



Economic Impact Survey 2009: Food Bank Response

How current economic conditions are impacting the emergency food system served by Central Pennsylvania 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 Central Pennsylvania 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:	30 to 50% increase in service requests from October 2008 to July 2009
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<p>Local factors impacting changes in demand:</p>	<p>The decline in the economy since last October has caused numerous layoffs throughout our service territory. Increased fuel prices and food costs also prompted increases in services. We received more calls for assistance from consumers who are unfamiliar with the emergency food distribution system than at any time within the last 10 years of my employment here. Many consumers mentioned that they were embarrassed to call and that more often than not, they often donated food and/or funds to the food bank. Now they are needing the assistance themselves. We have also have had more seniors (or their family members on their behalf) calling for assistance. Prior to the first of the year, it was not uncommon for us to field nearly 90 calls per week. These calls continue, but at not nearly the pace as last fall. As a result of these issues, we were instrumental in advocating for the creation of a Hunger Caucus within our State Legislature. In fact, a member of our staff helped to construct the framework for the creation of the Caucus. To date, more than 70 members of the legislature, from both sides of the aisle, have joined the Caucus.</p>
<p>Critical trends contributing to increased need for emergency food:</p>	<p>Unemployment Cost of Food Cost of Fuel</p>
<p>Client trends include:</p>	<p>More first-time users More employed persons</p>
<p>The frequency with which the food bank or its agencies had to turn people away:</p>	<p>Occasionally</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>Occasionally</p>

Additional Comments:

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We did a huge distribution to Commonwealth employees at the end of July (our state budget remains at an impasse). These employees are essentially expected to work even though they're not getting paid. Altogether, there are about 30,000 Commonwealth employees who were expected to show up for work even though they were not getting paid. So we decided to do a distribution for Commonwealth employees that took three weeks. We served only purchased product (wholesale inventory) and we provided over 2300 units of service from the food bank in three weeks. The first week we were open every day and received about 1700 service requests that week. It was a very powerful experience interacting directly with the clients, very eye-opening.

For further information, please contact:

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