

# North Valley Food Bank

## SHUTDOWN AND SNAP BENEFIT FREEZE FAQ

We understand that the freeze of SNAP benefits has created deep concern across our community. Many families who rely on this program for groceries are now facing uncertainty and worry.

At North Valley Food Bank (NVFB), we have been preparing for this moment.

Earlier this year, we anticipated changes to SNAP and took proactive steps to ensure we could meet increased demand. We expanded our grocery store hours, rented offsite warehouse space to store more food, and increased our volunteer capacity.

Over the past several years, we have built strong systems and strengthened logistics to move and store large quantities of food efficiently across Northwest Montana.

This challenge is not new to us. Our team has navigated crises before, and our staff and volunteers are well equipped to respond quickly and compassionately. Because of the generous support of our community we are ready to meet this moment and we are here for our neighbors.

Here are answers to some of the most common questions we've received about the SNAP emergency and NVFB's response:

### 1. Food distribution services

#### **Will the food bank run out of food?**

No, NVFB will NOT run out of food. NVFB has food for at least six weeks in stock and continues to receive deliveries from the Montana Food Bank Network, local grocery partners, and Montana farmers. We are managing resources carefully and have added additional food procurement strategies to meet higher demand. Our priority is to ensure everyone has access to the food they need.

#### **How long will you be able to help if SNAP benefits don't restart soon?**

We are committed to providing food assistance as long as needed. While we can't predict the duration of the shutdown, NVFB has strong community support and emergency reserves. We are also coordinating with partner organizations to make sure food continues to move where it's needed most.

#### **Are there limits on how much food each household can receive right now?**

Not at this time. Our free grocery store model remains client-choice, and households are welcome to take what they need. We do our best to make the following food groups available each week: canned vegetables, canned fruit, grains or pasta, fresh produce, milk, meat, and bread. The only limited food item we have is meat. We distribute meat based on the size of your household. Other than meat, there are no limitations on what you take home with you. If food supplies become constrained at any point, we will communicate changes clearly and well in advance.

### **Will distributions be canceled or reduced because of the shutdown?**

No. All regular food distributions, including our free grocery store in Whitefish and our mobile pantries in Trego, Olney, Columbia Falls and Essex are operating as usual.

### **Do I qualify for food assistance if my SNAP is frozen?**

Yes. Everyone is welcome at NVFB. There are no eligibility requirements and we do not require documentation. You do not need to show proof that your SNAP has been frozen to receive food.

We believe that everyone deserves the food they need. There is no judgment around how much customers need or should take. We believe that food is not, and should never be, a privilege.

We ensure that community members have access to healthy and diverse food. Our goal is to fill the gaps between where your resources end and your plate is full.

### **Do I need to show ID or paperwork?**

No. We never require ID or proof of income. If it is your first visit, we will ask you to complete a two-page intake form.

Our intake form is intended to collect demographic information of all household members that we can use to articulate the needs of our community and apply for necessary funding.

All personal information is kept in a confidential database and will not be shared outside of North Valley Food Bank.

### **Can I get food right away when I visit the free grocery store?**

Yes. You can receive food right away. Please try to come during the opening hours of our free grocery store. Tuesdays: 2:00 pm - 6:00 pm, Wednesdays: 10:00 am - 4:00 pm and Thursdays: 10:00 am - 4:00 pm.

### **Can I come more than once a month?**

Yes. You can come whenever you need food and we encourage everyone to come no more than once a week. Because we are a limitless pantry, you can get the amount of food you need for your family when you come.

### **Can I get food even if I've never used the food bank before?**

Absolutely. Whether you've been here many times or this is your first visit, you are welcome. Over the past few weeks, we have seen many neighbors coming for the first time, you are not alone.

### **Are opening hours changing because of the shutdown?**

No. NVFB's hours remain:

- **Whitefish free grocery store (at 251 Flathead Ave, Whitefish):**
  - Tuesdays: 2:00 pm - 6:00 pm
  - Wednesdays: 10:00 am - 4:00 pm
  - Thursdays: 10:00 am - 4:00 pm
- **Mobile Pantries:**
  - **Trego** (at TFS Community Hall): Fridays, noon – 1:00 pm
  - **Olney** (at Olney Fire Hall): Fridays, 11:15 – 11:45 am
  - **Columbia Falls** (at the Columbia Falls Kids Foundation Building at 540 4th Ave West): 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of the month, noon – 1:00 pm
  - **Essex** (at Izaak Walton Inn): 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday of the month, 10:30–11 am

Please check our website or social media channels for any future updates to hours.

### **Will there be additional or emergency food distributions?**

We are monitoring demand daily and will add distributions if necessary. Updates will be shared on our website, social media, and through local media.

### **Do the mobile pantries have enough food for everyone?**

Yes. We are sending additional food to our mobile sites in Trego, Olney, Columbia Falls and Essex to accommodate increased need. Please arrive during scheduled hours. Everyone will be served.

### **Will your deliveries to your rural partners continue as usual?**

Yes. NVFB will continue to deliver to our partner pantries in Bigfork, Browning, Columbia Falls, Eureka, Kalispell, Libby, Martin City, Troy, and Yaak. Rural food access remains a top priority and we are coordinating with statewide organizations to address any increased needs.

## **Where does the food bank get their food from?**

We receive food through community donations, federal commodities, and purchasing. We do our best to support local farmers and ranchers. You will likely receive local food items throughout the year, especially during summer.

## **2. Community Support and Funding**

### **How can I help my community during the SNAP benefit freeze?**

You can donate money, food or volunteer your time to NVFB or your local food bank. If you want to learn more, attend Community Tour Day on Wednesday Nov 19th 6-7 pm. Monetary donations are the most effective way to help because they provide flexibility, efficiency, and equity in addressing immediate and evolving community needs.

Unlike food or material donations, which require sorting, storage, and additional transportation, financial contributions allow us to purchase exactly what is needed, when and where it is needed most. This flexibility ensures that resources can be directed toward filling critical gaps, such as acquiring fresh, nutritious food that is often unavailable through grocery rescue or donation streams.

In times of crisis, needs can change overnight. Financial contributions make it possible for us to adapt quickly, whether that means increasing food distribution hours, covering transportation costs for mobile pantries, or purchasing perishable items like milk, eggs, and produce. Every dollar donated translates directly into nutritious meals for families, while also sustaining the long-term capacity of food access programs across Northwest Montana.

### **How many people are impacted by the SNAP benefit freeze and how will this impact NVFB?**

3,111 households (5,885 individuals) in Flathead County accessed SNAP benefits in September 2025. 1,375 households (2365 individuals) in Lincoln County accessed SNAP benefits last month. The monetary amount of SNAP benefits in both counties was \$1.3 Million in September 2025.

In September, we provided food assistance to an average of 550 households (1,400 individuals) weekly. In a worst case scenario, NVFB anticipates a 200% increase in food bank visits because of the SNAP benefit freezes.

### **Should I run a food drive in my neighborhood?**

We are deeply grateful to see so many of you stepping up to help your neighbors during this difficult time. The generosity and creativity in our community are powerful reminders of how much we care for one another.

We also want to make sure your compassion has the greatest possible impact.

While well-intentioned, small independent food drives and pop-up pantries can unintentionally create inequities in distribution, duplicate efforts, or even result in food safety challenges.

NVFB already has the infrastructure, transportation systems, cold storage, and partnerships in place to move food safely, efficiently, and equitably to the people who need it most across both our local and rural communities.

If you are hosting a food drive, we encourage you to drop off collected food directly at NVFB or your local food bank. We'll make sure your donations are quickly distributed through our free grocery store, and mobile pantries.

Your energy, initiative, and compassion are what make our community so strong. Together, by using existing systems and working collaboratively, we can make sure every donation reaches as far as possible.

### **How is my donation used during a crisis like this?**

Every dollar goes directly toward purchasing and transporting food, supporting our staff who manage increased distributions, and keeping our trucks running across the region. All funds are used to meet urgent community needs and every \$2 donated turns into one nourishing local meal for a neighbor.

### **Didn't the food bank just receive a lot of funding from the Great Fish Community Challenge? Why are you asking for more help now?**

We are incredibly grateful for the overwhelming generosity our community showed during this year's Great Fish Community Challenge. Because of your support, North Valley Food Bank has been able to expand our reach, strengthen our logistics, and ensure that thousands of families across Northwest Montana have consistent access to healthy, nutritious food. Your donations help us keep our trucks running, our coolers stocked, and our doors open to everyone who needs assistance.

However, while this funding is essential, it is also carefully budgeted to sustain our year-round operations, including our free grocery store, mobile pantries, and rural food deliveries. These funds, along with the contributions we traditionally receive through our Year-End Campaign, allow us to provide steady, equitable food access throughout all seasons.

This year, we are already experiencing a more than 20% increase in demand for food assistance, even before the challenges of winter set in. A sudden surge in need, such as what we're experiencing during the SNAP benefit freeze, can quickly stretch our food budget beyond what we planned for.

Rather than running a separate emergency campaign, we are simply asking our community to make their Year-End gifts a little earlier this year, in November if possible. Early giving allows us to plan ahead, purchase food strategically, and ensure that we can respond swiftly and responsibly when the need spikes.

Your continued partnership makes it possible for every neighbor to have access to the food they need to thrive.

**I prefer in-kind donations. Can I donate specific food items that help most during this emergency?**

Yes, at this time, we especially welcome food donations for Thanksgiving, including turkeys, turkey breast, flour, salt, spices, soups, pie crust, pie filling, stuffing, and gravy mix. We also always welcome shelf-stable proteins like canned chicken, tuna, and peanut butter, breakfast favorites, pasta, rice, cereal, and kid-friendly snacks.

**If the shutdown lasts a long time, will you need additional financial support?**

Most likely, yes. Sustained and additional support from our community ensures we can continue to serve hundreds of families each week across multiple counties. Ongoing community generosity keeps food flowing even when public benefits are frozen.

**Do you still need new volunteers?**

Yes. We rely on volunteers to fill over 70 shifts a week to stay operational.

A full volunteer schedule during times of crisis helps us tremendously and allows staff to focus on vital tasks such as food procurement and distribution, customer assistance, fundraising, and partnership coordination.

If you would like to join our amazing community fill out a volunteer application at [northvalleyfoodbank.org/get-involved/donate-time/volunteer](https://northvalleyfoodbank.org/get-involved/donate-time/volunteer)

Direct any questions to our Volunteer Coordinator, Whitney England, at [whitney@northvalleyfoodbank.org](mailto:whitney@northvalleyfoodbank.org)

**I have a group interested in volunteering. Do you have group shifts available?**

Thank you so much for reaching out and for your group's interest in volunteering with us! We're so grateful for your willingness to help support our work—especially during this very busy time as we respond to increased community needs related to the SNAP benefit freeze.

Right now, we're not able to accommodate special volunteer times or requests outside of our regular schedule. The best way your group can help us is by signing up for our group volunteer shift on Mondays from 4–5 p.m., or by filling individual volunteer roles on our regular schedule.

We truly appreciate your understanding and flexibility as we focus our efforts on meeting the growing needs in our community. Thank you again for your desire to help out — it means a lot to our team and the families we serve!

### **How are you deciding who gets food first if supplies are tight?**

Our commitment is to provide equitable food access. We have systems in place that ensure we have similar food items and quantities available during all opening hours. If supplies ever run low, we will communicate clearly and work with partners to restock immediately.

### **Are you coordinating with other food banks?**

Yes. NVFB continues to collaborate with all local food banks, the Montana Food Bank Network, and other partners to share resources, coordinate deliveries, and ensure food reaches every community in need.

### **Will the SNAP shutdown affect smaller rural pantries that rely on your deliveries?**

Yes, all local food banks will be impacted. We are in close contact with our partner pantries in Bigfork, Browning, Columbia Falls, Eureka, Kalispell, Libby, Martin City, Troy, and Yaak. We will continue regular deliveries and are working collaboratively to meet their increased needs.

### **How can I help my neighbors who rely on SNAP?**

Check in on friends and family. Offer to share a meal, donate to the food bank, volunteer, or help someone get to a distribution site. Simple acts of care go a long way in times like these.

### **How can we as a community make sure no one goes hungry during this crisis?**

Stay informed, share accurate information, volunteer, donate, and do your best to spread calm.

Thank you for standing with us during this challenging time. Your compassion, generosity, and trust make it possible for us to continue providing food access to our neighbors with dignity and care.