

Landscape Scan: Food and Hunger Relief Supports in Waldo County, Maine 2022

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Introduction

In 2022, Waldo County Bounty (WCB) conducted a landscape scan of food and hunger relief supports in Waldo County, Maine by interviewing and surveying individuals and organizations in the hunger relief and farming sectors. The landscape scan sought to better understand assets and gaps in local hunger relief and ways to foster collaboration among local hunger relief agencies, as facilitated by WCB. In conjunction, WCB created a [Catalog of Hunger Relief Assets in Waldo County](#).

WCB connected with 12 farms and 28 hunger relief subjects—40 total. Of the farms, 10 completed Survey Monkey surveys and 2 spoke with WCB by phone. All of the farms WCB interviewed participated in WCB Farm-to-Pantry and/or Veggies For All (VFA) activities in 2021.

Of the hunger relief subjects, 6 completed Survey Monkey surveys and 22 spoke with WCB by phone. The hunger relief subjects included 17 of the 18 area food pantries and soup kitchens, a comprehensive

set. They also included individuals working in RSU 20, 22, and 71, which represent about 14 Waldo County schools. Find a complete list of interview subjects in the Conclusion.

Farming Landscape in Waldo County

There is no known record of how many farms operate in Waldo County. A 2017 USDA study¹ recorded about 500 farms. The study also reported an 18 percent decrease in farms between 2012 and 2017.

General Findings: Many farms provide produce to food access programs, such as Good Shepherd Food Bank (GSFB), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and direct donations.

The percentage of the farms's sales going to food access efforts was mostly small or unknown, with a couple of exceptions.

Of the things WCB did that were most helpful to farmers, the overwhelming answer was buying produce from them.

The farmers we spoke to also really appreciated the ease of going through Daybreak Growers Alliance (DGA), who most of them were already working with. Many were grateful for an outlet for last-minute abundance from their farms. Farmers who worked with VFA expressed appreciation for how flexible and easy it was to coordinate donations and gleaning.

Hunger Relief Landscape in Waldo County

Waldo County has numerous hunger relief assets²: food pantries and soup kitchens; schools; gleaners, community gardens; and related supports at the county, state, and federal levels, such as Good Shepherd Food Bank (GSFB). **Yet, hunger remains high in Waldo County**³.

Food Pantries and Soup Kitchens

¹ [2017 Census of Agriculture Waldo County Profile](#)

² [WCB Catalog of Hunger Relief Assets in Waldo County](#)

³ 19.5% of people of all ages experience food insecurity in Waldo County, according to [Waldo Community Action Parters 2021 Community Needs Assessment](#)

Around 18 food pantries and soup kitchens offer hunger relief programs in Waldo County⁴. Most distribute food once or twice a month; a handful offer weekly distributions; and one offers more regular services Monday-Friday (Belfast Soup Kitchen). Little River Church in Belfast and Crossroads Food Pantry in Morrill stand out for offering food distributions in the evening.

Most provide groceries; some provide prepared meals; and some provide some other essential goods, such as dish soap and toothpaste. Some provide emergency food distributions to those in immediate need outside of normal food pantry hours and during emergencies, such as COVID-19.

Food pantries do not operate in Lincolnville, Waldo, Prospect, and Unity Township. Multiple food pantries serve the Belfast area⁵.

Schools

Most elementary, middle, and high schools provide universal free breakfast and lunch; meals during the summer months; and school gardens. Some offer onsite food pantries, take-home food boxes, take-home snacks, weekend meals, and backpack programs. Some offer educational programs in gardening, cooking, and, importantly, nutrition.

In sending food home with school children, schools have the potential to provide hunger relief services not only to students but student households, including households who do not typically engage in hunger relief services.

Schools have collected some of the most precise data on food insecurity in Waldo County through free- and reduced-lunch reporting. It is unclear how this data collection could be impacted by Maine's new universal free breakfast and lunch programming, which has a new application process.

Stigma around accepting hunger relief is a real challenge in schools, as in most settings, but some schools have had success overcoming this with creative programming, such as school gardens and prominently displayed free and high quality produce offerings.

Some examples of hunger relief programs impacting schools in Waldo County include the USDA's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) and the Maine Farm to School Network.

⁴ [Waldo County Bounty Food Pantry Listings](#)

⁵ Maine Emergency Management Agency Waldo County (WEMA) worked with GSF to create [this 2018 map of food pantry service areas](#). The map is out of date but accurately shows areas that are still without food pantry services and those with overlapping food pantry services in 2022.

Service Providers/NGOs

Hunger relief service providers and NGOs in Waldo County include GSFb Waldo County; the Kindness Programs in Searsport; The Game Loft USDA-Certified Food Service Program; Spectrum Generation's Meals on Wheels; Waldo Community Action Partners (WaldoCAP); the Waldo County YMCA; and the Women, Infants & Children Program (WIC). Their work greatly complements efforts by WCB. Are there redundancies? If so, in what sectors? How might they be decreased?

Government Agencies

Government Agencies furnishing hunger relief in Waldo County include the Reentry Center at the County Garden in Swanville and the Maine Emergency Management Agency Waldo County (WEMA). WEMA noted that one way to address food security is to produce enough food in Waldo County to feed Waldo County, an approach that falls in line with larger statewide initiatives, such as Mainers Feeding Mainers, a GSFb program committed to getting "fresh and nutritionally balanced Maine-harvested food to Maine families in need."

As the [Catalog of Hunger Relief Assets in Waldo County](#) records, numerous other federal and state programs also impact hunger in Waldo County, such as "food stamps" via SNAP.

Food Councils/Gleaners in Neighboring Counties

Food councils recently launched in nearby Lincoln and Knox Counties, and they appear to have found meaningful ways to impact parts of local food systems, from farmers to food pantries. Other related organizations in counties adjacent to Waldo County include Healthy Communities of the Capital Area (serving Kennebec), Healthy Northern Kennebec, Bangor Area Food Council, Somerset Food Resilience Taskforce, and Healthy Acadia (serving Hancock and Washington Counties).

Gleaning groups in nearby counties include the Lincoln County Gleaners, Knox County Gleaners, Central Maine Area Gleaners, Merrymeeting Gleaners (serving the 14 towns surrounding Merrymeeting Bay), and the Downeast Gleaning Initiative (serving Hancock and Washington Counties). These groups hold regional gleans and sometimes collaborate with VFA on gleaning events in and near Waldo County. All of these gleaning groups are part of the Maine Gleaning Network, which harvested 273,000 lbs of food in 2021. VFA harvested 35,000 lbs in 2021.

The Mid Coast Hunger Prevention Program offers dynamic hunger support from its base in Brunswick and operates the Food Security Coalition of Mid Coast Maine, which connects hunger relief organizations throughout the region.

The Maine Network of Community Food Councils is committed to "resilient, vibrant and self-reliant local and regional food systems" and working to "increase the capacity of local level food systems efforts through collaboration, coordination and resource sharing."

Programs to Facilitate Hunger Relief Efforts Across Maine

The Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, Forestry (DACF) operates the Ending Hunger AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) Program, which sends VISTA members to complementary organizations to build essential capacity.

GSFB operates the Building Advocacy Leadership Program, which collaborates with others in the hunger relief sector to foster advocates.

Standout Hunger Relief Assets and Needs in Waldo County

Assets:

Food

- GSFB provides significant food distributions for hunger relief to participating area food pantries, schools, and, at times, hospitals. It recently began distributing its hunger relief, as well as TEFAP distributions, in Waldo County—formerly only at GSFB’s Hammond facility—and food pantries report major time and cost savings as a result of the closer distributions.
- The Reentry Center program at the County Garden in Swanville grows about 200,000 pounds of free produce on a 63-acre property for area hunger relief agencies and other community organizations.
- The Waldo County YMCA conducts food drives, runs the Fill the Bus food drive campaign, and offers a seasonal free produce table inside of the facility.
- WaldoCAP provides such direct hunger relief as: holiday food baskets in partnership with Heroes for Hunger; summer school program in partnership with USDA with distribution sites in several community centers; easy-to-prepare meal kits for veterans and seniors; and the Resource Advocates program, which serves people with COVID-19. Its other key assets include community partners, transportation, grants, and ability to gather volunteers.

Storage

- Waldo County Technical School has two 8x40' refrigerator/freezer units that are available to Waldo County hunger relief organizations as of spring 2022. Overseen by Belfast Soup Kitchen, which is now accepting requests to use the units.
- Looking ahead, WEMA intends to build a 3500-sq-ft warehouse with refrigeration/freezer capacity and a loading dock for tractor trailers at the County Garden (expects to begin accepting contractor bids summer 2022). The loading dock could facilitate GSFb/the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) distributions, which use tractor trailer trucks. TEFAP provides commodity food products for food pantries.

Food Pantries

- Belfast Soup Kitchen is at the forefront of destigmatizing hunger relief in Waldo County through multiple efforts. It works to create a welcoming space for food insecure “guests”; for instance, it offers in-person coffee and dining programming, holds special events with entertainment, and welcomes the community to attend monthly in-person “conversations.” It finds ways to offer more foods that people want to eat, including prepared foods and easy-to-prepare foods, such as soup mixes featuring dried beans and dehydrated local vegetables. It also maintains regular hours Monday-Friday and facilitates access to wrap around services through such community partners as Belfast Public Health.
- Crossroads Food Pantry in Morrill is the Salvation Army service unit for Waldo County, providing “financial assistance to people who qualify by issuing them one-time vouchers for up to \$100 for just about anything that a family might be in need of (heating fuel, rent, electricity, etc).”
- Jackson Food Pantry has a cargo truck and leads on large food pickups that it cannot always take advantage of due to other employee commitments. The pantry could coordinate with others able to facilitate the pickup to share the food.
- Volunteer Regional Food Pantry in Thorndike is a “rural distribution organization” and receives certain bulk foods that it shares with other agencies.

Schools

- School districts have had success distributing food boxes via school bus.
- RSU 71 launched a successful backpack program with support from Greater Bay Area Ministerium.
- The Troy Middle School offers food boxes. Its school garden donates surplus produce to Belfast Soup Kitchen, hosts a Give and Take Table-style farmstand, and creates seed packets using saved seeds (it sold 800 seed packets via Belfast Co-op in 2021). During COVID, it created a free CSA program using garden produce for 10 families.

Meetings

- WCB hosts quarterly WCB Network Meetings for those in the hunger relief and agriculture sectors, as well as members of the public concerned about the local food system
- GSFb Waldo County hosts quarterly meetings for those in area hunger relief sector
- Belfast Soup Kitchens hosts monthly in-person “community conversations” about hunger as well as less frequent Greater Belfast meetings
- Food Security Coalition of Mid Coast Maine hosts a monthly meeting for Midcoast hunger relief organizations
- Maine Feeding Partners hosts biweekly meetings for those in hunger relief sector statewide

Needs:

- Several food pantries need transportation improvements, such as a refrigerated cargo truck, for picking up bulk drop offs during hot weather.
- Volunteers (particularly strong people with trucks)
 - The Kindness Project, Neighbors Cupboard, Northport Food Pantry, RSU 3 Fruit and Vegetable Market and Food Boxes Program, and Waldo County YMCA.
- Deliveries and ways to access underserved clients:
 - Neighbors Cupboard, Waldo County YMCA, Greater Bay Area Ministerium, Jackson Food Pantry, the Kindness Project (specifically senior clients), Northport (specifically senior clients), RSU 20, RSU 22, RSU 71, WaldoCAP, and Waldo County YMCA (area trailer parks). RSU 22 and RSU 71 are exploring ways to more effectively deliver summer meals (RSU 22 has farflung clients and needs transportation or a site where people congregate [there may be some extra Electronic Benefit Transfer/EBT funding out there for this]; RSU 71 is exploring transportation and volunteer solutions).
- Ways to make hunger relief offerings more accessible, including reducing stigma:
 - Little River Church Food Pantry (especially young people), Belfast Soup Kitchen, and RSU 22. RSU 22 specifically noted that offering food boxes indoors, instead of a pickup option, reduced participation. RSU 71 found offering fresh veggies and a backpack program inspired client engagement/reduces barriers.
- Dry Storage
 - Neighbors Cupboard, Little River Church, the Belfast Game Loft, and Belfast Soup Kitchen.
- Education related to gardening, nutrition, cooking, and other food security essentials:
 - RSU 22, RSU 71, Troy Howard Middle School, and the Belfast Game Loft.

- General supplies:
 - Various changing needs, e.g. takeout containers and half pan-size lids for Belfast Soup Kitchen; paper bags for Beacon of Hope; ziplock bags or another way to parcel bulk foods for Jackson Food Pantry; can openers for clients without kitchen supplies

Waldo County Bounty

Waldo County Bounty operates the Farm-to-Pantry and Gardening Programs; manages Veggies For All Gleaning, a program of Unity Barn Raisers; and raises awareness of food access policies. In 2021, WCB purchased 27,000 pounds of food from local farms for hunger relief through a partnership with Daybreak Growers Alliance; purchased 8,000 pounds of food through the 2021 Farm Box Pilot, a partnership between WCB, DGA, and the Belfast Soup Kitchen; gleaned 34,000 pounds of farm-grown food through the Veggies For All; and provided educational and material support, such as seedlings, through the Garden Program. It also operated 13 Give and Take Tables across the county, where home gardeners can donate crops and anyone can take the crops at no cost.

Assets (based on feedback from all hunger relief subjects):

- Quality of ingredients: 9
- VFA: 7
- Give and Take Tables: 3
- Seedlings: 3
- WCB's unique mission to support both farmers and people experiencing food insecurity
- Community connections: inspiring more food pantries to communicate and convene

Ideas for improvement:

- "Down the road, put on a workshop with table exhibits so everyone can see what's going on and who's doing what; table talk exercises."
- "Partner with the Farm and Sea to School Initiative to access clients who do not typically seek out hunger relief."
- Improve food pantry communications to foster collaboration with a monthly newsletter, that way "we could all know what everyone is doing."
- Help to establish a holistic community garden (one where everyone works together instead of individualized plots).

- Cultural intervention: create a space to talk about nutrition and gardening.

Should WCB facilitate the creation of a food council?

Yes: 12

Maybe: 2

No: 1

Additional feedback related to food council:

- “Waldo County is a special case because it is so spread out. To be effective, you really need to engage all elements of the food system: Farmers are often busy and sometimes reluctant to engage, but WCB may have more luck since farmers are core to its model. Food councils have been great at fine-tuning to meet local needs, and they have the ability to make state and federal legislation and advocacy relevant at a local level. It’s rare for folks to have those skills. I think the real value of food councils is that they deal in food, which is a need everyone shares. Among the main challenges is that a single person often holds it all together.”
- “Most important are networking and resources, including what programs are available and who to contact. Bring in more providers, not only food pantries.”
- “All pantries have surpluses and shortages that we could work together on. We all need to talk more.”
- “There are sometimes overlaps of efforts and work gets diffused; food pantries could align our calendars better so food distributions are offered at times that work for everyone; we could put an ad in the local paper every week so people can find us.”
- “Somebody needs to. But I’d keep it to convening with an eye toward developing an independent group. The best food councils should be focusing not just on increasing local agricultural efforts but how that integrates with the larger system and how the two can complement each other and not work at odds. The reality is, most of our food still comes from major national distributors. I don’t think they are at all opposed to the growth of local but entities like strong, neutral food councils need to emerge to help shape that relationship. For example: encouraging all the corner stores to sell only or mostly local lettuce when it’s lettuce season, or to keep a corner of the freezer stocked with local meats.”
- “WCB could help communicate what produce types are being grown, such as at the County Garden, to fill in gaps.”
- “I think a WCB food council would be a hard sell for some people.”

- “I don’t think a food council is necessary. We all already work really well together, and Mary Turner of Good Shepherd serves the area already.”
- “Provide practical information in the most concise form possible: Delivery dates, locations, communication opportunities from GSFB in particular.”

General Findings:

One size does not fit all for food pantries and soup kitchens.

Most food pantries and soup kitchens have operated relatively autonomously for years, and, as a result, each agency has developed its own unique style of operations. Hunger relief volunteers/organizers generally believe they have a firm grasp of the food insecurity landscape in their area. WCB will have to do more research to identify widely shared needs and practical solutions.

Many hunger relief subjects would like to access more fresh produce through WCB.

Due to limited deliveries – often just once a month – many food pantries and schools said they have a hard time accessing high quality fruits and vegetables. Some highlighted special challenges during the winter months, while others specifically requested more “durable” fruits and vegetables that can survive the trip home on a bus in a backpack.

The following said it would be great to receive more produce in some format from WCB: Little River Church, Liberty AMVET, Waldo County YMCA, and the Belfast Game Loft. The following expressed interest in learning more about and potentially engaging in WCB’s Farm-to-Pantry/VFA Programming: The Kindness Project, Beacon of Hope on the Hill, RSU 20 Food Pantry, and RSU 71.

Fresh produce breaks down barriers to hunger relief.

Over and over again, subjects said WCB programming provides produce at a quality level they cannot otherwise access and that clients really appreciate and enjoy the produce. “It makes us feel good about what we’re giving,” said one food pantry operator. “It helps with a sense of happiness.” Another operator said, “The great variety of produce caused people to keep coming back for more food month after month. Clients felt valued rather than being stuck with cast-offs.” One educational professional found that offering fresh veggies specifically inspired client engagement/reduced stigma. The landscape scan found that reducing stigma is a widely shared objective in area hunger relief.

Most subjects support the idea of WCB facilitating the creation of a Waldo County Food Council.

An overwhelming majority of subjects were receptive or felt positively toward the idea of WCB becoming or facilitating the creation of a food council. The newly formed Lincoln and Knox food councils appear to have found meaningful programs to impact the local food system. For instance, WCB was told by one interview subject that the Knox County Food Council has helped schools serve more locally grown produce to students by installing a single coordinator who manages complex liability issues. Other ideas include working with WIC to help farmers accept the new eWIC card and creating a hunger relief hotline for Waldo County.

There seems to be a movement toward establishing food councils across Maine right now, and other parallel supports that could assist WCB in this effort, such as the Maine Network of Community Food Councils.

There is a general sense that underserved populations exist in Waldo County and that building out food deliveries would help.

Numerous interview subjects believed there is a sizable population of food insecure residents who cannot access or who elect to forgo hunger relief services in Waldo County, and, though no data exists to prove the point, some subjects have successfully sought out underserved populations on their own, such as by delivering food to area trailer parks. Also, some food pantries reported an increase in clients picking up additional food for homebound neighbors, etc.

Conclusion

No other report exists that attempts to provide a snapshot of food and hunger relief supports in Waldo County, Maine to the authors' knowledge. The landscape scan attempts to begin to create an accurate picture of hunger relief work in the area. Based on the correlating [Catalog of Hunger Relief Assets in Waldo County](#), it is the opinion of the authors that the landscape scan represents a sizable portion—perhaps 70 percent—of current hunger relief supports based in Waldo County overall. As such, it offers a good assessment of current hunger relief activities and offers insights into how WCB can foster collaboration, improve programming, and address gaps in local efforts.

The scan offers data from a majority of the farms that WCB works with but a small percentage of the total farms in Waldo County.

In making the landscape scan publicly accessible, Waldo County Bountly hopes to improve awareness of the local food system and foster conversations within the hunger relief and farming sectors. For

instance, are there shared needs that we can meet as a community? Additionally, we hope others will contribute to the landscape scan, continuing to hone this snapshot of local hunger relief supports, by suggesting additions and changes. Please contact Waldo County Bounty at waldocountybounty@gmail.com. Relatedly, Waldo County Bounty welcomes feedback in regard to its other open-source research: the [Catalog of Hunger Relief Assets in Waldo County](#) and Literature Review of Waldo County Food Insecurity [LINK COMING SOON].

For this landscape scan, WCB collected data from the following farms and hunger relief subjects:

Farms:

1. Flood Farm
2. Calyx Farm
3. Songbird Farm
4. White Pine Farm
5. Johnny's Select Seeds
6. South Paw Farm
7. VillageSide Farm
8. Ironwood Farm
9. New Beat Farm
10. Chase's Farm
11. Dickey Hill Farm
12. Four Waters Farm

Hunger Relief Organizations

13. Belfast Soup Kitchen
14. Volunteer Regional Food Pantry
15. Greater Bay Area Ministerial Food Cupboard
16. Little River Church Food Pantry
17. Jackson Food Pantry
18. Palermo Food Pantry
19. Belfast Game Loft Soup Kitchen
20. Beacon of Hope on the Hill
21. Islesboro Food Pantry
22. Liberty AMVETS Food Pantry
23. Neighbors Cupboard, Inc.
24. No Greater Love Food Pantry

25. Northport Food Pantry
26. Searsport Congregational & Methodist Church Food Cupboard
27. The Open Door Soup Kitchen
28. The Crossroads Food Pantry
29. Good Shepherd Food Bank Waldo County
30. Kindness Project - Missions Outreach Committee of Searsport
31. The Reentry Center at the County Garden in Swanville [based on WCB's interviews related to [this article](#)]
32. Waldo County YMCA
33. Waldo Community Action Partners
34. Waldo County Emergency Management Agency
35. RSU 20
 - a. RSU 20 includes Searsport Elementary, Middle, and High Schools, Searsport
36. RSU 22
 - a. RSU 22 includes two schools in Waldo County: Leroy H Smith Elementary and Samuel L. Wagner Middle School, Winterport
37. RSU 71
 - a. RSU 71 includes Ames Elementary School, Searsport; Capt. Albert Stevens Elementary School, Belfast; East Belfast Elementary School, Belfast; Gladys Weymouth Elementary School, Morrill; Kermit Nickerson Elementary School, Swanville; Troy Howard Middle School, Belfast; Belfast Area High School, Belfast; BCOPE Alternative Education High School, Belfast; and Belfast Adult Education, Belfast.
38. Troy Howard Middle School
39. Women, Infants & Children Program (WIC)
40. Lincoln County Food Initiative Food Council

Future research should focus on the following individuals, organizations, and groups:

1. People with unmet need in Waldo County
2. Liberty Area Food Pantry
3. Spectrum Generations' Meals on Wheels
4. Waldo County Technical Center
5. RSU 3
6. Food Security Coalition of Mid Coast Maine
7. Full Plates Full Potential
8. Waldo County Hospital Clinics

9. Let's Go Waldo!
10. The Islesboro Community Center
11. Farmers WCB is not currently working with
12. University of Maine Extension Service
13. Others?