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A staff member from Cup of Uji prepares a nutritious meal at Athi River Primary School in Kenya.
(Image credit The Rockefeller Foundation)



Delivering Results

Good Food

Too often, food in the United States and around the world contributes to poor health for both people and the planet. For many, food is too scarce, and for others, diet-related illnesses take a heavy personal and financial toll. Meanwhile, the methods of growing, transporting, and processing food are contributing to a startling one-third of global greenhouse gas emissions. Fixing those problems means finding new ways to connect people with food that is good for them and the planet.

Stories from the Field

Minnesota

Want to transition to sustainable farming? Get a mentor.

Andrew Barsness grows corn and soy on 900 acres in Minnesota, and he is part of a young generation of farmers moving toward sustainable farming practices. To do that, farmers must eliminate all use of prohibited chemicals for at least three years; maintain detailed records of farming practices, inputs, and sales for at least five years; establish buffer zones to prevent contamination from other sources; and pay for annual on-site inspections. This puts farmers in a bind: Having gone cold turkey from agrichemicals, their yields plummet, and they have new expenses, but they get no price premium for their efforts until year four. “Taking this to conventional lenders felt frustrating,” says Barsness.

He’s one of many farmers trying to do the right thing ecologically—and in the long-term financially—only to confront an onslaught of red tape. Luckily, Barsness found Mad Capital, which offers financing and mentoring to farmers going regenerative and is supported through a project related investment (PRI) by The Rockefeller Foundation. “We want to help farmers put carbon in the ground, improve biodiversity, grow food that is healthy and chemical free, and bring back rural development,” says Brandon Welch, the co-founder and CEO of Mad Capital. For Barsness, that was certainly true: “I finally felt I had a funding partner in my corner who understood what I was doing and was ready to help me.”

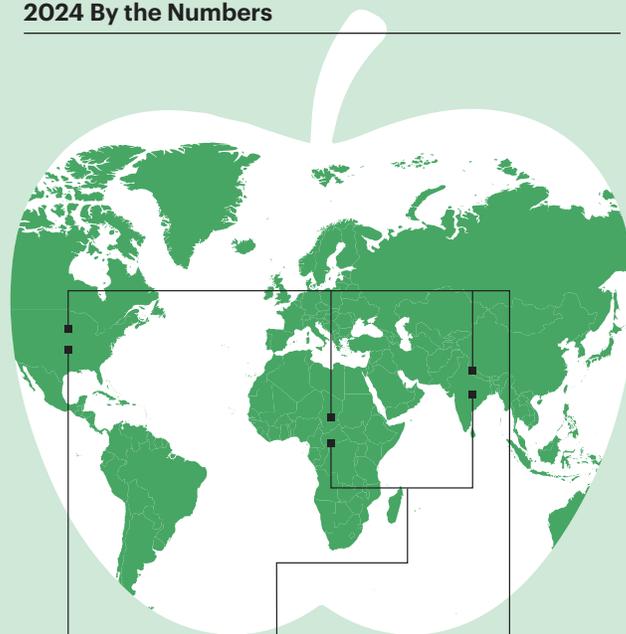


Andrew Barsness examines the quality of his certified organic corn as it is harvested (Image credit: The Rockefeller Foundation)

SNAPSHOT

The Foundation’s Food team uses data, science, policy advocacy, and innovation to advance solutions across several initiatives. In 2024, we advanced three programs: Food is Medicine, which uses food-based interventions, like produce prescriptions, medically tailored meals, and medically tailored groceries, to prevent, manage, and treat diet-related diseases; Resilient School Meals, which expands access to nutritious meals for children while ensuring sustainability; and the Periodic Table of Food Initiative, which is cataloging the complete biomolecular composition of the world’s food supply.

2024 By the Numbers



13.9 million
people reached with Good Food* and Food is Medicine programs within the United States

121 million
learners reached with Good Food* in Sub-Saharan Africa and India

\$110 million
leveraged for Good Food* and Food is Medicine programs in the United States, Sub-Saharan Africa, and India

*Good Food—food that is nutrient-dense, regeneratively grown, and equitably supplied and accessed.

Highlights



Maria Cristina Mosquera pulls some vegetables from the training farm. (Image credit: The Rockefeller Foundation)

Regen10: Change the Landscape

“Regenerative agriculture” takes a holistic approach to production that improves soil health, benefits biodiversity, and sequesters carbon, all of which create better outcomes for people, animals, and the planet. But there is little consensus on what “regenerative” means. Backed by \$10 million from the Foundation, the IKEA Foundation, the McKnight Foundation, and others, Regen10 is trying to change that—and change the future of agriculture for everyone from corn farmers in the United States to coffee farmers in Kenya. Now, Regen10 is working with over 1,000 businesses, scientific associations, farmers’ groups, and Indigenous organizations to align on principles and definitions for regenerative agriculture. As a result, in 2024, they were able to build a first-of-its-kind measurement framework co-created by farmers, purchasers, and other partners; a digital map showing where regenerative landscapes are leading the way; and a roadmap on the often-complicated processes for farmers moving toward regenerative practices.

The Periodic Table of Food tackles nutrition through science

The Periodic Table of Food Initiative (PTFI) is the world’s first database linking food quality to climate and sustainable agriculture. It’s also the most comprehensive database of standardized food data in the world, with over 2,500 food samples and 450,000 unique food molecules measured. PTFI now has more than 13 demonstration projects linking food data to health, climate, and agriculture, and over 1,000 experts trained in cutting-edge food analysis techniques through partners FoodEDU and Good Food Fellows.

In 2024, the Initiative unveiled the PTFI MarkerLab and the American Heart Association Precision Medicine Platform, tools that provide standardized data on the biomolecular composition of over 500 foods representative of global consumption.

Making School Meals Accessible

As a member of the School Meals Coalition, the Foundation remains committed to helping every child receive high-quality school meals, which make a critical impact on the educational outcomes, nutrition, and quality of life for vulnerable children around the world. Through partnerships with the World Food Programme and others, the Foundation is helping to introduce more nutritious foods into school meals.

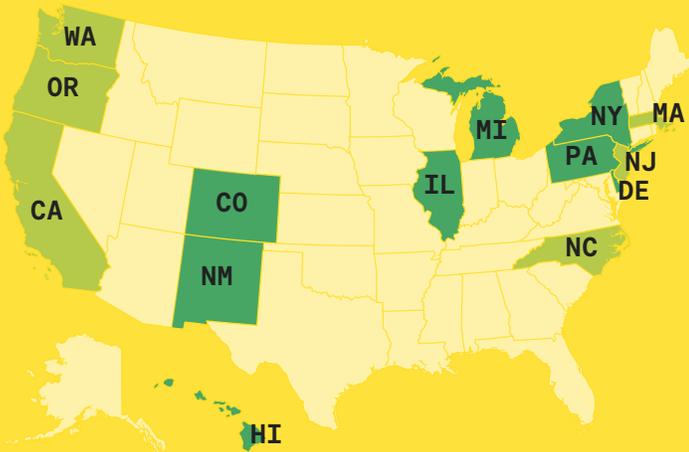
For example, in Benin, students now receive nutritious parboiled brown rice in their meals, and, in Rwanda and Burundi, almost 800,000 students are now consuming fortified whole grains. And in partnership with the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, The Rockefeller Foundation supported schools in Malawi, Kenya, and Tanzania in reaching more than 900 thousand children with meals that included high-iron beans and vitamin A maize. By sourcing healthy foods locally, these programs are also benefiting communities, especially farmers. One exciting example is in Benin, which is transitioning from importing all of its school meals to locally sourcing 70 percent, which is expected to contribute \$11.6 million to the local economy.



Students share school meals at Primary School Ko Anagodo, Benin. (Photo courtesy Jennifer Lazuta CRS)

Big Bet Food is Medicine

2024 By the Numbers



14 states

have approved **Medicaid proposals** that include coverage for the direct provision of food. States that received approvals in 2024 **are bolded**:

California, **Colorado**, Delaware, **Illinois**, Massachusetts, **New Mexico**, North Carolina, New Jersey, **New York**, Oregon, Washington, **Michigan (via ILOS)**, **Pennsylvania**, **Hawaii**



118.5 thousand
patients accessed

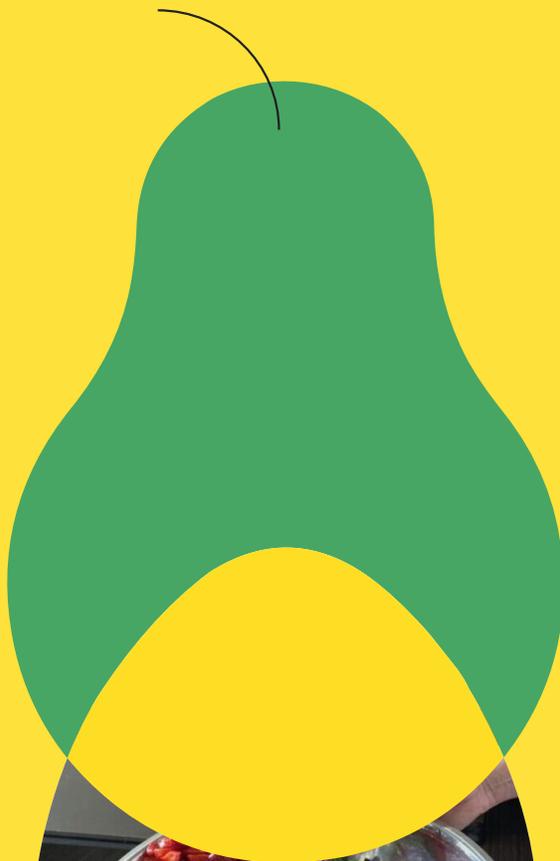
Food is Medicine programs through Rockefeller Foundation grantees



\$51.5 million
mobilized for Food is Medicine programs

Access to affordable, nutritious food is crucial for good health, yet many Americans, particularly in under-resourced communities, face barriers. The result: A \$1.1 trillion healthcare bill for diet-related diseases—equal to all the money Americans currently spend on food itself—despite the fact that the United States ranks 32nd out of 38 in life expectancy among OECD countries and spends 16% of its GDP on health care—much more than the OECD average of 9.2%.

But what if instead of being part of the problem, food could be part of the cure? Since 2023, the Foundation has been making a big bet on Food is Medicine, increasing its commitment to \$100 million. In 2024, our work continued building an evidence base for FIM that will inform better policy, better infrastructure, and better education and communication.



Ingredients are prepared for a Produce prescription cooking class. (Photo Courtesy of Adelante Mujeres)

Deep Dive

Helping Veterans Get Healthy

More than one in four Afghanistan and Iraq Veterans are food-insecure—that is, they don't have access to enough nutritious food to live a healthy life. What's more, compared with the general population, Veterans experience disproportionately high rates of diet-related chronic health conditions, like diabetes and heart disease. So, in 2023, the Foundation and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) launched their first Food is Medicine pilot projects in Texas and Utah, which together are home to more than 1.5 million U.S. Veterans.

"Part of my goal is to eat my way to better health," says Oz Hutton, a Marine Corps Veteran, who recently graduated from the program. As a participant, he not only learned what to eat but also what not to eat to maintain healthy blood pressure and to minimize chronic pain. He says that looking at meals through the lens of Food is Medicine is eye-opening. "By eating better, I have energy," says Hutton.



Produce prescriptions help U.S. Marine Corps Veteran Kenny A. Joyner battle degenerative disc and joint disease. He says it's better than drugs, because it tackles underlying issues.

For Herman Johnson, an Army Veteran in Texas, a new physique and half the meds are all the proof he needs. Once enrolled in the Food is Medicine program, Johnson made the switch to plant-based meals. He lost 50 pounds, lowered his blood pressure, and cut the number of medications he needs in half. "I gained a whole new perspective on eating," he says.

With guidance from the VA's Food Security Office, VA clinicians and social workers identified eligible Veterans like Oz and Herman and referred them to the About Fresh produce prescription program—a program in such high demand that the number of interested Veterans exceeded the program's capacity. In total, for one year, 272 Veterans in Houston and 273 Veterans in Salt Lake City received prescription grocery cards worth \$100 per month to purchase fruits and vegetables; they also received access to nutrition counseling at local VA health care facilities and the VA's Healthy Teaching Kitchen. The pilot programs funded by the Foundation will eventually serve over 2,000 Veterans with Food is Medicine across five states, while also researching their impact on reducing diet-related diseases like diabetes and high blood pressure. Program leaders ultimately want Veterans nationwide to have access to Food is Medicine.

The momentum behind Food is Medicine is growing. The Foundation has strengthened its relationship with the VA by collaborating on healthcare innovation to serve Veterans and building an evidence base for Food is Medicine. By investing in research, modeling success with the VA, and sharing our learning and best practices through convenings, we can bring even more partners—and good food—to the table.

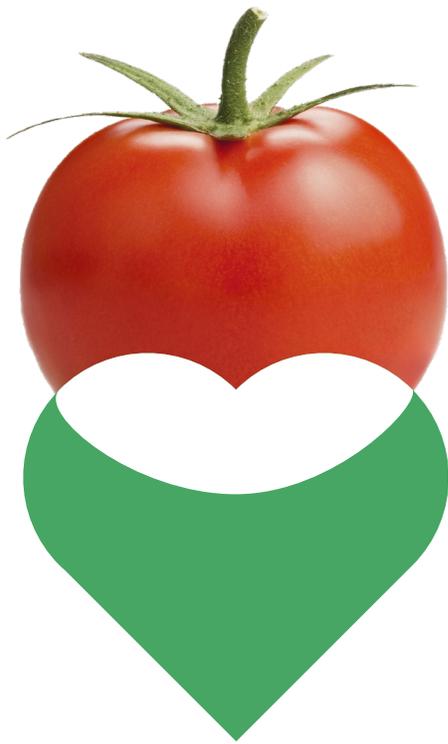
LESSONS IN ACTION



Learn first, join second, build last

As a science-based philanthropy, we often invest in research that will help us understand how an intervention can improve people's lives. This belief is central to our Food is Medicine strategy. But we have also learned that the most compelling evidence often does not come from research. Rather, it comes from the life experiences of people, like Veterans, who make it clear how and why access to healthy food matters. Staying close to these experiences—and making sure large institutions hear and act on them—is critical for success.

Stories from the Field



Capitol Hill Prescription for policy: Educate the legislators.

As the costs and consequences of the diet-related disease epidemic have intensified, so has Congress's interest in finding solutions. Chronic disease does more than put Americans' health at risk—it also contributes to 90% of the country's healthcare expenditure. Preventing and managing those diseases through programs like FIM could have massive health and economic benefits. That's why the Foundation provided informative, non-partisan policy briefings to staff from both political parties, including the congress members leading the new House Preventative Health and Wellness Caucus, which is putting a major focus on Food is Medicine.

Stories from Our Convenings

Bankers, ecologists, and farmers find common cause.

The Rockefeller Foundation convened a weeklong event at our Bellagio Center to bring together financiers, food purchasers, and farmer experts in ecology to prototype "lighthouses," financing mechanisms that reward farmers for regenerative outcomes to align with climate and nature reporting requirements. Participants identified common challenges, developed new initiatives, proposed innovative financing mechanisms, and mapped out the conditions necessary to succeed. Participants also explored prototyping next-generation investment structures to drive outcomes across biodiversity, water, greenhouse gas emissions, farmer well-being, yield, and other critical areas.

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LESSONS IN ACTION



Agreement isn't essential, embracing candor and conflict is

School meal delivery systems and healthcare systems are often embedded within mature bureaucracies, set in their ways of working. Their consistency is a key characteristic that enables them to meet the needs of so many. Innovators in newer programs, community organizations, and pioneering startups may be more willing to try out new ways of working when it comes to procurement and other tasks, showing the way for others. In our work with grantees, we seek to support both types of organizations, bringing them together to collaborate. This role is not always easy—we often ask ourselves the extent to which we should focus on improving what's established versus catalyzing disruption.



Stand behind—don't stand in for—leaders

Getting Good Food to those who most need it requires working across many sectors—from agriculture to health to education. We are learning the best ways to promote multi-sectoral collaboration and increasingly see that forging a leadership body that represents multiple perspectives is a powerful way to encourage collaboration across a coalition. For example, in shaping leadership for our Periodic Table of Food Initiative, we knew that agricultural and health sectors would have to build the science in ways that would answer question asked across disciplines. We are learning a singular focus in leadership can lead to a singular focus in the work, at the expense of uptake and impact.

Looking Ahead Resilient School Meals

School meal programs are the world's biggest social safety net, feeding over 400 million children worldwide. By empowering children to learn and grow, these programs generate an estimated nine times return in social and economic benefits, supporting entire communities. In March 2025, The Rockefeller Foundation announced its big bet on resilient school meals, committing \$100 million over the next five years to reach 100 million more children with the life-changing power of simple, nutritious, reliable food that's good for people and the planet.

