We’re thrilled to share a fantastic new volunteer opportunity with you: Retail Rescue Drivers! These volunteers, who are Foodbank-approved drivers with additional food safety training, play a crucial role in collecting donated food from our partner retail organizations. Within the first three weeks of the program, we welcomed seven drivers.

But what exactly is the Retail Rescue Program? It’s an innovative initiative aimed at tackling two major issues: food waste and hunger. Through strategic partnerships with various food retailers, manufacturers, and farmers, the program rescues surplus, safe-to-eat food that would otherwise go to waste and redirects it to the Foodbank and local partner agencies. This innovative approach not only helps provide nutritious meals to individuals in need but also significantly reduces the environmental impact of food waste.

Retail Rescue Driver Scott Nunes single-handedly rescued 2,202 pounds of food that would have otherwise found its way to our local landfill.
Dear Foodbank Friend

As we transition from the warmth of summer into the promise of a new fiscal year, I am thrilled to welcome you to our latest newsletter. Within these pages you will discover stories that illuminate our renewed vision: “food is the connection.” We invite you to join us on a journey that explores the profound impact of food as more than just sustenance but as a vital link that binds us together.

Throughout this edition, you’ll find tales of innovative solutions, collaborative efforts, and the remarkable resilience of our community. From selling peanuts harvested from our own farm to unveiling new opportunities to prevent food waste, each story underscores our commitment to our mission.

We’ll also delve into our continued focus on health equity through programs like The Healthy Pantry Initiative, which emphasizes our belief in the transformative power of food as the first medicine. Additionally, we’ll celebrate the strength of our partnerships, including the recent milestone of onboarding our 200th partner agency. Partner agencies are the backbone of our work and demonstrate our dedication to addressing the multifaceted needs of our community, recognizing that people are hungry for more than just food. Our commitment is to ensure access to nutritious food for all, while also acknowledging the broader challenges beyond hunger that individuals and families face.

As I conclude, I’d also like to shine a spotlight on yet another noteworthy accomplishment: surpassing our own record with the distribution of over 24 million pounds of food. In recent years, our community faced various challenges that heightened the need for our services. Despite these obstacles, we managed to not only meet but surpass expectations, setting new standards in our organization and reaffirming our dedication to efficiency. Now, we strive to exceed this ever-growing baseline goal each year, ensuring that no one in our community goes to bed hungry.

As you flip through these pages, I encourage you to reflect on the impact of our collective efforts and the role that you play in shaping the future of our community. Thank you for your ongoing support and your commitment to our shared vision.

Together, let’s continue to nourish and uplift those in need, one story at a time.

With tremendous gratitude,

Christopher Tan, President and CEO
In March, Hubbard Peanut Company (Hubs) released the fourth edition of its highly limited Single Origin Peanuts thanks to Southampton County native, pastor, and fourth-generation farmer Elisha Barnes, whom they partner with to produce the peanuts. The limited-edition peanuts are available on Hubs’ website for nationwide shipping and locally at The Hubs Vine (1459 Armory Drive, Franklin).

While the type of peanuts being offered is the same, sun-cured on stakes the old-fashioned way and sold with the skins on, this batch is unique. Proceeds from each can will be donated to the Foodbank, with each sale generating two meals for neighbors in need. The can also received a refresh, now adorned with the phrase “What can change a life? A peanut can!” Furthermore, this release marks years of partnership among Franklin/Southampton businesses, organizations, and residents, united by the goal of reducing food insecurity and making healthy meals more accessible to everyone in the region.

Inspired by single origin coffee and chocolate, Hubs released the country’s first Single Origin Peanut line in March 2020, sourcing peanuts solely from Barnes’ “Pop Son Farm” in Branchville, VA, where his great-grandfather started as a sharecropper. Barnes is the only farmer known to still use the “shocking method,” which makes these peanuts truly one of a kind. The peanuts take longer to produce using this method and the process is labor intensive, but Barnes wouldn’t have it any other way because for him, it’s about preserving a valuable piece of Virginia culture and history. The product was so popular, it sold out within the first 24 hours. Each year since, Hubs has released and sold out of each new batch of the Single Origin Peanuts.

Hubs started to work closely with us in 2020, when they offered their warehouse and provided volunteers to make kits for the BackPack Program. In 2021, Hubs hosted its “Harvest the Vine” event, which raised money for the Foodbank and drew attention to the need for more fresh food for those facing hunger in their community. In 2022, we connected with Rev. Eric Majette, who owned a 20-acre plot of land near our facility in Franklin. We worked out a symbiotic deal that helped solve that problem and created Izzie’s Field. Rev. Majette leased the land to us, and we agreed to let Barnes use half of the property as he wishes if he agreed to farm produce for the community on the other half. Barnes elected to use his extra land for this year’s batch of Single Origin Peanuts, planting corn on the other half. Thanks to the generous help of our staff and volunteers, the crop was successfully harvested and is now ready for distribution.

Scan the QR code to purchase peanuts that support the Foodbank!
Building a Better Community, One Can at a Time

The highly anticipated 24th Annual Canstruction Design and Build Competition returned in April. During this unique charity art exhibition, architectural, construction, and engineering teams competed to see who could best defy the laws of gravity by creating structures assembled from canned food. Once the structures were judged, all food from the competition was donated to the Foodbank.

Teams competed for top honors in six award categories:

- Best Original Design & Most Cans – Clark Nexsen
- Structural Ingenuity – HBA Architecture & Interior Design
- Best Meal – AECOM
- Best Use of Labels – Moseley Architects
- Honorable Mention – Whiting-Turner Contracting Company

This year, with the support of sponsors including the SDA and AIA Hampton Roads chapters, along with Lynnhaven Mall, the event scaled new heights. The collected food and funds, totaling 16,634 pounds and $4,000, resulted in 21,862 nutritious meals!

We’re thrilled to share a significant milestone in our ongoing fight against hunger: The Foodbank has officially welcomed its 200th partner agency on board! These agencies are the backbone of our efforts, serving as crucial community organizations such as food pantries, soup kitchens, and emergency shelters. They are on the front lines, working alongside us to ensure individuals and families facing food insecurity receive the support they need. Last year alone, these agencies distributed a staggering 70% of our total food, underscoring the vital role they play in our shared mission.

Why is reaching 200 such a noteworthy achievement? Historically, the Foodbank boasted a robust partner agency network. However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic led to the closure of many partner agencies, with several never reopening, nearly halving our network. This was largely due to constrained resources, heightened caution, and the fact that many of our invaluable volunteers are elderly. Nonetheless, thanks to the dedication of our staff, who worked tirelessly to rebuild our network, we not only weathered the storm but emerged stronger than before. This resilience was evident in our ability to distribute record-breaking amounts of food to our neighbors in need.
Nourishing Minds and Fostering Community at Monarch Pantry

Established in 2020 by the office of Leadership & Learning, Old Dominion University’s Monarch Pantry is a resource that has blossomed into a student-driven initiative, fostering a sense of community and dignity among its patrons. From its humble beginnings as a response to a neighboring pantry closure, the Monarch Pantry has evolved into a bustling hub of activity, providing a diverse array of fresh foods, nonperishable items, and personal hygiene products.

In addition to client-choice options, preorder opportunities enhance efficiency and accommodate busy schedules. They provide a wide variety of food tailored to different student needs — from dorm-friendly to apartment-friendly options. In fall 2020, there were 415 pickups total, and by spring 2024, they routinely served 200 students per week. This impressive growth underscores the effectiveness of their approach and the increasing demand for their services.

What sets it apart is not just its offerings but the experiential learning opportunities it provides. With student workers and volunteers at its helm, the pantry is more than just a place to access provisions; it’s a space for hands-on education and empowerment. From restocking shelves to offering personalized assistance, they exemplify the solidarity that defines the Monarch Pantry.

Through strategic partnerships and community support, the Monarch Pantry has flourished. Thanks to generous donations from Aramark — their on-campus dining partner — Panera Bread, and various financial backers, its shelves are stocked, and its impact continues to grow. Moreover, by joining forces with the Foodbank in December, the pantry has amplified its reach and efficiency, ensuring that every contribution stretches further to support those in need. It proudly stands as the first four-year institution to become a Foodbank partner agency. Leveraging their platform, they are dedicated to helping other institutions embark on similar journeys.

As the pantry looks to the future, plans for expansion and enhancement are underway, promising an even brighter horizon. With a focus on inclusivity, education, and innovation, the Monarch Pantry remains steadfast in its mission to nourish minds and bodies while fostering connections that uplift the entire ODU community. For more information, visit www.odu.edu/sees/feedodu.

Closing the Case on Hunger

The Legal Food Frenzy, an annual collaboration between the Virginia Attorney General, the Young Lawyers Division of the Virginia Bar Association, and the Federation of Virginia Food Banks, engages members of the legal community in a collective effort to combat hunger.

This year, 25 teams took action by fundraising, organizing food drives, and volunteering over a two-week period to provide much-needed support for their neighbors struggling with hunger. Together, they presented an impressive case, collecting $53,848 and 7,565 pounds of food, translating into a remarkable 114,000 meals for those in need across Southeastern Virginia and the Eastern Shore. Congratulations to our regional winner, McGuireWoods LLP Norfolk!
Paving the Way for Healthier Communities

Virginia’s food banks and their extensive network of pantry partners are deeply committed to not only providing food but also promoting health. To advance this mission, a collaborative effort involving neighbors facing hunger, food pantry partners, statewide food bank staff, and health and community partners gave rise to the Healthy Pantry Initiative.

The Healthy Pantry Initiative is a movement guiding all interested pantries to implement more health-focused and neighbor-centered practices. Three Foodbank partner agencies were selected to participate in the pilot phase, which ran from April 1 to June 30, each committing to implementing or expanding at least one practice in either the Food Availability or Neighbor-Centered categories.

### Food Availability
*Foods offered meet the unique dietary needs of neighbors facing hunger*

- Offer items from each of the five food groups (fruits, vegetables, protein, grains, and dairy)
- Offer fresh fruits and vegetables
- Offer food choices that address specific chronic disease or dietary needs
- Offer foods to meet cultural/religious needs of neighbors

### Neighbor-Centered
*Barriers are removed so that neighbors facing hunger can access the foods they need to thrive*

- Enable neighbors to choose which types of food they would like from the pantry
- Collect neighbor feedback on pantry services and utilize when making organizational decisions
- Serve neighbors on evenings and/or weekends
- Address transportation barriers in at least one way
- Have materials, resources, or processes for serving non-English speakers
- Serve anyone in need of food assistance, regardless of location, etc.
- Make accommodations for people with all physical and mental abilities
- Support a culturally inclusive and welcoming environment

The selection of the three agencies was led by their strong interest in implementing or expanding healthy pantry practices mentioned above, as well as the high rates of food insecurity and chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and obesity in their communities. These agencies identified specific practices they wanted to adopt but needed support to achieve. During the three-month pilot period, they focused on infrastructure enhancements regarding food storage and/or space to address their identified practices. The agencies received the support and resources necessary to bring their vision of a healthier, more inclusive pantry to life.

Looking ahead, we are excited about the next round of the Healthy Pantry Initiative. With the insights gained from the first phase, we are poised to expand and refine our efforts, empowering even more pantries to prioritize the health and well-being of their neighbors facing hunger.
Creating Sustainable Solutions

In the ongoing battle against food insecurity, a revised product purchasing program emerges to craft tailored solutions to meet the diverse needs of communities. Rather than competing with retail giants, it seeks to offer an alternative avenue for grocery purchasing, ensuring that every dollar spent goes further in supporting those in need.

Central to this approach is the active involvement of our partner agencies: community organizations that collaborate with the Foodbank to help distribute food to individuals and families in need. Through comprehensive surveys, we’ve gathered invaluable insights, with 90% of agencies responding and influencing the selection of offered products. From offering a mere handful of products last year to a current roster of 90, we are rapidly expanding our reach. Every agency now has access to this resource, with the capacity to offer up to 135 products in the future.

One of the primary objectives is to undercut retail prices, stretching resources to supplement produce purchasing. As grants supporting these initiatives diminish, this program becomes instrumental in ensuring the sustainability of our commitment to providing free produce to partner agencies.

Moreover, this initiative not only aids in cost-saving for agencies but also streamlines inventory management, minimizing the risk of lost products and ensuring quicker turnaround times. It’s a holistic approach toward sustainability, ensuring efficiency and effectiveness in every aspect of operations.

It’s crucial, however, to clarify that this doesn’t replace the importance of community donations. Rather, it complements them. By redirecting spending toward impactful initiatives, it empowers agencies to make a tangible difference while maximizing their budgets. It’s a strategic investment in the future, safeguarding access to nutritious food for vulnerable populations.

Delivering a Lot More Than Mail

We’re tipping our hats to our local letter carriers for their dedication to our community and their contribution to the success of the NALC Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive on May 11, and every year. Their commitment to parceling out nonperishable food donations directly from homes along their routes has stamped a significant impact on hunger relief. This year, their efforts delivered enough food to provide an astounding 50,000 meals to individuals and families in need. Their work and boundless generosity continue to inspire us all, and we are incredibly grateful for their ongoing support in the fight against hunger.
Chefs crafted a meal using a mystery food ingredient.

Cooking for a Cause

Earlier this summer, the Foodbank partnered with the Culinary Institute of Virginia for the inaugural “Cooking for a Cause” event, a collaborative effort to raise awareness about childhood hunger in our community.

Chefs were challenged to create a healthy, affordable meal featuring a protein, starch, and vegetable, along with at least one mystery ingredient commonly found in our BackPack Program. This added twist ensured the dishes were both practical and accessible for families in need.

A hearty congratulations to Team 6, whose creative take on chili mac ‘n’ cheese, incorporating several mystery ingredients, won them top honors. Their winning recipe will be included in outgoing BackPacks, allowing families to enjoy this delicious, nutritious meal at home. In addition to the recognition, the winners received a set of knives and scholarship money, generously provided by the school.

September is Hunger Action Month

Hunger Action Month is a time for everyone across the country to collectively act against hunger.

Whether you choose to donate, advocate, volunteer, or raise awareness, your actions make a significant difference in the fight against hunger. Stay connected with us on social media to learn more about how you can get involved.

Stay connected to the work you help provide! Please visit foodbankonline.org to learn more.

In accordance with federal law and internal policy, the Foodbank is prohibited to discriminate in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or a part of an individual’s income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact the Foodbank’s Director of Finance at 757-314-4547.

The Foodbank is an equal opportunity provider and employer.