

# PLENTY

Summer 2024

food gatherers®  
fighting hunger where we live

PARTNER  
FOOD BANK OF  
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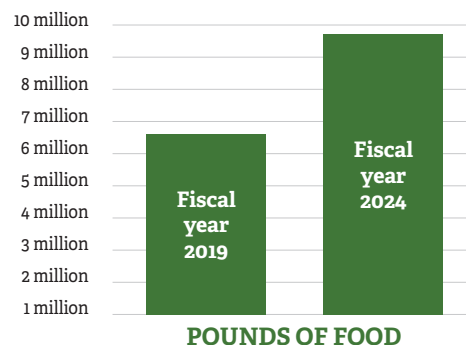


## A Bittersweet Milestone

**At the close of this fiscal year in June, Food Gatherers distributed 9.9 million pounds, a nearly 26% growth over the previous year and the most food we ever distributed in a single year!**

It's an impressive milestone and a testament to our hardworking staff and volunteers, our vibrant network of partners, and loyal food and financial donors. Food banks like Food Gatherers are designed to be responsive to real-time community needs and expand and contract as needed. We expected to expand during the pandemic and eventually contract. The contraction is not happening. **In fact, we are serving more people than we were during the height of the pandemic.**

**Real-time data in April 2024 from 45 pantries shows that we served 50% more individuals that month compared to the previous year.** The increase is directly linked to the ending of pandemic-era benefits, which provided increases in SNAP and rental assistance. Today, the benefits are gone but the high cost of food, rent, and other essentials persists. In Southeastern Michigan, 40% of households are struggling to pay for food, housing, and health care.



*Food Gatherers distributed 9,883,121 pounds of food in fiscal year 2024, a nearly 50% increase compared to 6,641,040 pounds of food in fiscal year 2019.*

In order to distribute record amounts of food, Food Gatherers is purchasing twice the amount of food (at much higher costs) than we did before the pandemic in fiscal year 2019. **We must source more food and raise more funds to continue to be the reliable safety net for our community.** A charitable response to hunger alone, however, will not be sufficient.

Federal nutrition programs like SNAP, WIC, and school meals are the first line of defense against hunger. Feeding America, our national network of food banks, estimates that for every meal we provide, SNAP provides nine. The upcoming Farm Bill is a critical opportunity to demand stronger investments in SNAP and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). **Passed roughly every five years, the Farm Bill is the centerpiece of federal legislation for nutrition and agriculture, and creates pathways to support U.S. farmers and producers while fighting hunger locally.** To learn more about Food Gatherers' advocacy initiatives and get involved, visit [FoodGatherers.org/Advocate](https://FoodGatherers.org/Advocate).

Help fight hunger where we live: Donate now at [FoodGatherers.org/Summer24](https://FoodGatherers.org/Summer24)

# From Seeds to Success: Growing skills and harvesting hope at Women's Huron Valley Correctional Facility



*WHV horticulture students have the opportunity to gain hands-on experiences in both agriculture and landscaping while in class. For many, it's an opportunity to gain skills and rebuild confidence.*

**W**hat impact can a half-acre of land make on a community? For the horticulture students at the Women's Huron Valley Correctional Facility (WHV), their small but efficient garden is a chance to build a brighter future for themselves and give back to the surrounding community.

Horticulture is just one of several vocational training programs helping the women at WHV plant the seeds for success upon reentry, but it's also directly impacting the lives of Washtenaw County residents facing hunger. Since 2004, WHV has partnered with Food Gatherers to donate the harvest from the program. The donations include a variety of fruits and veggies including berries, leafy greens, squash, and herbs – providing a nutritious supply of food at a time when many are struggling to afford groceries.

As one of only two prison-based horticulture programs in Michigan, it is a unique opportunity that has bloomed under its vocational instructor, Ellen Baron. We chatted with Ellen about the impact of the program on the community, and what the opportunity to give back means for students.

## **What is the goal for students who join the Horticulture program?**

*Our horticulture program is part of our Vocational Village trade school. Our goal is to prepare students for entry-level employment in the horticulture field. The students can achieve industry-recognized credentials such as*

*the pesticide applicator certification from MDARD and a landscape credential from the Michigan Nursery Landscape Association. Before they return home, we connect them with employment. We've had several students go on to leadership positions within the field, teaching others about gardening within their community gardens, and one former student even achieved a bachelor's degree in Horticulture.*

## **What happens when the crops are ready to pick?**

*Our harvest days are the most impactful days of the week. Donating the food motivates the students and they are proud to give the produce they grew to someone who is in need. Before Food Gatherers' truck arrives, we stack up boxes packed with collards, tomatoes, cucumbers, and the like so they can see how much it amounts to—it's really an amazing feeling. It's high-quality, nutritious food and it's all the more impactful when you know that what you picked this morning is going to be on someone's plate tonight.*

## **What is the impact on the students?**

*Some of the students have been food insecure before and they know how special it is to have fresh produce available at a food bank. One student once shared that she used to go to Food Gatherers' Community Kitchen at the Delonis Center to eat. She said that to be able to take something from her garden and give back meant the world to her. It was a very emotional moment.*

## **Students gain practical skills but what other growth have you seen?**

*So many of the people that come into prison have had challenges. They are away from their family, loved ones, and careers and their self-esteem is not great. They have been beaten down and you think, 'no matter what I can't be successful'.*



*Food Gatherers Food Run Manager Jeff Wells says that the fruits and vegetables from WHV are some of the highest quality produce donated to the food bank.*



WHV students have donated more than 2,000 pounds of fresh produce during the 2024 growing season.

*My favorite time of year is when they start planting, putting these tiny seeds in soil, and watering and caring for them. And you can see their self-esteem grow as they watch the seeds grow. That growth continues with caring for them in the greenhouse, planting their seedlings in the soil, and finally when they harvest the donations. You literally watch the person grow with the process. It's healing and is a restorative practice that will help make our returning citizens better community members.*

**There are a lot of women who have learned from you over the years, what do you feel like you've learned from the program?**

*I got into horticulture because I loved seeing things grow and I became a teacher and discovered I loved to watch people grow even more. That's what gets me up every day: the opportunity to make a difference in someone's life. It's such an honor to see the direct impact.*

We are so grateful to Ellen Baron, WHV, and the efforts of hundreds of students who have participated in the program, now in its 20th growing season. To date, the program has provided more than 240,000 pounds of fresh produce, helping children, adults, and seniors in our community!

# Welcome, New Board Members!

Get to know the four new members of Food Gatherers' Board of Directors



## Angela Jackson

Attorney  
Hooper Hathaway, P.C.  
*"I grew up in a community where food insecurity was widespread. I believe that consistent access to healthy food from birth is fundamental to a healthier community in all respects."*



## Juan Marquez

Medical Director  
Washtenaw County Health Department  
*"Access to healthy foods is a critical part of public health and I value the important role that Food Gatherers plays in our county."*



## Kelly Stupple

Program Manager  
Washtenaw Health Project  
*"I'm excited to join the Food Gatherers board because I love food and I hate waste! I feel as if our community has an abundance of resources and I'm very interested in how Food Gatherers is able to effectively reallocate resources to those in need, helping to bring our community into a healthier balance."*



## David Lamb

Chairman, CEO and President  
Oxford Bank and Oxford Bank Corporation  
*"I have known about the great work that Food Gatherers has done for years and knew I wanted to be part of serving the community with the most core essential, which is food. We can't address any other needs in the community without food security or reduced food insecurity."*

## Local Food Fights Hunger



Food Gatherers Director of Warehouse Operations, John Reed (left), receives a delivery of kale from We the People Opportunity Farm founder Melvin Parsons (right).

Shopping locally has profound economic, social, and environmental benefits – especially regarding where our community gets food.

Food Gatherers has a long history of partnering with markets, farms, and gardeners to connect our neighbors facing hunger to fresh, locally grown food. This year, thanks to a recent food-purchasing grant from the USDA, our food bank has more resources to support our vibrant local food system.

The Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement (LFPA) provides Food Gatherers access to \$50,000 per year for two years to purchase food

from regional producers within a 400-mile radius. LFPA is among several programs launched by the USDA to begin to address historic inequities faced by underserved farmers, including Black-owned, woman-owned, and small-scale operations.

The grant allows us to invest in the local food system and meet our goal of distributing at least 60% produce and protein. So far, funds have also been used to purchase products from two farms right here in Washtenaw County.

### Meet our partners:



#### Green Things Farm Collective

Since 2020, this majority women-owned farm business in Ann Arbor has focused on the thoughtful production of organic produce and agricultural events. In addition to selling fresh produce to our food bank, they are also long-time donors whose mission is to care for people, steward the land, and move towards a more sustainable future.



#### We the People Opportunity Farm

The mission of W.T.P.O.F. is to break the cycle of incarceration in Washtenaw County by helping formerly incarcerated men and women develop agricultural skills and fully engage their community. On the Ypsilanti farm, interns plant seeds, nurture the soil, harvest the crop, and deliver produce to local restaurants and customers, including Food Gatherers. To fight hunger locally, the program also hosts a free food distribution to provide community members with fresh, healthy produce.

## Free Summer Meals for Kids and Teens

Summer is here and so are free, nutritious meals for kids and teens! When the school year ends, many students lose access to free and reduced-price school meals, making summer the hungriest time of year.



*Food Gatherers partners with sites throughout the community to host free meals for kids, like at this end-of-summer event in Superior Township in 2023.*

To make sure children have the food they need to thrive, Food Gatherers' Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is offering *Eat & Play* and *Grab & Go* meals, as well as *Mini Grocery Pickups* at sites throughout Washtenaw County. For details, scan the QR code to visit [FoodGatherers.org/Summer](http://FoodGatherers.org/Summer).



*This year's program is offered in partnership with the Michigan Department of Education and with support from Toyota, Kroger, Lake Trust Credit Union, Kiwanis Club of Ann Arbor, and the Rotary Club of Ann Arbor.*



## Make a lasting impact on hunger through your food bank legacy.

When you include Food Gatherers in your will, you join the *Forever Gathering Society*, building a legacy that nourishes the people and communities that make your life special.

Did you know that August is *National Make-A-Will Month*? Now is the perfect time to ensure that your current and future neighbors will have access to healthy food when they need it.

For information on making a planned gift to Food Gatherers, please contact Charlotte Csicsila, Chief Development Officer, at 734-761-2796 or email [Charlotte@FoodGatherers.org](mailto:Charlotte@FoodGatherers.org).

## Upcoming Events

### Mow Down Hunger

September-October 2024

Generously sponsored by Weingartz, this fundraiser will match your donations to Food Gatherers! Look for details this fall.

### Hunger Action Month

September 2024

Hunger Action Month seeks to bring awareness, spark conversations, and inspire action about food insecurity. Follow along on our social media pages to find ways to participate!



### Food Gatherers Main Office

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