



Economic Impact Survey 2009: Food Bank Response

How current economic conditions are impacting the emergency food system served by Northeast Iowa 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 Northeast Iowa 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 seen a 27% increase in the number of unduplicated clients served.
Local factors impacting changes in demand:	We are still feeling the affects of the floods from the summer of 2008 and the affects of an ICE raid in one community (whose county has the highest unemployment rate in the state) as well as various other smaller company layoffs/closings or reduction in hours.
Critical trends contributing to increased need for emergency food:	Unemployment Underemployment Cost of Food



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Client trends include:	More requests from existing clients More first-time users
The frequency with which the food bank or its agencies had to turn people away:	Never

Additional Comments:

We operate a pantry onsite at the Food Bank. We are seeing many people who come in as a crisis client and then continue to use our services month after month. Our calendar of appointments is more full than ever before and we are having to squeeze more people in than we have available appointments. In visiting with three pantries yesterday, one served 550 in the month of July-their highest month ever; another is seeing clients from as far as 30 miles away, one way and another has seen more people because of many layoffs in town.

Many organizations have said that they are facing much emptier shelves before our truck arrives. This week, some volunteers at one agency were elated by the amount of product the pantry had received free because of a grant from a manufacturing company we had received. They were forced to be creative with what was on the shelves and what they were calling "nutritional" food boxes, but the extra food they received would help fix that problem.

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For further information, please contact:

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