



**ROOTED
+ RISING**

2024
**Year in
Review**



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The change we can make together

As I write this, I am in the midst of my 28th year in food banking, in San Francisco, Boston, Alaska and Oregon. I am days away from moving my family to Pennsylvania so my wife can take her dream job. I am months away from my last day at Oregon Food Bank, after 12 years of advancing change.

Rooted + Rising arose out of our desire to make more change. In 2018, while crafting Oregon Food Bank's vision of building resilient communities that never go hungry, I had an epiphany. Oregon Food Bank could join the food justice movement in a big way. We had the right vision, the right Board and staff and volunteers, the right partners, the right goals and even the right external political environment to make our vision a reality. We just needed more resources.

And thus Rooted + Rising was born, to accelerate our work in community food systems, to modernize our infrastructure, to amplify community power and to strengthen local food banks across Oregon and SW Washington. And you, our community,

have effectively said, "So that's what we need to do? Cool. Let's go!" As I write this we have raised more than \$70 million for those priorities.

This is not now — and has never been — about me, the outgoing President of Oregon Food Bank. It is not about my legacy. It is about ending hunger and its root causes — because no one should be hungry.

It is about the change we can make together. I know that Rooted + Rising will reach our goal. And I know that Oregon Food Bank will be stronger and more innovative than ever in its next chapter.

Because while hunger is big, our collective power for change is bigger.

Susannah Morgan (she/her)
President, Oregon Food Bank

Message from C. Nathan Harris

ROOTED + RISING IS UNQUANTIFIABLE. Even the historic resources we've mobilized fail to capture the magnitude of this effort ... Even as our vision for change manifests as tangible change all around us.

That's because our collective experience is a diverse chorus of cultures, sung by tens of thousands of our neighbors – each with a unique story of toil, heartache, hope and power. *This is us:* A community of many, daring to thrive and prosper against the odds of a system designed to favor only a few.

As our partner Michelle Week of Good Rain Farm puts it, this entails “ ... coming back from debt, from death, from extinction to being here and existing and taking space.” Later you can read more about how Michelle's farm is positively contributing to and feeding our community in a time of turmoil.

We're also educating people about racial justice for food justice, to catalyze support for a national movement. In the words of Rut Martínez-Alicea, Oregon Food Bank's Director of Equity, People, Culture & Administration, “If we can help the food banking community deepen our understanding that ending hunger will require us to look at root causes, we will be tapping into incredible community power.”

And that power is demonstrated through campaigns like Food for All Oregonians to ensure food assistance for all people in this state, regardless of where we were born. Representing Food for All Oregonians coalition partner, Afghan Support Network, Darwaish Zakhil agrees: “Access to food is essential for every individual on the planet. In Oregon, we have the opportunity and ability to bring about this change.”

Together we are indeed making that change happen. From Saddle Mountain to the Western Treasure Valley, Rooted + Rising is channeling resources into community-led change and a more prosperous, more just future.

Thank you for rising with us to realize that future!

I hope you find inspiration from the stories that follow. And I hope you remain with us in this journey of food justice.



C. Nathan Harris (they/them)

Director of Community Philanthropy,
Oregon Food Bank



Photos by Jamie Thrower

Good rain, living soil, **sustainable communities**

A Q&A with Michelle Week, founder of Good Rain Farm



Small-scale agriculture can help alleviate hunger, but small farmers face huge structural barriers to building and sustaining their businesses; especially if they come from Black, Indigenous, Latine or other communities of color. To start reversing the effects of our country's long history of colonization, land appropriation and racism, we must reimagine our entire food system from the ground up.

Michelle Week is doing exactly that. As the founder of ʔast s̓qit, Good Rain Farm in the Northern Willamette Valley, she plans to “make sure everyone gets fed” by bringing Indigenous First Foods back to dinner plates, treating the soil with reverence and passing something on to the next generation of farmers in her tribe. (“First Foods” refers to the more than 300 foods, from Chinook salmon to camas bulbs, that were staples of Indigenous diets and medicine in the Pacific Northwest for thousands of years before colonization.)

Michelle is a participant in Oregon Food Bank's Community Producer Support program. Since 2021, this program has channeled nearly \$5 million to 155 small-scale agricultural producers — 95% of whom are BIPOC — across 19 Oregon counties. In many cases Oregon Food Bank pre-purchases crops that are culturally relevant to these producers, crops that are later harvested and then distributed into communities experiencing hunger. Other times, the fund extends

business grants for land access and equipment. Either way, producers find greater stability and security in their businesses and build new wealth — which benefits us all.

In the Q&A below, Michelle talks about reintroducing traditional Native foods and farming practices.

How did Good Rain Farm, ʔast s̓qit, begin and who do you serve?

This started as a really large garden project in an effort to positively contribute to our community and feed people in a time of turmoil. From there it grew into the food sovereignty project that is today. We primarily serve Indigenous people, including up to 150 Community Support Agriculture (CSA) members. About half receive veggies free of charge. We also donated close to 7,000 pounds of food last year alone to a couple organizations, including Oregon Food Bank.

How do you decide what to grow?

Good Rain Farm grows a variety of culturally relevant foods, anywhere between 70 to 80 different varieties every year. We focus on Indigenous First Foods varieties — a lot of beans, squashes, corns, peppers and edible weeds and greens that are native to the Americas,



in addition to familiar cultivated foods. I'm reintroducing all these native plants to the lands they were removed from, and that soil is probably rejoicing because it gets to interact with its old friend again and do what it naturally wanted to do in this ecosystem.

How has Oregon Food Bank's Community Producer Support program made a difference?

It's helped expand my farm through investment in our community and feeding our community, as well as investments in time- and body-saving, ergonomically-friendly equipment to help weed, harvest and cultivate



GOOD RAIN FARM

NAME:

ǰast sqit (hast squeit) translates to Good Rain in the traditional language of the sngaytskstx (Sinixt), the Arrow Lakes Peoples.

LOCATION:

Northern
Willamette Valley

FOUNDING PRINCIPLES:

ǰast sqit Farm believes in food sovereignty, empowerment, concern for community and honorable stewardship of the land.

“We’re the original land tenders here. We had lived here for thousands of years and found a way to live here in harmony with our ecosystem and our fellow other beings.”

Michelle Week
Good Rain Farm

the land. We’ve been really grateful and appreciative. These kinds of innovative mechanisms allow us to bring careful considerations to how we impact the Earth — and also save our bodies so we can do this work for the long run. Community Producer Support also helps us free up the money we do earn on the farm and funnel it towards accessing land.

Unlike many white farmers in the region, you did not inherit a family farm. What are some of the obstacles you’ve faced working rented land?

As an Indigenous woman-owned farm with no real intergenerational wealth, we are really starting out behind zero, trying to generate enough financial well-being that we can then move forward into ownership.

In our first four years, we had to relocate almost every year because we either couldn’t get leases signed or I got evicted from a site because I was storing wicker baskets and power tools that were considered non-farm equipment.

What kinds of creative solutions have you used?

We’ve created a mobile infrastructure so we can move from location to location. This includes a fridge truck, an old Safeway delivery vehicle and a mobile carrying shed we are currently building. All this means we’re able to back up, hook up and roll out with this infrastructure, instead of leaving it bolted and





cemented to the ground. This is also a great benefit in the event of a wildfire or any other kind of disturbance.

How do you see your farm in the continuum of Native history, colonialism and restorative justice?

My tribe, my family became certified extinct and lost access to a lot of our land and a lot of our identity, a lot of our culture.

We're the original land tenders here. We had lived here for thousands of years and found a way to live here in harmony with our ecosystem and our fellow other beings. It's been difficult to realize that all this land was stolen Native land, and I also have to pay

over a half a million dollars to access some land that would make this farm viable and successful forever. It's something I hopefully can pass on to the next generation of farmers.

How do you balance using past methods to meet current needs?

We take teachings from my Indigenous culture and upbringing to survive our current economic situation and make sure everyone gets fed. So, it requires a lot of creativity, compromise and embracing innovation. It's human to invent and tinker and change things – but we must also balance that with reverence and respect for the soil and everything that lives in the soil.



What do you find most rewarding?

I'm just really excited to keep growing food for people and feeding my community. Bringing Indigenous First Foods back to dinner plates really elicits a lot of appreciation and joy from our CSA members. I really love to hear and see and share with the rest of our community that Indigenous people are still here, that my tribe is still here.

And so being able to share that and that whole story of what it is to be an Indigenous person in North America, on Turtle Island is also important. It deepens our community broadly, the connection to place that we have here in the Northwest.

Why does this work matter?

Food is a human right, and everyone should have access to it. We are ensuring that finances aren't a barrier to that access, while also honoring all the land stewards, all of the delivery folks and all the people along the way, and ensuring they have dignified, honorable wages, too.

The land, the earth is living and breathing and there's a need for a lot of respect and reciprocity and relationship-building there between what we usually consider as inert or dead. It really does carry a soul and lives and breathes and supports us. 🌱



Equity and racial justice **take root**

Rut Martínez-Alicea (she/ella), Oregon Food Bank's Director of Equity, People, Culture & Administration, believes education is the bedrock of building community power and meaningful change. Since arriving at Oregon Food Bank in 2018, she's made it her mission to instill the values of equity and racial justice within Oregon Food Bank and across our network of local to national partners. She founded the Equity & Racial Justice Education Team (ERJET) to provide food banks with consistent and supportive coaching, consultation and training on social justice concepts like food justice and identifying imperialism's and colonialism's impact on healthy communities. Having spent the first 23 years of her life in Puerto Rico, Rut knows firsthand how systems like imperialism and colonialism can destroy communities.

"Education doesn't make change but without it we cannot create change," said Rut. "If we can help the food banking community deepen our understanding that ending hunger will require us to look at root causes, we will be tapping into incredible community power."


Rut came to Oregon Food Bank after a career in social justice activism and education, most recently from Portland Community College, where she directed the college's Multicultural Center. In 2022, her close colleague Rachel Black Elk (they/them), a junior instructor at Portland State University (PSU) in Indigenous Nations Studies, joined



"If we can help the food banking community deepen our understanding that ending hunger will require us to look at root causes, we will be tapping into incredible community power."

Rut Martínez-Alicea (she/ella)

Director of Equity, People, Culture & Administration, Oregon Food Bank



“I wanted to share the brilliance and strategies of our communities in ways that explicitly named colonialism as the root cause of hunger. Rut made the conditions possible through her efforts for this stage of the curriculum to emerge.”

Rachel Black Elk (they/them)

Associate Director of Equity & Racial Justice Education, Oregon Food Bank



ERJET as associate director. As an enrolled member of the Rosebud Sioux tribe, Rachel had a deep understanding of colonialism and institutionalized racism. They played a pivotal role in shaping ERJET. Rachel did this by integrating with ERJET’s mission their experiences in teaching at PSU on subjects like decolonizing methodologies, indigenizing education, food sovereignty, conflict transformation and racial justice.

Reflecting on their story, Rachel noted, “I wanted to share the brilliance and strategies of our communities in ways that explicitly named colonialism as the root cause of hunger. Rut made the conditions possible through her efforts for this stage of the curriculum to emerge.”

Today, Rut and Rachel combine their expertise, passion and shared vision to create a ground-breaking curriculum aimed at transforming not just Oregon Food Bank but also the nationwide food justice movement. Their unique approach integrates expanding emotional and intellectual capacity, trauma-informed care and anti-racist principles paired with a decolonial lens into every aspect of food banking.

ERJET’s training programs are already reshaping how Oregon Food Bank and other organizations address food justice on the organizational and individual level. The Conflict Transformation section of their trainings bolsters relational skills for those wanting to sustain movement work by reframing conflict as a generative process. ERJET fosters a culture of equity and resilience, transforming how organizations and individuals approach food justice and community well-being in their daily practices.



“I have been fortunate to participate in the Equity Institute once in Spanish and the most recent in Winter 2023 in English. Both experiences allowed me to have a much better foundational idea of how identity, culture and systemic inequities play an essential role in our work in food justice and finding root causes of hunger,” said Carlos Soriano, Oregon Food Bank’s Food Network Manager.

“It allowed me to look deeper into my identity as a person of color and how colonization had a huge impact in how my culture views their worth in society. It has also helped me to apply and implement equity in our goals towards network transformation.”

Training participants frequently noted the value of practical skills for combating everyday racism and the integration of those techniques with food systems design — making racial justice core to food justice. Oregon Food Bank’s partnership with the national organization Feeding America further amplified ERJET’s reach and impact, positioning them as change agents and thought leaders in the national conversation around equity and racial justice in food banking.

Rut and Rachel continue to fine-tune their approach, while forging partnerships within our diverse community, from local food banks to Tribal Nations and racial justice advocacy groups. And equipped with new knowledge and skills, our partners are already reporting back a sharper focus on prioritizing the needs of marginalized communities, creating equitable food distribution practices and addressing systemic barriers to food access. 🌱



Donor spotlight: **Gary and Vivian Neel**

According to those closest to them, Portland-based twins Gary and Vivian Neel were guided by two core values – not spending unnecessary money and compassion for those struggling to pay rent or in need of a warm meal. They lived modestly but with a deep sense of community responsibility.

Gary, who worked for the US Postal Service, found joy in simple pleasures like finding the best fishing hole and eating

homemade apple pie. He made regular food donations over the years and, before he died in 2015, quietly established a trust in his sister's name to benefit Oregon Food Bank upon Vivian's passing. Beginning in 2021, the trustees, close work friends of Gary's, ensured that the trust addressed some of the greatest needs in our region, including the advancement of Rooted + Rising's strategic priorities.

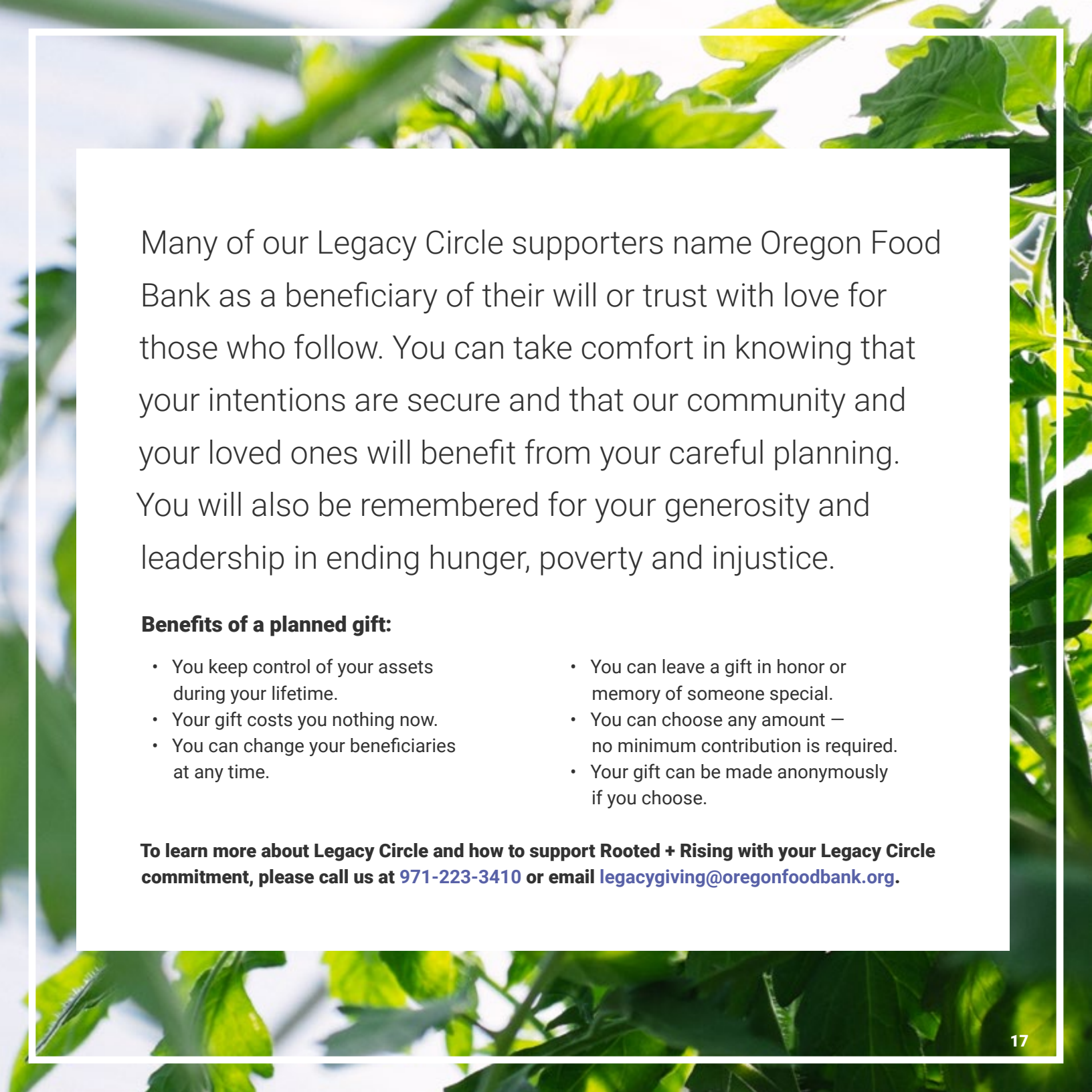


Support from the Gary and Vivian Neel Trust has already helped:

- Address an unprecedented volume of visits to food assistance sites — over 1.9 million in 2023 alone.
- Provide flexible business grants to farmers through the Community Producer Support program, helping grow and stabilize small agricultural businesses and build new prosperity across our region.
- Integrate green technology into Oregon Food Bank’s operations and facilities improvements to fight climate change while increasing community access to dietarily and culturally appropriate foods.
- Launch ERJET and Oregon Food Bank’s field organizing program to educate our networks and advocate for policy changes that end hunger for good.

The Trust’s \$5.8 million gift to Oregon Food Bank is impressive, with \$4.2 million designated to Rooted + Rising. It is an inspiring reminder of the potential we possess to make change through generous action rooted in a love for our neighbors.

And it is our entire community of Oregon Food Bank’s Legacy Circle members that help to ensure the sustainability of Rooted + Rising’s innovations into the future. Since the start of this campaign, 40 new Legacy Circle members have made documented bequest intentions with a total future estimated value of \$2.55 million. To meet our Rooted + Rising Legacy Circle goal, we hope 21 more supporters will come forward by June 30, 2026 to name Oregon Food Bank as a beneficiary of their estate plans. 🌱



Many of our Legacy Circle supporters name Oregon Food Bank as a beneficiary of their will or trust with love for those who follow. You can take comfort in knowing that your intentions are secure and that our community and your loved ones will benefit from your careful planning. You will also be remembered for your generosity and leadership in ending hunger, poverty and injustice.

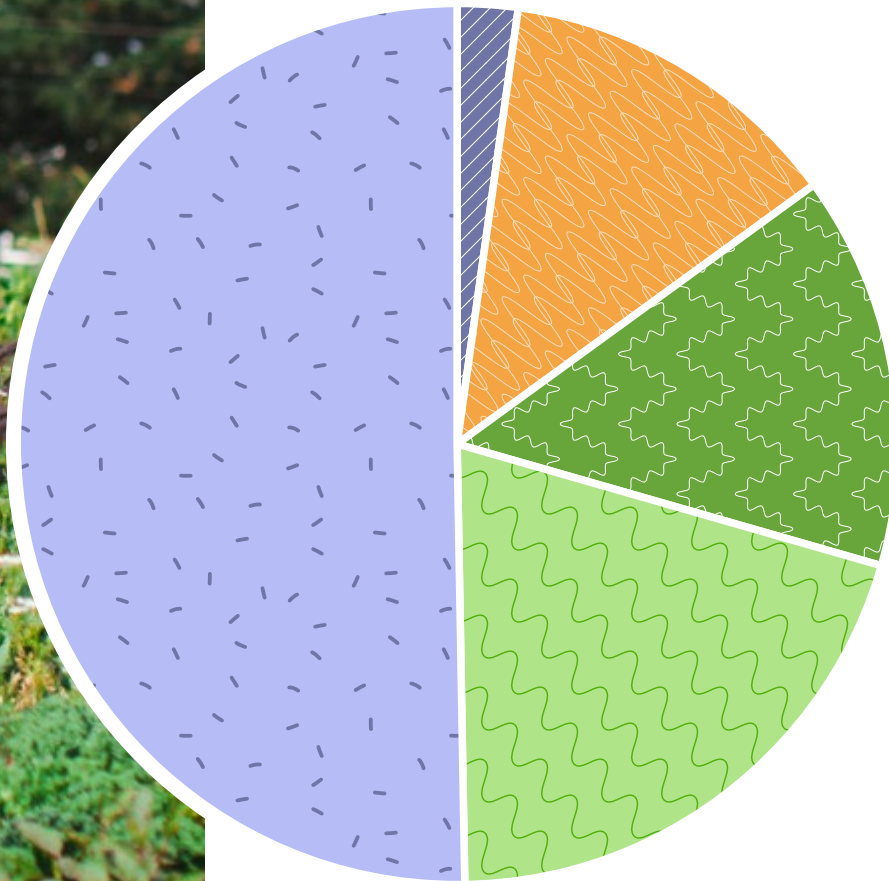
Benefits of a planned gift:


- You keep control of your assets during your lifetime.
- Your gift costs you nothing now.
- You can change your beneficiaries at any time.
- You can leave a gift in honor or memory of someone special.
- You can choose any amount – no minimum contribution is required.
- Your gift can be made anonymously if you choose.


To learn more about Legacy Circle and how to support Rooted + Rising with your Legacy Circle commitment, please call us at 971-223-3410 or email legacygiving@oregonfoodbank.org.


Revenue by **priority area**


Committed Total
\$71,279,123




2% 
Amplifying
Community Power
\$1,394,500

13% 
Modernizing
Infrastructure
\$9,237,700

14% 
Strengthening
Local Solutions
\$10,305,000

20% 
Reimaging
Food Systems
\$14,447,031

50% 
Unrestricted
\$35,894,892

Percentages are approximate



Afghan Support Network: Ensuring food for all Oregonians

In 2021, when Portland-based community leader and advocate Darwaish Zakhil heard the news of the collapse of the Republic of Afghanistan, he knew he had to take action. More than **6 million** Afghans were forcibly displaced from their homes, and nearly **1200 Afghans were about to resettle in Oregon.**

Darwaish's first move was to organize a protest at Pioneer Courthouse Square in Portland. Over 150 people gathered and spoke about the horrific events that had occurred in Afghanistan and at Kabul airport.

"The collapse of the Republic shattered the hopes of thousands," said Darwaish.



After the protest, Darwaish received multiple calls from community members who wanted to offer their support, including Ajmal Wahab and Yahya Haqiqi. Darwaish invited them to come to his home to talk further about how they could help the Afghan immigrants and refugees who were coming in large numbers to the U.S. and Oregon.

That first meeting with Darwaish, Yahya Haqiqi, Ajmal Wahab and Zubair Kohistani was the beginning of the Afghan Support Network. Afghan Support Network's mission was to empower Afghans through services and advocacy in the Portland Metro area. They wasted no time, meeting almost every day and finding ways to help the newly arrived Afghans.

While all four of them had full-time jobs and other responsibilities, Darwaish, a self-employed business owner, had the flexibility to visit the temporary shelter where Afghans were staying. He helped them with whatever he could and also created partnerships and relationships with other organizations across Oregon, including Oregon Food Bank. With Oregon Food Bank's help, the Afghan Support Network created a food support program for Afghan families. Oregon Food Bank helped with food and bus passes, and provided food vouchers for the Afghan families, which helped many families in that crisis.

With grant support from Oregon Food Bank, Afghan Support Network built community connections and provided bus passes and vouchers for dietary

“Food is a fundamental human right and necessity. Access to food is essential for every individual on the planet. In Oregon, we have the opportunity and ability to bring about this change.”

Darwaish Zakhil
Afghan Support Network

and culturally appropriate foods. As he was forging deep relationships with Afghan refugees, Darwaish started hearing reports of people being denied access to food assistance (aka food stamps or SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program).

Darwaish explained, “There are Afghans here in Oregon who do not have access to food stamps and I get many calls about our monthly food box donations with people saying that they need that support. When someone asks you for food, you know that they are struggling. Culturally, it is hard to ask for help and it can feel embarrassing for some.”





This reality is far too common for our immigrant and refugee neighbors in Oregon. Despite significant investments, state food assistance policies continue to leave over 62,000 Oregonians behind, excluding our communities based on immigration status and other arbitrary factors. Among the people and families who are barred from accessing SNAP and other vital programs are those who are Lawful Permanent Residents, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and asylum seekers.

That's why Afghan Support Network joined the steering committee leading Food for All Oregonians, a state-wide campaign to ensure everyone in Oregon – regardless of immigration status – has access to the food they need to thrive.

“Food is a fundamental human right and necessity. Access to food is essential for every individual on the planet. In Oregon, we have the opportunity and ability to bring about this change. We are aware that many individuals with various immigration statuses are

unable to apply for SNAP benefits. This is why ensuring food accessibility for all Oregonians is crucial for the well-being of Afghans in Oregon,” said Darwaish.

“We will need people power – hundreds of organizations like Afghan Support Network and thousands of individuals like Darwaish – to influence lawmakers to make Food for All Oregonians a reality,” said Cristina Marquez Guerrero, Associate Director of Organizing and Advocacy. “We build that people power through organizing with grassroots communities, amplifying community leadership and winning concrete changes that help our communities thrive.”

Rooted + Rising has made Food for All Oregonians’ reach and scale possible with crucial investment in Oregon Food Bank programs that advance public education, messaging research and **statewide organizing**. We can already see how these combined efforts amplify community voices speaking out for systems change and building upon historic relationships in the food system.

“Hunger is an issue that requires political power to change. And that power comes from people. People organized to take action together,” said Moira Bowman, Oregon Food Bank’s Director of Organizing & Advocacy. “And that’s why organizing at Oregon Food Bank has so much promise — there is immense people power in our statewide infrastructure for food assistance.”

Alongside leaders like Darwaish and organizations like Afghan Support Network, dozens of individuals and organizations representing communities with lived experience of hunger and its root causes are joining the Food for All Oregonians campaign. Since launching Food for All Oregonians, **140+ organizations have joined the coalition** and thousands of Oregonians have attended town halls or contacted their legislators in support of Food for All Oregonians. And when the legislative session begins in January 2025, Oregon’s elected officials will experience an even greater demonstration of our people power.

Thanks in part to support from Oregon Food Bank, Afghan Support Network is also stronger, expanding its services to include English language and IT classes, culture kits and re-certification for doctors. With 14 dedicated Afghan employees, Afghan Support Network spans the entire SW Washington and Oregon regions with nationwide aspirations. Afghan Support Network and Oregon Food Bank share a vision of the future in which Afghan immigrants and refugees thrive and prosper.

Darwaish praises Oregon Food Bank for this collaboration: “I cannot emphasize enough the positive impact of Oregon Food Bank and the successful outcomes that have resulted from their collaboration and partnership with Afghan Support Network.” 🌱



Thank you

As each of these stories amply demonstrates, ending hunger will take all of us. By joining the **Rooted + Rising campaign**, you are part of something transformational, creating a stronger, healthier, more equitable and prosperous future. Thank you for rising with us to meet this moment.

We look forward to hearing from you!

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