



Economic Impact Survey 2009: Food Bank Response

How current economic conditions are impacting the emergency food system served by Food Bank For New York City

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 For New York City has witnessed and reported over the past year in the community it serves.

Estimated increase in demand or need for emergency food assistance:	Data on the increase in need are currently being analyzed. Preliminary results indicate an increase of approximately 25 percent over the past year among the emergency food network.
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<p>Local factors impacting changes in demand:</p>	<p>The Food Bank For New York City has a number of programs in addition to food distribution that address food poverty among low-income individuals and families, including nutrition education, benefits access and income support, and as such we frame need more broadly than the need for emergency food assistance. Long-term solutions to hunger require addressing the myriad of issues and hardships faced by low-income residents, such as food, nutrition, health, housing, education, employment and wages, etc., all of which contribute to difficulty affording food. Research demonstrates that the number of New York City residents experiencing difficulty affording needed food has soared over the past five years – doubling from approximately 2 million to 4 million from 2003 to 2008. From 2007 to 2008 alone, the number of residents having difficulty affording food increased by 26 percent or almost 1 million people. (NYC Hunger Experience 2008 Update)</p>
<p>Critical trends contributing to increased need for emergency food:</p>	<p>Unemployment Underemployment Cost of Food Mortgage/Rent Costs Cost of Fuel Inadequacy of SNAP (formerly Food Stamp) benefits Cost of Health Care</p>
<p>Client trends include:</p>	<p>More requests from existing clients More first-time users More children More employed persons More seniors and residents in the baby-boom generation who will be aging into retirement.</p>
<p>The frequency with which the food bank or its agencies had to turn people away:</p>	<p>Frequently</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>Frequently</p>

Additional Comments:

National Office tel 312.263.2303
35 E. Wacker Drive fax 312.263.5626
Suite 2000 feedingamerica.org
Chicago, IL 60601



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Since the start of the recession in December 2007, the unemployment rate in New York City has more than doubled and is now at 9.6 percent – surpassing the U.S. unemployment rate of 9.4 percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics, July 2009 data). Anecdotal reports from agencies reveal that they are seeing more first-time visitors, including recently unemployed residents.

Affordability of nutritious food is a common barrier to eating healthy for many low-income families. Inadequate local access to fresh, nutritious food exacerbates this issue as there are too few retail stores in New York City that offer fresh, nutritious food.



For further information, please contact:

Ashley Baughman
Director, Research & Evaluation
Food Bank For New York City
New York City, NY
212-566-7855
abaughman@foodbanknyc.org