

Feed What Matters

Winter 2025 North Country Food Bank Newsletter

www.northcountryfoodbank.org

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Our Mission

North Country Food Bank is working to end hunger across communities through leadership and collaboration.

Supporting this community since 1983.

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Remember North Country Food Bank

Please let us know if you've included North Country Food Bank in your will and estate plans. We would like to add you to our Legacy Society. To learn more about our Legacy Society, contact scott@northcountryfoodbank.org.

From the Director's Desk



This past year was definitely one for the record books! It was a year of double-digit distribution increases — 16% — which is unheard of in our history and well above typical industry standards. It was a year of constant logistical challenges. The sheer amount of food needed by agency partners forced us to get creative with our trucking and find new and unique solutions to get the food delivered. It was also a year of food challenges. It always seemed as though the food was flying out the door so fast that we couldn't keep the warehouse full.

You can rest assured that, as a food bank, we take notes. We have statistics, numbers, and tracking for days on everything from the number of meals provided across the region to county poverty rates, volunteer hours, freezer temperatures, and beyond. You name it. We likely track it! **We are always looking at what we have done and ways to improve and do even more to make a difference.**

However, when looking back, the records, numbers, statistics, and challenges always pale in comparison to the wins. At North Country Food Bank, the ultimate measure of success is not pounds distributed. **We measure our success in the number of neighbors helped and lives changed.** Did we make a difference by making sure a child had food to eat on the weekend? Did we allow a family to pay their rent and stay in their home by helping with the grocery bill? Did our work give seniors the opportunity to pay for their prescription medications and still have food to eat? If the answer to these questions is yes, then we are on the right track.

It is so important to never lose sight of the fact that the numbers are not just staggering statistics but a day-to-day reality and struggle for so many neighbors in need. But, of course, the numbers do matter. **Thanks to your generosity, your gifts of time and money, and your support, we were able to distribute enough food for almost 6 million meals across the region. The more food we can distribute, the more lives we can positively impact. With your continued help and support, we plan to distribute more food this upcoming year and make an even bigger impact. Every dollar counts. Every person who helps makes a difference. And every person we help matters.**

With sincere gratitude,

Susie Novak Boelter
Executive Director



Stories From the Road

The face of hunger is not what you would expect. It is your young neighbors with young children struggling to make ends meet. It's a senior who has lived in your community her whole life and is now on a fixed budget in these difficult economic times. It's a young family where both parents work two jobs to make ends meet. We sometimes wish you could see the face of hunger through our eyes here at North Country. It may change your perspective and would most definitely melt your heart. The staff and volunteers at North Country are so fortunate to witness the immense kindness, appreciation, gratefulness, and generosity of those who live in our communities on a regular basis.

North Country typically conducts 4-5 mobile food distributions each month in different communities across the region. During each of these mobile distributions, long lines tend to form with people who are struggling to put food on the table. Everyone at these distributions needs help or is trying to help someone else. They all have compelling stories that touch the hearts of all those involved.

This is such a gift!

After a recent produce distribution in Bemidji, one of the event organizers and sponsors received the following message and passed it along to us at the food bank, *"I just wanted to send a thank you for the produce drop. My daughter and I attended and got more food — truly useful food — than we could have ever imagined. We are enjoying the abundance and shared portions with five other families. At a time when grocery prices are sky-high, and the economy is poor, this is such a gift. Would you please pass my gratitude on to all those responsible? They are truly appreciated."*

“ I just wanted you to know that we are so grateful for the food. We make sure none of it goes to waste. ”



Your smile made my day!

A volunteer at a recent mobile distribution was monitoring the line when an elderly couple waiting in one of the cars waved her over. The volunteer had walked the line several times that morning and often smiled, waved, or stopped to visit with people waiting in cars. When she approached the car, the wife leaned over from the passenger seat and said, *"I just wanted to tell you that your smile made my day! I have been watching you all morning. Sometimes, it is tough and embarrassing for us to have to come and get food, but everyone here is so friendly and welcoming. Seeing you walk by and smile, wave, visit, and joke with people waiting in cars really helped make us feel more comfortable being here."*

We put all of the food to good use!

Prior to the start of a recent mobile food distribution, several attendees were standing and visiting with volunteers. One of them exclaimed she was so thankful for the food she had received the previous month and put it all to good use. She said she peeled, chopped, and froze all the onions and canned the potatoes. The others said they had done the same. They froze the carrots. They peeled, sliced, and froze the apples. Another chimed in that the pineapple didn't make it too far. It was so good that he ate it all right away. Yet another said she used all the vegetables to make a stew that she then portioned and froze to share with her son. She said it should get her through the winter. She made a point of saying, *"I just wanted you to know that we are so grateful for the food. We make sure none of it goes to waste."*

The Power of the Community Shines Through



Wow! What a difference the community makes!

Last year, North Country set the goal of distributing enough food for 5.25 million meals for our hungry neighbors in northwest and west central Minnesota ... and you came through in a big way to help us surpass this goal.

Thanks to the support and power of our community rallying together, we blew past our goal and were able to distribute enough food for nearly 6 million meals.

At a time when people are struggling more than ever, you helped make this possible. Thank you for showing up to support our hungry neighbors and for helping to power the work we do each day. With your continued help, we can make a real impact on those struggling with hunger.

We recognize that our work isn't done. We know the upcoming year will be one of the most challenging years of hunger in recent history for our region. But thanks to your generous support, we are determined to make sure more of our neighbors will be able to get the help they need in their time of struggle.

How Does the Food Bank Work?

North Country acquires donated and purchased food.

The food is stored in our warehouse in East Grand Forks.

The food is distributed to our 220 agency partners across our 21-county service area in northwest and west central Minnesota, including food shelves, soup kitchens, meal programs, shelters, and more.

Our agency partners distribute the food directly to neighbors in need.

Over 40,000 of our neighbors face hunger. A \$1 donation provides 4 meals for a neighbor in need.



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To learn more or to make a donation to North Country Food Bank, visit www.northcountryfoodbank.org.

