



Economic Impact Survey 2009: Food Bank Response

How current economic conditions are impacting the emergency food system served by Worcester County 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 Worcester County 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:	There has been a 6% increase in total number of people who received assistance during the fiscal year as of June 30, 2009 compared to June 30, 2008.
	There has been a 13% increase in unduplicated clients who received assistance during the fiscal year as of June 30, 2009 compared to June 30, 2008.



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Local factors impacting changes in demand:	Hunger is hitting closer to home for many of our neighbors in Worcester County because of the recession, financial crisis, and long-term unemployment. Many of us know at least one colleague, friend, or family member who has seen their circumstances change for the worse; some of us have numerous friends and family members experiencing economic and emotional hardship. Every day, the Food Bank receives calls and visits from people looking for help as well as from people who are offering their help.
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 State Budget cuts
Client trends include:	More first-time users More children More employed persons

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