

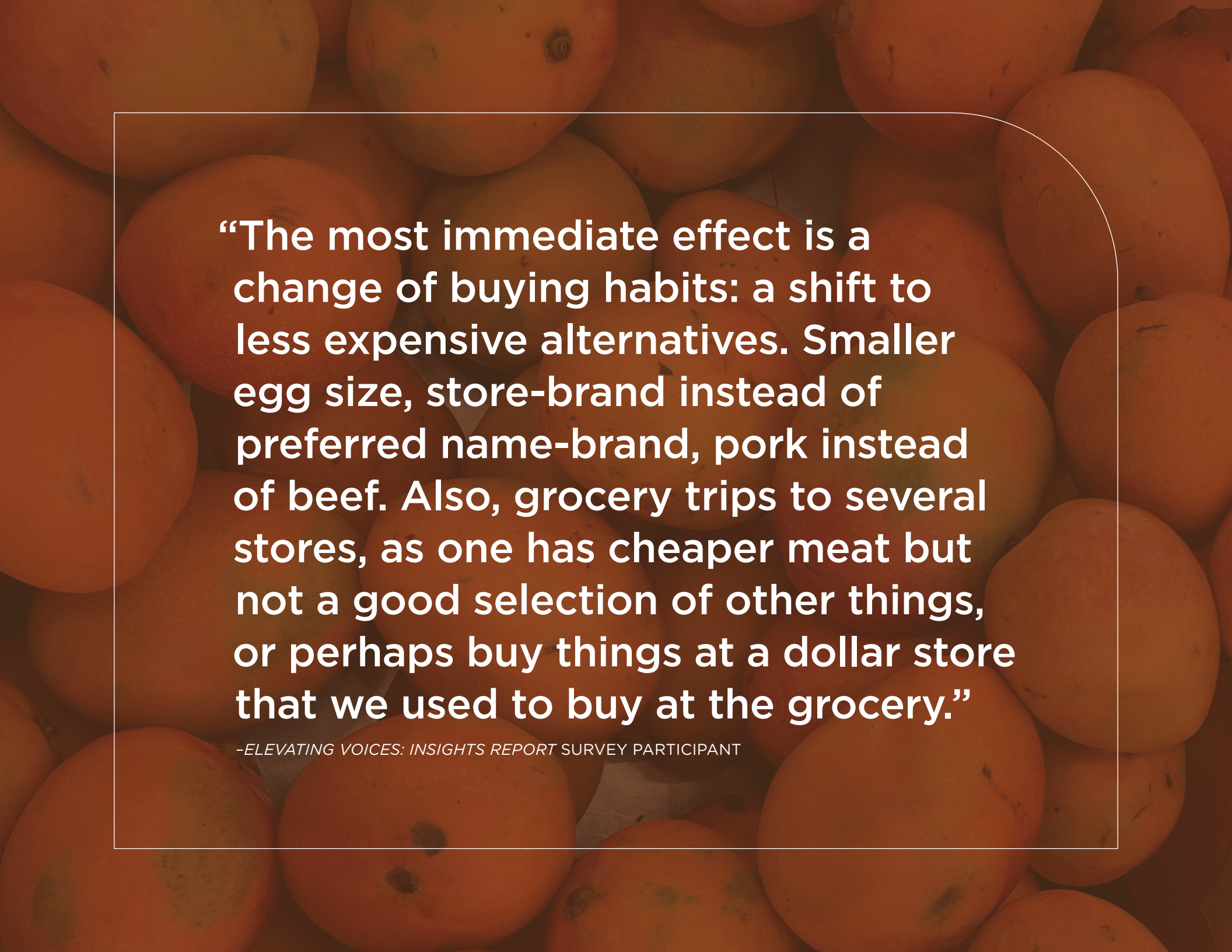


2024

# Elevating Voices: Insights Report





The background of the entire image is a dense, close-up photograph of many oranges. The oranges are a warm, orange-brown color and are arranged in a way that creates a textured, repeating pattern. The lighting is soft, highlighting the natural imperfections and stems of the fruit.

**“The most immediate effect is a change of buying habits: a shift to less expensive alternatives. Smaller egg size, store-brand instead of preferred name-brand, pork instead of beef. Also, grocery trips to several stores, as one has cheaper meat but not a good selection of other things, or perhaps buy things at a dollar store that we used to buy at the grocery.”**

*-ELEVATING VOICES: INSIGHTS REPORT SURVEY PARTICIPANT*





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SECTION 1

# Key Insights

Amid today's political divide, we can all agree on ending food insecurity. To end hunger, we must listen to people who experience it, recognizing them as the real experts on the issue.

Accordingly, Feeding America conducted the 2024 *Elevating Voices: Insights Report* survey to uplift the voices and experiences of our neighbors facing hunger.

"I had to pick up a second job to continue to buy the same type of groceries."  
-ELEVATING VOICES: INSIGHTS REPORT SURVEY PARTICIPANT





For the purpose of this survey, neighbors are defined as people who have received charitable food assistance and/or experienced food insecurity within the past two years.

In this year's report, neighbors vividly illustrate a clear picture of food insecurity in the United States today.



**NEIGHBORS' LIVES CONTINUE TO BE CHALLENGING, ESPECIALLY AS GROCERIES AND OTHER ESSENTIALS REMAIN COSTLY.**

Neighbors continue to face persistent hardships in affording food, despite some signs of an improving economy. Neighbors agree steep food costs and the high cost of rent or buying a home primarily fuel food insecurity, emphasizing their ability to access enough to eat is often curbed by unfavorable economic conditions.

Neighbors' food affordability worries are tied to a general sense of financial unease: 78% of neighbors feel they are only getting by instead of thriving, and only 40% feel financially stable and on top of paying all their bills.



**NEIGHBORS ARE COPING WITH THE SHOCK OF ELEVATED PRICES BY USING DIVERSE STRATEGIES AND RESOURCES, INCLUDING FOOD BANKS, TO SOURCE FOOD.**

Budgeting, saving, receiving a helping hand from community members—neighbors creatively find ways to cope with high costs. But often these approaches involve decisions no one should have to make, such as choosing between food and other necessities. When extra help is needed, neighbors turn to federal food assistance programs and the charitable food system, including food banks, both of which neighbors agree are lifelines.



**MANY COMMON THEMES EMERGE, BUT EXPERIENCES OF HUNGER VARY WIDELY FROM NEIGHBOR TO NEIGHBOR.**

Anyone can experience food insecurity, regardless of background, race or ZIP Code. This year's report provides a snapshot of the lives of hundreds of neighbors, who represent a range of identities and experiences with hunger. Some neighbors have constant food worries and make a lot of sacrifices in their lives. Others are less likely to use or be aware of available food programs but still experience challenges affording food. The diverse experiences of people facing hunger highlight that a one-size-fits-all solution to ending food insecurity is insufficient.





**EVEN WHILE WORKING THROUGH ONGOING TOUGH TIMES TODAY, MANY NEIGHBORS REMAIN OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE FUTURE.**

Neighbors are split on whether their financial situation is likely to stay the same (41%) or improve (40%) in the upcoming year, with younger neighbors (age 18 to 29) being among the most optimistic. To achieve the life they desire, neighbors told us their highest need is being able to save money now and pass it on to family members later, demonstrating aspirations for self-sufficiency in the present and future.



**NEIGHBORS AGREE ENDING FOOD INSECURITY SHOULD BE A PRIORITY FOR CONGRESS, DESPITE POLICYMAKERS' POLITICAL DIVIDES.**

Regardless of political party affiliation, 9 in 10 neighbors say they want Congress to make food insecurity a priority. Neighbors overwhelmingly support proven federal food assistance programs, like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which helps people buy the food they need. Neighbors are particularly opposed to policies that make it harder to access food or restrict food choices, pinpointing key policy areas for decision-makers to address.



**NEIGHBORS ARE ADAMANT THAT ENDING FOOD INSECURITY REQUIRES ALL OF US.**

Neighbors agree ending food insecurity will require unity across sectors, with 86% of neighbors agreeing reducing food insecurity must include the government, the private sector, nonprofits, local institutions like schools and churches, and communities joining forces.

**“Difficult days have brought my support team closer together to help each other.”**

*-ELEVATING VOICES: INSIGHTS REPORT SURVEY PARTICIPANT*





SECTION 2

# Detailed Findings

Neighbors surveyed shared that efforts to end food insecurity in the U.S. must include the following:

- Prioritizing Dignity
- Expanding Opportunity
- Improving Health
- Increasing Access

“I feel like I can’t catch up or get ahead.”

—ELEVATING VOICES: INSIGHTS REPORT SURVEY PARTICIPANT



# PRIORITIZING DIGNITY

Neighbors are the experts on what foods best meet the needs and cultural preferences of their households—but their dignity of choice is threatened by the high cost of food.

Despite budgeting and saving to put food on the table, many neighbors need extra support to absorb the financial hit of pricier groceries. To help fill in the food gap, many neighbors turn to federal food assistance programs, such as SNAP, or organizations within the charitable food system, like food banks.

The use of a broad range of approaches to accessing food underscores neighbors' creativity and resilience—and emphasizes how unaffordable food is forcing many individuals and families to make decisions

no one should have to make. To meet this moment, neighbors advocate for improvements to federal food assistance programs that will make these programs more responsive to neighbor needs and evolving economic realities.

Nearly all say programs like SNAP are important for limiting food insecurity. They see the value these programs provide—many have personally benefited—and do not want policymakers to cut funding, chip away at access or restrict the range of foods available with these

programs. Neighbors are also eager for policymakers to design federal food programs in ways that will not enable a “benefits cliff,” or the sudden loss of support as neighbors make progress toward self-sufficiency.

Neighbors' insights related to prioritizing dignity signal the need for a world where households can use federal assistance programs to receive preferred food without undue handholding or bureaucracy—mirroring the autonomous decision-making so many households get to experience with their food choices.





## NEIGHBOR STATS: PRIORITIZING DIGNITY

# 84%

OF NEIGHBORS SURVEYED BELIEVE CONGRESS SHOULD PASS POLICIES TO REDUCE FOOD INSECURITY THAT SUPPORT PEOPLE'S DIGNITY AND CHOICES IN WHAT THEY FEED THEIR FAMILIES.



# 83%

OF NEIGHBORS SURVEYED AGREE THAT OUR NATION SHOULD NOT ADD MORE RED TAPE AND PAPERWORK TO FEDERAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS.



# 69%

OF NEIGHBORS SURVEYED SAY IT IS IMPORTANT THAT FOOD ASSISTANCE BENEFITS PHASE OUT GRADUALLY TO AVOID ABRUPTLY LEAVING RECIPIENTS WITHOUT SUPPORT AS THEY WORK TOWARD INDEPENDENCE AND FINANCIAL STABILITY.



# 85%

OF NEIGHBORS SURVEYED SAY IT IS IMPORTANT FOR MIDDLE-INCOME PEOPLE TO QUALIFY FOR ASSISTANCE BECAUSE THEY FACE CHALLENGES SOMETIMES TOO.



# 92%

OF NEIGHBORS SURVEYED VALUE SNAP AND:



## 65%

WANT INCREASED FUNDING



## 26%

WANT FUNDING KEPT AT CURRENT LEVELS



## 8%

WANT FUNDING CUT

# 87%

OF NEIGHBORS HAVE A FAVORABLE VIEW OF FOOD BANKS. AMONG RESPONDENTS WHO HAVE GONE TO A FOOD BANK IN THE PAST TWO YEARS:



## 46%

WORRIED LESS ABOUT FEEDING THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES



## 30%

WERE ABLE TO PAY RENT, UTILITIES AND OTHER BILLS

Open-ended questions were included in the 2024 survey, inviting neighbors to describe their lives and the impact of high food prices on their households.

Below is a sample of responses from neighbors:

“When I got cut off of food stamps, I was afraid I wouldn’t be able to make my car payment.”

“While receiving EBT, we still make an effort to get the most out of the funds by taking advantage of sales, discounts, etc.”

“I receive SNAP assistance, yet it doesn’t come close to covering my food expenses, which means I have to use some of my disability pay towards food, but I don’t buy the healthiest of food because I don’t have enough money for that.”





# EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY

Neighbors near-universally agree that food insecurity is about more than food, highlighting a clear connection between the escalated cost of food and other essentials, and the financial adjustments families and individuals are making to access enough to eat.

As the shock of higher-than-usual food prices continues to ripple across the country, many households are making tough financial calls to put food on the table. This is especially true for neighbors, who are most impacted by costlier groceries.

To strengthen food security and lessen the sacrifices households must make to

afford food, neighbors say it's critical for decision-makers to pass legislation that will bolster economic well-being. Envisioning both short- and long-term change, neighbors aspire to improve their economic circumstances today and to achieve economic mobility across generations tomorrow.



# NEIGHBOR STATS: EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY

# 89%

OF NEIGHBORS SURVEYED AGREE STRENGTHENING ECONOMIC WELL-BEING WILL REDUCE FOOD INSECURITY.

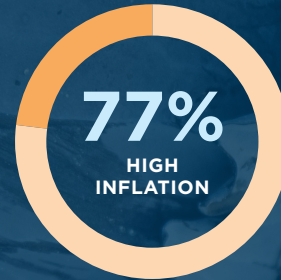


# 61%

BEING ABLE TO SAVE MONEY AND PASS IT ON TO FAMILY MEMBERS (61%) RANKED AS THE TOP SUPPORT NEIGHBORS SURVEYED NEED TO ACHIEVE THE LIFE THEY WANT.

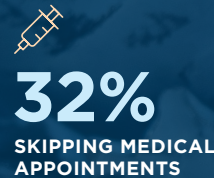
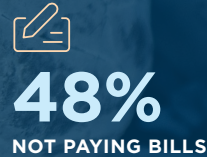


Top issues that neighbors surveyed say are the main drivers of food insecurity in the U.S.:



# 78%

OF NEIGHBORS SURVEYED SAY THEY HAVE MADE TRADE-OFFS TO AFFORD FOOD FOR THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS, INCLUDING:



# 85%

OF NEIGHBORS SURVEYED SAY IT'S IMPORTANT THAT ANTI-HUNGER POLICIES INCREASE THE MONTHLY AMOUNT PEOPLE CAN GET THROUGH SNAP TO KEEP UP WITH INFLATION AND HIGH FOOD PRICES.



Open-ended questions were included in the 2024 survey, inviting neighbors to describe their lives and the impact of high food prices on their households.

Below is a sample of responses from neighbors:

“It’s not excellent as far as finances, but I’m healthy, happy and have great friends and family.”

“No tener una reserva de dinero para situaciones inesperadas.”  
 (“Not having a reserve of money for unexpected situations.”)



# IMPROVING HEALTH

Eating healthy food that adheres to cultural and other preferences helps support strong physical and mental health, especially among children. This is a fact that neighbors emphatically agree on.

While many neighbors want to purchase nutritious food, their food choices are informed by larger economic forces such as the cost of food, housing and other basic needs. Balancing between buying healthy food options and wallet-friendly alternatives, affordability often drives decision-making. Neighbors are concerned about the impact of unaffordable groceries and food insecurity more

broadly on the health and well-being of their communities.

Food security and health go hand in hand. Neighbor insights demonstrate the need for lawmakers to improve current economic conditions for low- and moderate-income communities to promote and strengthen the overall well-being of individuals and families nationwide.





# NEIGHBOR STATS: IMPROVING HEALTH

# 91%

OF NEIGHBORS SURVEYED AGREE THAT “FOOD IS MEDICINE” AND HAVING REGULAR ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOODS IMPROVES OVERALL WELL-BEING.



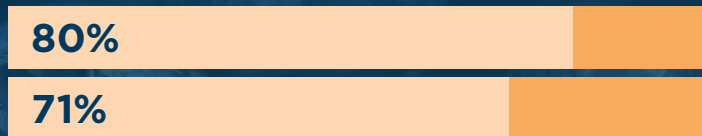
# 80%

OF NEIGHBORS SURVEYED SAY THEY ARE NOT AS HEALTHY AS THEY WANT TO BE.

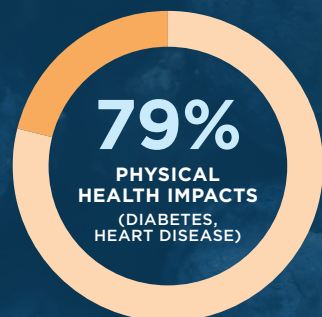
BUT...

# 71%

OF NEIGHBORS SURVEYED SAY THEY WANT TO EAT HEALTHIER BUT CAN'T AFFORD TO RIGHT NOW.



## Concerns from neighbors surveyed about the impacts of food insecurity in their communities:



# 80%

OF NEIGHBORS SURVEYED ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN FACING HUNGER IN THEIR COMMUNITY.



Open-ended questions were included in the 2024 survey, inviting neighbors to describe their lives and the impact of high food prices on their households.

Below is a sample of responses from neighbors:

“I’m struggling with anxiety nonstop.”

“I’m trying to find the right balance between work and home. It’s also a balance between our budgets because prescription medication isn’t being covered by our insurance.”

“I don’t know where my life is headed and unsure of being able to continue to have a place to live and the ability to cover medical expenses.”

“No poder comprar alimentos organicos y libres de antibioticos o toxicos para la comida de mis hijos.” (“Not being able to buy organic foods free of antibiotics or toxics for my children’s food.”)





# INCREASING ACCESS

Neighbors know the importance of ensuring *everyone* can access the food they say they need to thrive, regardless of where they live or who they are. However, access to food is deeply impacted by disparities driven by place and race.

Distinct challenges, such as a lack of transportation, low wages and underemployment, make food insecurity an acute hardship in rural and other hard-to-reach areas of the country. Historical, social, economic and environmental factors have also hindered progress for many communities, including communities of color, creating barriers to food security. Despite these challenges, these communities continue to build vibrant, dynamic lives and cultures.

To ensure no one goes without food, neighbors are eager for decision-makers to invest in policies that lessen hurdles to affordable food. A few potential starting points for lawmakers? Continue providing funds for food banks and bolstering support for school meal programs and other food assistance resources. These actions are critical for addressing the nation's uneven distribution of access to a fundamental resource we all need.



## NEIGHBOR STATS: INCREASING ACCESS

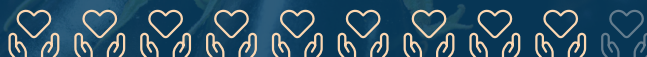
# 88%

OF NEIGHBORS SURVEYED AGREE POLICIES THAT RESTRICT AFFORDABLE FOOD ACCESS ARE WRONG AND THAT ANYONE EXPERIENCING FOOD INSECURITY SHOULD BE ABLE TO GET THE HELP THEY NEED.



# 90%

OF NEIGHBORS SURVEYED SAY IT IS IMPORTANT TO MAKE IT EASIER FOR CHILDREN, SENIORS AND ADULTS TO QUALIFY FOR AND ENROLL IN FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS WHEN THEY NEED HELP.



# 92%

OF NEIGHBORS SURVEYED SAY IT IS IMPORTANT THAT EVERY CHILD IN THE U.S. HAS THE FOOD THEY NEED TO THRIVE AND GROW

AND...

# 93%

SAY SCHOOL MEAL PROGRAMS ARE IMPORTANT IN ADDRESSING CHILD HUNGER.

92%

93%

# 89%

OF NEIGHBORS SURVEYED AGREE NO ONE SERVING IN THE MILITARY, WHETHER ACTIVE MILITARY, VETERANS OR THEIR FAMILIES, SHOULD HAVE TO DEAL WITH FOOD INSECURITY.



# 87%

OF NEIGHBORS SURVEYED SAY IT IS IMPORTANT TO DIRECT MORE RESOURCES TO FOOD BANKS TO SERVE MORE PEOPLE.



Open-ended questions were included in the 2024 survey, inviting neighbors to describe their lives and the impact of high food prices on their households.

To the right is a sample of responses from neighbors:

“Not being able to buy enough food; the food I do buy is lower quality, and I have to drive further to buy it.”

“I can’t find a local supermarket that has lower prices.”

“Everything in this world feels unaccessible, even when you work yourself to death.”

“With only one grocery store, you pay the higher prices.”





SECTION 3

# Report Context

“El dinero no alcanza es muy caro todo.” (“The money is not enough, everything is very expensive.”)

—ELEVATING VOICES: INSIGHTS REPORT  
SURVEY PARTICIPANT



## REPORT METHODOLOGY

In collaboration with the nonpartisan research firm PerryUndem, Feeding America designed and deployed an 18-minute national survey of adults who reported their household received charitable food assistance and/or experienced food insecurity within the past two years. To qualify for the survey, respondents had to answer “Yes” to at least one of the prompts below.

### At any time in the last two years, have you or anyone in your household:

- Worried whether your food would run out before you got money to buy more?
- Had the experience where the food you bought didn't last and you didn't have money to buy more?
- Gotten free groceries from a food pantry, food bank, church, or other place that helps with free food?
- Received a meal from a church, shelter, home-delivered meal service like Meals on Wheels, or other place that helps with free meals?

The survey, offered in English and Spanish, was conducted using NORC's nationally representative online panel and was fielded from March 20 to April 9, 2024. In total, 1,495 adults participated in the survey.

To help us better understand everyone's experiences and needs, the survey oversampled Black adults, Latino adults, Asian American and Pacific Islander adults, Native American adults and adults who have visited a food bank in the past two years. The margin of error is  $\pm 3.4$  percentage points but is larger for subgroups.

The survey also included a series of open-ended questions to provide an opportunity for neighbors to share more about their experiences in their own words.







## REPORT BACKGROUND

The first-ever *Elevating Voices: Insights Report* was designed as a nationwide community listening initiative for compiling and foregrounding the experiences and expertise of people facing hunger amid the 2022 White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health.

Since 2022, the report has evolved into a cornerstone Feeding America publication aiming to advance new understandings and narratives of hunger informed by the insights of neighbors facing hunger. Feeding America releases the *Elevating Voices: Insights Report* every September on Hunger Action Day during Hunger Action Month—a Feeding America campaign dedicated to inspiring individuals and organizations across the U.S. to join the movement to end hunger.


## ELEVATING VOICES PLATFORM BACKGROUND

Elevating Voices is Feeding America’s platform for consistently engaging with and amplifying the experiences and expertise of people with lived experience of food insecurity. The primary goal is to advance new understandings and narratives of hunger driven by the people closest to the issue.

### The Elevating Voices platform currently includes three core projects:

- **ELEVATING VOICES: INSIGHTS REPORT:** The report is an annual, nationally representative survey of the experiences, concerns and policy views of people facing hunger in the U.S.
- **ELEVATING VOICES: POWER SUMMIT:** The summit is a leadership conference designed by and for neighbor-advocates to bolster advocacy and other skills, engage with federal decision-makers, and build community and connections to center people experiencing food insecurity in the movement to end food insecurity.
- **ELEVATING VOICES: DIGITAL COMMUNITY:** The digital space brings neighbor advocates across the country together to continue building power, connections and community to collaborate and learn from each other to push for anti-hunger priorities in their communities.





“Every month is a new financial puzzle to solve. Every turn of the quarter or year is a tension point, wondering whether insurance rates will change, every illness is a new expense.”

-ELEVATING VOICES: INSIGHTS REPORT SURVEY PARTICIPANT

## Acknowledgements

Feeding America thanks the hundreds of survey respondents who dedicated time to provide a critical snapshot of the reality of hunger in the U.S. today. The insights neighbors facing hunger offered made the 2024 *Elevating Voices: Insights Report* possible and are the foundation of the nation's collective efforts to make food security a reality.

Feeding America also extends immense gratitude to the following neighbor-advocates who participated in a focus group in July 2024 to provide feedback for strengthening the content of the report: Erica Astacio, Nataly Castillo, Kim Harris, Kim Hart, Anne Lee, Odessa Oldham, Theresa Olegsiw, Tori Overton, Ed Perez, Shavonna Rodriguez, Khalil Rushdan and Keonna Yearwood-Branch.

Lastly, the production of this report could not have happened without the generous support, deep expertise and collaborative spirit of Feeding America's polling partners at PerryUndem, design partners at creative studio Eighty2degrees and subject matter experts throughout the Feeding America network.



# Elevating Voices | FEEDING AMERICA®

Join the movement to end hunger at  
[FeedingAmerica.org/ElevatingVoices](https://FeedingAmerica.org/ElevatingVoices)

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## About Feeding America

Feeding America® is the largest hunger-relief organization in the United States. As part of a network of more than 200 food banks, 21 statewide food bank associations, and over 60,000 agency partners, food pantries and meal programs, we helped provide 5.3 billion meals to tens of millions of people in need last year.

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## Report Citation

Feeding America. (September 2024). *Elevating Voices: Insights Report*.

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