

# Harvest News

A publication of



## FOOD BANK OF NORTH ALABAMA

### The Farm Food Collaborative Program Works to Feed Families AND Help Local Farmers

As an ardent supporter of the Food Bank of North Alabama, you know that the Farm Food Collaborative program works hard to provide locally grown fruits and veggies to North Alabama children through Farm to School, Farm to Early Care and Education, Farm to Summer Meals, and our very own Kids Harvest. But did you know we also work to increase farmer sales to commercial buyers like grocery stores and restaurants in North and Central Alabama?

Farm Food Collaborative co-managers, Natalie Bishnoi and Carey Martin, have been diligently working this summer to bring locally grown, farm-fresh produce to a broader range of people in our community. As of July, deliveries from local farms started going into all eight North Alabama Kroger stores. Be on the lookout for the Alabama Grown signs at your local Kroger store!

Last summer, the Collaborative facilitated sales to two Piggly Wiggly stores in Birmingham, which quickly expanded to nine Piggly Wiggly stores. As of this August, all 13 Piggly Wiggly stores in the Birmingham area have committed to buying from our local farmers as often as possible and are even running ads in their weekly sales flyers promoting their dedication to buying local!

We are also proud to provide Alabama Grown produce to restaurants in Huntsville! Local restaurants that you can find produce grown by North Alabama farmers are Happy Tummy, Pizzelle's Confections (both located at Lowe Mill), 1892 East, Cyn Shea's Café, and Farm Burger. You can also find delicious drinks made from local products at Piper and Leaf, Rocket City Republic, and Green Bus Brewing. Does your favorite restaurant buy local? If not, suggest that they give the Farm Food Collaborative a call to find out how to get started!



We are also proud to provide Alabama Grown produce to restaurants in Huntsville!



From left to right: FFC Co-Manager, Carey Martin; Mark Maxwell, Kroger; FFC Co-Manager Natalie Bishnoi; Will Scott, Scott's Orchard; Jonathan Young, Kroger, work together to bring locally grown produce to area stores.

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# New Refrigerated Van Gets Fresh Food to Those in Need



Now, the Food Bank of North Alabama has a new refrigerated vehicle hitting the roads — and it's all thanks to a Leadership Huntsville/Madison County group.

The Food Bank of North Alabama has a reputation for being small but mighty. Now, it has a new refrigerated vehicle hitting the roads that fits that description perfectly. And it's all thanks to a Leadership Huntsville/Madison County group.

The refrigerated van will enable the Food Bank to more easily distribute much needed fresh foods across its 11-county service area.

While the Food Bank has an impressive fleet of refrigerated trucks. Those trucks, and drivers, are on the road every weekday picking up donations at our grocery store partners. The Food Bank needed a smaller, more nimble vehicle that any employee could drive to any location, that could carry substantial amounts of food and keep it at safe temperatures.

But refrigerated vehicles are expensive. That's where Leadership came to the rescue. After learning more about the Food Bank's programs, particularly those helping children, a small group of Leadership's Flagship Class 31 was called to make a difference. The six individuals asked: "What do you need? How can we help?"

"When I learned the Food Bank had no way to deliver fresh food directly to the 1 in 4 kids in North Alabama who were going hungry, I knew we had to do something big," said local attorney Tony Mastando, a Leadership class member.

That something big was raising \$58,275.75 for the Food Bank's refrigerated van.

"I can't stand to see anyone go hungry, but children really pull at my heart strings," said Mark Branon, a Leadership member and Calhoun Community College Huntsville campus director. "With this van we can see fresh fruits and vegetables served to growing children in our community. Also it opens the door for them to try foods they may have never been exposed to before!"

The refrigerated van fits into the Food Bank's efforts to provide healthier, fresher, more nutritious foods to those in need. These foods also are more perishable and must be distributed quickly and at the right temperature. As well as being invaluable for the Food Bank's kid-focused efforts, such as Kids Harvest, Summer Meals and Farm to Early Childcare Education, the van will be used for senior mobile pantries.

Thank you to Leadership Class 31's small group Contributing Factors' members: Connie Spears, Madison City School Board member; Mark Branon, Calhoun Community College; Karen Mockensturm, Fantasy Playhouse Children's Theater executive director; Steve Noe, SAIC; Justin Appel, Lockheed Martin; and attorney Tony Mastando.



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# Food Bank Warehouse Under New Leadership

This past June, the Food Bank promoted its Store Donation Coordinator, Joshua Matthews, to the role of Warehouse Manager. Joshua, a Huntsville native and University of Alabama graduate, previously worked at the Community Food Bank of Central Alabama in Birmingham before joining the Food Bank of North Alabama in May of 2017. Joshua is embracing the challenges that come with his new role. Reflecting on it, Joshua said: "I am looking forward to the opportunities

and challenges that being Warehouse Manager represent. I am very happy to serve our 250 partner agencies and lead the warehouse team in our fight against hunger."



Joshua Matthews, a Huntsville native and University of Alabama graduate, previously worked at the Community Food Bank of Central Alabama in Birmingham before joining the Food Bank of North Alabama in May of 2017.

The Operations team has changed a bit and added new faces. Longtime Operations Technician Lawrence Hollins, a Food Bank veteran with over 17 years of experience at the Food Bank, is supported in his driving work by Frank Mitchell and Mark McCrary. The team of drivers picks up thousands of pounds of donated food from area retail partners five days each week. John-Edward Thomas, Vincent Wilson, and Nathan Smith all keep things running smoothly in the warehouse by processing the inventory and assisting agency partners as they procure and load their food items. We recently added a new Food Sorting Captain, Carla Johnston, who hosts groups of volunteers each week as they sort and inspect donated food. Please say hi and thank our warehouse team next time you visit the Food Bank!



The operations team keeps things running smoothly in the warehouse by processing the inventory and assisting agency partners as they procure and load their food items. From left to right: Mark McCrary, John-Edward Thomas, Nathan Smith, Vincent Wilson Jr., Carla Johnston, Frank Mitchell.

# Food Bank Launches New Partnership with Americorps VISTA Program

The Food Bank recently began a partnership with the national AmeriCorps VISTA program. VISTA stands for Volunteers in Service to America. Through the VISTA partnership, the Food Bank agrees to host a "VISTA" for one year of work. The VISTA is considered a volunteer employee and is paid a stipend, but does not inhabit a permanent position at the Food Bank. We were excited about this opportunity for two reasons: 1) it enables us to grow our capacity to better serve our partners and help more people; and 2) it provides an entry-level work opportunity for someone interested in nonprofit hunger relief work. Many VISTAs go on to work in other areas of the nonprofit field after completing their year of service.

Our first Americorps VISTA is Huntsville native and UAH graduate, Nicole Westrope. Nicole has worked in a variety of areas since beginning at the Food Bank this past February. She was instrumental in running our summer meal program for children. She also regularly hosts volunteers and assists the Farm Food Collaborative with local deliveries. We look forward to expanding the VISTA partnership in 2019 by hosting two VISTA volunteers.



**VISTA**  
Volunteers in Service to America



Nicole Westrope has worked in a variety of areas since beginning at the Food Bank this past February.

# Agency Development Series off to Strong Start

The Food Bank is investing in our partner feeding programs in a new way; we believe anything we do to help our 250 partners, helps the whole community and ultimately feeds more people in need.

We invested in our partners by offering a series of four free one-hour workshops. The first workshop, a popular one, was "Fundraising 101." It was taught by Alissa Mackiewicz, a Food Bank board member with several decades of development experience. Alissa covered a wide variety of topics, such as event-based fundraising, messaging, and applying for grants. Because the Food Bank works with a wide variety of

groups, such as church food pantries, sober living houses, and children's backpack programs, Alissa provided tools any of the groups could use to help them fund their hunger-relief programs, while acknowledging that fundraising is not a "one size fits all" topic.



The first workshop, a popular one, was "Fundraising 101." It was taught by Alissa Mackiewicz, Food Bank Board Member.

The next workshop focused on "Increasing Healthy Food Access in Your Food Program." It was taught by Food Bank staff members, Laurel Moffat and Nicole Westrope. The Food Bank is making a concerted effort to promote healthy foods among our partner agencies and the topic of this workshop supported our nutrition strategy. Some of the suggested ideas presented during the workshop were inviting SNAP Nutrition Educators out to your food pantry to do a nutrition demo during a distribution day, including recipes with healthy foods such as produce, and assisting clients with signing up for programs like the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Vouchers.

The third workshop's title was "Hunger Advocacy" and it was taught by Laura Lester, a lawyer by training and

director of the Alabama Food Bank Association. Advocacy can be a powerful tool for increasing the amount of meals available to those struggling with hunger, and also creating awareness around issues surrounding hunger. This workshop focused on equipping partner feeding programs with ways they can best advocate for hunger issues.



The health workshop focused on "Increasing Healthy Food Access in Your Food Program." It was taught by Food Bank staff, Laurel Moffat and Nicole Westrope.

The final workshop, in September, was taught by Food Bank board member Clarissa McClain, the WHNT19 evening anchor; its topic was "Public Relations: Telling Your Story." The workshop was designed to help our partners

**"The Food Bank believes anything we do to help our 250 partners helps the whole community and ultimately helps feed more people in need."**

communicate how they benefit their community, how they help those in need, and ways others can get involved. Thus, they were excited to learn more about messaging, social media, and working with local media to "get the word out."



The third workshop was "Hunger Advocacy" and it was taught by Laura Lester, executive director of Alabama Food Bank Association.

We look forward to further occasions to invest in our partners with additional professional development

opportunities, such as Hunger Summits and workshops, in the coming months.

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**Would you like to help the Food Bank by volunteering in our warehouse?**

Signing up is easy! • Call 256-382-0296 • Email Laura Fincher at [communityrelations@fbfna.org](mailto:communityrelations@fbfna.org)