



Economic Impact Survey 2009: Food Bank Response

How current economic conditions are impacting the emergency food system served by Greater Berks 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 GBFB has witnessed and reported over the past year in the community it serves.

Estimated increase in demand or need for emergency food assistance:	July 2008 to July 2009 25% increase in service requests; From July 2008 to July 2009 16% increase in clients served
Local factors impacting changes in demand:	The change in need and demand is accounted for in the percentage of new families (a household that didn't receive free food before from an emergency food distribution site). In addition , many of the "new" households have previously worked and are not employed now.
Critical trends contributing to increased need for emergency food:	Unemployment Mortgage/Rent Costs
Client trends include:	More first -time users

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The frequency with which the food bank or its agencies had to turn people away:	Occasionally
The frequency with which the food bank or its agencies had to reduce the amount of food available per person or household:	Occasionally

Additional Comments:

Currently, the fact that the Pennsylvania state budget has not yet been passed is contributing to the demand. Although the state is paying the state workers, many social service programs as well as daycare, early education programs, services for MH/MR etc. are reducing or discontinuing services.

For further information, please contact:

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