

## PLANTING SEEDS OF HOPE

At the Columbus Botanical Garden, beauty grows in many ways. Some visitors come to admire the blooms, others stroll the peaceful trails or attend vibrant community events—but for many, it is a place to feel inspired and rooted in something greater.

One source of that inspiration is the flourishing vegetable garden, lovingly cared for by Carolyn Reynolds and a dedicated team of volunteers. After a 38-year career in IT, Carolyn became a Master Gardener and now spends her time helping things grow, both in the garden and in the community.

"Volunteering is very important to me," says Carolyn. "All my life, someone was there to help me along the way, and now it's my turn to give back. That is why I grow these vegetables—to help others."

**"Our partnership with Feeding the Valley allows us to do what we do best: grow fresh produce, while they do what they do best: deliver it with care into the hands of families across our community."**

The garden is more than a learning space; it is a generous space. Each season, the harvest is shared



We love the creative ways our volunteers and donors choose to help others!

with neighbors through a meaningful partnership with Feeding the Valley. While the garden nurtures the idea of growing your own food, not everyone has that opportunity. This collaboration ensures that the garden's bounty reaches those who need it most.

"Our partnership with Feeding the Valley allows us to do what we do best: grow fresh produce, while they do what they do best: deliver it with care into the hands of families across our community," says Carolyn.

Together, they are growing tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, squash, eggplant, okra, cantaloupe, and even sweet potatoes, along with fragrant herbs like rosemary, basil, mint, and thyme.

Each plant, each harvest, is a reminder that even small seeds can grow into powerful acts of kindness. At Columbus Botanical Garden, they are not just planting vegetables, they are planting seeds of hope.

# FRESH THOUGHTS

From Frank Sheppard, President & CEO



Thank you for helping us end our fiscal year strongly, distributing more than 13 million meals to children, families, and seniors across our region. I hope you'll take a look at the impact report in this newsletter to see more of your support in action.

Yet even with this good news, Feeding America data shows food insecurity is growing in our counties. More working families are turning to us for support. Your continued support is critical to provide nourishment and care. Here are a few ways we're meeting the need:

## Food Drives:



The National Letter Carrier's Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive, two community drives led by local TV stations in Columbus and Albany, and another hosted by a major Columbus dealership stocked our shelves just in time to meet increased summer need. Food drives are a powerful force bridging the meal gap.

## Food as Medicine:

Launched a year ago in partnership with local healthcare providers, this program delivers healthy meals each week to patients with diet-related

illnesses. Patients also receive cooking guidance to prepare their own meals. We're proud of this growing work.

## Nourishing LaGrange and Troup County:



Thanks to a generous grant from Kroger, we're able to store more perishable foods in our brand new walk-in cooler. We've also been able to add a new Mobile Pantry in the heart of LaGrange. Caring volunteers have stepped up and more neighbors are coming as word spreads. And our mobile farmer's market truck now makes regular monthly visits to senior centers across LaGrange and Troup County.

## New Service in Columbus:

We'll soon open a Neighbor Market at our Columbus warehouse with evening hours designed especially for working families who can't make it to our weekday mobile pantries.

Because of you, families are nourished, seniors are remembered, and children go to bed with a full stomach. Thank you for standing with us and for making sure no one faces hunger alone.

Frank Sheppard  
President & CEO

## FOOD INSECURITY IN OUR SERVICE AREA

COUNTY	POPULATION	OVERALL FOOD INSECURITY RATE (ALL AGES)	CHILD FOOD INSECURITY RATE	COUNTY	POPULATION	OVERALL FOOD INSECURITY RATE (ALL AGES)	CHILD FOOD INSECURITY RATE
Calhoun	5,528	17.70%	29.80%	Quitman	2,092	19.20%	32.10%
Chattahoochee	9,181	18.60%	23.40%	Randolph	6,270	20.20%	37.60%
Clay	2,853	18.40%	36.10%	Russell (AL)	58,858	20.00%	30.00%
Dougherty	83,915	19.70%	37.80%	Schley	4,539	15.30%	15.90%
Harris	35,509	11.50%	11.40%	Stewart	4,978	21.90%	39.00%
Lee	33,337	11.60%	13.60%	Talbot	5,753	17.30%	33.40%
Marion	7,474	16.90%	25.20%	Terrell	8,941	21.60%	40.00%
Meriwether	20,757	17.90%	28.00%	Troup	69,821	17.10%	26.00%
Muscogee	204,383	17.90%	28.50%	Webster	2,348	17.10%	31.40%

\*Source: Feeding America data 2023

# WE'VE GONE BANANAS!

What do we do when we receive 20 pallets of bananas on a Thursday afternoon? We're only open to noon on Friday, and it's Memorial Day weekend? That's 18,000 bananas we have to get out to our community, or we're stuck with making lots of banana pudding next week.

We get on the phone and start calling agencies to come and get them. And they did, and they spread banana joy all over town!

Minions like bananas too...



Bananas galore! Good thing minions like bananas too...

## MAKE A DIFFERENCE: HOST A FOOD DRIVE!

During our current food shortage, food drives are a critical way to bridge the meal gap. When you host a food drive, every can, every box, and every bag of non-perishable food adds up to real hope for families facing hunger.

Host an in-person drive or raise donations for a virtual food drive as a fun fundraising challenge. Either way, you'll make a difference in your community. To get you started, here are some of the best non-perishable items to gather:

- Canned meats and tuna
- Peanut butter and jelly
- Canned fruits and vegetables

- Boxed meals (mac & cheese, pasta kits)
- Rice, pasta, and dry beans
- Cereal and oatmeal
- Shelf-stable milk
- Canned soups and stews
- Snack items for kids (granola bars, crackers, fruit cups)

Every can counts. Every effort matters. And every dollar donated can help provide **six meals** to neighbors in need. For more, visit [feedingthevalley.org/give-food](https://feedingthevalley.org/give-food).



# 2024-2025 OUR IMPACT!

More Than  
**15 MILLION POUNDS**  
of Food Distributed



Mobile Farmers Market Truck  
**71,595 POUNDS** of Produce  
Distributed



**4.8 MILLION POUNDS** of  
Fresh Produce  
Distributed



**5.9 MILLION**  
Mobile Pantry  
**POUNDS** Distributed



**482,899**  
Kids Cafe Meals



**71,050**  
Volunteer Hours

**81,409**  
Senior Meals

**101,254**  
Mobile Pantry  
Boxes

**18** Serving  
**COUNTIES**



**42,791**  
Buddy Packs



**1,454**  
Medically  
Tailored Meals



## LOOKING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Visit our website [feedingthevalley.org](http://feedingthevalley.org) for ways to get involved! You can donate food, start a food drive, volunteer at the Food Bank, or make a donation. Join us in ensuring that no one in our community goes hungry.

