

CHAPTER 03

FOOD



A rice huller in Nagaland, India supported by the work of Smart Power India, which expanded the reach of solar mini-grids to reach remote communities.

In much of the world, the food we eat is increasing human health risks, while our methods for growing that food are harming the planet. Climate change is also making it harder for many to find the food they need to live and thrive. The Foundation is working on multiple fronts to ensure the world grows, produces, and eats “Good Food,” which benefits people and planet alike.

By The Numbers

In 2023, the Foundation and its grantees and partners helped:



137M people with improved nutrition security through our global Good Food Initiative



8.6M people served with **Good Food commitments** in the United States; and over half of these people are underserved school-age learners



128.5M people served across Africa and Asia

100K+ produce prescription patients in the US, up from 12k in 2013

\$3.3B committed to **Good Food purchasing** in the United States and \$92 million in Africa



Over \$400M shifted to **Good Food purchasing** in Africa



The biomolecular composition of over **1,000 foods essential to humanity analyzed** so that we can understand what nutrition we can get from our food, with **37% sourced from the Global South**



Through our partnership with the Global FoodBanking Network, **13 national food banks in 10 countries tap into new sources of food salvage in agriculture, ports, and hospitality, reducing emissions while increasing nutrition access**

OUR BIG BET ON FOOD: FOOD IS MEDICINE

Poor diets are a leading cause of death and disability around the world, and diet-related diseases like diabetes and cardiovascular disease are the principal drivers of rising health care costs in the United States—representing 90% of healthcare spending. Further, high incidence of diet-related conditions greatly exacerbated poor health outcomes and health care costs during the Covid-19 pandemic.

A range of food-based interventions—including produce prescriptions and medically tailored meals—are collectively known as “Food is Medicine” and they hold immense promise in helping to prevent, manage, and treat chronic diseases. Our aim is to make Food is Medicine interventions accessible in the U.S. to all eligible patients as a reimbursable medical benefit, thus promoting equitable access to healthy diets, especially in underserved communities.

To do so, the Foundation began investing in 2019 and is helping partners deepen the scientific evidence and sustain the thought leadership that has elevated the issue and prompted action from insurers, big retailers, and government policymakers. The American Heart Association’s Health Care by Food initiative, launched in 2023 with Foundation support, is generating definitive clinical evidence on FIM programs and their impact on health in diverse populations.

As a result, many public and private insurers and national grocery chains are experimenting with a FIM offering. At the same time, ten states are offering, or planning to offer, FIM interventions through their Medicaid programs, while federal agencies, including the Veteran’s Health Administration and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, are calling for more to be done. Our role in this ecosystem is to support research and evidence that will enable the benefits of FIM to reach those who most need it.



The growing FIM momentum in the United States

2019 → 2023

12K → 100K+ produce prescription patients

2 → 10 states with approved and pending FIM programs

1 → 5 U.S. Federal agencies administering FIM funds

7 → 32 legislative actions

2 → 10 payers + 5 Food tech, investor coalition active

7 → 20+ major events; +475% media coverage since 2019

STORIES FROM THE FIELD



Adelante Mujeres gives participants vouchers to buy produce from the farmers’ market.

[Learn more >](#)

When Celerina Rojas and her seven-year-old son were both diagnosed as pre-diabetic, she knew she had to act. She turned to Adelante Mujeres’ produce prescription program, receiving \$40 per month per family member to buy fruits and vegetables, and an additional \$50 per month in farmers’ market vouchers. She lost weight, and neither she nor her son are prediabetic. Seventy percent of the families participating say at least one family member lost weight on the program, while 30 percent reduced the number of medications they were taking.

GOOD FOOD PURCHASING

The Foundation has supported Good Food Purchasing in the U.S. since 2019. The aim is to promote food that is healthy and sustainable and that creates opportunities for small- to mid-scale farmers and historically disadvantaged farm and food businesses.

Today, institutions serving meals to over 8.6 million people daily are shifting to Good Food in partnership with our grantees. The local food organizations we partner with are creating coalitions that connect local food producers with institutional purchasers—like school meal programs—thus providing more economic stability. At that same time, people who most need nutritious foods—such as children—find better food on their plates. Increasingly, commitments to good food include commitments to reduce carbon emissions of food purchases. For example, in New York City—which is enrolled in the Good Food Purchasing Program—greenhouse gas GHG total emissions per meal decreased from 2.3 kg of CO₂ per meal in 2019 to 1.8 kg of CO₂ per meal in 2022. Read more about the potential of good food procurement [here](#) and [here](#).

In Georgia, our partner The Common Market and their grantee—the Conservation Fund’s Working Farms Fund—helped farmer Rahul Anand move his regenerative farming practice from a 2 acre to a 200 acre farm.

In Ecuador, a member of the Guayaquil Food Bank team, supported by the Global Foodbanking Network, hands over food.

GLOBAL FOODBANKING NETWORK

In 2023, the Foundation partnered with The Global FoodBanking Network (GFN) to address food insecurity and reduce food waste and loss in ten countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. As a result, GFN has provided targeted support so that 13 national food banks in 10 countries can tap new sources of food salvage. This has provided food for an additional 3.8 million food insecure people in the longer term, rescuing 33,408,005 kilograms of food and avoiding an estimated 143,675 metric tons of CO₂ equivalent (CO₂e) by recovering food destined for landfill.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

Work from our Asia Regional Office

By 2050, the world will need to produce about 70 percent more food to feed its population, according to projections. Growing concerns about global food security and the impact of shifting climate patterns on crops has increased the urgency fueling an Asian Institute of Technology project supported by the Foundation to identify the most carbon-efficient methods of rice cultivation. Rice is a food staple for more than 3.5 billion people around the globe, and also the world’s most water-intensive crop.

13

food banks in 10 countries targeted through a grant to The Global FoodBanking Network

>3.8M

food-insecure people reached

>33.4M

kilograms of food rescued and distributed

~143

metric tons of greenhouse gases avoided by recovering food destined for landfills





Participation in the Good Food Purchasing Program in more than 25 cities and jurisdictions is solidifying the connection between institutional purchasers, smaller-scale and underserved producers, and other sources of sustainably grown food.

April 2023

New York City updates GFPP targets to include a 33% reduction in GHGs from food purchasing and consumption

March 2023

New Mexico and **Minnesota** adopt universal school meals policies

June 2022

Illinois removes lowest bidder requirements for school food; **California** creates \$1 QOM school meal incentive fund for good food purchasing

August 2023

Massachusetts adopts universal free school meals

July 2023

Michigan adopts universal free school meal policy

June 2023

Vermont adopts universal free school meal policy

October 2023

USDA awards \$4.4 million cooperative agreement to **RF grantee** Urban School Food Alliance to help agency transform school food procurement system

May 2023

New York Senate passes Good Food NY Bill allowing preference for vendors that deliver on good food values (full passage in 2024)

November 2022

Colorado adopts universal school meals, with local & equitable purchasing incentives, via ballot referendum

February 2022

New York City becomes largest city to adopt Good Food Purchasing Program and makes all food purchasing data public

June 2021

Illinois becomes first state to pursue state-level Good Food Purchasing; **California** and **Maine** become first states to adopt universal school meals

December 2021

USDA establishes the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement, largest federal program to support values-based purchasing (\$900M)



Historically underserved farmers have long been excluded from wholesale opportunities. Now...these farms are empowered to participate, grow, and sustain their businesses.

Bill Green

Executive Director,
The Common Market Southeast



GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

Our partnership with the [Chicago Food Policy Action Council](#) gets healthier foods to schools, hospitals, correctional facilities and senior centers. Partners made important gains connecting local farmers with these institutions, for example local aggregator, The Common Market, recently ran a full district pilot through the Local Food for Schools program to source pasture raised, regenerative yogurt from local farmers into all Chicago public schools. This is just one example of how Metro Chicago's \$300M food purchasing market is creating economic opportunity for underserved farm and food businesses while getting better food on people's plates.

Erika Allen of Urban Growers Collective, which operates eight urban farms, primarily on Chicago's South Side. Ms. Allen co-designed [Growing Justice](#) and sits on its Advisory Committee. (Photo Courtesy of Urban Growers Collective)



SCHOOL MEALS

With leadership out of our Africa Regional Office, since 2020, we have contributed to expanding the reach of healthy school meals to almost 118 million new students globally. We are seeing great gains in commitment to providing children with school meals. In Kenya, for example, the government committed to universal coverage for school meals by 2030, and reached 2.5 million children in 2023.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD



Robai's mother, Rosaline Wanjiru Gitau, at the cafeteria where she helps prepare school meals.

[Learn more >](#)

Work from our Africa Regional Office

Rosaline Wanjiru Gitau completed high school as a C- student, but it's not because she wasn't smart or didn't have dreams. Her grades suffered because there was never enough to eat. The cycle seemed destined to repeat itself, until a school lunch program disrupted generational poverty. Now, thanks to a kitchen run by [Food4Education](#)—a project of our grantee WFP and supported by The Rockefeller Foundation—her daughter Robai now gets at least one hot meal a day and intends to realize her dream to become a doctor.





We are also working to improve the quality of school meals. Alongside our partners, the Foundation has pioneered work on the new concept of fortified whole grain foods, which, on average, are 5-7X more nutritious than their refined counterparts. They can also be produced with a 20% smaller environmental footprint and can be sourced by schools at no additional cost, with very good acceptance by schoolchildren.

The Fortified Whole Grain Alliance (FWGA) aims to advance fortified whole grain adoption, particularly among school-aged children. There has been significant progress made in the three countries where FWGA is now active—Rwanda, Burundi, and Kenya—with over 300,000 children reached through various pilots and initiatives.

Rwanda

81

schools with nearly **74,000 students reached**, as of January 2023



Transitioning operations of programs from World Food Programme **to government of Rwanda**

Burundi

\$4.5M

school feeding spending by the government, nearly doubled

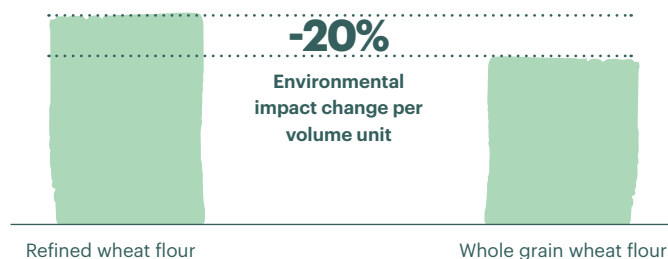
300K

learners consumed fortified whole grain

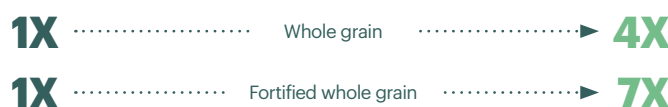
To scale the promise of quality school meals, we helped form the School Meals Coalition in 2021, which has emerged as a pivotal platform for collaboration and information exchange among member countries. Today, this coalition has generated significant political will among governments to expand and enhance the quality of school meals programs around the world. The coalition has 97 member states, 3 regional bodies, 124 partners, and 4 networked initiatives. Through the coalition's work, domestic funding continues to flow to school meals programs, despite competing priorities and more children are receiving school meals than in 2020.

Average reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and land, water, fertilizer, and pesticide use

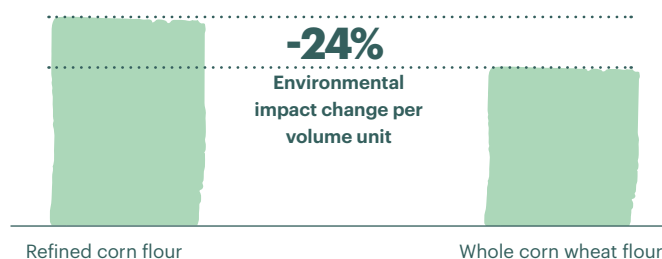
WHEAT



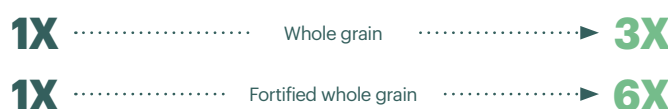
Nutrition impact



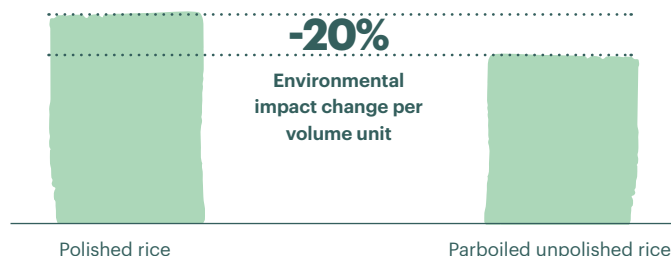
CORN



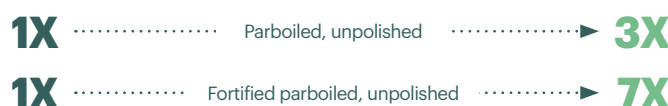
Nutrition impact



RICE



Nutrition impact



LESSONS LEARNED FROM OUR FOOD WORK



This work confirms that transforming food systems is needed for people and planet. As we seek to make that a reality, we are applying several lessons, including the following.

Patient grantmaking unlocks the capacity and resources necessary to seed scaling opportunities.

We must build a shared vision of success and be realistic and clear about the roles, resources, and capabilities of partner organizations.

To serve high-need populations, we must address access barriers.

For example, our grantees at Duke University found that Hispanic populations faced specific barriers to enrolling in Food is Medicine programs, including language, transportation, and fear of enrollment

leading to deportation. Other underserved communities face unique enrollment challenges, and either do not (or cannot) access the formal healthcare system.

The public sector's purchasing power can uniquely influence food systems

By prioritizing the purchase of Good Food, public institutions—like schools and hospitals—can stimulate demand for healthier and more sustainably produced foods. However, to respond to this demand, food producers need support and incentives.

Leadership must be shared—and at times ceded.

Through our work in fortified whole grains, school meals and Good Food, we've ceded the driver's seat to several experts and leaders around the world. As we have seen, providing support for local organizations to organize, align strategically, and build capacity is a powerful way to enable systems change. Our place-based work in Chicago and Atlanta are examples of this.

Where matters.

Locating our School Meals team in our Nairobi office has enabled trusted relationships and understanding—upon which we helped build the School Meals Coalition and its community of practice. At times, remaining too headquarters—focused has hindered our progress.

School lunches, supported by The Rockefeller Foundation as part of a grant to the World Food Programme, have improved 11-year old Robai Gitau's school performance, interrupted generational poverty, and made her dream of becoming a doctor seem achievable. She's seen here in her classroom at Kuraiha Primary School in rural Juja, about 20 miles north of Nairobi, Kenya.

