



## **Economic Impact Survey 2009: Food Bank Response**

### ***How current economic conditions are impacting the emergency food system served by Capital Area 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 Capital Area Food Bank has witnessed and reported over the past year in the community it serves.



Formerly named  
America's Second Harvest®

<p><b>Estimated increase in demand or need for emergency food assistance:</b></p>	<p>The need in the National Capital Region is increasing; our partner agencies are reporting longer lines, seeing new faces and the need to reduce the amount of food being to each family so that everyone gets something. Over the last year, we saw an increase of 91 percent in calls to our Hunger Lifeline, an emergency food referral system for clients. The economic crisis has touched so many people in unexpected ways. For example, the face of hunger is changing – we have received calls from former donors and volunteers who are finding they need assistance from the very organization they used to support. A continued commitment is needed from the community now more than ever. If more working class citizens are in need, think about those who were already on the brink. A little goes a long way – a donation of \$1 can provide 3 meals to a hungry person.</p>
<p><b>Critical trends contributing to increased need for emergency food:</b></p>	<p>Unemployment Underemployment Mortgage/Rent Costs Inadequacy of SNAP (formerly Food Stamp) Benefits</p>
<p><b>Client trends include:</b></p>	<p>More requests from existing clients More first-time users More children More employed persons</p>
<p><b>The frequency with which the food bank or its agencies had to turn people away:</b></p>	<p>Never</p>
<p><b>The frequency with which the food bank or its agencies had to reduce the amount of food available per person or household:</b></p>	<p>Occasionally</p>

**Additional Comments:**

*We have a high percentage of people living in poverty already, so the economic downturn puts the squeeze on those already struggling individuals and families. Also, the cost of living is high in the DC metro area, so increases in any expense increases the risk of residents going hungry.*

*At a critical time, our supporters are responding and donating at higher levels than ever before--food, funds, time, etc. They understand that we are providing basic needs services and this increase is allowing us to expand our food distribution and programs. It also allows us to assess and improve our information*



*systems to communicate our outcomes and impact. But we still have a long way to go. We are focusing on conducting a gap analysis so that we can reach out to underserved areas and collect useful data and information on how we can contribute to increasing our members' services. We have been able to leverage some excellent pro bono work from a local consulting firm who are invested in the mission of the CAFB.*

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