



Economic Impact Survey 2009: Food Bank Response

How current economic conditions are impacting the emergency food system served by Harvesters--The Community Food Network

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 Harvesters--The Community Food Network has witnessed and reported over the past year in the community it serves.

Local factors impacting changes in demand:

Demand is still up, based on a survey of our agencies this spring, and based on the monthly reports of our agencies. We track the number of households and individuals served by each of our agencies. The number of households we served through our pantries in June of 2009 were up 66% over June of 2008. The number of individuals we served through our on-sites in June of 2009 were up 40%. We are also simply using our distribution numbers as a good indicator of the need in our community. In FY09, we distributed more than 32 million pounds of food, which is 26 percent more than our previous record high.



Critical trends contributing to increased need for emergency food:	Unemployment Underemployment
Client trends include:	More first-time users More children More employed persons
The frequency with which the food bank or its agencies had to turn people away:	Rarely
The frequency with which the food bank or its agencies had to reduce the amount of food available per person or household:	Occasionally

For further information, please contact:

Karen Siebert
 Advocacy Consultant
 Harvesters--The Community Food Network
 Kansas City, MO
 816.929.3060
 ksiebert@harvesters.org