

Summit County Food Equity Coalition

Summit County Food Equity Coalition (FEC) is a dynamic group of community members with lived experience of food insecurity. They are dedicated to transforming food distribution sites into welcoming spaces for all. At these sites, shoppers access a variety of fresh foods without needing to provide identification and only need to update information annually. This shopper experience aligns with the FEC's goal of ensuring that system change is community designed and community informed. Using justice-centered approaches, the coalition has notably improved coordination among food assistance agencies.



FEC Community Food Market volunteers

FEC has increased coordination among:

- Family and Intercultural Resource Center (FIRC) Community Food Markets
- Smart Bellies
- CAFE Food Rescue
- Summit County Community and Senior Center

By increasing communication and marketing a community calendar, FEC increases the daily availability of culturally appropriate, nutritious foods. This collaborative strategy led to effective resource allocation and a more efficient food distribution system.

The coalition has also shifted perceptions about food insecurity in Summit County. In 2023, FEC administered a community survey that gathered almost 300 responses. One key survey finding was that limited fresh foods was the main reason why people did not use food pantries. FEC emphasized the nutritional and economic value of the foods provided at food pantries compared to grocery stores. FEC has also connected food security to other social determinants of health to influence system changes. Leveraging the interconnectedness between food and housing security, FEC has gained partner support to help food pantry recipients manage their housing costs.

Engaging Political Leaders to Sustain Food System Change

Summit County FEC's success and influence have been increased by its engagement with local political leaders. FEC's efforts are led by FIRC and supported by county commissioners. Commissioners provide strategic guidance to make sure that the coalition's plans and programming align with community needs. The Summit Foundation also informs the coalition's strategic guidance to ensure that the coalition addresses community-identified priorities.



summitfirc.org/food-for-all/

Valuing the Expertise of People with Lived Experience

Summit County FEC is primarily comprised of people with lived experience, selected through a nomination process. Local institutions rely on the coalition for its highly valued consultation, guidance, and input on food security programs. Members receive a standard \$200 stipend for two-hour monthly meetings and have additional opportunities to earn stipends by participating in food-related volunteer opportunities in the community.

There is strong awareness and respect for the coalition's efforts in the community and high demand among people with lived experience to join FEC, underscoring its impact. Carla Decker, FIRC's director of strategic advancement, states, "All food assistance providers now seek to vet ideas and changes with the Food Equity Coalition, which has transformed how agencies operate."



FEC touring the Sol Center

In the next few years, Summit County FEC hopes to:

- Create a passive funding source from a ballot initiative for a sugary-beverage tax
- Bridge with the Summit Food Collaborative to connect community voice to policy change
- Develop shared data metrics across Summit Food Collaborative partners to reshape the narrative around food security in Summit County



Using Online Tools for Equitable Food Distribution

The Northwest Colorado Center for Independence (NWCCI) empowers individuals to access food resources independently and with dignity. NWCCI collaborates with other coalition partners to equitably distribute surplus food using phone banking. NWCCI also has a representative at FEC, facilitated by FIRC. FIRC also operates Summit County's two largest free Community Food Markets. The Food Markets use PantrySoft, a client-choice online ordering system that assigns credits to families on the basis of household size. An average of 600 households receive fresh food every Tuesday through Thursday at the FIRC Food Markets. Leo Santos, NWCCI's independent living coordinator, shared, "This reimaged approach prioritizes community needs and preferences, offering culturally appropriate foods and efficient distribution systems."



STAY CONNECTED TO SUMMIT COUNTY FEC

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