



"How is Table to Table faring under the changes at the federal and state level?"

Threats to federal poverty relief programs like SNAP and Medicaid will impact our neighbors' ability to meet their basic needs. Table to Table partners will see pantry visits increase significantly. Nonprofit food access programs will never be able to supplement these programs fully.

USDA foods accounted for 17% of all the food distributed in Johnson County last year. Cuts to funding for a quarter of this food have already been announced. While remaining funds have already been allocated in the farm bill, we've seen other congressionally funded programs axed.

Our partners are facing significant funding cuts for key life saving services that can't be replaced by community funding alone. The most recent budget proposal guts HUD's affordable housing, homelessness, and community development funding. These programs directly fund shelter/housing services and also support local funding to 20+ community agencies including T2T.

T2T recently lost funding for all of our seasonal AmeriCorps roles. These members lead our seasonal local foods programs including managing over 30 farm partnerships and recovering 10% of the fresh produce we deliver.

What Can You Do?

1. To better understand the direct impacts on our neighbors, we encourage you to follow and subscribe to the Iowa Hunger Coalition. Use your voice to promote the importance of programs like USDA TEFAP, now, before we see those proposed cuts come to fruition.
2. Continue to volunteer with us, consider signing up to help glean or attend a farmers market this summer. We need you now more than ever and are so grateful that our extraordinary volunteer base helps us be resilient during these difficult times.
3. Consider making a financial donation like signing up for a monthly recurring gift. Sixty percent of our funding comes directly from individuals and local business contributions.



Volunteer Hangout!!

It's that time of year for yet another Volunteer Hangout at Big Grove. We will be hosting this event from 4-7 pm on Wednesday, May 28th, at the IC Big Grove. For this event, we will also be inviting some of the staff from both our donor and recipient partners. We are also looking to have some board games available. You can come for 10 minutes or the full 3 hours. You can chat with other volunteers or partners, sit down and partake in a game, enjoy a cold beer, or some combination of all of the above. It's just a casual hangout. We hope you can make it!

From Farm to Neighbor: The Power of Local Produce

Local food isn't just fresher, it's foundational. Supporting local agriculture helps ensure that high-quality, nutritious produce makes it from nearby farms directly into the hands of our neighbors. As a volunteer-driven organization, we rely on dedicated individuals like you to help bridge the gap between food that is grown and food that is needed.

Local food offers a range of important benefits that make it worth supporting. Locally grown foods typically offer better flavor and nutrition because they are harvested at peak ripeness and don't travel long distances. But the benefits go beyond quality. Supporting local food helps keep farms viable, supports sustainable practices, and strengthens the local economy. It also fosters a more responsive food system, allowing us to align seasonal harvests with community needs.

This is where T2T gleaning programs come in. Gleaning is the act of harvesting surplus produce from farms, gardens, and orchards. By recovering perfectly good crops that might otherwise be left unharvested, gleaning helps ensure that nutritious produce reaches folks in need. It also carries environmental benefits including conserving valuable resources like water, energy, and soil by ensuring that food already grown is eaten, lessening the need for additional production. Additionally, because gleaned food redistributed locally, it reduces the environmental impact associated with long-distance food distribution.

Now more than ever, this work is vital. As we face the loss of crucial programs like the Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) initiative and essential AmeriCorps positions that help build our capacity to access and distribute local food, our community food system is under increased pressure.

These programs have been instrumental in helping us connect local food to those who need it most. Without them, we may no longer have the capacity to maintain produce stands throughout the community, one of the most accessible ways for people to receive fresh, nutritious food close to home. In this challenging environment, the role of volunteers and locally-driven support becomes even more critical.

How Can You Help?

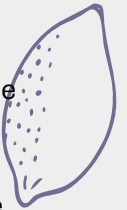
There are many ways to make a difference. You can lead a glean by organizing a group to harvest donated crops. Join the on-call list and be available for last-minute farm pickups. If you're a gardener, consider dedicating a row in your garden specifically to grow produce for donation, or bring any excess fruits and vegetables from your land to Table to Table.

Contributions of all sizes are helpful! We also have volunteers attend the Twin County Produce Auction (TCPA), which serves as a source for bulk local produce donated by farmers for redistribution. And don't underestimate the power of spreading the word: tell a friend, share a post, or invite someone new to volunteer with you.

Every box of gleaned tomatoes, every trip to pick up cucumbers, and every market stand – it all adds up to a healthier, more resilient community. Thank you for being a part of this important work!

Recruitment Note: Gleaning

Because of federal cuts to the AmeriCorps program, we will not be able to work with any new AmeriCorps members this summer. Because of this, we will not have the same personnel required to manage the local fresh produce initiatives that we have had in past summers. We are wondering if there is a volunteer, or several volunteers working together, who might want to lead some of our farm relationships and/or gleaning activities this year. If you are interested in this opportunity or have some questions, please let Jared (jared@table2table.org) or Natalie Tapscott (GreenIowa@table2table.org) know.



Volunteer Spotlight: Rajni Vijh



For those unfamiliar with her, meet Rajni Vijh—a passionate and dedicated volunteer at Table to Table (T2T). Originally from India, Rajni has been an integral part of the T2T community for nearly five years, dedicating her time and energy to fighting food insecurity and reducing food waste.

Prior to her retirement, Rajni was an IT Technical Director. She always envisioned volunteering at T2T after her career, and when the COVID-19 pandemic and businesses slowed down in 2022, she decided to retire earlier than planned and shifted her focus to her volunteering passion. Her transition from technology professional to a community helper exemplifies her commitment to making a difference.

One of her fondest memories at T2T dates back to her early days as a Route Volunteer. Her first assignment was riding along with Jon Feaver to pick up food from Trader Joe's. They collected a staggering 3,000 pounds of food, leaving her pleasantly surprised and proud to be part of an organization that makes such a tangible impact. This experience solidified her confidence and happiness in her volunteer role.

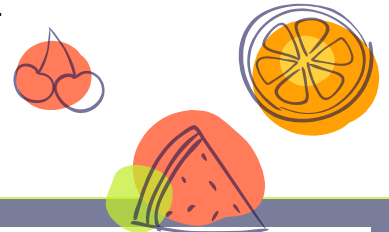
Rajni offers valuable advice to new volunteers: she encourages them to explore all available opportunities within T2T. Participating in volunteer appreciation gatherings is also something she recommends, as it fosters camaraderie and lifelong friendships among volunteers. When discussing food insecurity and waste, Rajni wishes more people understood the magnitude of these issues. She highlights that millions of pounds of food are wasted daily, while countless community members face hunger. She is especially proud that T2T has rescued, distributed, and saved 2.7 million pounds of food from being wasted—an achievement she hopes

more people acknowledge and support.

Amid her diverse interests, Rajni fondly recalls a memorable experience from her recent trip to India. She stayed at a hotel with an Indian Gooseberry tree loaded with fruit. The hotel manager thoughtfully packed a few pounds for her, which she turned into a homemade pickle to preserve this nutritious fruit known for its health benefits. This embodies her love for exploring international recipes and cooking for others.

Her hobbies include brisk walking—she aims for at least 10,000 steps daily—and experimenting with international cuisines. Yet, her favorite hobby is volunteering at T2T, where she finds purpose and joy.

Looking ahead, Rajni dreams of visiting Machu Picchu in Peru, eager to explore new cultural and natural wonders. As for her favorite ice cream treat, she prefers classic vanilla.



Thank You for Your Feedback!

As mentioned in the last newsletter, Table to Table is collaborating with Volunteer Iowa in the initiative, Service Enterprise. Completing the program certifies that the agency has structures/processes in place that incorporate engagement of volunteers in all aspects of the T2T mission and strategic plan.

In March, a survey was sent out to all T2T volunteers, resulting in responses from 70 of our active volunteers. The objective of the survey was to assess and improve the engagement and experience of our volunteers. Areas of focus included: leadership involvement, planning, technology, orientation, supervision, support, and training.

T2T thanks you for your input from this survey and the many other ways you demonstrate your investment in the mission!

Summary of results:

Responses were very positive. The results indicated that most volunteers serve because of a belief in the mission (90%), reducing food waste (82 %), and a sense of purpose (78.6%). Volunteers' responses indicate they have a good understanding of roles/responsibilities (80 %). Twenty respondents indicated they would be interested in ongoing training. A strong percentage responded that they have specific skill sets that could benefit T2T. The survey results also indicate that the volunteers feel supported by T2T staff (85.5 %). *If you are interested in additional results, please contact Jared.*

Annual Dinner Wrap-up



In case you missed it, this year's Annual Dinner was held on April 23, and it was one for the books! The event raised \$42,000 - that's the most we've ever raised through this event before!!! More than 70 T2T volunteers were at this year's dinner, either as volunteers or as attendees and we couldn't have pulled it off without them. A special shout out to the Event Committee who worked hand in hand with Natalie the past several months to ensure the event went off without a hitch. If you're interested in joining the Event Committee, email Natalie Leathers at natalie@table2table.org to get in on the action! Thank you to everyone who participated in the festivities of the dinner, we hope to see you all again at next year's event!

Reminder: Roll Up Windows in the Vans

Spring is finally here, which means perfect weather to roll down the windows and let in some fresh air! If you like to feel the breeze through your hair while on a route, please remember to roll the windows up once you return to Table to Table. One of our vans got quite the shower last month after a window was left open during a weekend of rain storms, leaving flooded floors, soaked seats, and a sad Elizabeth. Thank you for your help in keeping our vans safe and dry!



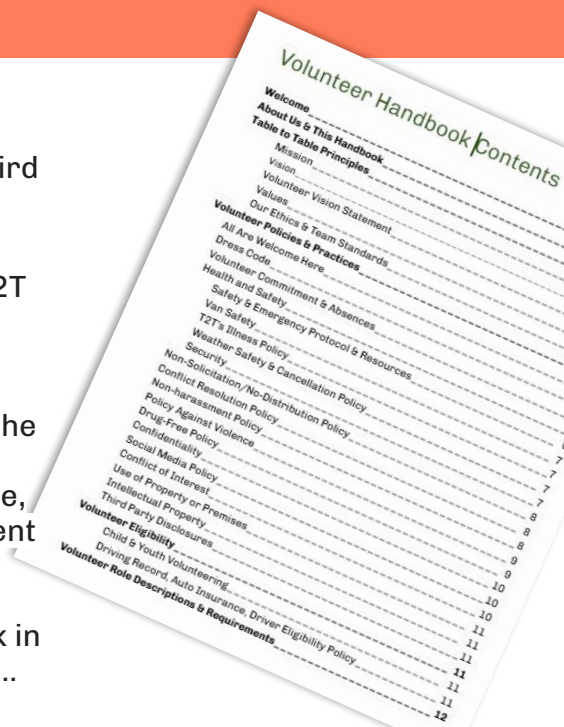
Continuing Updates to the Volunteer Orientation at T2T

We are continually updating the Volunteer Orientation at T2T because of its importance as it relates to fulfilling our mission. There are several aspects to our volunteer orientation. These include an initial interview/overview with the Manager of Volunteers, followed by online education.

Next, the new route volunteer is assigned their first few routes with an experienced volunteer. The new volunteer is provided an orientation checklist,

which they are to discuss with their route partner(s) and complete by the end of their third route.

In addition, the Volunteer Engagement Committee and T2T leadership team have been reviewing and revising the Volunteer Handbook. The objective of this project is for the content of the Handbook and online education to be accurate, comprehensive, and in alignment with the agency's mission and processes. We will be introducing this new handbook in the near future. Stay tuned....



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