

# Empty Shelves, Louder Voices: What Happens When Food Security Becomes a Footnote



Let's name the silence.

Montana's food banks are hurting. Not metaphorically. Not bureaucratically. But tangibly — like empty shelves where there used to be fresh produce, like waiting rooms that once had warmth and now only echo.

Recently, the federal rug was pulled from under two essential food programs: the *Local Food for Schools Program* and the *Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program*. Long names. Quiet supports. Gone now.

Together, these programs injected over a billion dollars into local economies, nourishing bodies, sustaining farmers, and holding fragile systems together. And just like that — deleted from the ledger. Montana's most vulnerable communities, already navigating scarcity, now stand in even longer lines, only to receive less. Less food. Less dignity. Less care.

## **The Anatomy of a Cut**

The programs did more than fund logistics. They curated relationships: between food and community, between rural producers and urban hunger, between local abundance and collective survival.

Now that relationship has been severed.

Food banks in Montana, already stretched, are scaling back. Volunteers are turning away people they used to welcome. Small farmers, once proud contributors to community health, are left with surplus they can't distribute and dreams they can't afford.

And none of this feels accidental.

## **Where Does LIFTT Stand?**

We are a Center for Independent Living, yes. But we are also a center for humanity. And food insecurity is not a side issue — it's central. You can't fight for civil rights on an empty stomach. You can't access public transit if you're faint from skipping meals. Independence without nourishment is a contradiction.

So we say: this matters.

To everyone who once depended on a food box to stretch their month: we see you.

To the food banks trying to hold the line: we stand with you.

To the growers who now wonder if justice and agriculture can still coexist: we thank you.

## **This Is Not the End of the Story**

Postmodernism, if it teaches us anything, tells us not to trust the old narratives. That power often speaks in passive voice. That erasure begins with a policy memo. And yet — every system can be rewritten. Every absence can become an invitation.

So, what do we do?

**We listen louder.** To those on the ground, those in the grocery lines, those who lost access overnight.

**We connect the dots.** Because hunger doesn't happen in a vacuum—it intersects with disability, poverty, race, geography, and dignity.

**We create anyway.** Gardens. Co-ops. Community kitchens. Mutual aid networks. We remember that we've always found ways to nourish each other, with or without permission.

LIFTT will continue to advocate. To amplify. To resist the narrative that says “there's nothing we can do.” Because there is always something.

And if the shelves are empty, we'll fill them with our voices.