



Economic Impact Survey 2009: Food Bank Response

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

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 Food Bank of Iowa has witnessed and reported over the past year in the community it serves.

Estimated increase in demand or need for emergency food assistance:	The increase in services requested from the first six months of 2008 compared to the first six months of 2009 is 13% for our food pantries. 73,121 families used a pantry, an increase of 9,110 families in the first six months of 2009.
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<p>Local factors impacting changes in demand:</p>	<p>We are demonstrating the increased need based on the numbers our partner agencies report to us. Here in Iowa our unemployment rate continues to rise, but even more impact is felt by those that have exhausted their unemployment benefits, a large senior population with fixed incomes that have been reduced, pay and hour cuts, foreclosures, loss of health benefits, etc. and in the immediate future it does not appear that things will get better. A number of families are just one emergency away from not being able to manage.</p>
<p>Critical trends contributing to increased need for emergency food:</p>	<p>Underemployment Mortgage/Rent Costs Inadequacy of SNAP Benefits (formerly Food Stamps) Cost of Health Care Exhausted unemployment benefits</p>
<p>Client trends include:</p>	<p>More requests from existing clients More first-time users More children More employed persons</p>
<p>The frequency with which the food bank or its agencies had to turn people away:</p>	<p>Rarely</p>
<p>The frequency with which the food bank or its agencies had to reduce the amount of food available per person or household:</p>	<p>Occasionally</p>

Additional Comments:

Because Iowa is mostly a rural state, there may be one major employer and a closure or layoffs can affect an entire community.



For further information, please contact:

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