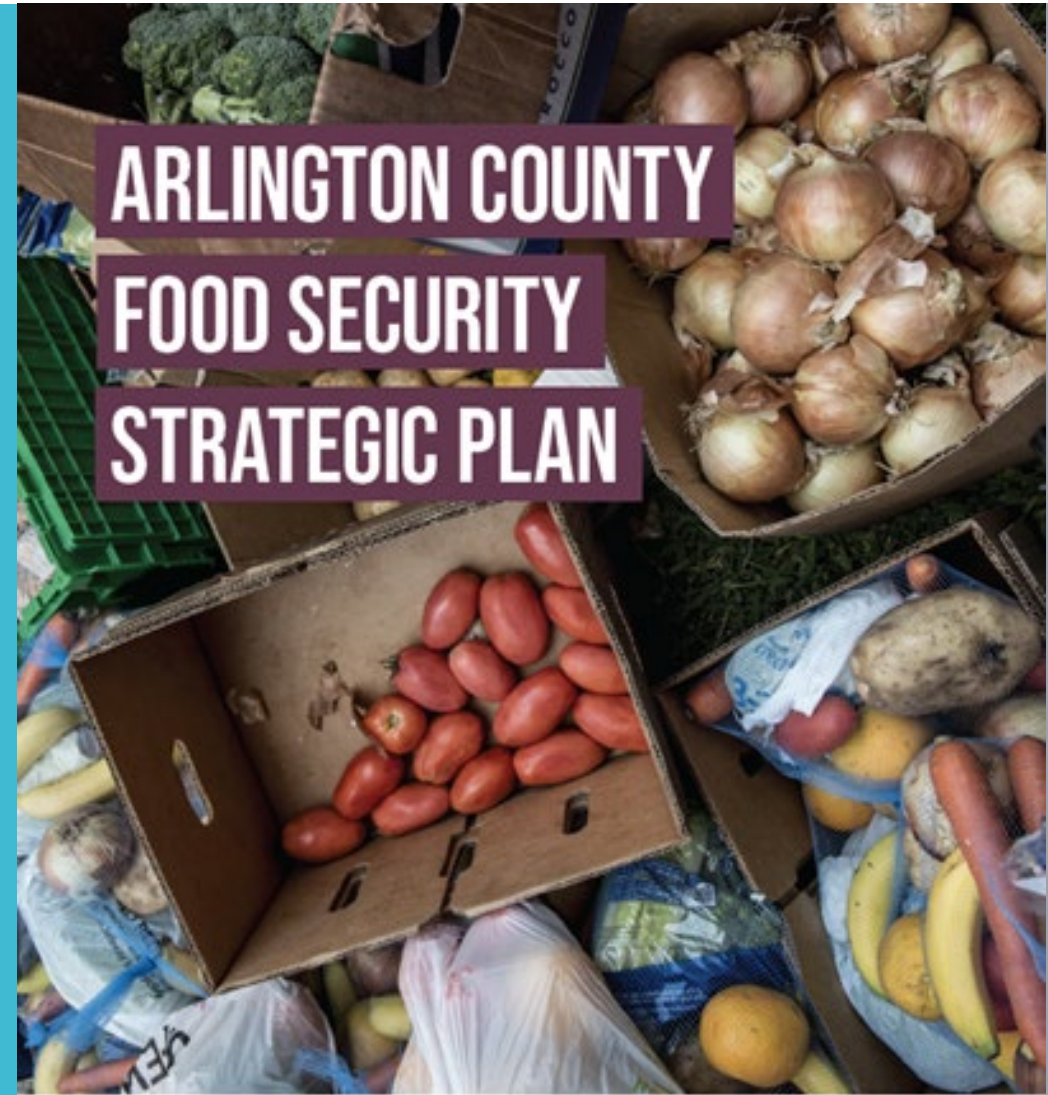


2022-2026 Arlington County Food Security Strategic Plan Recap

July 2026





Where we started



Systemic & Capacity Successes



Challenges Faced



Food Access Successes

Agenda

Where we Started

- Food Security Coordinator role created – FY 2021 Budget
 - Stephanie started in role in February 2021
- Food Security Task Force – Spring 2021 – Fall 2022
- First Strategic Plan released – October 2022



5 categories

- Systemic Change
- Food Access
- Outreach & Education
- Capacity Building
- Informed Decision Making

28 strategies

Overview



Systemic Change

- 1.1. Advocate for federal, state, and local policies that reduce food insecurity and support efforts promoting inclusive economic opportunity.
- 1.2. Improve nutrition equity by working to eliminate, reduce, and prevent disparities in food security policies, procedures, and practices to ensure that all those in need of food assistance receive the support they need.
- 1.3. Support the development of a standardized process for county funding to support food security efforts.



Food Access

- 2.1. Enhance school-based supplemental food offerings, including food pantries, in-school snacks, and weekend food support.
- 2.2. Establish new charitable food distributions in neighborhoods with unmet need.
- 2.3. Increase capacity to deliver charitable food to those unable to access available resources.
- 2.4. Establish a WIC clinic on the western side of the county.
- 2.5. Increase food rescue & redistribution operations.
- 2.6. Implement incentives and other supports to bring and preserve affordable and ethnically relevant retail grocery options to Arlington.
- 2.7. Pilot universal free breakfast and/or lunch at select schools with high percentages of low-income students.
- 2.8. Support the expansion of local and regional pilot programs offering discounted public transit fares to low-income individuals and students.



Outreach & Education

- 3.1. Promote food assistance resources and assist residents with enrolling in programs for which they may be eligible.
- 3.2. Diversify the ways that DHS shares information and engages with the community.
- 3.3. Increase presence of DHS staff at food distribution locations to facilitate access to DHS services.
- 3.4. Implement a coordinated SNAP outreach campaign.
- 3.5. Increase nutrition education opportunities for residents of all ages.
- 3.6. Partner with resident community leaders to share information about resources in key languages and provide compensation for their work.



Capacity Building

- 4.1. Develop training materials to inform social services staff and volunteers about food assistance programs, specifically SNAP and WIC, and help residents apply.
- 4.2. Provide trauma informed care training for staff & volunteers working with food insecure residents.
- 4.3. Create a cultural foods guide for charitable food providers with partners from the region.
- 4.4. Increase the capacity to share locally-grown produce from gardeners and farms with food pantries through expanded donation processing infrastructure.
- 4.5. Increase capacity within the DHS Customer Service Center to continue to meet expanded requests for service.
- 4.6. Collaborate with APS through its forums to review existing programs and practices and address food equity.



Informed Decision-Making

- 5.1. Create a food security coalition to oversee the implementation of this strategic plan, continue to monitor needs, and periodically reassess priorities.
- 5.2. Create channels for food assistance participant feedback allowing for varied levels of engagement.
- 5.3. Collect data from food assistance organizations that provides information about usage trends and services provided.
- 5.4. Publish and annually update a food security dashboard showing progress towards strategic plan implementation and food assistance program trends.
- 5.5. Establish a food security Performance Measurement Plan to track achievement of DHS food security goals.

Systemic & Capacity Successes



Create a food security coalition to oversee the implementation of this strategic plan, continue to monitor needs, and periodically reassess priorities.

- Created a community, built relationships
- Created a space for discussion & action to happen
- 39 monthly meetings
- Average participation in FY25 was 30 people
- Satisfaction survey (June 2025)
 - Coalition meetings are a productive use of time – 89%
 - I plan to stay involved next year – 98%



“
I just wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed the meeting yesterday. I really appreciate how much thought and planning you put into these meetings. They are always so enlightening!
”

Support the development of a standardized process for county funding to support food security efforts.

- Established the Food Security Mini-Grants
- Supported 33 projects at 25 organizations over 3 years.
- Funding supported a range of activities addressing all aspects of the food security strategic plan, including seed funding for pilot projects, infrastructure support, purchase of fresh produce, sustainability funding, and more.
- AFAC Sole Source contract starting in FY 2025
- Competitive County funding opportunities funded several food security projects/organizations – Real Food For Kids, Meals on Wheels, Salvation Army, CAFB.

“ For a small nonprofit like Food For Neighbors, grants like this one mean so much more than the funding itself. They provide visibility into what we're doing and affirm that our programs are vital to the community. ”

“ Thanks to our grant, we established a relationship with FarmFresh, and we continued that relationship, purchasing fresh vegetables for our clients. ”

“ The most positive part of participating in the grant project was the ability to expand what we provide to the families. We have often used grant funds to purchase eggs and some of the most commonly received feedback we get is how much the families value receiving eggs. So, it has allowed us to meet immediate needs for our families. ”

Provide trauma-informed care training for staff & volunteers working with food insecure residents.

- The Arlington Resilience Community hosted two trainings for the Arlington Food Security Coalition:
 - “Building Resilient Communities”
 - “Dealing with Trauma & Triggers”
 - Trained 127 participants from 13 organizations.

“ Absolutely terrific presentation. It changed my perspective and I learned so much about myself and how to be more empathetic and understanding. ”

DEALING WITH TRAUMA AND TRIGGERS

This educational experience explores the importance of trauma-informed assistance and how to navigate triggers. Let's start a dialogue on what we can do to build more resilient and empathic communities.

JOIN US IN CREATING A CONNECTION WITH OUR COMMUNITY

Tuesday, June 6 at 1pm - 2:30pm
Our Lady Queen of Peace Church - 2700 19th St S

Wednesday, June 14 at 6:30pm - 8pm
Arlington Dept. of Human Services - 2100 Washington Blvd. Sequoia 1

Click this link to register for an informative session!

<https://forms.office.com/r/5rsTbzxmsj>



**ARLINGTON
FOOD SECURITY
COALITION**

**Arlington
Resilience
Community**

Use varied levels of engagement to encourage food assistance recipients to provide valuable feedback on programs and services.

- Expanded annual AFAC client survey to gather feedback from other community food pantries.
- Focus groups conducted in Fall 2024 provided valuable insight into the daily challenges families are facing with rising costs of living.
- 2026 surveys had the most engagement from pantries and participants.
- **2022:** Annual Client Survey at AFAC – 1,500 responses
- **2026:** Annual client survey at AFAC, and 12 other pantries - 3,278 responses



Advocate for federal, state, and local policies that reduce food insecurity and support efforts promoting inclusive economic opportunity.

Federal

- **SUN Bucks**
 - A nationwide Summer EBT program, SUN Bucks, was established in 2024. The program provides families enrolled in SNAP, TANF, Medicaid and Free School Meals with money for food over the summer.
- **CEP eligibility expansion**
 - CEP (free school meals for all students at a school or in a district) can now be offered if 25% of students are identified as receiving SNAP, Medicaid, or TANF – down from 40%.
- **HR1**
 - Shared information about the House, Senate, and final versions of HR1, the 2025 budget reconciliation bill, and provided information about advocacy opportunities.

State

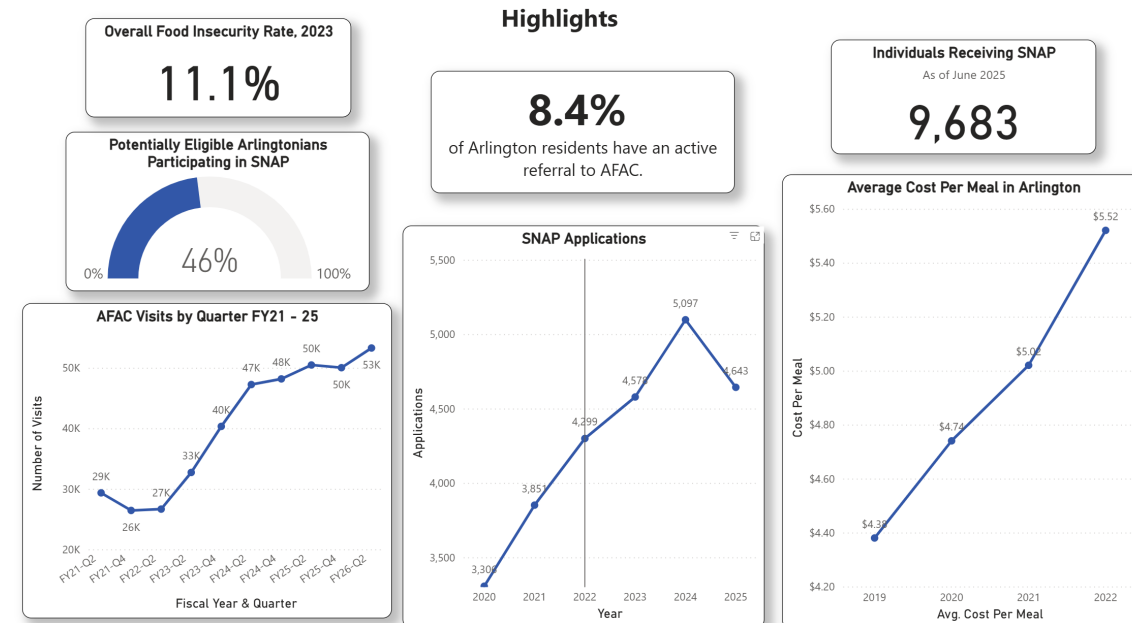
- **Virginia Food Access Coalition & Healthy School Meals for All Coalition**
 - Virginia General Assembly did not pursue universal free school meals or raising the SNAP minimum benefit for older adults.
- **Minimum Wage**
 - Virginia raised the minimum wage from \$11 in 2022 to \$12.77 in 2026 with future increases projected through 2028.

Collect data from food assistance organizations that provides information about usage trends and services provided.

Publish and annually update a food security dashboard showing progress towards strategic plan implementation and food assistance program trends.

Establish a food security Performance Measurement Plan to track achievement of DHS food security goals.

- A data portal was created and now 20 organizations share data on the numbers served quarterly.
- A **data dashboard** combining food security metrics from various sources was published on the Food Security Coalition webpage.
- DHS developed a food security Initiative Measurement Plan, the first of its kind, in FY 2025 to capturing a snapshot of the elements affecting food insecurity and the work done to alleviate it by DHS and other community partners.



Challenges Faced



Drops in SNAP participation & changes to eligibility

- Large reductions in SNAP enrollment over the past 18 months – could be from a variety of factors, fear included.
 - Will have a ripple effect on CEP eligibility for schools.
- Increased work requirements for SNAP eligibility in 2023 funding bill and 2025 HR1 – increased ages for work requirements, decreased age for dependent exemption
- Removed most immigrant eligibility for SNAP in HR1.



Inflation & Rising Costs

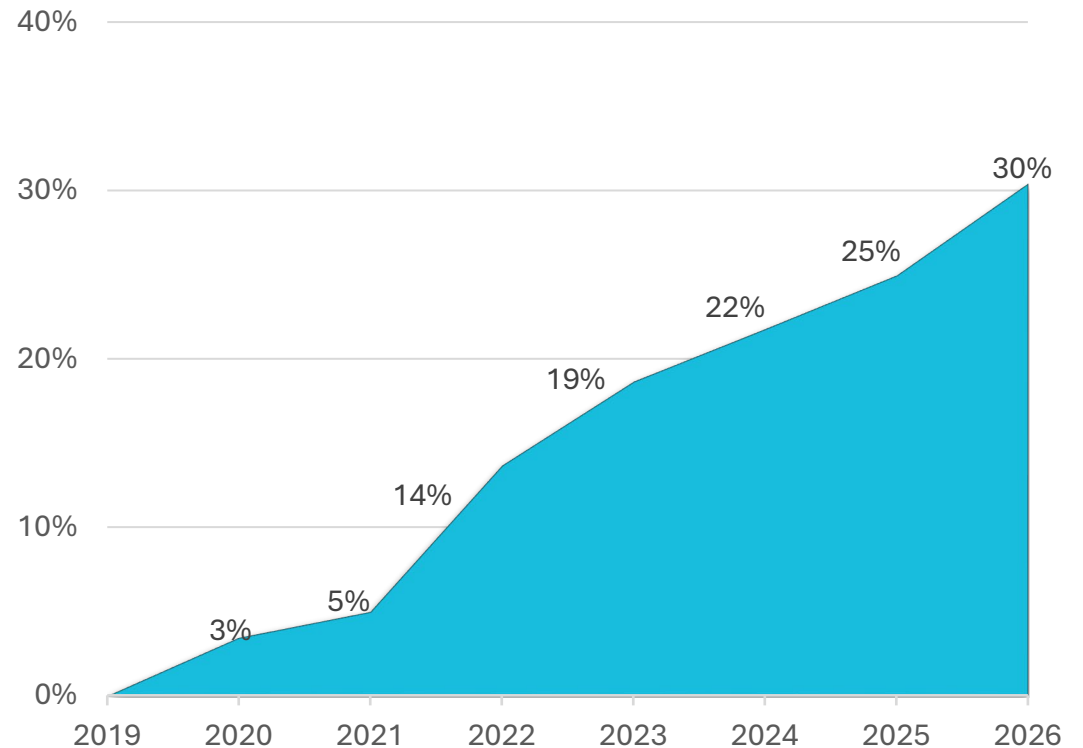
- The Consumer Price Index for food items , which measures inflation, has gone up 30% since 2019.
- [A 2025 study by the Capital Area Food Bank](#) found that while cumulative wage growth in the region has lagged at a 6% increase since the pandemic, costs have inflated by 21%. This is equivalent to the average wage being cut by 12% over that time period.

“

It's a big help especially since prices have gone up so much and the money doesn't cover the rent and everything else since it's all so expensive.

”

Change in Food Prices from 2019





Since Fall 2024 there has been a general fear of engaging with government resources and gathering in large groups.



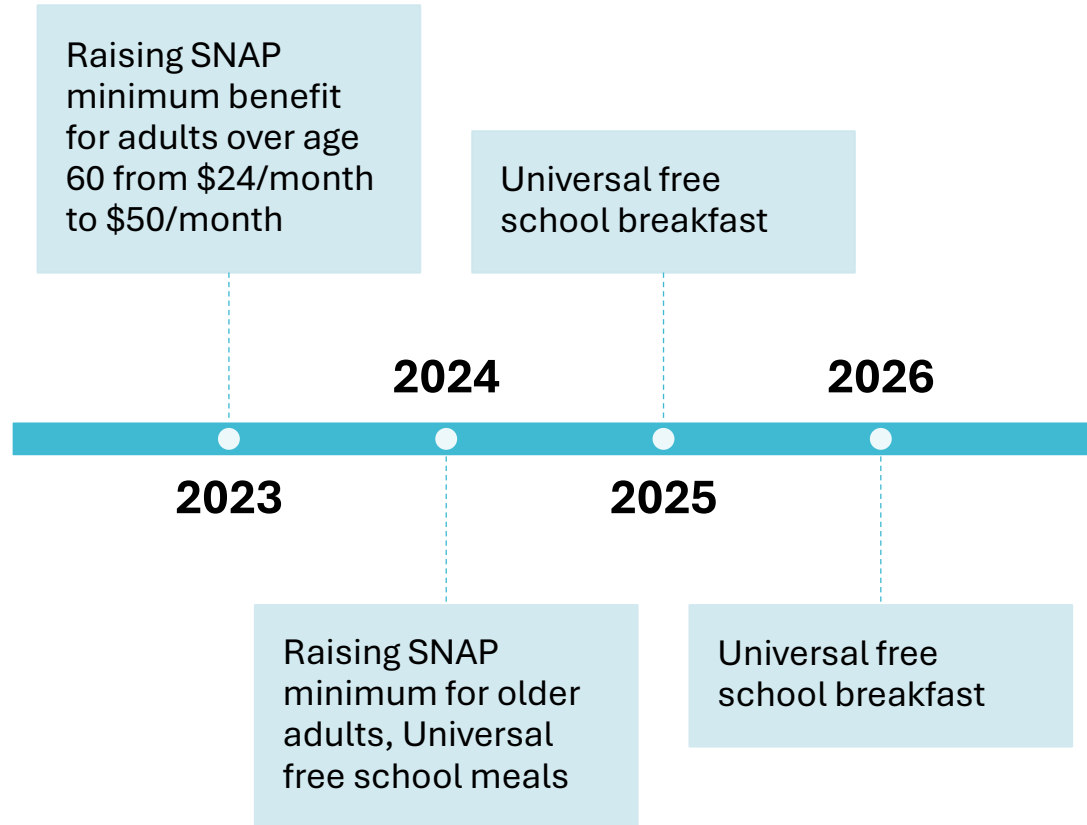
Some food distributions have seen dramatic decreases in participation immediately after local activity.



Some people are choosing not to renew their benefits due to data sharing with Homeland Security and other reasons.

Environment of Fear

Advocacy efforts in Virginia that didn't succeed



Amazon Right Now Needs Fund Discontinued

- Since 2020, Amazon had donated tens of thousands of dollars to APS as Amazon gift cards.
- Social workers used these funds to fulfil immediate needs for students, including food for breaks, weekends, etc.
- This fund was eliminated as of December 2025 leaving a gap.



Food Access Successes



Establish new charitable food distributions in neighborhoods with unmet need.

- New programs/sites
 - Mission: NOVA
 - Park Shirlington CAFB Mobile Market
 - Food for Neighbors
 - AFAC in Westover
 - Arlington Assembly of God pantry
 - Food Not Bombs NOVA at Ballston Metro
 - PTA pantries - Hoffman-Boston, Abingdon, Glebe
 - Little free food pantries:
 - VHC outpatient clinic
 - St. John's Episcopal Church in Glencarlyn
- Re-opened programs
 - CUMC Community Café (first reopened as Provision Church)
 - Mt. Olivet CAFB Mobile Market
- Short-term program
 - APS Evening Meals during the government shutdown



Enhance school-based supplemental food offerings, including food pantries, in-school snacks, and weekend food support.

- **Food for Neighbors**

- Established operations in Arlington, supported initially by grants from Amazon and Arlington County.
- Now supports 10 secondary schools with community-sourced donations of teen-friendly snacks.

- **Capital Area Food Bank Family Markets**

- Carlin Springs, Randolph, and Drew Elementary schools offer monthly food distributions with food provided by the Capital Area Food Bank at their schools to support families.

- **Share Tables**

- Share tables were established at 23 APS schools by the Healthy Community Action Team (HCAT) Arlington and DC Food Project to recover uneaten and unopened food from school breakfast and lunch and offer it to other students and staff.

- **PTAs**

- CCPTA and several individual PTAs established efforts to provide food to families on weekends, before breaks, and on an ongoing basis.
- Several school PTAs set up little free pantries and regular food distributions.

- **Out-of-School-Time Meals**

- APS now provides meals to all students enrolled in APS summer school by aligning summer school locations and CEP schools.
- Kitchen of Purpose began providing afterschool meals to the Aspire Afterschool programs at Randolph and Drew Elementary Schools.
- CAFB began providing afterschool meals at Kenmore Middle School and summer meals at Arlington Mill Community Center, in addition to the many afterschool and summer programs they already supported.
- APS hosted evening community meals, providing dinners, during the 2025 government shutdown.

Increase capacity to deliver charitable food to those unable to access available resources.

- **FY22 AFAC deliveries:**
 - 5,681 deliveries to 208 households from Nelson St. HQ
- **FY25 AFAC deliveries:**
 - 7,443 deliveries to 214 households from Nelson St. HQ
 - + 5,000 deliveries to 100 households based at off-site locations
- **Meals on Wheels of Arlington**
 - Was able to maintain services even with cuts to federal funding.

“ AFAC’s home delivery program has been a huge relief because I am recovering from cancer and often don’t have very much strength to go outside or do anything. ”



Support the expansion of local and regional pilot programs offering discounted public transit fares to low-income individuals and students.

- WMATA introduced Metro Lift in 2024, providing 50% off fares to SNAP recipients. It served 428 Arlington residents in 2024.
- APS bus iRide program provides free rides to all students. (began in 2023)
- FY27 budget includes expanding Metro Lift to be accepted on ART buses.

Increase food rescue & redistribution operations.

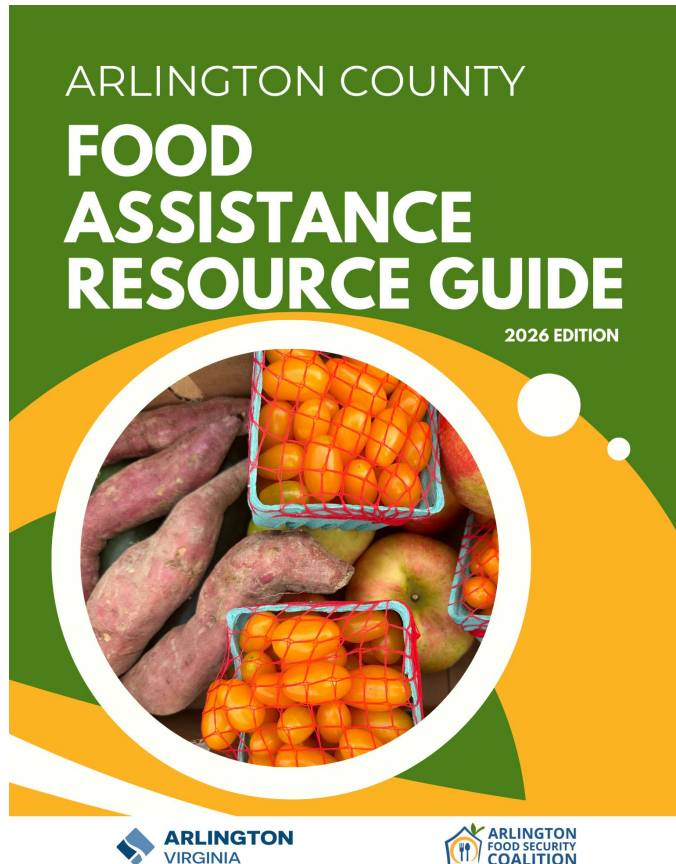
- **2022:**
 - # of food rescues - 852
 - # of food donors – 7
 - # of food recipient organizations – 8
- **2025:**
 - # of food rescues – 1,252
 - # of food donors – 15
 - # of food recipient organizations – 18
- **2026: DC Food Rescue rebrands**



Pilot universal free breakfast and/or lunch at select schools with high percentages of low-income students.

- # of schools with universal free meals
 - **2022-23:** 5 schools (2,387 students)
 - Barrett, Barcroft, Carlin Springs, Drew, Randolph Elementary Schools
- USDA expanded access to the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) in 2023, by lowering the minimum identified student percentage (ISP) participation threshold from 40% to 25%.
 - **2025-26:** 10 schools (7,853 students at CEP schools)
 - 2022-23:
 - Barrett, Barcroft, Carlin Springs, Drew, Randolph Elementary Schools
 - Added in 23-24:
 - Abingdon Elementary School, Kenmore Middle School
 - Added in 24-25:
 - Campbell Elementary School, Wakefield High School
 - Added in 25-26:
 - Thomas Jefferson Middle School

Develop training materials to inform social services staff and volunteers about food assistance programs, specifically SNAP and WIC, and help residents apply.



- Created a comprehensive guide to food assistance resources in Arlington with 2 updated versions.
- Distributed it to community non-profits, schools, and county staff.

Outreach & Education – 3.1 & 3.4

Promote food assistance resources and assist residents with enrolling in programs for which they may be eligible.

Implement a coordinated SNAP outreach campaign.

- Developed a food assistance flyer with annual updates to provide easy-to-digest information about food resources open to all.
- Real Food For Kids developed a SNAP Ambassadors program to provide information about SNAP to trusted community members and volunteers.
 - Staff and volunteers conducted outreach to support SNAP enrollment.
 - ECDC did outreach to support SNAP renewals in 2026.
- DHS put bus ads about SNAP and eligibility changes in ART buses in spring 2026.



SNAP HELPS PEOPLE BUY FOOD

You may be eligible for SNAP if you meet income requirements and are a:

- U.S. citizen
- Child born in the U.S.
- Lawful permanent resident

Find help getting food in Arlington

703-228-1300

arlingtonva.us/food-assistance

EXPANDED WORK REQUIREMENTS

As of 2026, SNAP now requires 20 hours of work per week for:

- Adults without disabilities aged 18 – 64
- Parents of children ages 14 – 18.

ARLINGTON VIRGINIA Human Services

Exp. 9/2026

Increase nutrition education opportunities for residents of all ages.

- **Virginia Cooperative Extension:**

- **2022:**

- 26 cooking demonstrations/nutrition classes at senior centers and virtually for 120 attendees.
 - 12 Master Food Volunteers reported 200 hours
 - Cooking demos at AFAC, Carlin Springs market, affordable housing reaching 200 people.

- **2025:**

- 103 events with 976 attendees, including 27 cooking classes for 268 kids/teens



- **Healthy Community Action Team (HCAT)**

- Established Share Tables at 20 APS schools
 - Taught monthly nutrition/cooking classes with Even Start family literacy program.
 - Partnered with Aspire Afterschool to teach family cooking classes

- **Real Food For Kids**

- Conducted Fresh Food Explorers – a preschool nutrition education program at Randolph & Carlin Springs Elementary Schools in 2024-25.

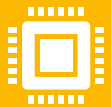
“ AFAC has helped me out with getting different foods. I like all the variety! I normally wouldn't buy vegetables but have learned how to use the items I've received. Now I'm learning how to use my kitchen.” ”



Increase the capacity to share locally-grown produce from gardeners and farms with food pantries through expanded donation processing infrastructure.

- Friends of Urban Agriculture (FOUA) coordinated the donation of an annual average of 13,000 lbs of produce from local gardeners and gleaned an annual average 45,000 lbs from local farms which were donated to local food pantries.
- FOUA got a grant which allowed them to hire an intern to improve processes and procedures. They also were able to rent a UHAUL to transport gleaned produce back from local farms more efficiently.





Great progress made

Resources developed
Relationships made
Grants funded projects, pilots,
initiatives, infrastructure



Environmental challenges continue



Still more to be done



Work from many strategies will carry over and continue on

Conclusion