



## Economic Impact Survey 2009: Food Bank Response

### *How current economic conditions are impacting the emergency food system served by Westmoreland County 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 Westmoreland County Food Bank has witnessed and reported over the past year in the community it serves.

<b>Estimated increase in demand or need for emergency food assistance:</b>	<b>10% increase</b>
<b>Local factors impacting changes in demand:</b>	<b>We send press releases talking about the increase in demand &amp; how the economy, high food costs, funding cuts and decreased food supply negatively impact us. We communicate the same to policy makers in letters &amp; visits. We also report on these issues on our web site &amp; are adding an advocacy module to the web software in order to get the community more involved.</b>



<b>Critical trends contributing to increased need for emergency food:</b>	<b>Unemployment</b> <b>Underemployment</b> <b>Cost of Food</b> <b>Cost of Fuel</b> <b>Cost of Health Care</b>
<b>Client trends include:</b>	<b>More first-time users</b>
<b>The frequency with which the food bank or its agencies had to reduce the amount of food available per person or household:</b>	<b>Frequently</b>

**Additional Comments:**

*We've had plant closings around the county in the past 18 months--many have been laid off. The downturn in the economy & high costs of food, fuel, etc. are major factors in increased demand for our services.*

**For further information, please contact:**

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