



Gleaners Community Food Bank Impact Report

A Capital One Investment
in Taylor, MI



Executive Summary

Gleaners Community Food Bank is leading the fight against food insecurity in southeastern Michigan by operating as the premier food bank in its five-county service area. Located in Taylor, MI, Gleaners' South Campus has allowed the food bank to streamline its operations, increase its capacity, make its distribution more efficient, and engage partners to meet the food security needs of its communities through a variety

of programs. Gleaners' acquisition of the South Campus, which has been operational since 2021, was financed in part by Capital One Community Renewal Fund via the federal New Markets Tax Credit program. The project helped Gleaners meet the intense and immediate community need for food during the COVID-19 pandemic, and it has continued to create transformational impact across the region.

Project Key Metrics

\$2M

NMTC allocation from Capital One Community Renewal Fund

\$17M

total project cost

180,000

square foot food distribution facility



South Campus Facility Highlights

25,000

square feet of office space

155,000

square feet of warehouse capacity

21,000

square feet of freezer space

30,000

square feet of cooler space

24

refrigerated loading docks



Reducing Food Insecurity

80M

pound annual distribution capacity

350

feeding partners

54,000

volunteer hours in 2024



Building Community Wealth

39

permanent FTEs supported

100%

of FTEs supported are quality jobs

92%

of FTEs supported are accessible to individuals without a college degree



About Gleaners Community Food Bank

Gleaners Community Food Bank is leading the fight against food insecurity in its home community of Taylor, MI, and throughout its five-county service area through the expansion and upgrading of its South Campus – the organization's headquarters and primary food distribution location in Taylor. Funded in part by Capital One Community Renewal Fund (COCRF) via the federal New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC) Program, Gleaners has drastically improved its capacity and efficiency as a result of its new facilities. The upgrades allow Gleaners to continue to operate as the premier food security organization in southeastern Michigan.

Gleaners was originally founded in 1977 and operated out of a building in Detroit that was never intended to distribute more than 20M pounds of food annually. Expansions over the years increased Gleaners' capacity, but the food bank lacked a centralized space for warehousing and operations. The original building had two truck docks, which made logistics extremely challenging, according to Cara Rayner, Senior Director of Operations and Project Management for Gleaners: "We were extremely inefficient with two truck docks, one inbound and one outbound. We would have semis lined up and down the road." The food bank utilized a variety of solutions including renting space from the Salvation Army and other warehousing alternatives, but the goal was always a centralized location that would allow Gleaners to increase its



capacity and efficiency. Said Rayner: "When we saw the building that we ended up purchasing in Taylor, our minds were just blown up." Gleaners moved into its new headquarters at the South Campus in 2021.

COCRF's \$2M NMTC allocation was part of a larger \$17M package to allow Gleaners to acquire and rehabilitate a 180,000 square foot refrigerated warehouse space, allowing the food bank to consolidate and streamline its operations to better serve its community and larger service area. The new facility shifts the burden from warehousing constraints to sourcing challenges – that is, Gleaners' new challenge is to source enough food to fit its new space.



“The [NMTCs] were powerful... It gave us time to raise more money and put together an effective plan for how to get the project done.”

— Gerry Brisson, President and CEO

According to Gleaners President and CEO Gerry Brisson, the cost to build a new building could have been as high as \$45M – nearly triple the cost of acquiring and renovating the existing facility. The new facility gives Gleaners around 25,000 square feet of office space alongside 155,000 square feet of storage space. This includes over 50,000 square feet of freezer and cooler space – a nearly 500% increase from the previous capacity. Gleaners now operates 24 loading docks from its facilities, up from two loading docks previously. The new building allows for a highly efficient design; according to Brisson, Gleaners gained around 100,000 square feet of operating space without a significant increase in operating costs.

The NMTC package was a critical piece of the financing for the acquisition, according to Brisson: “The [NMTCs] were powerful. They were a way to show support for the project on a broader scale. They were a way to show some immediate cash availability for some of the things that had to be done in the renovation. So it gave us time to raise more money and put together an effective plan for how to get the project done.”

Gleaners has a history of growth and innovation, which led the food bank to be recognized as [Feeding America’s Member of the Year in 2019](#). Gleaners recognizes the prevalence of food insecurity and the importance of dignity for those utilizing its services. The new facility will enable Gleaners to significantly increase both the quality and quantity of its operations. The food bank typically distributes around 50M pounds of food annually, but the new facility gives it the capacity to scale up to 80M or more pounds annually in a crisis, as it did during the COVID-19 pandemic when the community’s need rapidly increased. The facility creates greater capacity to serve its network of 350 partners over a five-county area with increased logistical efficiency. The project will allow Gleaners to create quality jobs that will be available to the local community. Said Julie Beamer, Chief Operations Officer for Gleaners, “We fundamentally believe that food insecurity can be solved...The South Campus is a key part of that. My hope would be that in my lifetime, we would get to that place in Southeast Michigan. It’s absolutely achievable.”

Key Metrics



\$2M

NMTC allocation from Capital One Community Renewal Fund



\$17M

Total Project Cost



180,000

Square Foot Food Distribution Facility

About Taylor, MI

“Poverty is a dynamic, not a static thing,” said Gerry Brisson, referring to economic challenges facing residents across Gleaners’ service area. Gleaners staff and partner agency representatives agree that food insecurity is often closer than people think, particularly in historically disinvested communities with high poverty and low median family incomes. Each of the five counties in Gleaners’ service area have a [food insecurity rate of at least 10%](#), with Wayne County – the site of Gleaners’ South Campus – having the highest rate at 17.6%.

The census tract in which Gleaners’ South Campus is located displays severe distress characteristics that emphasize the need for an organization like Gleaners. The tract is a Qualified Opportunity Zone, a USDA-Designated Food Desert, and a FEMA Disaster Declaration Area. The poverty rate is 31.8%, and the median family income (MFI) is 68.6% of the area MFI. The 17.6% unemployment rate is 2.1 times the national average.

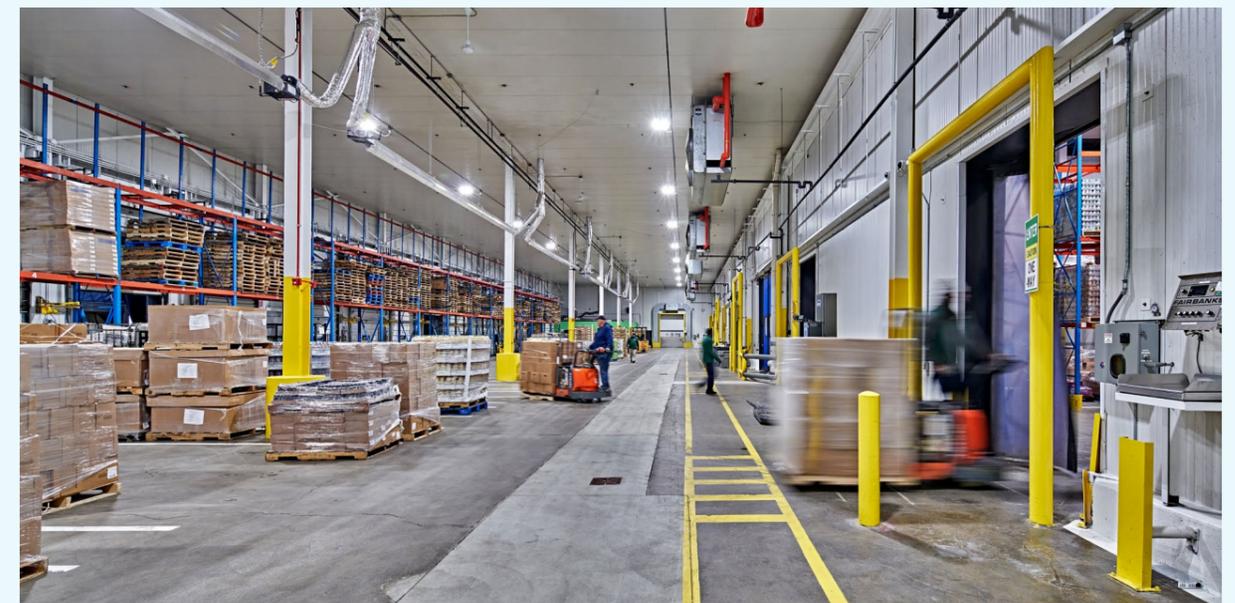
Amanda Borg, Community Health and Well-Being Supervisor for Trinity Health Livingston, pointed to another group vulnerable to food insecurity: Asset-Limited, Low-Income, Employed (ALICE) residents, who may technically earn wages above the poverty line but still struggle to meet their basic needs due

“Poverty is a dynamic, not a static thing.”

— Gerry Brisson, President and CEO

to the gap between federal poverty designations and the actual cost of living. The five counties in Gleaners’ services area range [from 21% \(Livingston\) to 31% \(Wayne\) in ALICE-rate](#), with zip code 48180 having an elevated ALICE-rate of 50%.

Gleaners’ expansion is supported by local economic development and community health goals. The City of Taylor Master Plan identifies reuse of vacant, underutilized, or dilapidated buildings as a goal. Additionally, each of the five counties in Gleaners’ service areas have engaged Community Health Assessments that directly or indirectly (e.g. as part of a larger community health goal) identify food insecurity as a challenge to be addressed.



Distress Criteria

21405 Trolley Industrial Drive, Taylor, MI, 48180

Project address

26163583000 (Severely Distressed)

Census tract

31.8%

Poverty rate

68.57%

MFI

17.6%

Unemployment rate

2.12x

Unemployment rate to national unemployment rate ratio

Qualified

Opportunity Zone

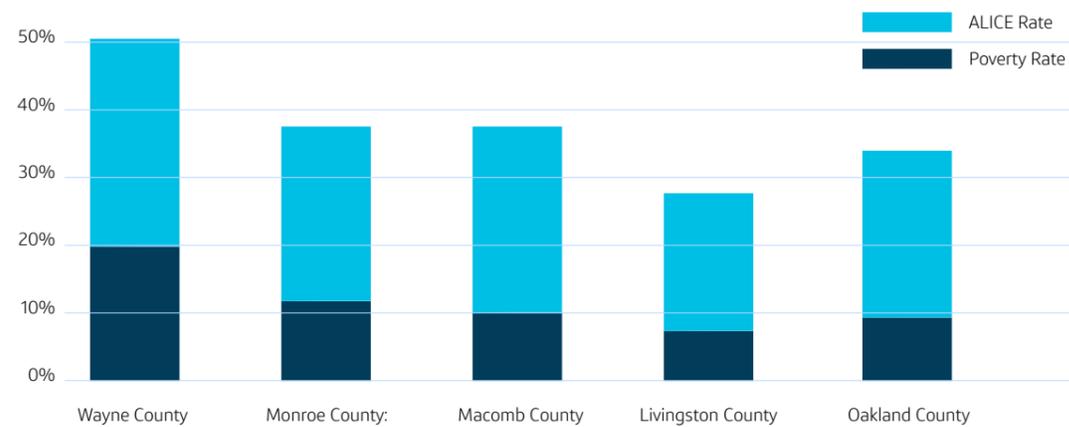
USDA

Food Desert

FEMA

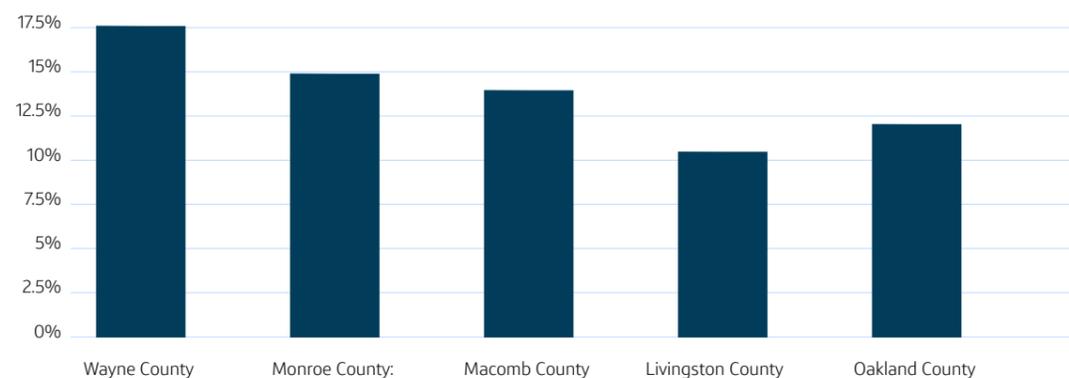
Major Disaster Declaration Area

Household ALICE Rate* and Poverty Rate, Gleaners Service Area (2023)



*ALICE Rate does not include households below the poverty line

Food Insecurity Rate, Gleaners Service Area (2023)



Reducing Food Insecurity

Increasing Capacity and Efficiency

Gleaners is currently distributing around 50M pounds of food annually, with a goal of 60M in 2026 – a 33% increase from its 2019 distribution. The South Campus has the capacity to scale up to 80M pounds annually and beyond in the event of a crisis that creates a rapid increase in food insecurity. Cara Rayner pointed to the COVID-19 pandemic as an example, noting that Gleaners distributed around 80M pounds of food between the summers of 2021 and 2022.

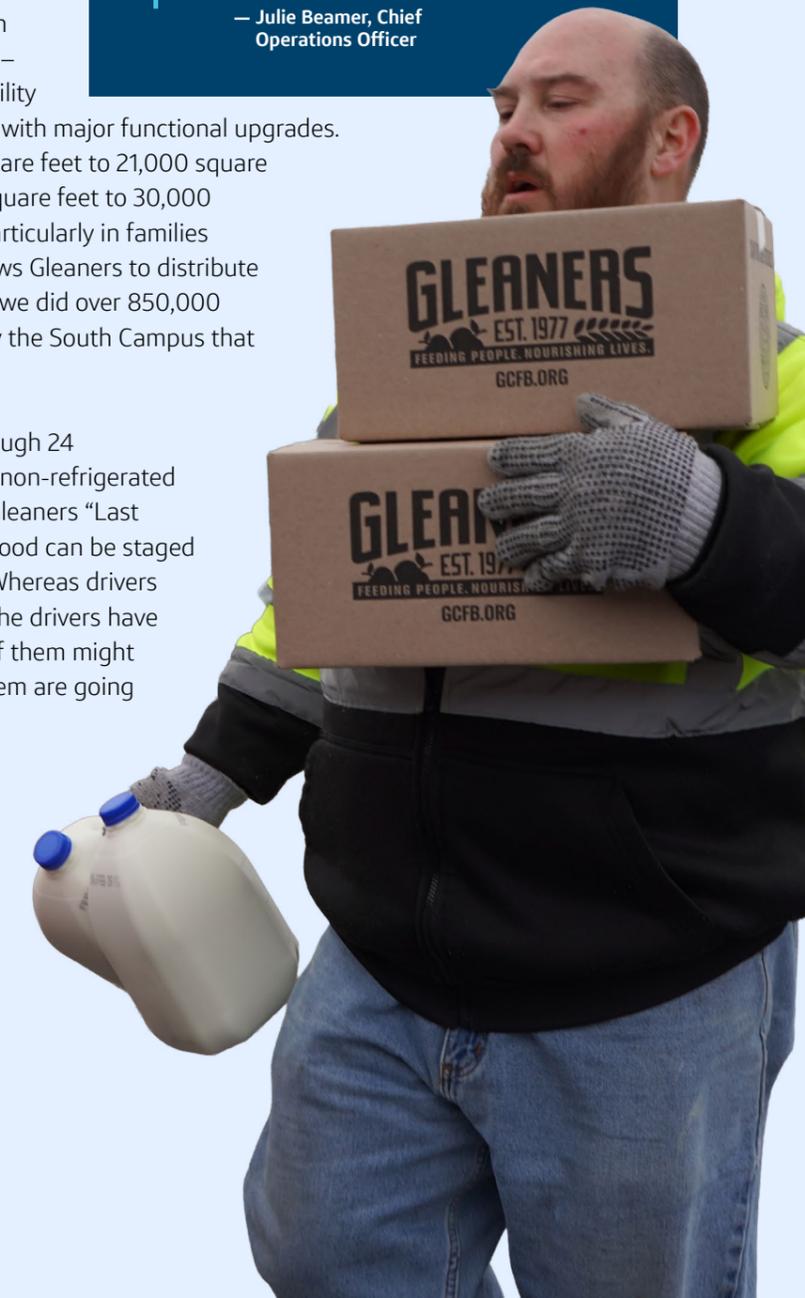
Gleaners hopes to regularly distribute 80M pounds of food annually. Whereas Gleaners previously faced storage limitations, according to Beamer, the South Campus has created a new challenge for Gleaners – sourcing enough food to fill its warehouse. The facility contains 155,000 square feet of warehouse space, with major functional upgrades. Freezer capacity has tripled in size, from 7,000 square feet to 21,000 square feet, and cooler space has expanded from 1,800 square feet to 30,000 square feet. One of the most common requests, particularly in families with children, is fresh milk. The South Campus allows Gleaners to distribute 16 trucks of milk monthly. Said Beamer: “Last year, we did over 850,000 gallons of milk out to the community, and it’s really the South Campus that allows that.”

The high distribution volume is made possible through 24 refrigerated loading docks – an increase from two non-refrigerated docks previously – that increase the efficiency of Gleaners’ “Last Mile” service. Because the docks are refrigerated, food can be staged in advance, allowing drivers to load more quickly. Whereas drivers previously had to wait in long lines, said Rayner, “The drivers have less downtime, so they can do more turns. Some of them might be able to go out three times per day, and all of them are going out minimally two times.”

The facility makes it much more efficient to get food from Gleaners to its partner agencies, who deliver food directly to communities.

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— Julie Beamer, Chief Operations Officer



Engaging Community Partners

According to Rayner, Gleaners has around 350 partner agencies throughout its service area, and Brisson noted that Gleaners directly runs around 40 mobile pantries per month. Beamer pointed to a network of 39 schools that Gleaners supports by providing fresh produce, fresh milk, and frozen meats annually, along with shelf stable commodities to the families. Gleaners' service area has both rural and urban communities and is economically diverse, and working with community partners allows Gleaners to leverage local expertise to maximize distribution in different communities. Gleaners' network of pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, and other partner agencies allow Gleaners to maximize its impact across its service area. Amber Schroeder, Community Impact Coordinator for Livingston County United Way, commented on Gleaners' commitment to local partners: "They are truly a partner. They're never going anywhere saying 'Gleaners did this,' or 'I did this.' It's always 'We did this.' They hold their partnerships in high regard."

In addition to its feeding partners, Gleaners engages a variety of community members and institutions to support community health. In Livingston County, Gleaners partners with the Livingston County United Way, Trinity Health System, and other organizations as part of the [Livingston County Hunger Council](#), a collaborative body focused on providing access to food as well as food and nutrition education to the

local population. Amanda Borg described Gleaners as an important referral partner for food insecure patients. Said Borg, "They're committed, and they support other community organizations in various ways. They get out into the community. Whether it's other coalition meetings, other community events, Gleaners is one of those partners that shows up."

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— Amber Schroeder, Community Impact Coordinator for Livingston County United Way



Feeding Partner Highlights

Eagles Helping Hands

Eagles Helping Hands, located in Redford, MI, is an organization focused on diverting food that could potentially become waste and redirecting it to community members facing food insecurity. The organization picks up 10-20 pallets of food from Gleaners weekly, which is "gone by the end of the day," according to Kristina Knoerl, Daily Operations Coordinator for Eagles Helping Hands. Milk is one of the most popular items for Eagles Helping Hands, and Gleaners is one of the providers. Said Knoerl, "It's a great impact on the community, knowing we have a partner we can count on at least once a week to be able to pass out a large amount of food to people in need. It gives us a sense of security to know we're able to count on [Gleaners]."

Fish and Loaves

Fish and Loaves is a client-choice food pantry located near Gleaners' South Campus in Taylor. The pantry is organized like a grocery store, with around 70 items including fresh produce, milk, and meat. Fish and Loaves purchases its food from Gleaners and then makes it available to community members. The organization also provides produce three times per month through its Saturday Fresh Market program, in which residents can receive 25 pound boxes of fresh produce and milk provided by Gleaners. Stephanie McNeese, CEO of Fish and Loaves, noted that most people are closer to food insecurity than they realize: "Most people are closer to food insecurity than they are to buying a house." She commented on the importance of a partner like Gleaners to enable her organization to reach the community: "I don't have the buying power or the facility to handle the food that they're bringing in, but I can definitely move it. I can get it to the people. So it's unbelievably important. We couldn't operate without them."

Communities in Schools

Communities in Schools (CIS) runs seven mobile food pantries in Dearborn, MI, at schools with the greatest needs around food access. CIS staff runs the pantries, and Gleaners provides the food. Gina Mroczka, Senior Director for CIS in Dearborn and Ypsilanti, described Gleaners as compassionate and accommodating, noting that Gleaners provides Halal options to meet the needs of the local community. [Hunger affects a variety of learning outcomes](#), making it a critical challenge for families with children. Said Mroczka: "Food is fuel. It's important to be able to go to school and be focused on what you're learning. It's impossible without that basic need." She commented on Gleaners' role in the community: "[Gleaners] is the backbone of our fight against food insecurity."

Livingston County United Way

Livingston County United Way has a unique relationship with Gleaners in that the organization serves as both a funder of Gleaners as well as a feeding partner. According to Amber Schroeder, the organization provides grant funding for several Gleaners programs in Livingston County including Gleaners' Community Garden Initiative, a Nutrition Education Program and mobile pantries at schools and senior centers. Livingston County is more rural than Taylor, and Schroeder pointed to Gleaners' innovative efforts to reach rural community members, including a partnership with DoorDash to distribute food. Said Schroeder, "Livingston County is considered the only food secure county in Michigan. So we have the capacity to meet the entire need of our community...and I would feel comfortable saying that is almost 100% thanks to Gleaners."

Providing Volunteer Opportunities

Gleaners engages its communities through volunteer opportunities. The South Campus has a “safe but specialized, bright, and vibrant space” with a separate entrance, which is designated for volunteers, according to Beamer. She stated that in 2024, Gleaners had around 25,000 volunteer shifts, equivalent to roughly 54,000 volunteer hours. Said Beamer, “We have the highest volunteer experience that we’ve ever had, and the space is really the enabler of that.”

Jeanne Antulis has been volunteering at Gleaners for two years after seeing the extent of food insecurity in her community during the COVID-19 pandemic: “I would go for a long walk by my brother’s church, and they had food boxes. They were giving out food, and just the lines of traffic to get food. And the high school right by my house – just the lines. I really just learned what a huge need there is for food.” She decided to go to a volunteer shift at Gleaners and was immediately drawn to the organization: “Everyone was just so welcoming. They cannot thank you enough. They’re so appreciative of their volunteers. They just made you feel comfortable.”

Antulis has participated in a variety of different volunteer activities including putting together food packs for mobile distributions at senior centers and schools as well as fresh food packs for individuals who come to food distribution centers. Maggie Einhaus, another volunteer who has been working with Gleaners for over five years, has made calls to

seniors, packed food boxes, and done more client-facing work like loading food into recipients’ vehicles.

Antulis said Gleaners always provides clear instructions as well as safety training to ensure both food recipients and volunteers have optimal experiences. Said Einhaus, “It is so organized. You always know what is expected of you....Gleaners has very good care for their volunteers to make sure you never question what you’re doing, why you’re doing it, or what the impact is.”

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— Maggie Einhaus, Volunteer

Building Community Wealth

In addition to combating food insecurity, Gleaners supports wealth creation in its service area by providing quality job opportunities for local residents. Gleaners currently employs around 140 individuals, with 39 permanent, full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs supported by the NMTC investment in the South Campus (seven created; 32 retained) along with 20 temporary construction FTEs. All permanent FTEs at Gleaners come with comprehensive benefits including health insurance, retirement benefits, and access to Gleaners’ Mobile Grocery program to ensure no employee faces food insecurity. According to Brisson, one of the largest causes of food insecurity is healthcare costs, so “if it’s [Gleaners’] mission to create food security, how can we not provide that for our team?”

Nearly all (92%) of FTEs are available to individuals without a college degree, and 69% are available to individuals with a high school diploma or less education. One strategy Gleaners uses to ensure its job opportunities are accessible is to make them available to volunteers, many of whom come from populations with barriers to employment. Said Brisson, “The community that we build with our team is one of the priceless elements of being in the community. If you asked any one person on the team why they were working at Gleaners, you’d be not only impressed but inspired by the stories people will tell about why they’re here.”

“If it’s [Gleaners’] mission to create food security, how can we not provide that for our team?”

— Gerry Brisson, President and CEO

Key Metrics



80M
pound annual
distribution
capacity



350
feeding partners



54,000
volunteer hours in
2024

Key Metrics



39
permanent FTEs
supported



100%
of FTEs supported
are quality jobs



92%
of FTEs supported are
accessible to individuals
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Methodology

LifeCity's impact assessment and reporting process applies rigorous standards to place-based, client-focused research projects. For this report, LifeCity interviewed a diverse group of Gleaners personnel and Detroit area community members and analyzed the interviews alongside community planning initiatives to evaluate the alignment of the project with real community needs and existing economic development plans. LifeCity completed the assessment virtually.

Interview List

Staff

- » Julie Beamer, Chief Operating Officer
- » Gerry Brisson, President and CEO
- » Cara Rayner, Senior Director of Operations and Project Management

Community

- » Jeanne Antulis, Volunteer
- » Amanda Borg, Community Health and Well-Being Supervisor, Trinity Health Livingston
- » Maggie Einhaus, Volunteer
- » Kristina Knoerl, Daily Operations Coordinator, Eagles Helping Hands
- » Stephanie McNeese, Executive Director, Fish and Loaves
- » Gina Mroccka, Senior Regional Director, Dearborn and Ypsilanti, MI, Communities in Schools
- » Rene Palileo, Essential Services Manager, Programs and Partnerships, Ford Philanthropy
- » Amber Schroeder, Community Impact Coordinator, Livingston County United Way

Sources

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- » ["Examining the Health of Monroe County: Our Community's Health Improvement Plan, 2023-2025." Building Healthy Communities Coalition.](#)
- » ["Feeding America Announces Award Winners for 2019." Feeding America.](#)
- » ["Food Insecurity Among the Overall Population in Michigan, 2023." Feeding America.](#)
- » ["Healthy Macomb Community Health Improvement Plan, 2024-2028." Macomb County Health Department.](#)
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- » ["Strategic Issue Data Brief." 2024. Energizing Connections for Healthier Oakland.](#)
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^ LIFECITY

