



49 million people or **1 in 6**
received charitable food assistance sometime in 2022.

What do we mean by charitable food assistance participation?

Feeding America's charitable food participation estimate reflects the total number of unique individuals who received food one or more times during the year from a charitable food distribution, including distributions from food banks, food pantries, and other private food assistance programs. While Feeding America is the largest hunger-relief organization in the United States, the estimate is designed to account for individuals who participated in any charitable food distribution, both inside and outside of the Feeding America network of food banks, food pantries, and community-based organizations.

Why does this estimate matter? How does it relate to other measures?

Our estimate of charitable food assistance participation, combined with other measures, data, and insights, can help improve understanding about the barriers that keep millions of people from thriving, as well as the programs and resources that exist to help people access enough food for themselves and their families.

Charitable food assistance participation is related to but distinct from food insecurity, which is defined by the USDA as having limited access to adequate food due to a lack of money or other resources. The federal government operates a number of nutrition assistance programs that are designed to keep individuals and families from experiencing food insecurity, the cornerstone of which is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). For some households, the benefits provided through federal programs like SNAP are not enough to achieve food security, while other households who might benefit are not eligible for federal nutrition programs. In these cases, private programs including charitable food assistance exist as additional supports to help keep individuals and families from experiencing food insecurity.

The economic crisis brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic had the potential to cause a significant increase in food insecurity in the U.S, but so far that has not happened. Overall food insecurity rose only slightly in 2020 and then fell to the lowest level on record in 2021. (Food insecurity for 2022 data is expected to be published by the USDA in September 2023). These stable food insecurity rates reveal how investment in public (e.g., SNAP, etc.) and private (charitable food) programs collectively helped to keep millions of people from experiencing food insecurity. However, the sunset of pandemic-era programs, which already began prior to the end of COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, may lead to food insecurity levels rising again.

How does the latest estimate compare to prior years?

The estimate of the number of people who participated in charitable food assistance in 2022 (49 million) is lower compared to 2020 (60 million) and 2021 (53 million) but remains higher than 2019 (40 million).

In the end, regardless of change from recent years, the estimated number of people who participated in charitable food assistance programs in 2022 remains high at 49 million people, or 1 in every 6. Despite indicators of economic improvement since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, charitable food assistance participation in 2022 is greater compared to pre-COVID (2019), indicating that the charitable food sector remains a critical support for tens of millions of people.

Who participated in charitable food assistance programs in 2022?



Walberto, Maria, and Esther

Walberto, Maria and their eight-year-old daughter Esther were headed home when they noticed the Open Door Pantry truck parked outside of a suburban Minneapolis junior high school. As they passed through the school cafeteria converted into a distribution center, they were excited to see a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables alongside meat and milk. “The most important thing is that you’re healthy,” Maria said.



Deidra, Kaeden, and Mila

After Hurricane Ian caused massive wind and water damage in her community, Deidra visited the Awaken Church Food Pantry, a partner agency of All Faiths Food Bank, with her son Kaeden, 10, and daughter Mila, 3. “I wasn’t working since the hurricane,” Deidra said. The pantry is “helping me out financially so I don’t have to spend out of pocket expenses, knowing that I’m going to be on maternity leave. It warmed my heart to see even the little kids out here helping out as much as possible,” she said.



Anwar, Muhammad, and Ibrahim

Anwar has been driving Uber ever since he lost his job, but with inflation, high fuel prices and a family of six to feed, the money he makes doesn’t stretch very far. Recently, Anwar and his sons Muhammad, 5, and Ibrahim, 7, visited the Atlanta Community Food Bank distribution at Brumby Elementary School in Marietta, Georgia. Anwar loves to cook for his family, and he was excited to learn that the pantry was distributing meat that day. “Food is really expensive right now,” he said. “All of this helps.”



Kathy and family

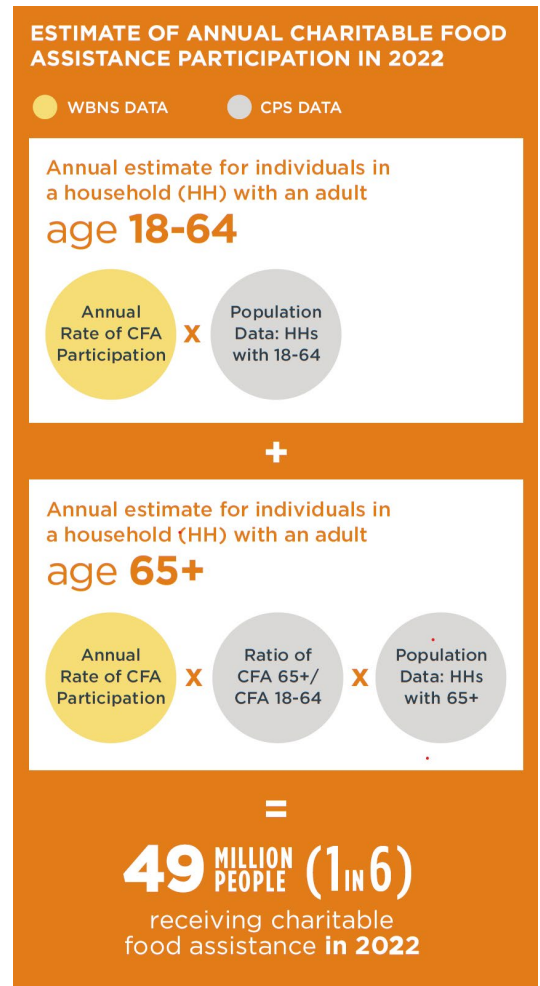
Between her and her siblings, Kathy has 42 nieces and nephews. Usually, she looks forward to big family gatherings, but this year, “we’re all struggling, so we’re not coming together for Thanksgiving, unfortunately. It’s been a rough couple of years,” Kathy said. She has noticed that many people in her community have lost work and cannot afford the community’s cost of living. Without the 11th annual Thanksgiving Angels distribution, Kathy said that her family – including her 12 children – would not be able to celebrate with a traditional meal.

How did we estimate charitable food assistance participation in 2022?

The estimated number of individuals who received charitable food assistance (CFA) in 2022 is derived from two primary sources of information: (1) findings from the Urban Institute’s Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey (WBNS) and (2) the December Supplement of the Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey (CPS). Both surveys are nationally representative, and both ask respondents whether they have received CFA in the past 12 months and in the past 30 days. Because the WBNS uses CFA questions that have been more rigorously developed and tested by the Research Department at Feeding America, we primarily rely on the results of that survey, while supplementing our calculation with data from the CPS to arrive at an estimate for the overall population.

How we calculate the estimate is shown in the graphic. First, we estimate the number of people who received CFA in households with an adult age 18-64 (the WBNS is nationally representative of this population) by multiplying the annual CFA rate from the WBNS by the corresponding population estimate from the CPS.

Next, we estimate the number of people who received CFA in households without an adult age 18-64. To do this, we use CPS data to calculate a ratio of the frequency by which individuals 65 and older receive CFA relative to adults 18-64. Then, we take the annual CFA rate from the WBNS for the 18-64 population and multiply it by the ratio and by the corresponding population estimate from the CPS. The sum of these two numbers is the estimated number of individuals who received CFA.



FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

[The Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey \(WBNS\)](#) – Urban Institute

[Current Population Survey \(CPS\)](#) – Census Bureau

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