

TEAM PROFILE

Metro Caring

Based in Denver, Colorado on the traditional territory of the Tsésthó'e (Cheyenne), Očhéthi Šakówiŋ, hinono'eino' biito'owu' (Arapaho), Núu-agma-tv-p (Ute), Sioux, Shoshone, Apache, Kiowa, and Comanche.



Andy Breiter, the rancher at Grama Grass & Livestock, partners with Metro Caring to bring fresh, locally raised beef to the Denver community. Photo courtesy of Grama Grass & Livestock

ABOUT METRO CARING

As a leading anti-hunger organization in Colorado, Metro Caring works with the community to meet people's immediate need for nutritious and culturally relevant food while building a movement to address the root causes of hunger. Metro Caring offers programming in five core areas: healthy food access, nutrition education and cooking classes, urban agriculture, community organizing and resource connection.

Metro Caring runs a no-cost grocery store called the Fresh Foods Market in Denver. In 2021, the organization began purchasing from local producers—including Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC), women, and beginning farmers and ranchers—to stock the market. While grocery rescue, TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program) distributed through their Feeding America Partner— Food Bank of

F2FA PROGRAM QUICK FACTS

► F2FA PROGRAM REACH:

Metro Caring purchases directly from 13 producers within a 50 mile radius of Denver, and purchases from about 15 additional producers through a partnership with the East Denver Food Hub. More than 56,000 individuals, primarily from Denver, Arapaho, Adams, and Jefferson counties, access food assistance through the Fresh Foods Market per year.

► FUNDING SOURCES:

- USDA Local Food Purchase Assistance Program (LFPA)
- Other federal funding
- City and county funding
- Individual donations

*Metro Caring was established in 1974
Their F2FA program has been in operation since 2021*

► WEBSITE:
metrocaring.org



“

“With nearly half a million dollars in food procurement funding, we really have felt like it’s quite a responsibility to be investing that money back into our local economy with our local farmers. It’s a different mindset—it’s not just us trying to get the shelves stocked with the most things that we can possibly get for the cheapest amount of money.”

**– CORY SCRIVNER, FOOD ACCESS MANAGER,
METRO CARING**

the Rockies, and donations still account for most of the food for the store, Metro Caring now spends close to half a million dollars annually procuring food from local producers.

Through the Fresh Foods Market, the organization distributes roughly 15,000 pounds of food to hundreds of people every day. Most community members have low-incomes and are people of color. Many are immigrants or refugees, and more than 40 languages are spoken by market shoppers, with the top five being English, Spanish, Russian, Arabic and Dari (an Afghani language).

SHIFTING PURCHASING TO REFLECT VALUES AND ADDRESS ROOT CAUSES OF HUNGER

Like many food access organizations, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Metro Caring saw a sharp increase in demand for food. This crisis came at a time when the organization had been engaging in an analysis around the root causes of hunger—including industrial agriculture—and the right to food. Metro Caring began to understand how foods donated through the emergency

food system were a result of an industrial food system that relies on the charitable food system to artificially inflate the prices of farm commodities. They began to think about nearby farmers as part of their community in addition to people experiencing food insecurity.

This shift in thinking, along with the changing landscape for food access due to the pandemic, was the genesis of Metro Caring's F2FA program. With widespread attention on skyrocketing rates of food insecurity, increased funding from foundations and elsewhere meant Metro Caring's budget for food procurement grew to over \$400,000 in 2021—more than a 20-fold increase over the previous year. This change aligned with their commitment to addressing the root causes of hunger. As explained by Emily Settlecowski, Manager of Strategic Initiatives at Metro Caring, “We started to view food procurement as another tool towards our movement building to end hunger.”

Since then, the organization has received Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) funding from USDA, boosting their ability to support local agriculture. This has meant higher quality groceries for shoppers, new partnerships with farmers, and an investment in the local farm economy. According to Cory Scrivner, Food Access Manager at Metro Caring, “We’ve really been quite intentional about trying to shift from this food access as a ‘last resort rescue’ option and really increase the quality of goods that are available to our shoppers in the Fresh Food Market. A main point is trying to procure that stuff locally.” This has meant taking time to educate stakeholders about the reasons for this shift, as Cory explains, “When we’re an anti-hunger org that’s trying to make the shift to rights and not charity, there’s a lot of work that has to go alongside with our volunteers and with our donors, around [explaining that] our goal is



WHO'S AT THE F2FA TABLE?

Metro Caring's Farm to Food Assistance work is guided by a Community Advisory Council of community leaders and farmers. The Council guides research for the program and builds community awareness about how Metro Caring is partnering with local producers to stock their Fresh Foods Market, which is modeled after a no-cost grocery store. Across the broader organization, Metro Caring has multiple points of community governance. Individuals with lived experience of food insecurity sit on the Board of Directors, and various programs within the organization are guided by councils made up of community members. The organization also invests in creating community-led and equitable power structures through training and leadership development.

not just to feed as many people as possible. We want to address the root causes of hunger, and end it."

As part of the evolution of their F2FA program, Metro Caring recently began procuring meat directly from local ranchers—which include BIPOC, female, and beginning ranchers. Ranchers are now raising whole cows for Metro Caring. This translates into substantial income for ranchers, with some contracts as much as \$50,000 per year. It also means Metro Caring can offer cuts of meat—like tongue and organ meats—that many clients are delighted to see. In many cases these foods are a traditional part of clients' diets.

Metro Caring has created a Local Food Procurement Guide which profiles producers and helps to foster urban-rural relationships. Metro Caring uses the guide for their procurement and shares it with smaller

organizations that are also interested in making the shift to purchasing from local producers.

In just a few years, Metro Caring has made big changes to align their procurement with their commitment to addressing root causes of hunger and support local farm viability while bringing high quality produce to their shoppers. As Emily Settleowski puts it, "We recognize that systems have historically oppressed and marginalized groups of people by identity, and we work to dismantle both the patterns of behavior and the way we approach our work. We stand in solidarity and deep relationship with our community. Rather than do 'For,' we seek to do 'With' by ensuring we create spaces at every table for those most impacted by food injustice.



IN THEIR WORDS



KEY SUCCESSES

The process of Farm to Food Assistance has really helped our understanding and application of root cause work for ending hunger. It's really encouraged us to grow in our understanding as an organization around principles of food sovereignty directly because we're engaging in this type of work.

Entered into 8 producer agreements with local suppliers which provide income that local farmers can count on for this growing season. All are growing specific items requested by community members like cilantro, okra, and certain peppers and tomatoes, and also pork, beef, and chicken.

The expansion of the Local Food Procurement Catalog.

With input from community members, the Market has identified "Never Out" local items like meat, onions, potatoes and pintos that will always be in stock, so that community members can count on getting them when they come to the Market.



KEY CHALLENGES

Centering community voice: How can we center community voice, decision making, and cultural food values in our purchasing decisions while expanding our procurement from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color farmers? We are working with our Community Advisory Council to address the challenge of navigating the expectations and desires around food from the community and the capacity, barriers, and reality of the local food system.

Sustainable funding: How to secure sustainable funding for this work. What narratives work well with funders? What funding opportunities outside of government funding exist, and how do we build a movement as food access organizations to push the sector forward in F2FA?

Scaling up a values-based supply chain: Through our F2FA work in our Fresh Foods Market and pilot of Never-Out Items, we are building the case for a Universal Basic Food program where regardless of income, everyone in Denver would have free access to nutrient-dense, locally sourced, and culturally responsive food items. For this to lead to systems level change, we need to learn how to scale up our current level of procurement while maintaining our level of relationship building and weaving that is required of a values-based supply chain.

Communication: Making sure our community is aware of this shift to procuring local, high-quality products and their right to them, and creating ways to connect them to producers so that we shift the narrative and experience around the food system.



VALUES IN ACTION

Establishing mechanisms for community leadership and guidance

Providing culturally important foods

Purchasing from BIPOC and women producers

Providing a reliable source of income for farmers



LESSONS LEARNED

"It is going to be hard. It is not the easier path. There is going to be a lot of conversation about why you would choose to do this as opposed to purchasing something cheaper and feeding more people. It's the long game." - Cory Scrivner, Food Access Manager, Metro Caring

The Farm to Food Assistance Learning Lab was made possible through a 2021 USDA Local Foods Promotion Program (LFPP) grant, with supplemental support from The Rockefeller Foundation. This profile features one of ten participating teams who served as co-investigators in the Wallace Center's research on the field of Farm to Food Assistance.