

NEWS & POLITICS

Alleged ringleader in \$250 million meals fraud case goes on trial this week

Aimee Bock, who led Feeding Our Future, may testify in the trial. She will face the jury along with Salim Said, who owned Safari Restaurant in Minneapolis.

By **Jeffrey Meitrodt**  
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Aimee Bock, executive director of nonprofit Feeding Our Future, speaks to the Star Tribune on Jan. 27, 2022, just days after the FBI searched her St. Anthony offices. (Shari L. Gross/The Minnesota Star Tribune)

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Three years after FBI agents [raided Aimee Bock's home and business](#) to kickstart one of the largest fraud investigations in Minnesota history, the alleged ringleader of an extraordinary [pay-to-play scheme](#) featuring dozens of co-conspirators will finally get her day in court Monday.

During Bock's much-anticipated trial, prosecutors will portray the controversial [founder of a St. Anthony nonprofit](#) known as Feeding Our Future as the mastermind who figured out how dozens of people could steal \$250 million from a federal program meant to feed children in need, court records show.

Bock has [denied the allegations](#), saying she received no improper payments and was unaware of any fraud taking place.

Her trial will be only the second in the sprawling case. Security measures will be bolstered after last year's trial ended with an [attempted bribe](#) of a juror, a rare [incident](#) that drew international media attention and resulted in jurors being sequestered for their safety.

Of the 70 people [charged since 2022](#) in the massive case, 30 have pleaded guilty; five tied to a Shakopee restaurant were [convicted by a jury last year](#), and two were acquitted.

At least 13 of the defendants who pleaded guilty have been identified as potential witnesses for the prosecution in the coming trial, court records show. The trial is scheduled to last more than a month.

Also going on trial this week is Salim Said, co-owner of Safari Restaurant, a once-small Minneapolis business that federal investigators have identified as one of the largest beneficiaries of the fraud scheme.

Prosecutors have described the scheme as a brazen effort to get rich fast by falsely claiming to feed thousands of children every day at sites controlled by Feeding Our Future and its partners, including Safari Restaurant.

Feeding Our Future allegedly organized the fraud by recruiting participants [willing to pay kickbacks](#) for the chance to file reimbursement claims for millions of meals that were never provided.

In 2021 alone, prosecutors say, Feeding Our Future received nearly \$18 million in federal funds for its 10% cut of the action, allegedly camouflaged as “administrative fees.”

### What to expect at the trial

The trial will start with jury selection. The process lasted [four days](#) in last year’s trial as attorneys struggled to find jurors who didn’t have strong opinions about the high-profile case.

Prosecutors have said they will show the jury hundreds of documents, including emails, text messages between defendants, FBI surveillance video, invoices and checks tracing money to new luxury car and home purchases.

Witnesses are expected to include FBI forensic accountants and case agents.



The offices of Feeding Our Future are shown Jan. 27, 2022, a week after an FBI raid. (Shari L. Gross/The Associated Press)

In a surprise twist, two defendants slated to join Bock and Said on trial [pleaded guilty last week](#). Eight others charged with Bock in the same indictment are expected to stand trial in April and June.

One defendant [pleaded guilty in 2023](#), and another, Abdikerm Eidleh, a former Feeding Our Future employee, fled the country.

Unlike many of her co-defendants who were accused of improperly diverting millions of dollars of federal funding for their own use, Bock has not been accused of buying [expensive property](#) or [hiding money](#) abroad.

Prosecutors say she personally obtained \$1.2 million in fraudulent proceeds, mostly by giving money to a construction firm owned by her then-boyfriend, court records show.

As the head of Feeding Our Future, Bock paid herself \$190,000 a year. After the FBI searched her business and home, she was forced to turn over \$185,000 from her bank account and the keys to her 2013 Porsche Panamera. Authorities also seized \$13,462 in cash from her.

Prosecutors said bank records show Bock and her boyfriend used proceeds from the fraud to fund their personal lifestyle, including spending more than \$50,000 on travel and “tens of thousands of dollars” on luxury purchases and jewelry.

Since she was charged in September 2022, Bock has lost her Rosemount house and now lives with her parents, said her attorney, Kenneth Udoibok. He said Bock has been unable to find work since losing her job with a ridesharing company.

"If she did this, where's the money?" Udoibok asked in an interview with the Minnesota Star Tribune last week.

In a court filing, he said Bock "did not make any extravagant purchases," and he denied she took a July 2021 trip to Las Vegas that the government says cost more than \$20,000.

Moreover, Bock said in the [2022 interview](#) that her boyfriend's company was paid more than \$800,000 for doing legitimate renovation work at her nonprofit's offices.

Udoibok said Bock wants to testify at the trial, but he has not decided whether that would be the right move.

"To make her the fall girl is unfair," Udoibok said. "I am hoping the jury will see this. Aimee is an innocent woman."



Aimee Bock, executive director of nonprofit Feeding Our Future, speaks publicly for the first time days after the FBI searched her St. Anthony offices in January 2022. (Shari L. Gross/The Minnesota Star Tribune)

According to court records, Said allegedly diverted as much as \$10 million for his personal use by claiming his Lake Street restaurant provided more than 10,000 meals daily.

Prosecutors say Said used some of the money to buy a \$1.2 million home with an indoor basketball court in Plymouth, a \$60,000 Mercedes and a \$47,000 pickup truck.

Said and other business partners also allegedly spent more than \$5 million to buy commercial properties in Uptown Minneapolis and Columbus, Ohio, court records show.

Said's attorneys did not return a request for comment.

### 'Vindictive' prosecution

The case centers around meal programs funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for low-income children after school and during the summer. Meal distribution sites are overseen by "sponsors," like Feeding Our Future.

Bock's nonprofit oversaw more than 200 food distribution sites across Minnesota and quickly grew – from receiving about \$3 million in federal funds in 2019 to nearly \$200 million in 2021.

In court filings, Udoibok argued that the government's case is "potentially selective or vindictive" because Bock sued the [Minnesota Department of Education](#), which [administers the federal funding](#), in 2020 when the state agency tried to block the rapid growth of her operation.




But prosecutors say Bock played a key role in the scheme. As head of Feeding Our Future, she was responsible for ensuring her providers were actually serving the huge number of meals they claimed to be. Instead, prosecutors said in a trial brief, Bock "gave false assurances" when state officials questioned the sky-high meal counts.

In her 2022 interview with the Star Tribune, Bock maintained that she and other Feeding Our Future employees visited meal sites – many of which were overseen by individual nonprofits – as often as once a month to make sure they were following federal guidelines.

"We have verified the nonprofits pass out the food," she said at the time. "We have verified the nonprofits purchase the food."

"I don't have a criminal mind," she added. "Could I be outsmarted by somebody who is good at it? Sure. But I firmly believe that is not the case."

Hadith Ahmed, who said he was Bock's "right-hand man" at Feeding Our Future, [testified last year](#) that the nonprofit had no checks and

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MEALS, UNDER WHOM HE AND OTHER EMPLOYEES ACCEPTED MEMBERS' DONATIONS FOR FEEDING THE STARVING.

“We were not visiting sites,” he testified. “We were all taking kickbacks.”

Ahmed said Bock knew the meal sites were submitting fake children’s names to cover their tracks and that she once handed him a plastic bag full of \$5,000 in cash.

Udoibok sought in court filings to prevent Ahmed from testifying in this month’s trial. The attorney argued that Ahmed wasn’t credible because he said more than 80 times during cross-examination that he couldn’t recall information.

U.S. District Judge Nancy Brasel, who is overseeing the case, denied the motion.

**Correction:** A previous version of this story misstated the date of the start of the trial. It starts Monday.

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Jeffrey Meitrodt is an investigative reporter for the Star Tribune who specializes in stories involving the collision of business and government regulation.

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