

# Charitable Food Assistance Participation Measurement

Feeding America

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Food insecurity remains a persistent problem in the United States. In 2020, the first calendar year of the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 38 million individuals lived in food-insecure households, though it is believed that significantly more people would have experienced food insecurity had it not been for the public and private response to the economic crisis.

There are a variety of programs that exist to help the individuals and households who lack access to enough nutritious food. Many of those programs are funded and operated by the federal government, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). In addition, there are numerous types of charitable food assistance programs that also provide food to individuals in need. Feeding America is the largest hunger-relief charity in the U.S. The Feeding America network includes 200 food banks, which collectively partner with 60,000 food pantries and meal programs in communities across the country.

Charitable food assistance programs are an important source of nutrition for many low-income people in the United States. Having reliable and consistent data about the people who receive help from charitable food assistance programs is an important step in both understanding need and developing solutions to address food insecurity and improve food access in this country. However, historically there have been few nationally representative surveys that have included questions on charitable food assistance, and among surveys that have, the questions used have not been consistent, leading to results that have varied significantly.

To address this issue, Feeding America has developed and tested survey questions with the goal of improving the consistency, accuracy and reliability of data about charitable food assistance participation in the United States. Feeding America's Charitable Food Assistance Participation Module (CFAPM), which is shown on the next page, consists of two questions that ask separately about receipt of free groceries or free (prepared) meals.

## FEEDING AMERICA'S CHARITABLE FOOD ASSISTANCE PARTICIPATION MODULE (CFAPM)

*Sometimes people need help getting food for their household. There are many programs in the community that can help.*

Q1. During the past [30 days/12 months], have you or anyone in your household gotten **free groceries** from a food pantry, food bank, church, or other place that helps with free food? [Include any free food you plan to receive today when you answer.]

### RESPONSE OPTIONS

- Yes
- No

Q2. During the past [30 days/12 months], have you or anyone in your household received a **free meal** from a church, shelter, home-delivered meal service like Meals on Wheels, or other place that helps with free meals? [Include any free food you plan to receive today when you answer.]

### RESPONSE OPTIONS

- Yes
- No

## CONTACT

For questions or additional information about Feeding America's Charitable Food Assistance Participation Module, please contact **Monica Hake and Emily Engelhard**. If you are a researcher and plan to utilize these questions on a survey, please let us know.

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## MODULE DEVELOPMENT AND TESTING

Feeding America developed the CFAPM with guidance and support from Dr. Hilary Seligman of our **Technical Advisory Group**, and the module was cognitively tested with individuals in different parts of the country during the spring and summer of 2017.

## ASSESSING CHARITABLE FOOD ASSISTANCE PARTICIPATION

An individual/household is considered to have participated in charitable food assistance if they respond "yes" to one or both questions above.

## WHERE HAS THE CFAPM BEEN USED?

The CFAPM has been included on the Urban Institute's **Wellbeing Basic Needs Survey** (WBNS). Feeding America used the results of this survey, combined with data from the Current Population Survey (CPS), to estimate **Charitable Food Assistance Participation in 2020**.

Additionally, the questions are being considered for use on the **USDA's National Household Food Acquisition and Purchase Survey** (FoodAPS) and the **Census Bureau's Current Population Survey** (CPS).

The surveys mentioned above include those that we are aware of at this time. We will continue to keep this list updated as use of these survey questions expands.