

Food Connection **2025 Annual Report**

Mission & Model

Food Connection is a North Carolina 501(c)(3) that rescues surplus chef-prepared food and redistributes it—at no cost—to neighbors facing food insecurity. Our logistics-first, volunteer-supported model intercepts high-quality prepared meals from hotels, caterers, universities, hospitals, camps, and events, then rapidly chills, repacks, and delivers those meals through Mobile Meals routes and agency partners. This approach addresses both food insecurity and environmental impact by preventing edible food from entering landfills while expanding access to nutritious, ready-to-heat meals.

2025 Program Impact

In 2025, Food Connection distributed 224,030 meals, the highest annual total in the organization's history, exceeding its internal goal of 175,000 meals. This represents continued year-over-year growth following 186,575 meals distributed in 2024. The vast majority of meals distributed in 2025 were rescued food, with no purchased or gifted meals reported in the first three quarters of the year, underscoring the efficiency of the rescue model.

Mobile Meals remained a core delivery strategy. In 2025, Mobile Meals programs served tens of thousands of meals across multiple categories, including:

- Beyond the Bus Line drive-through distributions in rural and transit-limited communities
- Youth & Families sites (11,113 meals), including early learning centers and after-school programs
- Recovery and behavioral health partners (11,201 meals)
- Elder programs serving older adults in senior housing and Meals on Wheels-affiliated sites

Food Connection worked with 100+ food donor partners and 100+ agency recipient partners across Buncombe, Henderson, Madison, and surrounding counties, embedding prepared-meal rescue into shelters, recovery programs, community meals, schools, and senior housing.

Disaster Response & Community Resilience

Following Hurricane Helene's impact in late 2024, Food Connection adapted routes and distributions to meet increased need in 2025. Post-Helene feedback surveys showed that a large share of participants began receiving meals after the storm and reported greater difficulty meeting food needs due to disrupted income, transportation, and benefits. Food Connection provided consistent food access during recovery without requiring documentation, income verification, or referrals—reducing barriers during a period of instability.

Volunteer Engagement

Volunteer participation continued to grow in 2025, with 183 individual volunteers engaged in Q4 alone and 1,605 volunteer hours contributed during that quarter. Volunteers supported meal packing, food pickups, route deliveries, and Community Connector activities, making it possible to scale service without proportional increases in cost.

Infrastructure & Operations

In 2025, Food Connection strengthened its operational capacity by adding a new Ford Transit van (donated by Publix and outfitted under budget) and a freezer trailer, significantly improving cold-chain storage and route flexibility. These investments reduced reliance on purchased emergency meals, increased pickup capacity, and allowed surplus meals to be stored during peak periods and deployed during slower months—improving year-round stability.

Financial Overview

Food Connection closed 2025 in a strong financial position.

- Annual revenue budget: \$728,500
- Year-to-date actual revenue: \$1,130,289.79 (152% of budget)

- Revenue was diversified across grants, individuals, corporate sponsorships, and events.
- Net assets at year-end exceeded \$1.1 million, supporting organizational resilience and operational continuity.

Looking Ahead

In 2026, Food Connection will continue scaling Mobile Meals, strengthening youth and family distributions, integrating low-burden health education and food insecurity screening, and maintaining disaster-ready logistics. With a proven rescue model, strong partnerships, and disciplined operations, Food Connection is positioned to deliver high-impact nutrition support efficiently while advancing health equity and environmental stewardship across Western North Carolina.

Testimonials

Since that time, we have received over 15,000 of their delicious meals. Eleven large deliveries were delivered to us in just six days. This high quality heat and serve food came just in the nic of time. - LaQuita Pickens, Chief Director of Operations, Western Carolina Rescue Mission

What a joy to meet Lathan and Lacey on Tuesday at Providence House (Providence Baptist Church) to receive 59 trays (full and half size) to fill nearly every square inch of freezer space we had available!

We have been feeding a food insufficient community for 15 years in our Hendersonville home and currently we see 30-40+ meal guests every Sunday afternoon at 4pm. We were able to maintain this practice even during the CoVid years with bag lunches and hot soup. Because of the ongoing generosity of produce from Fresh Market, we have been able to provide ""grocery shopping"". Our shelf stable items have been received via Manna and another church. Manna has been challenged of late and all that trickles down to depleted resources for us and other Henderson county food programs. This is where Food Connections has been a Huge Boost to allow us to continue to serve a hot meal weekly! What a miracle these coordinated food donations are arranged by you, Marisha, and Food Connections! Every Sunday we receive grateful thanks from children to the elderly for a delicious meal! What a gift to be the recipient of these benefits for both a Community Meal, and later repackaged to-go, to serve those unable to make the trek to Providence House. Pasta Primavera, Cottage Pie, Lasagna, and even ""Breakfast for Supper"" by way of Egg and Cheese casserole and Turkey Hash will likely show up soon on a Sunday afternoon - high quality food that may never have made its way to a hungry belly! Thanks, Food Connections, for making a difference in Henderson County! We love you and your Heart! - Glenda Tapper, Worship Meal Co-Leader, Providence House

Food Connection has shown a commitment to provide meals to our community in ways I've not seen before. Greeting our homebound friends with a smile and a nutritious meal they don't have to prepare themselves has meant the world to them. We could feel it too, that our neighbors would be missing the most anticipated meal of their week. - Marie Whitener, Coordinator, Leicester Community Welcome Table

The church witnessed the profound and direct impact these resources had. Rescued food serves people and the planet. Food Connection is at the center of a valuable web across our region. - Rev. Judith Whelchel, Rector, St. James Episcopal Church

The ministry of Food Connection embodies the heart of what we pray for every Sunday — that all may be fed, that all may be welcomed, and that the abundance of creation might be shared in right-relationship with one another. - Rev. Kelsey Davis, Vicar, St. George's Episcopal Church

The work that Food Connection does has a profound impact on reducing food insecurity. This need has become even more critical in the wake of Hurricane Helene. Together, we can build a stronger, healthier community where everyone has access to the nourishment they need. - Norma Duran Brown, Executive Director, UNETE, Inc.

We have been working with Food Connection for several years and their donations have helped us tremendously. The team at Food Connection is dedicated to and passionate about reducing food waste. They are truly an asset to our community. - Donna Earnshaw, Executive Director, 12 Baskets & Asheville Poverty Initiative

My partnership with Food Connection has been a lifeline for the business. This partnership allowed me to keep three young men and one young woman employed. Funding Food Connection's Chef Meal program would have a huge impact on our community. - Chef Clarence Robinson, Owner/Caterer, Cooking with Comedy Catering Services

Food Connection has had a significant impact on numerous lives within the Back on Track community. Providing food for our classes fosters a sense of community and offers a safe space for conversations. It also supplies meals for the Women's Home, allowing the residents to enjoy healthy food together while working on their recovery and life skills. Additionally, serving food to the homeless enables us to establish connections with them, helping them transition off the streets. The positive effects of this initiative will reach many individuals, and we are truly grateful for the opportunity. - Misty Oliver-Caton, Board Member, Back On Track Ministries

I wanted to share that I dropped off meals for a single mom of 6 children living in Klondike yesterday. As you know from your work experience there are so many stressors for so many families in our community! It was a gift to share the Food Connection Meals and think of lightening her load even just a bit. Food Connection is the bigger hands of support on the Circle of Security, and we are so grateful for their valuable work in our community! - Colleen Burnet, BSW, IMH-E® Infant Family Specialist, Community Educator, Mountain Child Advocacy Center

Total Pounds Diverted by Year

