**Food Equity Implementation Plan**

The goal of the Food Equity project is to determine whether the food collected by Rachel’s Table’s (RTWM) rescue, gleaning, & purchase programs is being distributed equally or at least relatively equally (equitably) among Rachel’s Table associated agencies. Food collected via Rachel’s Table partnership with the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts (FBWM) is included in the analysis. The project is looking at both the overall pounds of food delivered, and the types of food & non-food products being delivered.

**Methodology- Abstract**

Pounds Analysis:

The data on pounds delivered was collected from entries made by Rachel’s Table volunteers after they drive their daily routes and was broken down by agency.

Data on clients served by the agencies was collected from Rachel’s Table’s Agency List and correspondence with agency contacts by phone and email. Where data was unable to be obtained from agencies, generally due to an inability to get in-touch with anyone from an agency or because an agency doesn’t collect the needed data, an average value using data from all of the agencies in the same service category was used.

Most agencies fall into three service categories, Food Pantries, Meal Services, and Residential Facilities, with some agencies covering multiple categories. It was difficult to determine the number of clients served among the different agency types so after consultation with professors at Smith College it was determined to use Meals Served as a substitute for Clients Served. There is an industry standard which equates 1.2 pounds of food as 1 meal.

The agencies also fall into three categories in relation to the FBWM Partnership. Non-FBWM agencies receive no food from FBWM, Food Bank Enabled Agencies which receive significant, but varying, amounts of the food delivered by RTWM from FBWM donors, and Food Bank non-Enabled Agencies for whom almost all of the food delivered by RTWM is from RTWM donors. This is important because it affects the implementation plan recommendations.

Of the 65 RTWM-associated agencies, 52 were able to be included in the analysis. For the ones not included, it was due to the inability to get/lack of needed data (including defunct and new agencies) or an agency model that didn’t lend itself to being included.

Food Type Analysis:

The Food Type analysis was made qualitatively as data on the number of pounds of each food type is not recorded by volunteers when they drive their routes. That is, what was determined was the percentage of the overall deliveries an Agency received contained a particular food type.

The food types are Bread & Bakery, Dairy & Eggs, Prepared Foods, Non-perishables, Produce, Meat & Protein, & Cleaning & Hygiene. In determining the number of food types a delivery contained as many categories as possible were entered. For example, a Ham & Cheese sub could be categorized as Prepared Food, but it was also entered as Bread & Baked Goods (the sub roll), Dairy & Egg (the cheese), & Meat & Protein (the Ham).

Percentages for each agency were compared to the overall percentages delivered by Rachel’s Table.

**Conclusions**

Pounds Analysis:

This analysis shows food is being distributed very inequitably. A relatively small number of agencies have high Meals Delivered/Meals Served scores (**MDMS**) and a relatively large number with low MDMS scores.

The median (half of the scores above/half below) MDMS for **all** agencies is 6.4%. The number of agencies above or below the median varied significantly among the three different FBWM Partnership categories (Non-FBWM, Food Bank Enabled Agencies, and Food Bank non-Enabled Agencies.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 1** | Non-FBWM | Food Bank Enabled | Food Bank non-Enabled |
| Above median | 9 | 8 | 8 |
| Below median | 8 | 4 | 13 |
| Equal to median | 1 | 1 | 0 |

Table 2 breaks out agencies far above and far below the median:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 2** | Non-FBWM | Food Bank Enabled | Food Bank non-Enabled |
| **Far above median** | **3** | **3** | **2** |
| Above median | 6 | 5 | 6 |
| Below median | 3 | 2 | 6 |
| **Far below median** | **5** | **2** | **7** |
| Equal to median | 1 | 1 | 0 |

One interesting fact is getting a lot of food delivered was not a guarantee an agency would above the median MDMS. Of the 20 agencies receiving over 10,000 lbs of food in 2023, 8 (40%) were nevertheless below the median MDMS. This includes Gray House which received nearly 51,000 lbs in 2023, the second highest overall total of any agency. However, only one agency receiving over 10,000 lbs in 2023 in the Far Below Median group, Margaret’s Pantry.

The reason for this phenomenon is all of these agencies serve a very high number of clients/meals. Gray House serves the third highest number of clients/meals of any agency we work with.

There is a noticeable geographic trend. Most of the agencies in Hampshire County (4 of 5) and Franklin County (3 of 4) are below the median, though the Northampton Survival Center is statistically very close to the median at 5.6%.

While it is not the goal of this project to attempt to bring all our associated Agencies an equal MDMS value the calculations below show the challenges involved in doing so and therefore are illustrative of the challenges involved in making the food distribution more equitable.

To bring all 52 Agencies included to the median MDMS of 6.4% the following would need to occur.

**Table 3**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 680,491.1 | Additional lbs to be delivered to get to 6.4% MDMS for agencies below 6.4% |
| 218,442.3 | # of lbs of food needed to be removed to get to 6.4% MDMS for agencies above 6.4% |
| **413,850.5** | Net additional lbs to be delivered to get to 6.4% MDMS for all agencies |
| 760,210.9 | Total Lbs Rescue, Gleaning & Purchase in 2023, Rachel’s Table & Food Bank routes |
| 54.4 | Percent increase in lbs delivered if shifting donations from agencies above 6.4% MDMS |
| 89.5 | Percent increase in lbs delivered if **not** shifting donations from agencies above 6.4% MDMS |

However, the shifting of food donations shown above can’t occur due to limitations imposed by the FBWM Partnership. Food picked up from FBWM Donors can’t be delivered to non-FBWM agencies. Small amounts of food from FBWN donors in 2023 were delivered to FBWM Non-enabled agencies (5,263.6 lbs out of 300,983.6 lbs or less than 2%), but this is only allowed when the FBWM Enabled agencies don’t take all of the food offered.

The table below shows the situation if only working with Non-FBWM & FBWM non-Enabled agencies, where Rachel’s Table has complete discretion as to where the food is delivered.

**Table 4**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 356,521.5 | Additional lbs to be delivered to get to 6.4% MDMS for Non-FBWM & FBWM non-Enabled agencies below 6.4% |
| 79,850.9 | # of lbs of food needed to be removed to get to 6.4% MDMS for Non-FBWM & FBWM non-Enabled agencies above 6.4% |
| **276,670.6** | Net additional lbs to be delivered to get to 6.4% MDMS for all Non-FBWM & FBWM non-Enabled agencies |
| 760,210.9 | Total Lbs Rescue, Gleaning & Purchase in 2023, Rachel’s Table & Food Bank routes |
| 36.4 | Percent increase needed in lbs delivered if shifting donations from Non-FBWM & FBWM non-Enabled agencies above 6.4% MDMS |
| 46.9 | Percent increase needed in lbs delivered if **not** shifting donations from Non-FBWM & FBWM non-Enabled agencies above 6.4% MDMS |

However, food could be shifted from Food Bank Enabled agencies above the median to those below

**Table 5**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 130,973.4 | Additional lbs to be delivered to get to 6.4% MDMS for FBWM enabled agencies below 6.4% |
| 136,934 | # of lbs of food needed to be removed to get to 6.4% MDMS for FBWM enabled agencies above 6.4% |
| **-5,960.7** | Net additional lbs to be delivered to get to 6.4% MDMS for all FBWM enabled agencies |
| 0 | Percent increase in lbs delivered using above numbers |

However, making this shift is difficult because of the location of the agencies and the food donors. Some of the food donors and agencies are located in Hampen County and others are located in Hampshire County. The partnership is set up such that food from donors in one county goes only to agencies in the same county, with some small exceptions amounting to a very small number of pounds of food.

**Table 6 Hampden County**

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| --- | --- |
| 28,591.2 | Additional lbs needed to be delivered to get to 6.4% MDMS for FBWM enabled agencies below 6.4% in Hampden County (Gray House only) |
| 125,225.4 | # of lbs of food needed to be removed to get to 6.4% MDMS for FBWM enabled agencies above 6.4% in Hampden County. |
| 549.8 | Lbs/week additional needed to bring Gray House to the current median |

**Table 7 Hampshire County**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 102,382.1 | Additional lbs needed to be delivered to get to 6.4% MDMS for FBWM enabled agencies below 6.4% in Hampden County (Gray House only) |
| 11,708.6 | # of lbs of food needed to be removed to get to 6.4% MDMS for FBWM enabled agencies above 6.4% in Hampden County. (Not Bread Alone only) |
| 3,987.8 | # of lbs food delivered to Not Bread Alone from FBWM food donors in 2023 |

These charts show it’s **possible** to bring Gray House up to the current median by shifting ~550 lbs/ week from other Agencies. It would also be **possible** to bring the Hampshire agencies close to the current median by shifting donations from Hampden County to Hampshire.

Whether it is **feasible, desirable,** orwould be **allowed** by the FBWM are questions to be decided.

What this analysis leads to is Rachel’s Table needs to increase the food we collect and deliver in order to make our deliveries more equitable, as shifting food among the donors won’t accomplish the goal.

Food Type Analysis

This analysis was much “noisier” than the Pounds analysis, that is, the data was much more scattered, there were fewer obvious trends but there were a few. Also, more agencies were able to be included in this analysis as it didn’t require data collection from the agencies. 59 agencies were included in this analysis. The agencies not included in this analysis are closed permanently/indefinitely, were closed during all of 2023, didn’t receive any donations in 2023, or are new agencies in 2024.

**Equitability relative to annual number of donations**

Generally, agencies receiving higher numbers of deliveries over the year were more likely to be relatively close to the average Food Type percentages. Of the 25 agencies receiving ≥100 deliveries for the year, 21 (84%) were relatively close to the overall average in 5-7 of the food types (6 food types plus Cleaning & Hygiene products). For agencies receiving ≤100 deliveries only 20 of the 34 (59%) were relatively close to the overall average in 5-7 of the food types.

For the agencies with multiple food types far from the average there were specific reasons for most. Also, to be clear, far from average doesn’t necessarily mean **below** average. For example, St. John’s Friends Place is only close to average for 3 food types, but is far above average in Dairy & Eggs, Non-perishables, and Meat & Protein and only below average in Produce.

**Small-very small numbers of deliveries**. Agencies in this category included MLK Center, the Thrive Center, & Jewish Family Service (not including ESSENtials an RTWM purchase program) all with fewer than 10 deliveries for the year. Square One, Parish Cupboard, FCCMP, & Gandara fit best in this category with 17-76 donations.

**Limited ability/desire to accept certain food types**. This can be related to a lack of refrigerators/freezers, to agency programming, and/or licensing. Agencies in this category include Harm Reduction-Greenfield and -Northampton, Seniority House, High St Adult Medicine, the Care Center, the Dream Center & Hairston House.

**Receiving food from the same food donors**. These agencies receive all or almost all food donations as part of No Call or FBWM routes and therefore tend to contain the same food types. A No call route is one in which particular agencies receive donations on the same day every week from the same donor(s) and are called No call routes because each day’s Dispatcher does **not call** the RTWM volunteer driving the route. Agencies in this category include Manna Soup Kitchen, Main St. Shelter, Stone Soup, Westfield Food Pantry, & St. John’s.

**Trends in General vs. Food Bank Donations**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 8** | **Average Food Type Percentages Across all Deliveries in 2023** | | | | | | |
| Bread & Bakery | | Dairy & Eggs | Prepared Foods | Non-perishables | Produce | Meat & Protein | Cleaning & Hygiene |
| **69.7** | | **17.9** | **38.9** | **6.0** | **28.4** | **39.5** | **1.1** |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 9** | **Average Food Type Percentages General vs. Food Bank in 2023** | | | | | | |
|  | Bread & Bakery | Dairy & Eggs | Prepared Foods | Non-perishables | Produce | Meat & Protein | Cleaning & Hygiene |
| All donations | **69.7** | **17.9** | **38.9** | **6.0** | **28.4** | **39.5** | **1.1** |
| General | 75.2 | 19.2 | 41.7 | 3.4 | 25.3 | 34.7 | 1.1 |
| Food Bank | 40.4 | 12.3 | 23.7 | 19.9 | 44.7 | 65.3 | 1.1 |

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 10 Ingredient/From Prepared Food Donation Percentages General vs. Food Bank in 2023** | | | | |
|  | **Dairy & Eggs** | | **Meat & Protein** | |
|  | Ingredients | From Prepared Foods | Ingredients | From Prepared Foods |
| General | 9.2 | 10.0 | 3.1 | 31.6 |
| Ingrd. Vs. FPF | **47.9/52.1** | | **8.9/91.1** | |
| Food Bank | 3.7 | 8.6 | 52.1 | 13.2 |
| Ingrd. Vs. FPF | **30.0/70.0** | | **79.6/20.4** | |

Table 8 shows the overall percentages of the different types in the donations delivered to agencies in 2023, while Table 9 breaks it down further showing differences between the food types for General donations vs. those for the FBWM donations.

For 2 of the 3 “healthy/healthiest” food types (Dairy & Eggs, Produce, Meat & Protein) the FBWM donations outpace the General donations by substantial margins with Dairy & Eggs being the exception. This trend is probably even more pronounced by poundage, though that can’t be precisely determined.

The reason the food type poundage can’t be determined has to do with the fact that one component in a donation may be counted in multiple categories. For example, a Ham & Cheese sub could be categorized as Prepared Food, but it could also be entered as Bread & Baked Goods (for the sub roll), Dairy & Egg (for the cheese), Prepared Foods, & Meat & Protein (for the Ham) and there is no way to account for the weight of each category. To a much smaller extent this is also a factor in FBWM donations, mostly associated with donations from Cumberland Farms locations.

Table 10 tries to address the issue above by breaking down the Dairy & Eggs and Meat & Protein categories in Ingredient and From Prepared Foods. An Ingredient donation would be something that could be used to cook a meal while From Prepared Food would be ready-to-eat or just needs to be heated up.

* Ingredient Dairy & Eggs might be: Sliced deli cheese, raw eggs, milk, yogurt.
* Prepared Dairy & Eggs might be: Grilled cheese sandwiches, yogurt parfaits, cooked eggs.
* Ingredient Meat & Protein might be: Uncooked chicken, beef, seafood, sliced deli meat, peanut/almond butter.
* Prepared Meat & Protein might be: Turkey subs, tuna salad, fried chicken, frozen turkey pot pies.

Ingredient donations aren’t necessarily healthier or more appropriate to be included in a donation though it may seem that way. For example, an agency with a large percentage of homeless clients or with limited cooking facilities then From Prepared Food donations may be better suited to their clients.

Given that idea, a ratio of Ingredient/From Prepared Food close to 50/50 seems like it might be appropriate. In General Dairy & Egg donations we are very close to that ratio, while in Meat & Protein we are very far away. In FBWM donations we are very far from that ratio in both categories, but we don’t have any way to affect them.

This same analysis can be done in the Produce category, but has not been done to date.

**Recommendations**

Implementation of these recommendations is envisioned as occurring over a period of 3-5 years.

**Recommendation 1: Focus our equitability efforts on the non-FBWM and FBWM non-enabled agencies, especially the smaller agencies.**

Referring to Table 4- In order to bring the non-FBWM and FBWM non-enabled agencies below the current MDMS median to the median RTWM would need to rescue, glean, and/or purchase an additional ~277,000 lbs of food if we were to redirect food from those agencies above the current median to those below or ~357,000 lbs if there were no redirection. These numbers represent an ~36% or ~47% increase in food delivered.

In either case this is a very large increase in the amount of food RTWM would need to deliver. In the former case it’s an increase that’s nearly 75% as large as in the latter. While we have increased the amount of food we’ve delivered significantly recently in recent years (Table 11) and are projected to rescue, glean, and/or purchase well over 800,000 lbs in 2024 most of that increase has come due to Rachel’s Table’s refrigerated van. The van is crewed by a small number of RT’s volunteers and much (large majority?- stats to be developed) of what it rescues is part of the FBWM partnership and is designated for FBWM enabled agencies.

However, if the agencies with the smallest service populations with an MDMS below the median were targeted (Our House-Domus, Longmeadow Adult Center, Springfield Housing Authority, ALIANZA, Hairston House, Care Center, The Thrive Center- HCC, CHD/Community Assessment Program) **only** an additional **<12,000 lbs of food** would need to be delivered. The Behavioral Health Network and Educare, Springfield could probably also be included in this group, but BHN hasn’t gotten a donation since before 11/21 and needed info was not received from Educare so they weren’t included in the analysis.

Table 11

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Total Pounds 2022** | **Total Pounds 2023** | **Pounds Increase 2022-23** | **% increase 2022-23** |
| 436,130.8 | 760,210.9 | 324,080.1 | 74.3 |

Recommendations 2-5 are based on the above facts.

**Recommendation 2: Develop a Food Drive program**

Rachel’s Table receives donations from food drives several times every year, but these are generally unplanned, most frequently late in the calendar year, and require the Operations Manager and/or other RT staff to coordinate the pick-up and delivery of the food.

A Food Drive program could have a regular schedule of food drives from particular people/organizations/ businesses at the same time every year and scheduled throughout the year. There already some existing examples of this including Bassie Baron’s Birthday food drive in August, the Longmeadow HS Music Department fruit donation in November, and the Beans & Rice donation from St. Mark’s Church in Oct/Nov.

We have also engaged businesses in ongoing food drives. In November and December 2022 we engaged Greenfield Savings bank to set up food donation boxes in several branches which they collected at their main branch and an RT volunteer would pick-up and deliver the food. Westfield Bank seems like it could be a good partner in this model. Other banks with more locations in Hampshire (Florence Savings Bank?) and Franklin Counties (Greenfield Savings Bank?), People’s Bank could help with the geographic disparities in food equity.

Also, perhaps their employees, especially for the Hampshire & Franklin County partners could make the deliveries. If this could be developed it would not place an added burden on our current volunteer base and over time some of these people might become regular RT volunteers.

Also, because food drives are primarily composed of non-perishables, they could be directed especially toward those agencies with no/minimal cold storage many of which are among the agencies below the current median MDMS.

**Recommendation 3**: **Develop a cold storage purchase program** (Board member suggestion)

Currently, there is only one agency we work with without any cold storage, High St. Adult Medicine, but there are several with minimal cold storage. These agencies include:

BHN (1 residential fridge w/freezer),

Educare-Springfield (1 freezer, 1 fridge, both commercial),

Hairston House (1 large fridge, 1 small freezer),

Harm Reduction- Greenfield (3/4 size fridge & small, attached freezer),

Harm Reduction- Northampton (1 fridge w/freezer, mostly for staff use),

Highland House (need specific details),

Home City Pantry (1 fridge w/small freezer on top & 2nd fridge/freezer at Bay St.),

Longmeadow Adult Center (1 fridge, 1 freezer),

Main St. Shelter (1 fridge, 1 freezer),

Not Bread Alone (1 fridge, 1 freezer),

Springfield Housing Authority (fridge/freezer, more detail needed)

La Voz (1 fridge),

The Thrive Center (1 fridge, 1 chest freezer),

YMCA of Franklin County (fridge/freezer, more detail needed).

**Recommendation 4- Arrange for smaller agencies to pick up food directly from the RT Van in the JCC parking lot.** (Board member suggestion).

The idea behind this recommendation is the van can’t get to many of the small agencies with food left over from large pickups due to time constraints, so arranging for smaller agencies to come get food remaining from van pickups while the van is parked at the JCC could get them more food. The van would be plugged in (the refrigeration system is normally run by the engine, but can be run by plugging into a 20 amp circuit) to keep food cold if the extra food is perishable.

This would, presumably, only be possible with non-FBWM pickups, a minority of the van pickup’s currently.

Implementation of this recommendation has already started.

A related idea might be to use the van as a mobile food pantry. Some agencies in the RT service area do this so RTWM could consult with them about how it works. This would probably be primarily possible if RTWM buys a refrigerated box truck which could take over most (all?) of the van’s current pick-ups.

**Recommendation 5- Develop No Call routes for the smallest agencies**

Setting up No Call routes for these agencies would ensure they would be getting regular donations. Main St. Shelter is an example of an agency getting very few donations until a No Call route was set up bringing them food from Cooley Dickinson Hospital on Fridays (Tandem Bagels too, initially). This once-a-week donation is enough to put Main St. Shelter above the current median MDMS.

**Recommendation 6- Purchase a refrigerated box truck**

This would allow a significant increase in the overall pounds RT could collect, perhaps helping the medium-sized & larger agencies below the current median MDMS (Gray House, Margaret’s Pantry, Northampton Survival Center, Project Hope, Parish Cupboard, First Baptist Church of Amherst, CSR Food Pantries, Oasis Food Pantry [currently not operating, looking for new site], Amherst Survival Center, S.M.A.R.T. Food Pantry, Salvation Army- Greenfield, MLK Center).

Also, as suggested in Recommendations 5, it might free up the refrigerated van to help with the smaller agencies.

RTWM is already exploring purchasing a refrigerated box truck

**Recommendation 7- Deliver donations collected in Hampshire & Franklin counties ONLY to agencies in those counties**

This is mostly the case, but, for example, the donations picked up from Brookfield Farm (Hampshire County) are brought to Lorraine’s Food Pantry & Salvation Army Holyoke which are located in Hampden County and are above the current median MDMS.

**Recommendation 8- Develop more food donors/volunteers/no call routes in Hampshire & Franklin counties**

This is help deal with the geographic disparity in food deliveries. The No Call routes would be so as to not add to the work of each day’s Dispatcher.