



Fall 2021

Our Island community met the need for food assistance, but the challenge keeps growing.

As the pandemic continues to negatively affect San Juan County and the rest of the nation and world, we at the Orcas Island Food Bank continue to investigate the need for food support and how we can meet that need in our community.

According to a recent report from the San Juan County Economic Development Council and data from the WSDA's Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), an estimated 50% of the population on Orcas Island qualifies for food assistance. That's roughly 1,300 households or 2,600 individuals. In other words, most of the folks who deliver our packages, clean and build our houses, and work in the shops and grocery stores qualify to come to the Food Bank.



"You enable me and my kids to eat well and still pay our bills. It's beautiful... sometimes I cry."

An outpouring of community support has enabled us to keep up with this increased need. We have:

- Increased weekly food distribution hours from a pre-pandemic 2.5 to the current 18.
- Stepped up publicity, education, and advertising to ensure that community members experiencing food insecurity know we are here for them and their unique needs.
- Contracted with local farmers to greatly increase our supply of fresh produce and protein.
- Initiated new programs, including making soup, gleaning, stocking Latinx/Hispanic foods and foods for special dietary needs, and recovering grocery-store foods that would otherwise go to waste.
- Pursued grant opportunities to help with food purchasing, capacity building, and staffing via AmeriCorps service members.
- Strengthened relationships with local organizations such as schools, the Senior Center, markets, farms, Camp Orkila, and Pawki's to reach islanders who need food and to increase, diversify, and secure our food supplies.
- Restructured our staff, promoting Amanda Sparks to executive director and hiring former Americorps members Mary Heydron and Alison O'Toole as permanent employees. This experienced and dedicated staff is ready to continue shaping the Food Bank's services as customer needs require.

"I was laid off, along with almost all the workers whose jobs were based on tourism. I didn't see how we could make it through the pandemic with our main industry shut down. I volunteered at the Food Bank and saw how it was changing week to week to meet the increased demand. That made me realize the whole Island community could be resilient. It gave me hope."



Among all Washington counties, San Juan County has one of the highest costs of living, coupled with one of the lowest average wages. This is not likely to change anytime soon, and the uptrend in demand for food assistance continues. In the early months of the pandemic, the number of customer visits to the Food Bank more than doubled from the same months in 2019. This year, visits are close to doubling again.

“I appreciate the good fresh produce, dairy, and eggs. I don’t have a refrigerator, so it’s life changing that the Food Bank is now open three days a week.”

Visits to OIFB January 1 through August 31

	2021	2020	Increase #	Increase %
Households	6,435	3,462	2,973	86%
Individuals	13,091	6,789	6,302	93%
Houseless people	260	59	201	304%



OIFB’s mission, “To work with our community to prevent hunger,” relies on your ongoing support.

Although we have successfully met the 85% increase in household visits over 2020, we recognize that we are underserving the need. The potential for another doubling of demand — or more — is real, and we need be prepared for it.

We need your help to ensure that our hard-working friends and neighbors have food security. The pandemic has made us increasingly aware of the economic gap in San Juan County. Social support systems like the Food Bank allow basic-wage earners to continue to live here and fill vital jobs. The Food Bank ensures that islanders have access to healthy food for all age groups that suits their cultural and

dietary needs. Studies have shown that when people eat an adequate number of calories from nutrient-rich foods, they perform better, have lower stress and depression, and suffer fewer health issues.

Here’s how you can help...

- Mail a check payable to OIFB in the enclosed envelope.
- Visit orcasislandfoodbank.org and click on “Donate to OIFB through PayPal.”
- Schedule a monthly contribution through the website or by mail or phone.
- Join our fantastic group of volunteers,

call OIFB at (360) 376-4445 or email orcasislandfoodbank@centurylink.net

“When my husband and I moved to Orcas Island we looked for a way to get involved in the community. A lot of people said volunteer at the Food Bank. We’ve been here for a few months now; it’s a source of friendship and satisfaction.”

The Orcas Island Food Bank Board and Staff:

Board: Bob Morris, Susan McBain, Margie Bangs, Berto Gándara, Mimi Anderson, Tony Ghazel, Erik Koehler, Kevin Ranker and Rick Rhoads.

Staff: Amanda Sparks, Mary Heydron, Alison O’Toole and Becky Hawley.

And Our Awesome Volunteers!

Orcas Island Food Bank

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