts
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon ground pepper
¾ cup poppy seed salad dressing
1 small can mandarin orange sections, well drained



"Utilizing, it's teaching people what you can do with what's there," Velma says. "Because I've found that [the free produce distributions] are very good... Commodities is a bit repetitious, but there's always somebody who can use it, if you want to look."

Velma's connections to the people in the NEK go way back. She was born in Holland, Vermont, and over the course of her life worked at numerous jobs in the area, from managing a local propane dealership to directing the Head Start program in Orleans, Essex, and Caledonia counties. In each position, she prioritized helping her community, whether bringing veggies along when picking up gas payments from a gentleman who couldn't leave his house or helping parents and daycare centers improve menus for kids.

No stranger to food insecurity herself, Velma says her own experiences play a role in her commitment to helping people who are struggling to make ends meet and who may be reluctant to seek help with feeding themselves or their families.

"When my last son was born in December of 1965, in January I walked from the other end of Newport down here to the Overseer of the Poor to get food for my kids. I had three kids, two in diapers, and I remember it was a cold, cold day.... I went in there, it was the most humiliating time of my life. I had to fill out papers and answer stupid questions that never should have related to me feeding my children," Velma says, referencing what was once a state-mandated town welfare

Combine coleslaw mix (or cabbage), cranberries, and nuts in large bowl. Sprinkle salt and pepper over this mixture and toss well. Drizzle poppy seed salad dressing over the mixture and toss. Top with well-drained mandarin orange sections. Chill at least one hour before eating.

officer. "I feel for these people that are coming in now...you see them kind of looking down, and they're ashamed. **And there's no reason in hell that people should be ashamed when they've got families to feed.**"

And so she cooks for people, shares recipes, and teaches folks how to tweak and mix things up when needed.



"Find something that looks good, like roasted cauliflower, that's boring," she says. "But you take the cauliflower and you cut it off in steaks. Add some red pepper on it, throw it with a little butter and olive oil, a little garlic, chopped, yummy."

The ideas around food and ways to help others utilize it flow freely from Velma. She's got plans for crockpot recipes for the winter produce distributions, recommendations for stretching cornmeal beyond muffins, and a running list of people in the NEK she's got meals planned for. She's driven by love for her community and a belief that teaching people to cook from scratch, use it all, and change things up when necessary, is how to keep nourishing food on neighbors' tables.

"I'm trying to make it easier for people to realize what they've got out there," Velma says. "I don't like pats on the back...but I like cheering people up and making a soup for somebody."

Dreams for a **Holiday Table**

Nicole is a paraeducator in Vermont. Her wage doesn't cover living costs and she frequently has to make impossible decisions when it comes to affording groceries, health care, and housing. Thankfully, she's able to access nourishing food through programs and services you help support.

Nicole describes herself as someone who rolls with the punches and hopes for the best. Her three children are grown and out of her home, she's recently divorced, and she just got a free treadmill. "I'm going through crazy amounts of stress right now," she says, "I used to work out... and I knew that that's what I needed to get myself mentally back to where I need to be."

Nicole works with intensive needs students, teaching skills like cooking and going to the post office. "We definitely have a lot of students that

don't have sufficient enough food," she says. **Nicole can recognize food insecurity in her students because she experiences it herself.**

"I've been at my job for 18 years, and I'm just barely making \$18," shares Nicole. "I'm kind of like too poor to buy food, but too rich to get food stamps."

Nicole explains that as a paraprofessional she makes an hourly wage and doesn't get paid time off for school vacations, summer break,

or snow days. Her inconsistent income makes it challenging to apply for assistance, and she is constantly doing mental gymnastics to pay bills—and is often forced to make tradeoffs when buying food.

"I would love to buy a thing of apples so I can have a fresh apple in my oatmeal, but in my brain it's like, *Well yeah, but you need to pay your mortgage and you need to pay your electric bill...* I'm just barely making it with everything. But I mean who isn't, nowadays?"

To help make ends meet and stay nourished, Nicole visits free, fresh food events Vermont Foodbank hosts in her area, as well as her local food shelf. It's your support that makes food distributions possible, keeps food shelves well-stocked, and ensures food is accessible to neighbors who need it—in every county in Vermont.

"I just went this past Monday, and I have an overabundance of potatoes and carrots. Which I love!" says Nicole. "Last time I got grapefruit. I got some apples. I have so many eggs, which is wonderful since they're so expensive... [it] has been definitely a huge, huge, huge help. I mean huge."

She believes that hunger persists in Vermont because it's an invisible issue. "It's not something you see every single day. You don't, ever... I think that's where we get stuck... I think we've gotten lost in the shuffle."

Nicole says she wants people to know how hard it is to feel hungry. She wants to buy groceries without calculating whether she can also afford toilet paper, or a trip to the dentist. She dreams of being able to fill her house with food for her kids when they come home to visit, and host holiday meals.



"I always wanted like, 'Come to my house for Thanksgiving,' you know. I want the pies. I want the feast. I want the counter to be full with food. And I want everybody to be like laying around with their pants unbuttoned, belching, you know, watching football. I want to be able to do that and not have to worry about whether my electricity is going to be shut off or not. Or whether I'm gonna have enough money to be able to get gas for my car and food for the rest of the month."

It takes all of us—the Foodbank, state and federal government, and community members like you—supporting one another, to make sure everyone in Vermont has nourishing food this holiday season and every day of the year.

Nicole plans to walk in silence on her new treadmill in the mornings, using the quiet time to say her prayers and get mentally organized. She's hard-boiling the eggs she brought home to add to her salads. And she's proud of her kids and all they've accomplished. "My heart is happy," she says. "And that's all that matters."

**Photo substituted to protect privacy. To help advocate for state and federal policies that ensure we can all access the food we need, sign-up for advocacy alerts at vtfoodbank.org/advocacy.*

You're helping neighbors keep nourishing food on the table.

A Holiday Feast for Us All!

Give the Perfect Gift

Instead of presents, consider making a donation in honor of a friend, family member, or colleague. For every \$35 you donate, we'll send you this blank, special edition holiday card that you can mail to someone special.

This year's card art, titled "Poem," was donated by Vermont artist Beth Mueller.



All proceeds from this holiday card benefit the Vermont Foodbank and help provide food and services to friends and neighbors who are experiencing hunger.

Your Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone Number: (_____) _____ Email: _____

Amount Enclosed: \$ _____ **Please enclose a minimum gift of \$35 per card**

Charge my (check one): ☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard ☐ AMEX ☐ Discover

Card Number: _____ Expiration Date: _____ CVV Code: _____

Signature: _____

Order online at vtfoodbank.org/holidaycards or mail this completed form to:
Vermont Foodbank, Attn: Holiday Card, 33 Parker Road, Barre, VT 05641

PLEASE NOTE: To ensure that your holiday gift card arrives to you before December 25, orders must be received at the Foodbank by December 10th.

Thank you for giving the gift of food to Vermont neighbors this holiday season.