

Economic Impact Survey 2009: Food Bank Response

How current economic conditions are impacting the emergency food system served by Community Food Bank

Feeding America is the nation's largest domestic hunger-relief organization, serving an estimated 25 million low-income Americans each year through its network of 205 food banks and their 63,000 charitable feeding agencies, including food pantries, soup kitchens, and homeless shelters.

The current recession and the rise in unemployment are having a profound effect on the nation's food banks. In early September 2009, Feeding America conducted a brief survey of food bank members to learn more about the challenges faced by food banks, their member agencies, and clients served. A total of 176 food banks participated in the survey. What we found was that 99% of all participating food banks reported increases in demand for emergency food assistance over the last year. The average increase in demand across the network from Summer 2008 to Summer 2009 was 30%. However, the increase in need for services over the last year varies across the nation, ranging from 5% in some areas to more than 150% in others. Local economic circumstances, such as plant closings, can have a significant impact on need but it is also clear that high unemployment across the nation – which reached 9.7% in August – is a critical factor in the rising need for emergency food.

It's becoming increasingly more difficult for many food banks and their agencies to meet the needs of their clients, especially when new clients arrive all the time. Despite the fact that the nation's food banks delivered 2.63 billion pounds of food between July 2008 and June 2009 – an increase of 21.4% over the prior year --many are struggling to meet this increase in demand.

Here is a snapshot of what Community Food Bank has witnessed and reported over the past year in the community it serves.

Estimated increase in demand or need for emergency food assistance:	We have doubled our distribution, via monthly poundage, in the last year, which includes dramatic increases in all programs and food distribution methods (e.g. mobile pantry, partner pantry distributions, drought disaster relief)
Local factors impacting changes in demand:	Fresno County experienced a severe drought this year which decreased the amount of agricultural jobs in the region.

Critical trends contributing to increased need for emergency food:	Unemployment Underemployment Cost of Food Mortgage/Rent Costs Cost of Fuel Inadequacy of SNAP (formerly Food Stamp) Benefits Cost of Health Care Drought Disaster
Client trends include:	More requests from existing clients More first-time users More children More employed persons More Seniors
The frequency with which the food bank or its agencies had to turn people away:	Frequently
The frequency with which the food bank or its agencies had to reduce the amount of food available per person or household:	Frequently

Additional Comments:

We are experiencing higher than national average unemployment, nearing Depression era rates upwards of 40%. This year a severe drought impacted the West side of Fresno County where over 600,000 acres were left fallow as a result.

Thousands of our clients each week stand in line for hours at a time in triple digit weather just so they can have something to feed their families because their agriculture related jobs have disappeared and their communities lack meaningful employment alternatives.

For further information, please contact:

Dana Wilkie
CEO
Community Food Bank
Fresno, CA
559-237-3663
dwilkie@communityfoodbank.net