

Resilience, Innovation, & Dignity

INSIGHTS FROM COMMUNITY
FOOD GRANT REPORTING &
APPLICATION DATA 2024–2025

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The success of the 2024–2025 Community Food Grants would not have been possible without the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS), our grant partners, and the many individuals who committed their time and energy to tracking receipts, submitting timely reports, and most importantly, feeding Coloradans. Provecho Collective is grateful for the trust you've placed in us to administer these funds and support the partners doing this essential work. Together, we create greater collective impact than any of us could achieve working alone.

“ My family has been greatly helped by the help offered here. The food is of good quality and my children love it. We are happy not to have to worry about food every month. Thank you very much for the support you have provided to our family. ”

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Introduction

This report draws on data from the Community Food Grants program between September 2024 and September 2025 to highlight the current realities facing food pantries across Colorado. Community Food Grants (CFG) provide funding to food banks and food pantries statewide to increase access to fresh Colorado-grown and culturally meaningful foods.

The state legislature first allocated funding for this program in 2018 and has continued to invest each year to help address food insecurity across the state. Provecho Collective has administered the program since 2021, including the 2022–2023 allocation (\$2,351,000), 2023–2024 supplemental funding (\$5,000,000), 2024–2025 allocation (\$2,746,500), and the current 2025–2026 funding (\$1,700,000).

The insights presented herein are gleaned from data that represent 83 food pantries and 5 food banks funded during the 2024–2025 grant cycle, as well as 972 pantry neighbors who completed a survey in Spring 2025 and applications submitted by 190 food pantries for the 2025–2026 grant cycle.

Provecho Collective's Vision

A Colorado where everyone can access the food they choose, where they want it, and when they need it.

Provecho Collective's Mission

Building a movement for a more responsive, equitable, and sustainable food system by shifting power to our Colorado communities.



Key Insights

A Lifeline Amid Rising Demand

Grant funding and donations are a “lifeline” amid rising demand and supply challenges, providing the capacity for staff to offer services with dignity.

Local Resilience in the Face of Federal Disruption

The federal funding cuts and immigration crackdowns disrupt Colorado’s hunger-relief efforts, forcing local networks to shoulder the burden.

Commitment to Community Voice

Across Colorado, food pantries center community members as experts, ensuring both dignity and efficacy by listening and learning from those they serve.

Defining Culturally & Spiritually Significant Foods

A shared definition of culturally and spiritually significant food can be framed as foods that provide nourishment beyond calories.

Disciplined Budgeting & Local Reinvestment

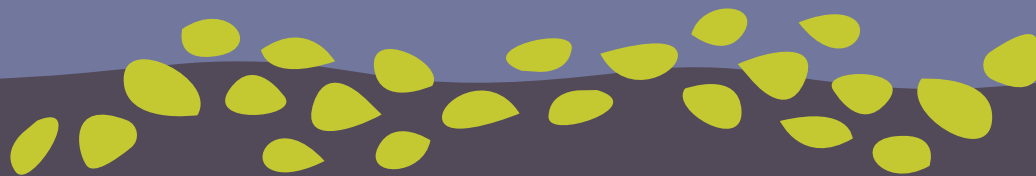
Food pantries and food banks practice disciplined budgeting strategies to ensure consistent access to high-need items like protein and culturally relevant foods, while reinvesting dollars into local Colorado producers.

Mutual Benefit in Local Sourcing

Prioritizing local producers creates mutual benefit across the food supply chain and hunger-relief efforts.

A Persistent Proximity Problem

Colorado’s climate, growing season, available farmland, and geographic spread limits the variety of local foods available.



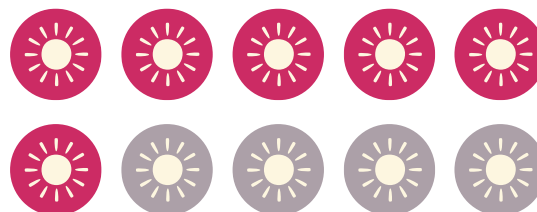
A Lifeline Amid Rising Demand

Grant funding and donations are a “lifeline” amid rising demand and supply challenges, providing the capacity for staff to offer services with dignity.

For many organizations, grant funding or donations are a lifeline during an intense period of rising community need, inflation, and resource scarcity. Purchasing power is a linchpin in their ability to respond to surges in demand when other funding sources are cut or unreliable.

Prior to the federal government shutdown, 6 in 10 food pantries (60%) experienced an increase in demand from 2024 to 2025. For these food pantries, that equates to **an average of 200 more people needing food access each month**, or 137% of last year’s demand.

Most organizations are serving new community members, and many report that returning families are requiring more frequent assistance due to SNAP cuts, layoffs, inflation, and broader economic instability.



6 in 10
food pantries

experienced an **increase in demand** prior to the government shut down.

These food pantries are serving **200 more people each month**, on average.

Food pantry staff across Colorado share concerns about food supply, with **66% saying the greatest impact of grant funding is the ability to address supply challenges**. However, causal issues of supply shortages vary, with some observing an increasingly inadequate food supply, and others pointing to insufficient funding to purchase the needed items. Food supply was the top reason for limiting the number of times a single family can be helped within a month. Similarly, the most frequent challenge reported by community members is needing to shop more often than they are permitted to.

“

Our partner agencies are already seeing more people than they've ever seen. Going forward, we'll see less food in the system and more people will need it.

- Feeding Colorado Food Bank

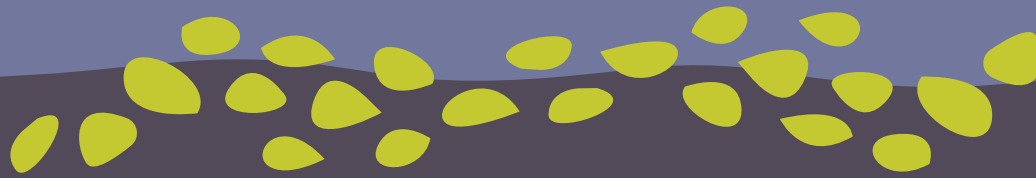
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We are already seeing supply issues at the Food Bank and are bracing for another increase in food costs.

- Food Pantry, Southwest Colorado

Food pantries are working to increase their budgets for essential services, a difficult challenge with scarce funding sources. Among pantries who have experienced an increase in demand, 67% have been able to expand their budget to almost match this growth rate. **However, 10% of all food pantries saw a drastic increase in demand (average of 150% of numbers served in 2024) while operating at 70% of their previous budget.**

Food pantries emphasize how funding for food also expands their operational capacity and emotional bandwidth. With essential inventory covered, some organizations are able to redirect staff time and energy toward volunteer recruitment, community engagement, and operational improvements. For many, grant funding represents both practical and psychological relief — affirming that hunger-relief missions matter to Coloradans.

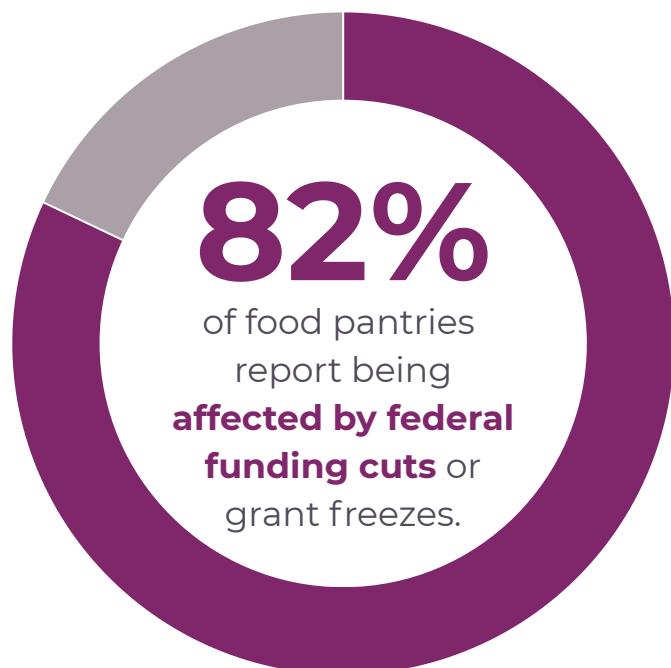


Local Resilience in the Face of Federal Disruption

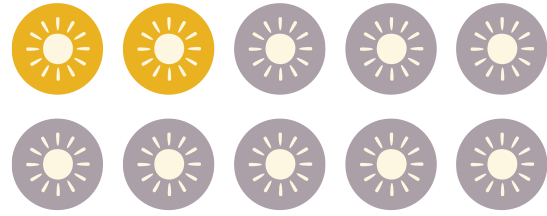
The federal funding cuts and immigration crackdowns disrupt Colorado's hunger-relief efforts, forcing local networks to shoulder the burden.

A new presidential administration ushered in significant shifts in federal funding priorities, program freezes, and policy rollbacks. These changes rippled through Colorado's food access network, producing immediate and often destabilizing effects. **About 82% of food pantries reported being affected by federal funding terminations or grant freezes.**

The most frequently cited challenge was the sudden loss or suspension of federal food assistance and related funding streams, such as the Local Food Purchasing Agreement (LFPA), The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), and AmeriCorps. A parallel theme was the rise in fear and instability among immigrant and mixed-status households.



About 64% of food pantries reported that federal immigration enforcement has negatively affected their organization's safety and security. While food pantries are describing "an almost exponential growth rate" in food insecurity, **two in 10 food pantries (20%) across Colorado report a measurable decline** in participation, most frequently among Latine and immigrant families. Most communities are **attributing this decline to fear of violent immigration enforcement, ICE visibility, and community distress concerning raids**. Food pantries are operating in an "atmosphere of anxiety" that affects both community and staff, with some participants too fearful to attend distributions or community events. Despite these pressures, food pantry staff demonstrate extraordinary adaptability and resilience.



2 in 10 food pantries

saw **decreased demand** for their services prior to the government shutdown, most attributing this to **fear of ICE visibility and community distress concerning raids**.

“

We have changed the NAME of our DEI committee [...] but are continuing all efforts. We have developed new procedures to address if/when ICE comes to our facility and are messaging our support of all participants, regardless of immigration status. This has meant significant extra work, but is necessary to make sure we are serving our community in the most effective way possible.

- Food Pantry, Denver Metro

Their acts of strategic resilience reflect a sector that remains mission-driven even amid turbulence. The response of community food providers to federal upheaval serves as a **powerful testament to their collective resilience, innovation, and deep-rooted commitment to dignity and inclusion.**

Commitment to Community Voice

Across Colorado, food pantries center community members as experts, ensuring both dignity and efficacy by listening to and learning from those they serve.

Grant dollars from CFG's 2024-2025 funding cycle supported an **intentional shift toward nutritious, fresh, and culturally meaningful foods that community members wanted** and gave them a sense of belonging. This alignment between mission and practice built trust with community members and provided staff with a renewed sense of purpose during a turbulent funding climate.

Within the hunger-relief community, food is seen as the foundation upon which other forms of stability are built. Access to nutritious food isn't just about meeting hunger needs, it also enables participation and engagement in other critical programs.

“

Two of our programs provide a prepared meal at the start of each class so that families can come together over a healthy meal and experience an important family bonding moment. We notice that when families are hungry, they are less able to concentrate and benefit from upstream strengthening and educational resources. As expected, they are focused on the crisis of feeding their families and themselves.

- Food Pantry, Southern Front Range of Colorado



The meal/food supplement to our reentry programs has many times encouraged them to follow through with program attendance and recommendations they have received. Many times, they have attended just to get the food that is available and find that the program and recommendations are beneficial to them.

- Food Pantry, Denver Metro

Stable funding for food access makes long-term outcomes and impact possible, enabling service providers to sustain both crisis response efforts and ongoing support programs.

Food pantries are increasingly **using community engagement as a guiding star** in their work. This feedback is collected through both formal and informal methods, with more than half of food pantries using a combination of the two. Many organizations **emphasize building strong, personal, and trust-based relationships** with community members.



Repeated, face-to-face interactions help build trust, an essential foundation for honest feedback... Through these trust-based relationships, we gather ongoing information and feedback about what's working, what's needed, and how it can better support the community.

- Food Pantry, Denver Metro

Organic, immediate feedback sourced during distributions is valued over formal surveys. Food pantry staff explain that real-time data allows for real-time adjustments that respond to emergent needs. Additionally, over half of food pantries opt for mixed-method options to ensure they collect complete data. **About 75% of pantry neighbors (n=868) were asked about at least one need or preference they have regarding the food they receive.**



Food pantries are collectively moving away from the charity model, which is characterized as aid for the needy, and shifting toward hunger-relief models that center their community members as experts. These efforts to elicit community voices, with feedback instigating shifts in how pantries serve, respond, or provide safe and equitable access to food. Examples of these data-informed changes include:

- **Being more intentional about cultural and spiritual food needs**
- **Shifting to stocking more fresh, nutritious items**
- **Removing access barriers like ID requirements**
- **Serving new populations**
- **Moving to market-style/client-choice models**
- **Implementing reservation systems and safety protocols**

“

We shifted to a client-choice model that honors dignity and allows families to select foods that meet their cultural, dietary, and personal preferences.

- Food Pantry, Denver Metro

“

We focus on creating safe, inclusive spaces where everyone is welcomed regardless of immigration status, income, or background.

- Food Pantry, Denver Metro

Food pantries activate the funding they receive to ensure dignity and community voice are at the center of the experience they offer.

Defining Culturally & Spiritually Significant Foods

A shared definition of culturally and spiritually significant food can be framed as foods that provide nourishment beyond calories.

Over 80% of food pantries are purchasing culturally or spiritually significant foods. Using the definitions provided by frontline service providers and their community, Provecho Collective surfaced three possible definitions for “culturally or spiritually significant food”:

1.

Foods tied to cultural or ethnic traditions providing a sense of belonging, affirmation of identity, and nourishment beyond calories.

2.

Foods meeting religious or spiritual dietary requirements and ceremonial needs (like halal, kosher, vegetarian during fasting, and foods for religious observances).

3.

Community-identified foods and community-specific ingredients needed for traditional meal preparation, as defined by community voice and feedback – and often expressed through specific examples of ingredients.

The general consensus is that
culturally and spiritually significant foods are those that provide nourishment beyond calories.

Culturally significant foods connect people to their **heritage, faith, and sense of belonging**. These foods reflect the diverse traditions and identities of the communities we serve; therefore, **specific foods and ingredients must be determined by community members themselves**.

“

When we talk about culturally relevant foods in our work, we’re referring to foods that are familiar, meaningful, and appropriate for the communities we serve—not just nutritionally, but culturally and spiritually as well. We recognize that food is deeply tied to identity, dignity, and tradition, so we take intentional steps to ensure what we provide reflects that.

- Food Pantry, Denver Metro

The top listed items relating to culturally significant foods are: fresh produce, meat/protein, fruit, beans (pinto and black), rice, eggs, tortillas, and spices/herbs/oil. Importantly, **all top-listed culturally significant food items, aside from rice, can be sourced from Colorado-local** producers and food hubs.

Some notable culturally significant ingredients that can be sourced from Colorado producers include:

Vegetables, Herbs, & Beans

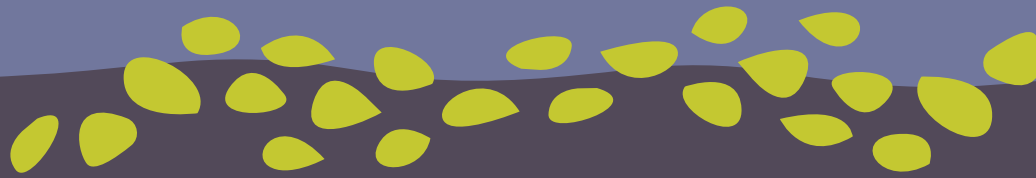
pinto beans, peppers/chiles, tomatoes, cilantro, onions, potatoes, greens/lettuce, corn, collard greens, carrots, squash

Proteins

eggs, chicken, beef/ground beef, pork, halal meat, goat, bison

Breads, Flour, & Grains

tortillas, masa, harina, flour



Disciplined Budgeting & Local Reinvestment

Food pantries and food banks practice disciplined budgeting strategies to ensure consistent access to high-need items like protein and culturally relevant foods, while reinvesting dollars into local producers.

Food pantries' budgeting strategies reflect both short-term survival tactics — budget-stretching, bulk buying, filling inventory gaps — and long-term resilience-building — strengthening local supply chains, forging equity-based producer partnerships. Grant funding allows organizations to **stabilize access to core food staples while also investing in community resilience**. It bridges gaps in protein access, supports dignity and cultural responsiveness, and keeps dollars circulating in Colorado's local food economy.



We approached the funding with a disciplined, period-based budgeting method. Rather than front-loading or reacting to short-term spikes, we divided the funds evenly across the months of the grant period. By allocating the funding evenly, we ensured that our community would not experience service gaps. We prioritized purchasing core staples such as meat, dairy, canned goods, fresh produce, and essential hygiene items—products that are often most needed and hardest to access for our underserved populations. Additionally, we took care to monitor pricing fluctuations and food availability from our suppliers to make strategic purchases when prices were lower or bulk options were available. This helped us maximize quantity and quality without sacrificing nutritional value.

- Food Pantry, Denver Metro

Several food pantries described **adopting time-based budgeting because it ensures that their communities do not experience gaps** in service between deliveries, during high-demand seasons, or due to federal funding terminations and freezes.

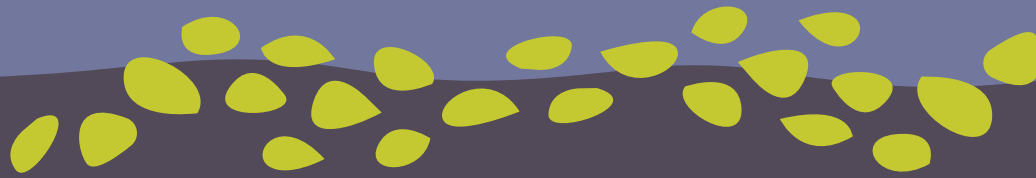
These survival tactics also required trade-offs between cost and quality. Some programs opt to purchase lower-cost or more processed items to stretch limited funds, while others strategically allocate a portion of dollars to high-impact items — like milk, eggs, or protein — despite their higher expense. **Protein emerged as the most cited inventory gap that funding or donations helped to fill.**

“

For many of our community members, meat is a critical component to a balanced diet and is always in high demand. However, meat is expensive and especially hard to obtain through recovered or donated sources. We used grant funds to purchase culturally- (e.g., halal) and nutritionally-relevant (e.g., protein) meats from a small business supporting Colorado's ranchers, farmers, and producers.

- Food Pantry, Southern Front Range

Over half of food pantries reported that items such as meat, eggs, and dairy are rarely available through traditional food bank or grocery rescue channels, yet remain among the most requested. Strategic relationships with producers and food hubs were essential to managing these realities.



Mutual Benefit in Local Sourcing

Prioritizing local producers creates mutual benefit across the food supply chain and hunger relief efforts.

Using funding provided for direct food purchases, a total of \$1,620,836.49, or **59% of the 2024–2025 CFG funds, were reinvested into locally grown foods or foods processed within Colorado**. Some food pantries even emphasized “hyper-local” procurement, which created ripple effects such as: strengthening community trust, reducing transportation impacts, and keeping dollars in rural and regional economies. When given the opportunity, **1 in 3 organizations (30%) established forward-purchasing contracts or pre-season purchasing agreements with local farmers**, ensuring a steady supply of fresh food while providing growers with guaranteed income.



When given the opportunity,

1 in 3



hunger relief organizations



established **pre-season purchasing agreements with local farmers**, ensuring a steady supply of fresh food.

“

We wanted this funding to make a difference for our clients, for local food producers, and for the overall economy of our area. We facilitated our first pay-forward contract with a producer this summer and he has told us directly that our agreement is allowing him to expand operations and grow more food for our local market.

- Food Pantry, San Luis Valley

By supporting local supply chains, grant partners contributed to producers' ability to stabilize sales, expand operations, and invest back into local agriculture. **The result is a closed-loop system grounded in mutual benefit.**

“

What's neat is that these producers then give back to our organization. If they have a surplus of a certain cut of meat or some fresh lettuce, they will donate it to our pantry.

- Food Pantry, Northwest Colorado

“

The beef producer we built a relationship with due to CFG funding is now selling to two other businesses in our town, and he has since thanked us for introducing him to new markets.

- Food Pantry, Southwest Colorado

As relationships across the food system are sustained, or even deepened, the energy and effort for systems change can be magnified by increased community capacity. Unfortunately, **expense is a consideration for local procurement, listed as the top challenge by 12% of food pantries.**



A Persistent Proximity Problem

Colorado's climate, growing season, available farmland, and geographic spread limits the variety of local foods available.

Gaps or absences of local producers in rural areas is a consistent concern throughout the many cycles of CFG funding. In the 2024–2025 grant cycle, **23% of food pantries identified gaps or needs for additional producers in their region.** Yet, even with these gaps in local food supply chains, 92% of food pantries were able to procure some amount of local foods.

Colorado's growing season, climate, water availability, and agricultural economy greatly impact what can be feasibly grown in the state. Some rural grant partners discussed the prevalence of cattle ranches, which may or may not engage in smaller markets, as well as a complete absence of farms focusing on produce.

The seclusion of rural communities in Colorado reinforces the issue of transportation and storage infrastructure. Even in communities with access to vegetable farms, Colorado's short growing season also spells a lapse during the winter months when these items are not available.



We live in a very rural area where most crops are for livestock. This funding did help us with purchasing meats from local farmers, but we unfortunately do not live in an area with access to a lot of locally grown produce.

- Food Pantry, Southwest Colorado

“

In our rural, mountainous community we have but one grocery store, which is a small business, and can really only grow beef cattle. Our closest Farmer's market is 45 minutes away and we did not have the staff capacity to develop relationships with them this year or to navigate the transport.

- Food Pantry, Central Colorado Mountains

However, **food pantries who face challenges of hyper-local food access do not dismiss the importance of local food economies.**

Instead, they lament the challenges they face and share a vision for a more resilient food future.

“

We also faced challenges in sourcing culturally appropriate foods locally. Many of the items that are most meaningful and familiar to our community — such as certain fruits, vegetables, and pantry staples — are not grown or produced in Colorado and often come from California. This highlighted a significant gap in our local food system and reinforced the need to support more diverse, culturally responsive food production within the state.

- Food Pantry, Northwest Colorado

These **geographic and climatic barriers reveal both the limitations and possibilities of local food procurement in Colorado.** While food pantries remain committed to supporting local economies, they recognize that building a truly resilient and culturally responsive food system will require strategic investment.



Conclusion



Strategic public investment, paired with community-centered administration, can transform how Colorado addresses food insecurity. Despite facing unprecedented federal disruptions, food pantries across the state are making choices that reflect the strategic resilience of a sector that remains mission-driven even amid turbulence. The response of community food providers to federal upheaval serves as a powerful testament to their collective resilience, innovation, and deep-rooted commitment to dignity and inclusion.

As public and private donors and volunteers consider how to contribute to this movement, the lessons learned here point toward a path forward: building a food system predicated on relationship-driven procurement, reverence for community knowledge, and a commitment to feeding all people who live in Colorado.

Get in touch

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