



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



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Mayor Johnson joins Greater Chicago Food Depository, BJ's Market to celebrate nearly \$18 million invested in Black and Brown businesses to feed new arrivals

The City of Chicago, Greater Chicago Food Depository, and community partners celebrate economic impact generated while providing millions of meals for asylum-seekers

CHICAGO – In partnership with the City of Chicago, over the past eight months the Greater Chicago Food Depository and State of Illinois invested \$17.6 million in small, predominately Black and Latino owned Chicago businesses to feed more than 10,000 asylum-seeking new arrivals. Mayor Brandon Johnson joined Food Depository leadership today at BJ's Market and Bakery, 1737 E. 95th St., to celebrate this impact and a shared commitment to continue investing in local minority-owned businesses.

"I want to thank the Greater Chicago Food Depository for its service to our city during this critical time and for being an leader and an inspiration in the fight against hunger for more than four decades," said **Mayor Brandon Johnson**. "I also want to recognize BJ's Market and Bakery for being an anchor of the South Side, and for being a part of a number of community-based organizations stepping up to meet this moment by providing delicious and nutritious food to thousands of our new neighbors."

In May of 2023, the City of Chicago called on the Food Depository to help provide meals for the growing number of asylum-seeking new arrivals at city-operated shelters. Working in close coordination with the City of Chicago, the Food Depository convened a network of BIPOC restaurants and caterers to provide daily hot meals at an expanding number of shelters.

By the end of 2023, the Food Depository's 17 contracted restaurants and caterers were serving 18,000 daily hot meals across 21 shelter sites. This impact was made possible with \$14.5 million in funding from the State of Illinois plus private donations secured by the Food Depository.

"We believe food is a basic human right and our mission is to end hunger," said **Kate Maehr, executive director and CEO of the Food Depository**. "Achieving our mission means we provide food for anyone who needs support today, while creating solutions to address the root causes of hunger – poverty, systemic inequity and structural racism. Our work to feed new arrivals gave us the opportunity to meet an urgent demand while creating economic impact and living wage jobs. We did this by investing directly in neighborhood-based Chicago restaurants and caterers."

Businesses who partnered with the Food Depository in the response for new arrivals reported dramatic increases in revenue while adding more full-time positions to accommodate the growing orders.

BJ's Market and Bakery, a Black-owned restaurant located on the South Side, joined the effort to feed new arrivals as a contractor of the Food Depository and continues to do so as a subcontractor of Parish 14. During its time partnering with the Food Depository, BJ's chef and owner John Meyer reported a 100 percent increase in revenue and the opportunity to hire four additional staff.

"Being part of the new arrivals program has been like a new world to me," said **John Meyer, chef and owner of BJ's**. "For the first time in my 31 years in business, I've been able to run my restaurant as it's meant to be. I learned so much about myself, my team and we all are better because of it."

Other restaurants and caterers who partnered with the Food Depository to feed new arrivals include **Blueprint Group, Catering Out the Box, Rome's Joy Catering, Carnitas Uruapan, Food Hero, Chi-Care (a non-profit food collective), Chi-Fresh, Chinese American Service League, Garifuna Flava, Irazu, Jarabe, La Merced, Los Comales, Nellie's, Atzimba Catering, and Nuevo Leon**.

The Food Depository first piloted this approach in early 2023 to provide meals for Chicago teens and young adults participating in opportunity youth programs on the West Side – working in partnership with businesses from the Hatchery. The organization plans to continue investing in minority-owned meal suppliers as it scales up prepared meal programs for Chicago and Cook County residents at increased risk of hunger.

"The Food Depository is thankful to the City of Chicago for trusting us with this important work, and we are proud that the city is embracing this approach to feeding our newest neighbors," said **Kate Maehr**. "We are immensely grateful to the State of Illinois and generous donors for investing in this response."