



Generosity of Spirit

“These people donating, they give us our respect back.”

— George, a client at Centre Street Food Pantry in Newton, on the impact of GBFB donors.



Inside Harvest:

- Meeting People Where They Are
- Community Coming Together in Newton
- Takeda and Mobile Markets
- The CHA Revere Mobile Market
- Volunteer Spotlight
- Feeding More, Thanks to Food Recovery



Dear Friends,

Every winter, as the days get colder, we are reminded of so many who struggle to choose between heating or healthy eating. No one should have to make these tough choices and we must ensure everyone has access to proper nutrition, no matter their circumstances. This issue we explore the concept of Food as Health. And the various ways we are working to provide nutritious food and promote healthy communities.

Increasingly, The Greater Boston Food Bank (GBFB) finds itself at the intersection between nutrition, hunger and health, serving as the central provider of nutritious food to nearly 600 food programs across Eastern Massachusetts. Our partnership with Cambridge Health Alliance and Point32Health to serve CHA's Revere Mobile Market with fresh produce is just one example. We're also seeking and sharing solid data that enables us to better address the social determinants behind food insecurity.

Because, to quote our partners, Takeda—also profiled here—that data will 'better allow us to address the need at hand, and also get ready for the next need.'

GBFB has long prioritized nutrition in our mission and through creative partnerships—such as our Food Donation Recovery Program, which enables us to help our neighbors in need. You, too, can partner with us—join us by giving your time, your donations or your awareness of our mission.

Because our research also tells us that we've still got some way to go to fully address the need at hand.

Gratefully,



Catherine D'Amato
(she/her)
President and CEO



Meeting People Where They Are

Five years ago, GBFB made a strategic decision to expand Mobile Market partnerships with community health centers, recognizing its role in providing nutrition interventions. Today we run eight Mobile Markets at Community Health Centers across Eastern Massachusetts. Not only did the decision address GBFB's goal to 'meet people where they are' and connect healthy food with food insecure patients, but it also offered a powerful opportunity to glean solid data for improving impact.



Mobile Markets serve our community and provide a critical source of fresh produce to neighbors in need.

Led by GBFB and researchers from CHA, we launched the HC PRODUCE Study in February 2019 to better understand barriers and facilitators to Mobile Market attendance at the Cambridge Health Alliance (CHA) in Revere. Short for 'Health Center PROgram to support food security through nutrition Coaching and produce marketEts,' researchers initially surveyed 853 patients and followed up with 715 of them a year later. The study provided a sharper lens on the Market, whose participants are more likely to be: younger (30–49); Asian or another race; have a language of medical care other than English; make less than \$1000/month; and live in Revere, although not exclusively.

The big takeaway, however, was that stigma did not emerge as a significant market barrier, as it often does at other food access sites. Accessing the Market through a healthcare provider goes a long way to maintaining dignity, as it turns out. Participants also spoke at length about their desire for fresh produce—the essence of the Market—for their children. Typically, such produce has proved prohibitively expensive for many clients.

"It [the market] showed me that my health insurance plan or my health clinic cares about its customers and wants to improve their health by offering vegetables and fruit that maybe some people have never tried before," said one regular Market participant.

"There's a unique opportunity for the healthcare system to provide food in a less stigmatizing way—in a dignified way, and this research validates that." adds Dr. Lauren Fiechtner, senior health and research advisor for GBFB and pediatrician at Mass General for Children.

Learn more at:

[GBFB.org/about](https://www.gbfb.org/about)



Volunteers at the Centre Street Food Pantry set up along the side of Furber Lane in Newton every Tuesday morning to welcome and serve those in need in their community.

“Without this, we’d be lost”

George Duarte, 65, has known good times and not-so-good times. A former phlebotomist and waiter, where he made as much as \$800 a week, all that came to an end when he injured his back. On disability for the last 13 years, his income today is \$760 a month, which must cover all expenses, including the cost of his diabetes medicine and high winter utility costs.

“I freaked out when I first went on disability,” he says. “I wondered, ‘What happened? Am I going to have a meal tomorrow? How am I going to survive?’”

Many people turn to family for help in such times. George’s family is a cat—a cat that also requires medicine. Yet he remains undeterred, filled with a generosity of spirit and purpose that has powered him through deprivation and bouts of homelessness.

“I give food to people in my neighborhood... I tell people, ‘If you don’t have something, come on over. I’ve got beans. I’ve got spaghetti. I’ve got pasta. I’ve got sauce.’ I like to share.”

“I did Thanksgiving for 11 people. They came to my door. I gave them a plate... I’ve always had something for somebody to eat. That’s the way I was raised.”

He adds, “It’s important for donors to know that they’re not just helping one guy.”

These people donating, they give us our respect back. I’m thankful. I really am, and I want these donors to know, hey, we thank you.

—George

As a current client of Centre Street Pantry in Newton and a former food pantry volunteer in Brookline for 10 hours a day, George Duarte understands well and appreciates the dynamic of volunteerism and charitable giving.

“I know what it’s like when getting food and you see a smile on someone’s face. It makes you feel good. Just like we smile when we get it. These people donating, they give us our respect back. I’m thankful. I really am, and I want these donors to know, hey, we thank you. I say, if I ever [have money to give], I’ll be donating to these places. I’ll be helping. I’ll be giving out food like crazy.”

“Without this, we’d be lost.”

Takeda and Mobile Markets: Better health, brighter future

Reflecting the values of its native Japan, Takeda Pharmaceuticals maintains a polite and modest face to the world, regardless of its position as one of the world's biggest biopharma companies. In Massachusetts alone, it employs close to 9,000 employees.

Two years ago, Takeda U.S. was given the opportunity to re-imagine how to make philanthropic giving more meaningful and tied more closely to its mission: 'Better health, brighter future.'

"We decided our focus would be on helping build the social infrastructure for our most vulnerable communities, in health, environment, learning and providing," explains Chris Barr, Head of U.S. CSR & Philanthropy. 'Providing' meant food system equity, and Takeda became the lead sponsor of GBFB's entire Mobile Market program, with a four-year grant that runs to 2024.

What's a Mobile Market? A farmer's-market style food distribution program set up at easily accessible partner sites within high-need communities, often outside, allowing clients to easily 'shop' at each table for food—mostly fresh produce, but also dairy products and high-protein items.



Bags of kale ready to be distributed at a Mobile Market.

Takeda's sponsorship helps support 33 GBFB Mobile Markets across Eastern Massachusetts serving approximately 10,000 households per month, addressing the needs of a diverse range of targeted audiences. Ten markets—formerly known as the GBFB Brown Bag program—are focused on seniors. Another 10 are community-focused, in which GBFB partners with community colleges, veterans, housing authorities and others. Eight are allied with health centers and produce-focused, such as the CHA Revere program, and five partner with K-12 schools.

The CHA Revere Mobile Market: 'It's Almost Like Getting a Prescription'



The CHA Revere Mobile Market provides 20–30 pounds of fresh food to community members in need.

"Food is medicine," says Carl Paratore, chief audit executive of Point32Health, GBFB Board of Director member, and deeply invested in the three-way partnership they've built with Cambridge Healthcare Alliance (CHA). Together, the three organizations launched the CHA Revere Mobile Market in March of 2018, following research by CHA that showed fully 51 percent of its patients suffered from food insecurity.

Held the first Saturday of every month at CHA's Revere facility, GBFB's produce-focused Mobile Market provides 20 to 30 lbs. or 7–8 items of fresh produce per person in need. Typically, the market serves some 450 families; in 2022, it delivered nearly 137,000 pounds of food provided by GBFB to CHA patients and community residents, says Jean Granick, CHA Community Health manager and market director.

Research on food insecurity plays an ever-greater role at GBFB, revealing social determinants that help shape strategy and drive tactics. For example, GBFB's 2019-2020 study of the Revere market showed that of the many typical barriers to client access to food pantries—e.g., mobility, time, reaching seniors, stigma—the latter never emerged as an issue.

"Often, our volunteers are CHA medical staff, so it's not uncommon that some of the patients will see their doctors there," Paratore explains. "It creates a different feel, a different vibe, in the relationship."

Adds Granick: "So, getting food from your doctor's office—it's almost like getting a prescription."

Volunteer Spotlight: Ira and Julie Sperling

“As retirees, we were looking for volunteer opportunities to give back,” says Ira Sperling of South Boston. “We thought this would be a good place to start.”

Ira and Julie, his wife, have given their time to GBFB for nearly seven years, both of them working twice a week in the warehouse to assemble meal boxes, sort and separate frozen foods and train new volunteers, among other tasks—one of which involves a funny story about sweet potatoes.

Citing the physicality of the work and interaction with other volunteers as motivators, they quickly add that the opportunity to work with warehouse supervisor Kelly Sajous, a 26-year GBFB veteran, is key. “He’s one of the primary reasons we keep returning,” they explain.

“We’re committed to the premise that no one should go hungry in Eastern Massachusetts—or anywhere,” Ira and Julie say. “Go—immediately,” they advise those who’ve not yet volunteered.

And, to those who have: “Come back. Bring your family. Stay another day. Break a sweat. Fill some boxes. Help somebody who’s hungry get something to eat.”



Ira and Julie Sperling volunteer at GBFB twice a week.

Feeding More, Thanks to Reducing Food Waste

‘Retail food recovery’ has become a form of art—and a critical strategy—for addressing hunger and reducing waste in the U.S., ever since pilot programs began expanding across the country in the early 2000s.

Feeding America reports that this system where retail stores set aside perishable and non-perishable products for food banks and their partner agencies—has grown 300 percent in the last 10 years. In 2021, its network recovered 2 billion pounds of food from retail outlets such as Walmart, Wegmans, Costco, and Starbucks.



Last year, GBFB’s Retail Food Recovery Program totaled over 10.66 million meals or nearly 12 percent of its total food distribution. On behalf of our 600 network partners, GBFB’s Food Acquisition Team coordinates and connects our food pantries to their local grocery retail stores to make pickups of donated food that otherwise could have gone to waste.

First launched in 2009 with two retailers, the program now partners 160 GBFB partners with 28 local retail food donors and 660 store locations, including Amazon, Stop & Shop, Shaw’s, BJ’s, Target, & Trader Joe’s, and its newest, Dollar General, just to name a few. And it is always on the lookout for new prospects. “We’re fortunate to have many retailers here in Eastern Massachusetts supporting our mission,” says Emily Yerby, GBFB’s senior manager of local food donors. And she explains that, while these initiatives are many times coordinated at the corporate level, it’s the bonds that she and her team build that strengthen partnerships locally within the community to improve efficiencies, help to reduce food waste and increase food access.

“Our team are the conduits of data, and we manage relationships—that’s what we do,” Yerby says. “Sharing our network data showcases the impact our retail partners are making. That way, we can make sure we’re developing and broadening our donor relationships, mitigating food waste, and providing equitable access to a variety of food items like fresh produce, dairy and meat for our agency partners and their clients within the community.”



Spring for Meals

Supported by



Fresh food for our neighbors in need

March is National Nutrition Month so there's no better time to Spring for Meals and help support GBFB's work of providing fresh, healthy food to our neighbors in need across Eastern Massachusetts.

Due to the high cost of fresh fruits and vegetables, they are often the first items removed from shopping lists for those managing tight budgets and struggling with food insecurity.

With your support, and a matching gift from Delta Air Lines, we can continue to purchase and distribute fresh produce and healthy food through our network of more than 600 partner hunger-relief agencies and through GBFB programs like our free Mobile Markets.

Join us:



[GBFB.org/SpringForMeals](https://www.gbfb.org/SpringForMeals)