



Five local photographers turn their lenses on Oregon's farm-to-table fight against hunger.

FOOD CHAIN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
LINCOLN BARBOUR, BRIAN LEE, STUART
MULLENBERG, DANIEL ROOT, STEVEN SCARDINA



BRIAN MONTECUCCO AND NINA DIOUF typically arrive at their jobs before the sun's first rays appear. And though they live just 28 miles apart, they might as well be on different sides of the planet. Montecucco deploys the workers on his family farm on the Willamette River as Diouf stirs up the first of the 225 meals served each day at Sisters of the Road in Portland's Old Town. Yet the two are linked by a sprawling statewide food chain designed and built by the Oregon Food Bank.

With its 108,000-square-foot North Portland warehouse serving as the command center, the Oregon Food Bank is a vast web of relationships: 935 hunger relief agencies and 20 regional food banks spread across the entire state, all supplied by supermarket chains, food wholesalers, and nearly 200 growers. In 2009, the bank delivered 785,569 food boxes (each includes enough food for 40 home-cooked meals) and provided most of the ingredients for 3.8 million emergency meals served in places like Sisters of the Road.

In many states, multiple food banks compete and overlap with one another, but the Oregon Food Bank is a streamlined delivery system that's been able to respond to the region's escalating need for food with stunning efficiency and breadth. Even though total cash donations shrank by 23 percent over 2009, the number of individual contributions grew by nearly 18 percent. Volunteer hours rose to 93,000—the equivalent of 45 full-time employees and \$1.5 million in salaries.

So look around and give thanks. Although 6.6 percent of the state's households regularly experience hunger (Oregon is second only to Mississippi in need), we are blessed with a dedicated network of farmers and volunteers who work with the Oregon Food Bank to ease some of that hunger.

CARLOS BEBOLLA balances atop the air circulation pipes of Hale Farms' potato storage shed in Boardman, Oregon. The farm is part of the Farmers Ending Hunger network, which will deliver two million pounds of fully processed crops and livestock to the Oregon Food Bank in 2010. farmersendinghunger.com
photograph by Stuart Mullenberg



DUANE DITCHEN (pictured) and his twin brother, Darrin, of Golden Valley East in Silverton, joined four other growers to launch Farmers Ending Hunger in 2006. Their first act as an organization was to donate 173,000 pounds of green peas to the Oregon Food Bank. Now they farm wheat and have joined an even older effort, Bushels for Betsy, in which more than 100 wheat farmers from Eastern Oregon work with Pendleton Flour Mills and Continental Mills to harvest, mill, and mix Krusteaz baking mix. In two years, the group has donated more than 225,000 pounds of the packaged mix to the Oregon Food Bank for distribution to kitchens across the state.

photograph by Stuart Mullenberg



GREG SATRUM donates a pallet of eggs (720 dozen) to the Oregon Food Bank every week. They're collected from chickens at Willamette Egg Farms, the farm his great-uncle and great-grandfather started in Canby 75 years ago.

photograph by Stuart Mullenberg

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LEFT: IN 2009, Montecucco Farms co-owners and brothers Brian and Jason Montecucco donated 25 tons of beets, or 5 percent of the annual yield; here, Brian holds a few pounds' worth of a recent harvest. "It's simple," says Jason. "People need food. We have it. We give away what we can't sell. And while it may not be good enough for the market, it's good. It's what we eat at home."

RIGHT: NINA DIOUF, kitchen co-manager at Sisters of the Road, stirs up the morning's meals. Some customers pay the \$1.25 the kitchen charges for a meal (25 cents more for a drink), but just as often they pitch in, emptying trash, cleaning tables, or doing whatever else is needed. For their toil, they receive \$6 an hour in meal credits (just 15 minutes of sweeping, for instance, earns one credit) to either feed themselves or to donate to a family in need or someone too disabled to work.

photographs by Daniel Root



IN 2009, volunteers donated 93,000 hours of work at the Oregon Food Bank's 108,000-square-foot North Portland warehouse—the equivalent of 45 full-time employees and \$1.5 million in pay. In a typical year, Stemilt Growers of Wenatchee, Washington, sells 135,000 pounds of organic apples (at one cent per pound to cover packaging) to the Oregon Food Bank.

photographs by Lincoln Barbour



RESIDENTS of downtown Portland's Blanchet House can stay as long as four months if they "work the floor," serving some 600 meals each day. They are typically joined by 10 volunteers at every meal. The Oregon Food Bank provides about 10 percent of the supplies, including critical packaged bulk items like mac and cheese, noodles, and the much-desired pancake mix that's made as part of the food bank's alliance with Bushels for Betsy and Farmers Ending Hunger.

photograph by Steven Scardina



FOR THE PAST YEAR, Bob and Michelle Betcone and their son, Brian, have been delivering food to the hungry through their church, All Saints Parish. Volunteer efforts like theirs are the final step in a chain that often begins in the fields of farms across Oregon. Those harvests find their way to local congregations through Oregon Food Bank affiliate St. Vincent de Paul. Bob says this is a way to "integrate giving into our lifestyle," and to offer 8-year-old Brian "a tangible way to demonstrate the value of helping people."

photographs by Brian Lee



About the photographers
Steven Scardina has long volunteered at St. Vincent de Paul's food pantry, one of the 935 agencies that belong to the Oregon Food Bank's network. So when he and Lincoln Barbour, Brian Lee, Stuart Mullenberg, and Daniel Root formed a new photography collective, PhotoForce, documenting the system from farm to table was a worthy first project. Dan Root traveled to farms in Canby, Hillsboro, and Ontario; Mullenberg and Lee headed to a farm in Echo; Mullenberg photographed migrant workers; Barbour explored the warehouses where the food is trucked and stored; and Scardina studied downtown meal providers. Visit Venue Pearl (323 NW 13th Ave, venuepearl.com) for the first PhotoForce exhibition on January 21. Donations of canned food are encouraged.

Go to portlandmonthlymag.com/foodbank for more images. Become part of the chain by volunteering or donating to the Oregon Food Bank (oregonfoodbank.org).