



Economic Impact Survey 2009: Food Bank Response

How current economic conditions are impacting the emergency food system served by Second Harvest Heartland

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 Second Harvest Heartland has witnessed and reported over the past year in the community it serves.

Estimated increase in demand or need for emergency food assistance:	We report a 54.4% increase comparing January through June 2008 to January through June 2009
Local factors impacting changes in demand:	The 980+ food shelves and programs that Second Harvest works with report that requests for emergency food are up about 50% over last year. With the cost of everyday food items like milk or cereal increasing, we expect these visits to continue to rise.
Critical trends contributing to increased need for emergency food:	Unemployment Underemployment Cost of Health Care



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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
The frequency with which the food bank or its agencies had to reduce the amount of food available per person or household:	Never

Additional Comments:

Almost every agency one of our specialists visited and talked with this month had their own story to tell that expresses the value of their partnership with us. We heard from a few youth programs that for some kids, the food they provided for them would be their only meal for the day. Another teen in a youth program told the Director that he doesn't get much food except for snacks and asked if they could help him find a job so he could get some food.

For further information, please contact:

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