



2022 STRATEGIC IMPACT NEWSLETTER



Thank you for investing in food security for the people of northern Essex County. You not only believe in universal food access, but you have proven through your actions and your investments that you are willing to pitch in and do what's needed to make that belief a reality. This newsletter provides you with an exclusive look into Our Neighbors' Table, our daily operations, our challenges and successes, and the risks and opportunities that appear on our horizon. Your strategic investments allow us to sustain our mission in good times and in the face of a global crisis. You have not only secured our day-to-day promises to keep food universally accessible to all, but you are affording us the opportunity to see the potential impact on the horizon. I look forward to reaching that potential with you in the year to come. For now, please enjoy this opportunity to reflect on your impact over the last year.

With gratitude,

Lyndsey Haight
Executive Director

IMPACT 2022

CONTINUOUS SERVICES:

Total people served: **4,287**

Children: **964**

Adults: **2372**

Seniors: **912**

New registrations:
541 households (↑67%);
1140 ppl



STABLE TABLE ACTIVITIES:

ONT's Food Security Advisory Group (FSAG) is committed to educating and preparing the community as a whole to recognize and address food insecurity. 51 teachers and municipal leaders across the region participated in Community Readiness Activities:

- Food Security 101 Trainings – What does food insecurity have to do with taxes or classroom performance? We're connecting the dots.
- Collecting and analyzing school data – Newburyport saw nearly 50% drop in nutrition-related visits to the nurse while universal school meals were available.
- Feeding the economy, one household at a time by closing the SNAP Gap and enrolling eligible households to receive SNAP funds spent at retailers and farms.

2022 CHALLENGES LABOR FORCE:

Great Resignation-related staff turn-over: **42%**

Adapting COVID protocols to maintain **ZERO** transmission among **300** staff/volunteers

FOOD SECURITY

LOCAL RESOURCES

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

COMMUNITY

INFLATION-DRIVEN RISE IN COSTS:

Utilities: **+5.3%**

Food transport fuel costs: **+83%**

Food/Goods: **+28%**

THE LANDSCAPE OF FOOD INSECURITY

While the worst of the COVID-19 crisis seems to be behind us, the trajectory of the economic recovery and perhaps ever-changed supply chain have had and will continue to impact the status of food security in our region. The cost of “food at home” rose 11.8% year-over-year in 2022 and housing, including rental costs continued to climb – with numerous local rental complexes increasing rent twice or more since 2020.

Unemployment has hit a historic low, but 2022 wages, particularly in service and in lower wage jobs, do not cover the cost of living. ONT saw a direct correlation in program utilization; the **number of visits** to our grocery markets and the number of **new households** registering for free groceries **increased by 18% and 67% respectively.**

ONT’s **grocery market model is based on a standard of predictability and product**

quality. Guests must be able to anticipate what foods they can receive from ONT so they can spend their limited dollars efficiently at the local grocer and ONT must ensure that we are providing the products that are most needed, and often most cost-prohibitive. The **food supply chain has been anything but predictable.** While our Warehouse Team has successfully leveraged our food partnerships to maintain and even exceed our Market Standards, it requires more trips to more sources while gas prices soared, **increasing our truck fuel costs** by 83%. Greater Boston Food Bank, our primary food source, faced soaring prices for our most-needed products and ONT’s regional surplus food donors (wholesalers, farms, retailers) are still struggling with their own supply chain. As a result, **ONT has had to purchase more food than ever** before, increasing that line’s costs by 28%.



Food-at-home costs
+11.8%

ONT Food Costs
+28%

IMPENDING FOOD CRISIS

One-third of the households served by ONT are enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) that provides the household with a funded debit card that can be used to purchase retail food items. In 2020, Congress eliminated the pro-rated benefit allotment based on an income sliding scale and provided every eligible household the maximum benefit. ONT anticipated the expiration of this program in Summer 2022 with a prediction of surges in need that would have rivaled Summer 2020. However,

Congress delayed this rollback through year-end, allowing ONT to respond to and meet inflation-driven demand.

As we enter into 2023, with 60 days' notice, local households will receive their final supplemental allotment in March, resulting in a **loss of \$90M PER MONTH from the Commonwealth's economy**. This will have a devastating impact on the local economy as more than **4,000 local households will lose a combined \$665,000 every month**. Seniors will, again, be forced to choose to pay for food

SNAP "CLIFF" IMPACTS ELDERS

Retired individual income **\$22,000/yr***

SNAP benefit in 2019 = **\$16/mo**

SNAP benefit 2020-2022 = **\$194/mo**

SNAP benefit 2023 = **\$22/mo**

Loss = \$2,064/year

*Maximum income allowed for SNAP eligibility for an individual.

or utilities or property taxes; families face buying dinner or putting gas in the car.

How will this affect the local economy, businesses and employment? This loss of spending power equates to a loss of \$7.86M in annual revenue for local grocers, the equivalent of wages for 231 minimum wage employees, who may now be at risk of lay-offs, driving even more people into financial crisis and increasing food insecurity.

Historic & Projected Expense Trends



THE FUTURE OF FOOD SECURITY

In 2019, ONT set its goal of creating a Food Secure Region, ensuring universal food access in all 12 cities and towns, by 2029. The COVID-19 crisis strengthened our resolve to achieve this vision and also taught us that it will require the commitment and engagement of the entire *village* to make it a reality. Over the last year, ONT has been working to lay the groundwork for collective action across sectors and among all of our food partners across the region.

COLLECTIVE STRATEGY

The Seacoast Food Providers, ONT's Regional Food Security Advisory Group and ONT's board staff and volunteers have launched our 3-year strategic planning process to assess the current state of food insecurity in the region, set priorities and a clear path of action. Our goals will help us strengthen the **Stable Table** in each of the 12 cities and towns in our region and chart our progress in serving every family and individual who is experiencing food insecurity.

SHARED INFRASTRUCTURE



A strategy without the tools to execute it is just a dream. In March 2022, ONT purchased 114 Bridge Road, Salisbury, a 24,000 square-foot mixed use property that will serve as the future home of the **Seacoast Regional Food Hub**. Building on 18 months of scanning the strengths and weaknesses of our regional food safety net and capitalizing on opportunities to scale ONT's expertise and collaborate with our partners across the Lower Merrimack Valley and the Greater Boston Food Bank, ONT and its partners are building shared storage and refrigeration,

increasing local food sourcing, and regionalizing volunteer recruitment and engagement. As of early 2023, a regional Warehouse Design Committee has collected data from more than 27 agencies; ONT's Building Committee has completed its design and selected its General Contractor; and ONT has raised \$2.3M toward its goal of \$4.86M to complete this project debt-free. Follow the creation of the Seacoast Regional Food Hub and learn how to get involved at ourneighborstable.org/foodhub.





PO Box 592
Amesbury, MA 01913
ourneighborstable.org