

2026



ELEVATING VOICES

Insights Report



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Missy, Tennessee



High food prices are forcing us to budget much more strictly and cut back on extra family activities just to cover our basic grocery bill each week.

2026 SURVEY PARTICIPANT (CALIFORNIA)



FOREWORD

Hunger Is Still on the Table

In 2022, Feeding America released our inaugural *Elevating Voices: Insights Report*. Since then, food insecurity has persisted in communities nationwide. According to the latest available data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), nearly 48 million people—including approximately 14 million children—are facing barriers to accessing enough nourishing food while working to build healthy, thriving lives.¹

Food insecurity in America is the result of multiple overlapping challenges,

including economic pressures exacerbated by years of sudden disruptions, from a pandemic to the longest government shutdown in the country's history. A nationwide rise in rent has outpaced households' growth in earnings, health care has become costlier and more families are experiencing sticker shock at the grocery store—all signs that life is becoming more expensive across the country, making it harder to afford groceries.²

¹ Rabbitt, M. P., Reed-Jones, M., Hales, L. J., Suttles, S., & Burke, M. P. (2025). *Statistical supplement to household food security in the United States in 2024* (Report No. AP-126). U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.

² McKernan, S., Harvey, C., Acs, G. (2025). *Policy Solutions for an Affordable Future*. Urban Institute. <https://www.urban.org/apps/policy-solutions-affordable-future>

Enduring Hardships, New Concerns

The 2026 *Insights Report* continues Feeding America’s work to better understand the experiences of people facing challenges putting food on the table and to compile their expertise on how the nation can move toward a future where everyone has access to nutritious meals. This year’s release echoes what we have heard throughout our report series: on-ramps to the economic stability needed to consistently afford groceries remain largely out of reach, and the scale and impact of critical government nutrition programs remain constrained by administrative hurdles.

The survey fielded to inform the 2026 report launched earlier this summer—about a year after the passage of legislation that brought broad-scale changes to the country’s government nutrition assistance landscape. Given

the timing of the survey fielding, the 2026 report also reflects a growing worry among our neighbors: the future reliability of a government nutrition assistance system that has long served as a temporary bridge toward stability for millions of families.

To make ends meet amid limited economic opportunity and rapidly changing government nutrition programs, neighbors turn to community members for immediate help while receiving supplemental support from food banks, food pantries and other similar organizations. However, neighbors’ experiences confirm that making real progress toward a hunger-free nation requires strengthening the country’s economic footing and making food assistance benefits more accessible, consistent and reflective of the current cost of living.



A Future Where Nutritious Food Is Within Reach

Although many neighbors feel they cannot get ahead, they also believe meaningful change is possible. Feeding America remains committed to working alongside our neighbors to build a future where everyone has reliable access to nutritious food. Reaching that future will require partnering

with policymakers to build strong and accountable government nutrition programs, a resilient charitable food system, and solutions that reflect the economic realities families face—with people experiencing hunger leading the way.



Glossary

KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Food Insecurity: An official term from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), food insecurity is a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food at some time during the year.³

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): SNAP is the nation’s largest nutrition assistance program and provides food benefits to families most in need.⁴

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP): TEFAP is a government program that moves food from farms to food banks to help supplement the diets of people with low income by providing emergency food assistance.⁵

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC): WIC is a government nutrition program that helps women, infants and children afford healthy foods and baby supplies.⁶

3 U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. “Food Security in the U.S - Measurement.” (Updated 2026). <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/measurement>
4 U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).” (Updated 2025). <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>
5 U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. “The Emergency Food Assistance Program.” (Updated 2025). <https://www.fna.usda.gov/tefap/emergency-food-assistance-program>
6 U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. “WIC Program.” (Updated 2026). <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/measurement>

SURVEY PARTICIPANTS



Johnny, Jessica, Leila, Gage, California



Voices Nourishing Change

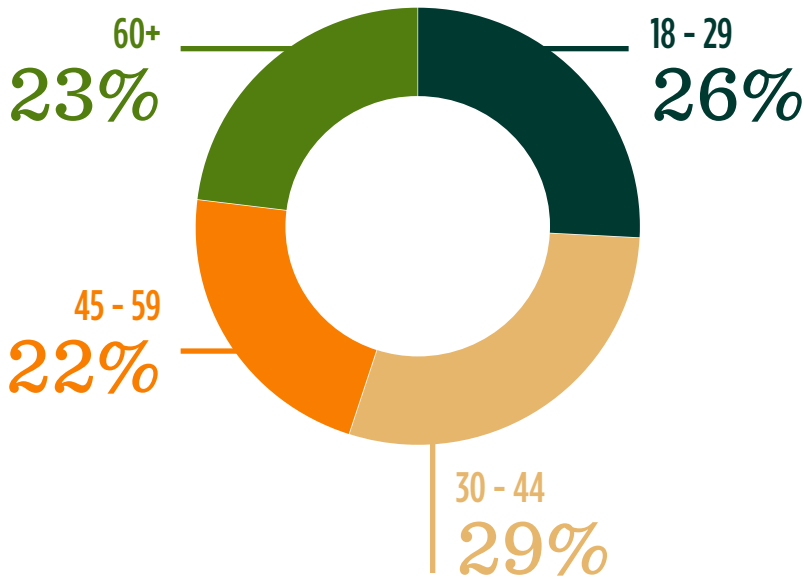
The 2026 *Insights Report* findings are based on a survey Feeding America fielded from June 16 to July 6, 2026, to understand the current experiences, concerns and policy views of our neighbors—individuals defined in this report as people who have received charitable food assistance or experienced food insecurity within the past two years. In this year's survey, we heard from over 1,200 neighbors—hundreds of parents, seniors, veterans and other people from across the country—representing a range of backgrounds and lived experiences.

Many neighbors are already leading the charge to end food insecurity, using their expertise and wisdom to drive policy change, mobilize their communities and provide meals when government systems fall short. To fuel our work, Feeding America knows we must continue to listen to, collaborate with and amplify the stories of our neighbors—the people closest to the issue of food insecurity who are working to provide fair access to nutritious food for all.

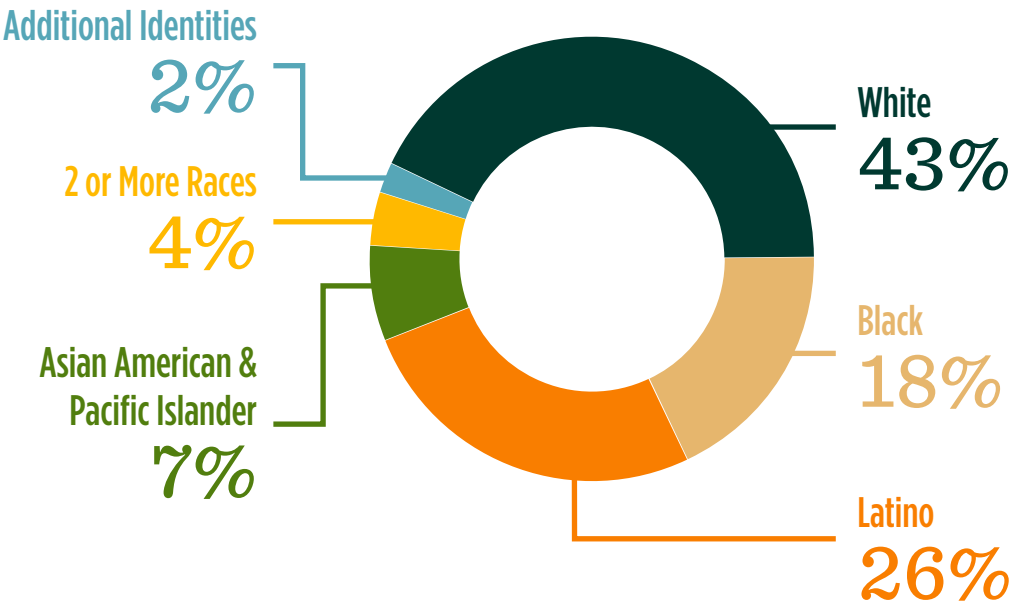
In this report, “neighbors” are defined as people who have received charitable food assistance or experienced food insecurity within the past two years.

The voices we heard from in the 2026 survey build on what we heard from neighbors in past iterations, offering critical insights to inform the work of food bank leaders, community partners, businesses, policymakers and others dedicated to creating a stronger, healthier and more resilient nation.

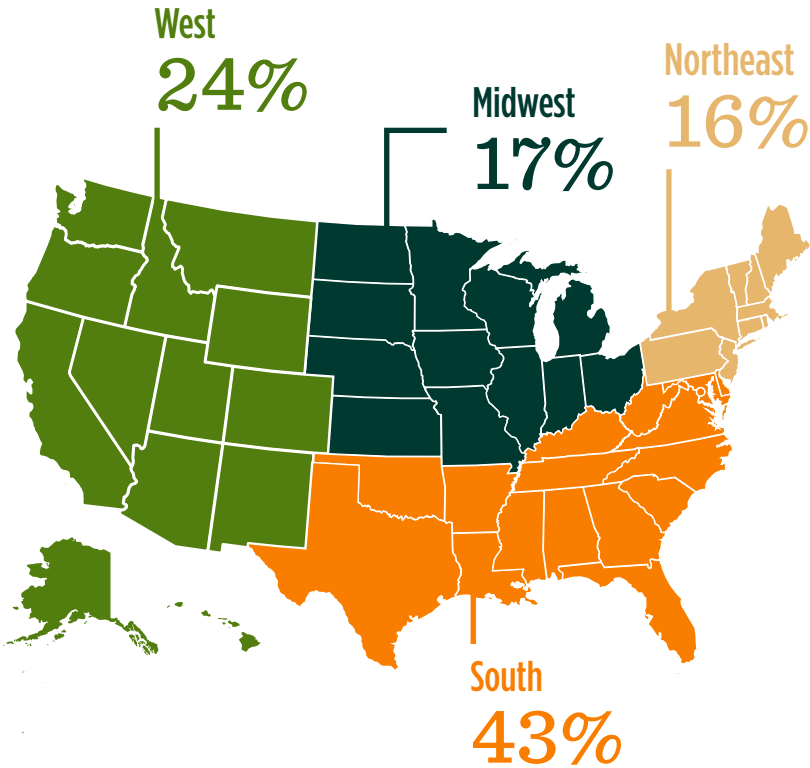
Age



Race and Ethnicity



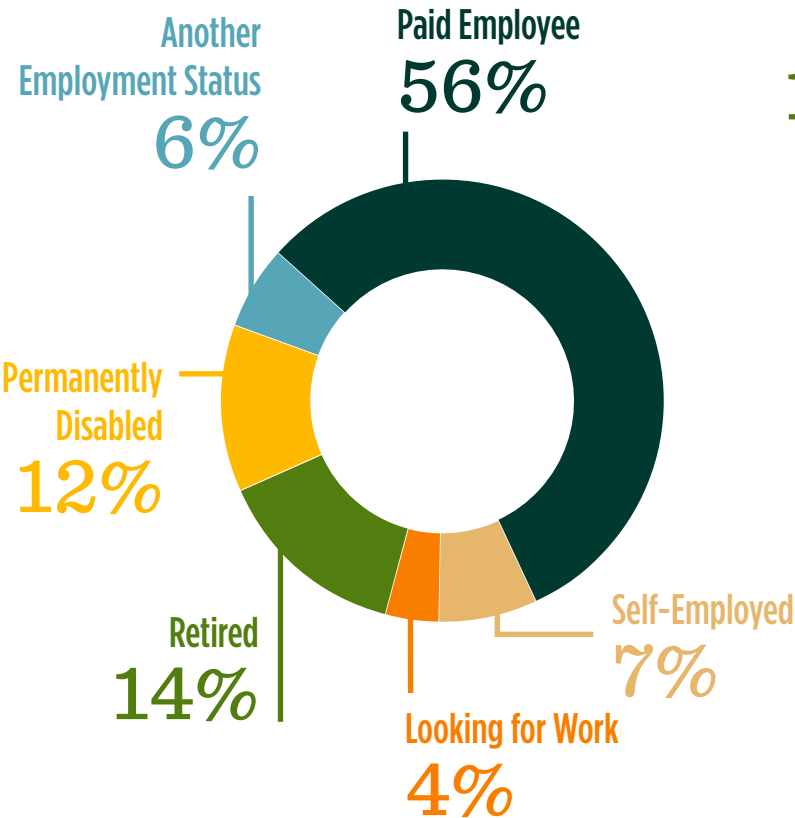
Region



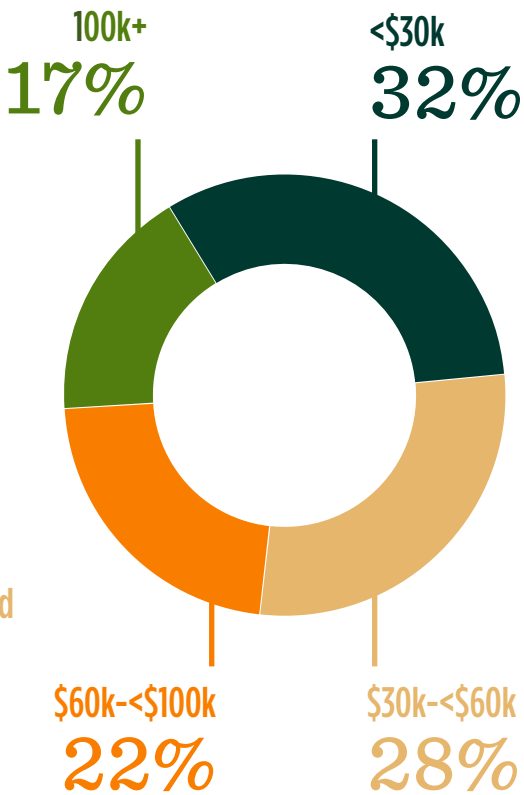
Area



Employment Status



Household Income



KEY INSIGHTS

Eustolia and Jennifer, New York



Los precios suben, pero los sueldos no. (Prices are rising, but wages are not.)

2026 SURVEY PARTICIPANT (PUERTO RICO)



INSIGHT 1:

Economic Pressures Continue to Make It Harder for Neighbors to Thrive

NAVIGATING THE CURRENT COST-OF-LIVING SQUEEZE

As compounding economic forces, from high costs to stagnant wages that prevent self-sufficiency, leave many households without the footholds to reach financial stability, neighbors find themselves in a state of financial uncertainty. Economic stresses are directly affecting neighbors' lives: when stocking up at the grocery store, filling up their car or putting a roof over their

heads, neighbors find it challenging to stretch their budgets to afford the basics.

To ease budgetary worries and keep their fridges, pantries and cupboards full, neighbors reported deploying several strategies over the past year, including taking on debt and forgoing access to competing essentials like health care.

60%



Say they do not feel financially stable and on top of their bills

88%



Say they are concerned about food prices

85%



Say they are concerned about gas prices

77%



Say they are concerned about the costs of their rent or mortgage

48%



Delayed paying bills (e.g., rent, utilities, medical expenses) to afford groceries

52%



Relied on credit cards, loans or borrowed money to afford groceries

Top issues driving food insecurity, ranked by neighbors:

62%



High food costs

47%



Wages not keeping up with the cost of living

35%



High cost of rent/mortgage

EXPERIENCING PERSISTENT ECONOMIC STRESS

Neighbors say economic insecurity is a constant, not a temporary, short-term condition. Communities are experiencing economic insecurity as an entrenched, longstanding reality without near-term reprieve—especially as neighbors figure out present and predict future financial uncertainty in their households and across the country.

Over a third of neighbors (40%) report their economic standing has worsened compared to last year, and over a third of neighbors (42%) have felt no shift in their financial security in the last 12 months. Looking to the year ahead, neighbors are split over whether their financial situation will get better (37%), get worse (26%) or stay the same (36%). And on a national scale, more than half (57%) of neighbors expect the country’s

overall economic situation to worsen over the next year.

Neighbors face more than just financial strains. Anxiety and stress are high among neighbors, contributing to the difficulties they face day to day. Despite these challenges, neighbors continue to adapt, problem-solve and plan for the future: neighbors feel optimistic about what lies ahead and confident in their ability to move through tough times.



Say they are dealing with lots of stress and anxiety



Feel like life is unpredictable right now



Say people in their community are dealing with long-term financial stress, not just temporary hardship



Feel confident navigating challenges when they arise



Feel hopeful about their future

GOVERNMENT NUTRITION PROGRAMS REMAIN IMPORTANT AS ACCESS BECOMES MORE UNPREDICTABLE

Neighbors affirm that the nation’s government nutrition programs are essential for our country: 84% agree that The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) is a critical support, and 86% agree the Special Supplemental

Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a vital resource. Together, these programs and others keep food moving to neighbors as grocery prices remain costly.

Despite recognizing the importance of the nation’s government nutrition assistance system, confidence in it is wavering, especially around the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Now a year after the passage of sweeping SNAP policy changes, neighbors are aware of the transformation of the government food assistance landscape and are concerned about their ability to access food from it. Surveyed SNAP recipients specifically anticipate that accessing SNAP benefits will become more difficult as they navigate recent federal and state rule updates.



Say they are concerned about access to government food assistance



Say that programs and systems that help people access food can be difficult to navigate consistently



Say they have seen, heard or read about changes or cuts to government food assistance programs in the past year



Say they have seen, heard or read about people losing or having trouble keeping food assistance benefits in the past year

THE IMPORTANCE OF SNAP



Think SNAP is important for our country



Of past and present SNAP beneficiaries say their benefits are/were important for their ability to afford food



Say they would be concerned if SNAP funding stopped and the program ended in their state

AMONG CURRENT SNAP BENEFICIARIES:



Say they are concerned that recent federal and state changes to SNAP will make it harder for them or someone in their household to keep benefits or receive them in the future



Say they are concerned about losing benefits if their income increases slightly



Say they are concerned they or someone in their household could lose SNAP benefits because of paperwork, renewal issues, or administrative problems, even if they still qualify for assistance



INSIGHT 2:

Ongoing Challenges Are Taking a Toll on Neighbors’ Health

NEIGHBORS WANT TO EAT NUTRITIOUS MEALS, BUT HIGH FOOD COSTS STAND IN THE WAY

Across the country, neighbors are working hard to build healthy futures for their families and communities. However, neighbors’ ability to secure better health outcomes through nutritious meals remains strained by heightened food

costs and significant changes to government nutrition programs. Without consistent, reliable pathways to nourishing food, neighbors tell us they cannot achieve the health outcomes they desire.

75%



Say they are not as healthy as they want to be

55%



Say they skipped meals or ate less food in the past year because of high food prices

68%



Say they want to eat healthier but cannot afford to right now

82%



Say they are concerned about the costs of health care

“

Los altos precios de los alimentos no me permiten consumir con regularidad los alimentos que necesita mi cuerpo para mejorar mi salud. (High food prices prevent me from regularly consuming the foods my body needs to improve my health.)

2026 Survey Participant (Puerto Rico)

NEIGHBORS PRIORITIZE AFFORDABLE, NUTRITIOUS FOOD CLOSE TO HOME

As economic conditions make it difficult to bring home nutritious food, neighbors share what government nutrition programs must provide to support their families’ health: benefits that keep up with the real cost of living (39%) ranked as their highest priority, followed by access to fresh, healthy food (28%). Additionally, to ensure everyone in every community can better shape the future of their health in ways that honor their dignity, choice and needs, neighbors desire nearby access to nutritious, low-cost food.

Top-ranked supports neighbors say they need to achieve the kind of life they want:



Mersadez and her daughter, Texas





INSIGHT 3:

Neighbors Are Turning to Food Banks and Each Other Amid Uncertainty

FOOD BANKS ARE STEPPING IN AS NEIGHBORS CALL FOR A STRONGER FOOD ASSISTANCE SYSTEM

The charitable food system has become a reliable and trusted source of supplemental food: 86% of neighbors think food banks are important for our country, and 79% say that food banks and pantries are becoming more important for many families in their community. Knowing how critical charitable food is in helping families stay afloat and build wiggle room in their budgets, neighbors urge policymakers to further equip the charitable food system to support communities.

Among neighbors who received food assistance in the past year:

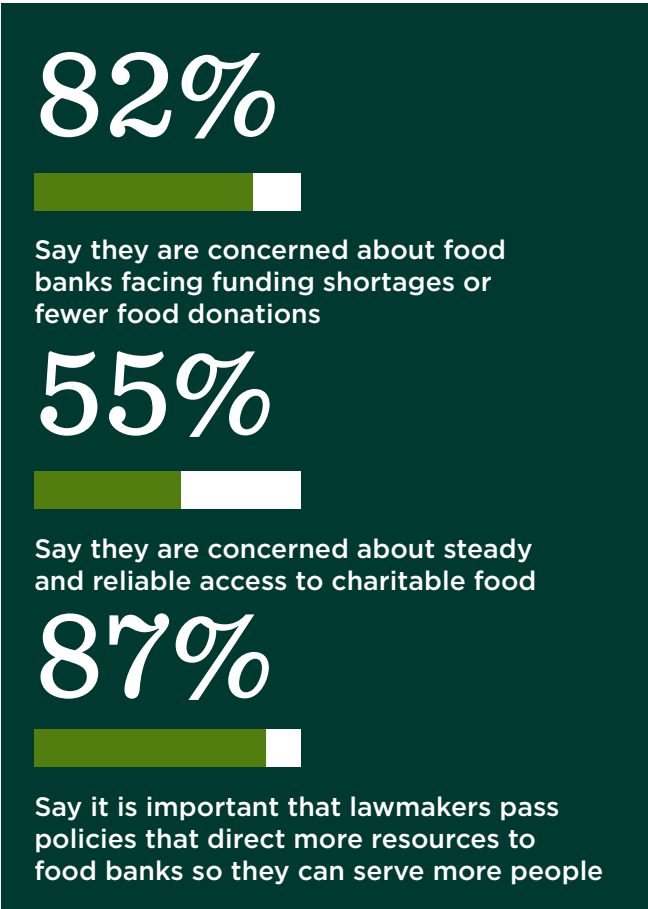


Say the assistance they received was important for helping their household afford food



Say they faced challenges accessing enough food, even with food bank help

At the same time, neighbor experiences underscore that no single organization alone can cover all food gaps, affirming the need to expand economic opportunity and improve government nutrition programs that provide an incomparable scale of food support.



What impacts or changes have you seen in your community because of limited funding or supplies at food banks?

“

I have volunteered with [a food bank] and heard that the number of people arriving for support keeps increasing as the amount of food goes down.

2026 Survey Participant (Michigan)

“

More families struggling to pay for necessities.

2026 Survey Participant (New York)

“

Massive early lines at food banks and more need during holidays.

2026 Survey Participant (Washington)

“

More senior citizens and veterans are facing food insecurity.

2026 Survey Participant (Louisiana)

NEIGHBORS ARE HELPING ONE ANOTHER MEET FOOD NEEDS

As economic conditions remain unfavorable and as concerns about the government nutrition assistance landscape grow, communities are patching together peer-to-peer support networks to keep neighbors from being left behind. From growing and sharing their own food to exchanging resources on digital platforms, neighbors are pooling resources to provide immediate assistance. These stand-in systems demonstrate community power and

unity while also highlighting the need to bolster the nation’s government nutrition programs and overall economic health.



Say they are relying more on themselves, their family or their community because larger systems are not helping enough right now

Over the past year, because of high food prices:



Shared meals or groceries with community members, friends or family



Grew food at home or in a community garden



Used online groups, community networks or social media to find food resources or assistance



INSIGHT 4:

Financial Stability and Government Food Program Predictability Are Top-of-Mind for Neighbors

ECONOMIC SECURITY IS ESSENTIAL TO FOOD SECURITY AND THRIVING

Eighty-six percent of neighbors say food insecurity is a serious problem in America right now, and 86% think lawmakers should prioritize reducing it. To make a difference, neighbors have policy interventions in mind that they want lawmakers to prioritize: policies that allow neighbors to keep more of what they earn after paying bills, boost government nutrition program benefits

to keep pace with current economic realities, and enable government nutrition programs to serve as bridges that support neighbors in moving toward steadier financial ground. Overall, neighbors emphasize that establishing security in all areas of their lives requires strengthening *economic* security for all households.

Top-ranked supports neighbors say they need to achieve the kind of life they want:

1. More money in my pocket after I pay bills
2. Healthy and affordable foods near me
3. Better jobs that pay well and offer benefits

Top-ranked issues neighbors say are most important for food access policies to address:

1. Increased support to keep more money after paying bills
2. Allow individuals to earn more without being penalized or losing benefits
3. Increased access to healthy and affordable foods near me

Top-ranked elements that neighbors say are important for food assistance programs to have to best meet the needs of themselves and their family:

1. Benefits that keep up with the real cost of living
2. Access to fresh and healthy foods
3. Emergency food or cash help when needed

Robert, Texas

“I was unable to plan for emergencies when I was cut off unexpectedly [from SNAP].”

2026 SURVEY PARTICIPANT (PENNSYLVANIA)



In your own words, what is one thing that would make a difference in helping you and your family thrive right now?

“

Higher wages. I’ve been teaching for 16 years, but my pay has been stagnant for the last nine years.

2026 Survey Participant (Texas)

“

Housing prices decreasing and general affordability of the state we live in.

2026 Survey Participant (New Jersey)

“

More money. We could get the house fixed up, pay off some debts, and just breathe.

2026 Survey Participant (Oklahoma)

“

Que bajara el costo de vida y se pudieran disfrutar las cosas verdaderamente importantes de la vida. (That the cost of living would go down, and one could enjoy the true things in life.)

2026 Survey Participant (Florida)

“

Not having to work long hours to get decent pay. Better health insurance with lower deductibles.

2026 Survey Participant (Michigan)

“

Not losing my government benefits for making a few extra dollars a month.

2026 Survey Participant (Maine)

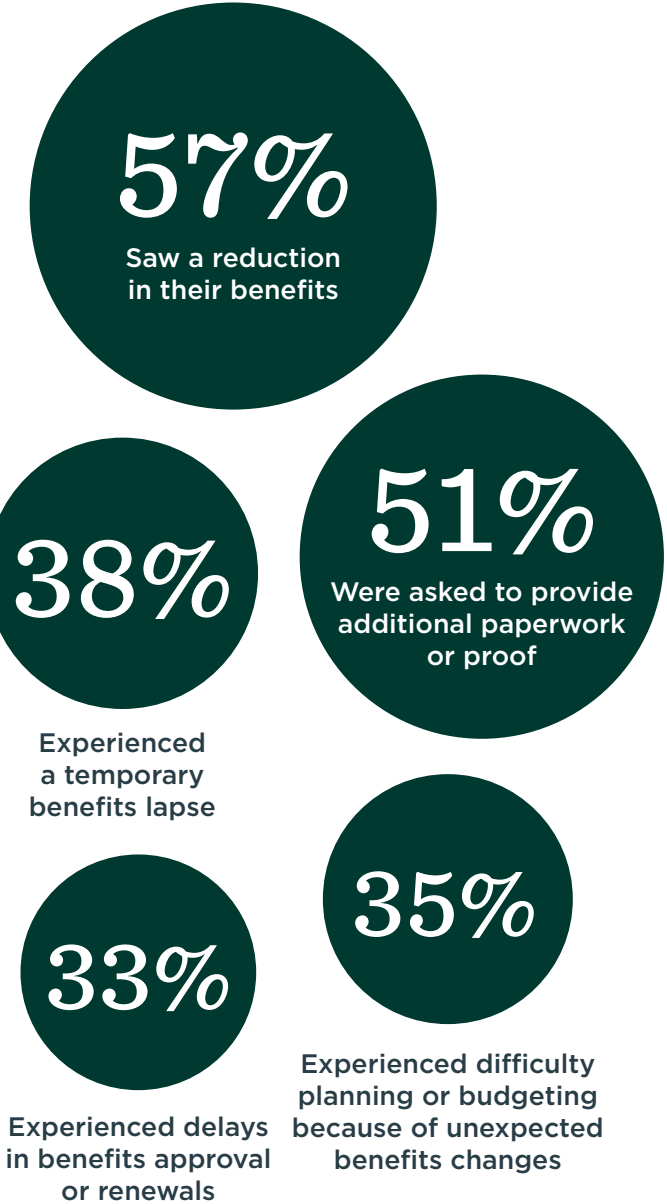
MAKING SNAP BENEFITS EASIER TO ACCESS

As the country’s nutrition assistance landscape evolves, neighbors are feeling the effects—especially SNAP beneficiaries. Over the last year, surveyed SNAP recipients reported experiencing an average of three issues with or disruptions to their benefits.

SNAP access challenges do more than create inconvenience for neighbors;

they can also lead to taking on debt, turning to already-strained food banks and unexpectedly spending more out of pocket. Neighbor experiences make clear that difficulties getting and maintaining benefits undermine SNAP’s ability to do what it was designed to do: put nutritious food on tables while helping families transition to economic stability.

Among current SNAP households, over the past year:



Due to recent SNAP changes, among neighbor households:



When SNAP is managed effectively, the program helps communities stay resilient, supports health and future success, and ensures families can access nutritious food during difficult times. With that in mind, neighbors urge lawmakers to make it easier—not *harder*—for anyone who needs food assistance to get and keep SNAP benefits so they can stay on track amid uncertainty. Neighbors also call for expanded benefits to help families navigate heightened costs with stronger financial backing.

Kenny, New York



[For SNAP enrollees who experienced an issue with SNAP in the past year] What impact did this have on you or your household?

“

We had to start using food banks and ask the community for help.

2026 Survey Participant (Montana)

“

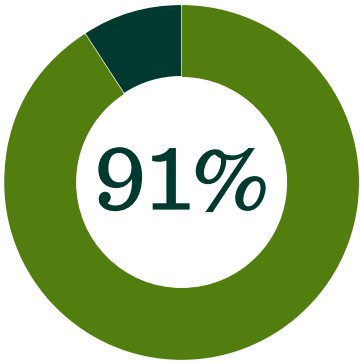
Reduced benefits mean more out-of-pocket expenses on food and groceries.

2026 Survey Participant (California)

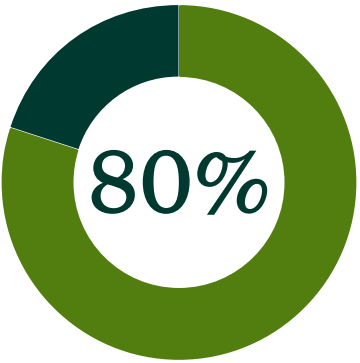
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It's hard because food prices are so high and you don't get enough benefits to cover the whole month.

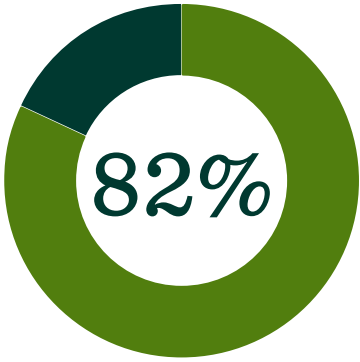
2026 Survey Participant (Louisiana)



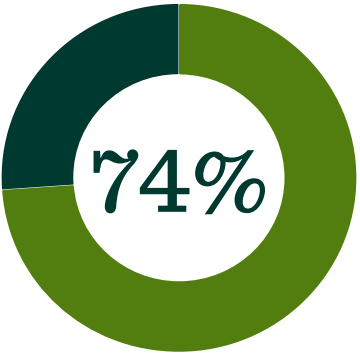
Say it is important that lawmakers pass policies that make it easier for children, seniors and adults to qualify for and enroll in food assistance programs when they need help



Say it is important that lawmakers pass policies that reduce food assistance benefits gradually as people earn more money, so they are not left suddenly without help while trying to become financially stable



Say it is important that lawmakers pass policies that increase the monthly amount people can get through SNAP to keep up with high food prices



Say it is important that lawmakers pass policies that let people with slightly higher incomes still qualify for food assistance, so more families can get the help they need

NEIGHBORS WANT A ROLE IN ADVANCING FOOD SECURITY

While urging decision-makers to implement policies that will help end food insecurity once and for all, neighbors say they are willing to play a role in the movement to end hunger themselves.

To support policies that improve food access:



Say they would vote for candidates who prioritize food insecurity issues



Would share information or raise awareness on social media



Would volunteer their time with food banks and advocacy groups

REPORT CONTEXT

Elevating Voices: Insights Report Background

Launched in 2022 during the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health, Feeding America's *Elevating Voices: Insights Report* is a publication that amplifies the experiences and expertise of people facing hunger to

inform anti-hunger policy solutions. The report is released annually during Feeding America's Hunger Action Month campaign on Hunger Action Day in September.

2026 Report Methodology

In partnership with the nonpartisan research firm PerryUndem, Feeding America designed and deployed an 18-minute national survey of U.S. adults (18+) who reported their household received charitable food assistance or experienced food insecurity within the past two years (n = 1,257).

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 free meal from a church, shelter, home-delivered meal service like Meals on Wheels, or other place that helps with free meals?

Feeding America launched the survey in English and Spanish using NORC's nationally representative AmeriSpeak online panel from June 16 to July 6, 2026. In addition to survey questions focused on a range of topics to

quantitatively capture neighbors' experiences, the survey included a series of open-ended questions, giving neighbors an opportunity to share more about their experiences in their own words.

In alignment with our commitment to meaningfully center the voices of people facing hunger, the survey oversampled the following communities, which are

among the groups most impacted by food insecurity: Black adults, Latino adults, Asian American and Pacific Islander adults, Native American adults, adults who have visited a food bank in the past two years, and current SNAP enrollees. This approach is crucial to helping us gain a deeper understanding of neighbors' experiences and develop more effective anti-hunger solutions together.

For the Spanish translation of this report, please visit FeedingAmerica.org/ElevatingVoices.

2026 Report Acknowledgments

Feeding America continues to thank the hundreds of neighbors nationwide who share their experiences, concerns and policy views year after year to inform our *Elevating Voices: Insights Report* series. Additionally, we are grateful for the following neighbor advocates who

provided invaluable input to guide the development of the 2026 survey, all while leading hunger-relief efforts in their own communities: Jazmine Blakely, Anita Garrett, David Horst, Joshua Kassel, Lauree Madson, Elayne Masters, Shirley Paley and Alejandro Perez.

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Join the movement to end hunger at
FeedingAmerica.org/ElevatingVoices



Rooted in the voices of neighbors facing hunger, Feeding America® unites communities through a nationwide network to ensure everyone has access to food and a thriving future. As part of a network of 250+ food banks, 20+ statewide food bank associations, 10+ regional co-ops and 60,000+ agency partners, food pantries and meal programs, we helped provide 5.9 billion meals to tens of millions of people in need last year.

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