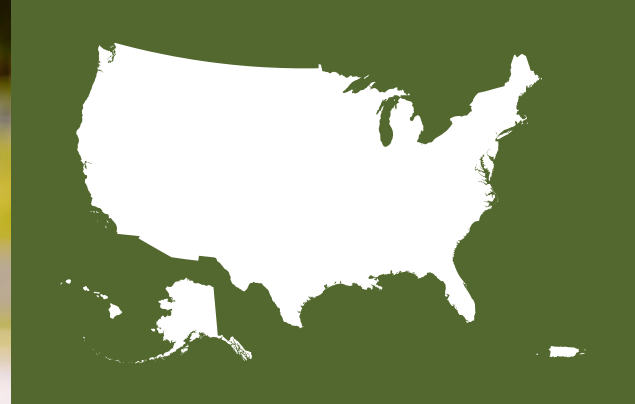




# Hunger in America 2014

Executive Summary



A report of Charitable Food Distribution in the United States in 2013

# GLOSSARY

## **AGENCY**

A charitable social-service organization that operates a program(s) that provides food and grocery items supplied by a food bank directly to clients in need.

## **CHARITABLE FOOD ASSISTANCE**

Food and grocery items that are provided to people in need through charitable feeding programs, including grocery programs and meal programs.

## **CLIENT**

A client is an individual or a household member who receives food through the Feeding America network. Clients are counted differently depending on whether they visit meal or grocery programs. At meal programs, only individuals present are counted as clients since they typically consume the meal on-site. At grocery programs, all members of the household are counted as clients since they will likely benefit from the food distributed at the grocery program.

## **DUPLICATED CLIENTS**

The number of times clients are reached through food distributions, through the Feeding America network, during a given period of time.

## **FOOD BANK**

A non-profit organization that solicits, receives, inventories and distributes donated food and grocery products pursuant to industry and appropriate regulatory standards. Food banks are organizations that distribute donated food to charitable social-service agencies, which provide the products directly to clients through various programs. Some food banks also distribute food directly to clients in need.

## **FOOD PROGRAM**

A specific service that distributes food and is operated by an agency. For *Hunger in America 2014*, food programs are classified as either meal or grocery programs. Many food banks and agencies also operate non-food programs to assist clients with other needs.

## **FOOD SECURITY & FOOD INSECURITY**

Food insecure households may not know how they will provide for their next meal. As defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), food security refers to the household-level economic and social condition of reliable access to an adequate amount of food for an active, healthy life for all household members. A household is food insecure if, in the previous year, they experienced limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods.

## **GROCERY PROGRAM**

A program that distributes non-prepared food and grocery items for off-site use, usually for preparation in the client's home. Grocery programs include all types of food pantries, home-delivered grocery programs, mobile pantries, Commodity Supplemental Food Programs (CSFP), Backpack Programs, and community gardens.

## **MEAL PROGRAM**

A program that provides prepared meals or snacks to clients at the program site or in their homes. Meal programs include all congregate meal programs, as well as (soup) kitchens, shelters, group homes, rehabilitation programs, transitional housing programs, and community kitchens.

## **NON-FOOD PROGRAM**

A program that serves a purpose other than food distribution to help client's access to other resources, such as providing clothing or furniture donations, legal assistance, housing or education assistance, as well as referrals to other community organizations that also offer assistance.

## **POVERTY/FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL**

The minimum amount of income that a household needs to be able to afford housing, food and other basic necessities. During the survey period for *Hunger in America 2014*, the federal poverty level was \$23,550 for a family of four. If a family's total income is less than this threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered in poverty. A household's percentage of the federal poverty level is used to set federal nutrition program thresholds for eligibility, such as the threshold for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly the Food Stamp Program).

## **SNAP**

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program. SNAP is the largest of the federal nutrition programs and provides recipients with resources to buy groceries with federal benefits.

## **UNDUPLICATED CLIENTS**

The number of unique individuals who receive food assistance through the Feeding America network during a given period of time.

## ABOUT FEEDING AMERICA

Feeding America is a nationwide network of 200 member food banks that serve all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. As the largest domestic hunger-relief charity in the United States, the Feeding America network of food banks provides food assistance to an estimated 46.5 million Americans in need each year, including 12 million children and 7 million seniors.

The Feeding America national office supports member food banks across the country by securing food and funds for the food banks; by building partnerships that benefit the network nationally and also provide support for food bank programs; supporting programs that help improve food security among the people and communities we serve; and by raising awareness about the problem of hunger and advocating on behalf of food insecure Americans.

In turn, the food banks distribute donated food to community-based hunger-relief agencies across the country and help support feeding programs such as food pantries, soup kitchens, emergency shelters, senior centers, and mobile programs that directly serve people in need.





# ABOUT THE HUNGER IN AMERICA SERIES

*Hunger in America* is a series of quadrennial studies that provide comprehensive demographic profiles of people seeking food assistance through the charitable sector and in-depth analyses of the partner agencies in the Feeding America network.

It is the largest study of its kind. The data collected help guide the development of programs and solutions that improve food security for individuals and their households and inform public awareness and policy development for addressing hunger in the United States.

*Hunger in America 2014* is the sixth and most comprehensive study in the *Hunger in America* series. Through interviews with more than 60,000 clients and 32,000 partner agencies, we have a comprehensive understanding of the people who receive assistance through the Feeding America network, the personal and economic circumstances of their households, and the response of the partner agencies that provide assistance to those in need.

## METHODOLOGY

*Hunger in America 2014* makes numerous innovative improvements to a twenty-year-old quadrennial study series.

Rich data from two widely distributed surveys comprise the basis for the *Hunger in America 2014* results. For the first time in this study's history, almost all data were collected through electronic surveys, which supports a higher level of data monitoring and quality checks. The surveys were conducted in two sequential stages: first, Feeding America network partner agencies completed the Agency Survey; then, clients at select partner agencies' food programs completed the Client Survey. The Agency Survey was fielded from October 2012 to January 2013 among the partner agencies of all participating food banks. The Agency Survey contained detailed questions about partner agencies' services, capacity and food distribution, including a specific set of additional questions regarding the individual food programs operated by the partner agency.

The Client Survey, fielded from April through August 2013, was implemented through a vast force of data collectors, a majority of whom were volunteers, recruited by each participating food bank. At least 6,000 data collectors were trained and registered to carry out client data collection. In lieu of face-to-face interviews used in years past, *Hunger in America 2014* utilized touchscreen tablet computers and a proven computer software program that allows respondents to simultaneously read and have survey questions read to them through private headphones, maximizing confidentiality. Data collectors followed a prescribed study plan in order to select a random sample of clients at nearly 12,500 food programs across the Feeding America network. More than 60,000 clients responded to questions about themselves, their households, and the circumstances that led them to seek assistance from the charitable food network.

Feeding America's participating food banks contributed to the successful execution of the study design by fulfilling important roles throughout data collection. The research vendor Westat conducted analysis of the data collected and, together with the Urban Institute, produced the national and local reports in the spring and summer of 2014.

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN *HUNGER IN AMERICA 2014* AND PREVIOUS HUNGER STUDIES

*Hunger in America 2014* marks a departure from past versions in design enhancements. In addition to the use of technology as the primary platform for data collection, the scope of this study was expanded to include not just programs classified as traditional "emergency food assistance"—pantries, kitchens, and shelters—but also non-emergency programs such as senior programs and residential facilities. Including this broader universe was intended to reflect the diversity of food programs across the Feeding America network. Client interviews were also conducted at a much larger number of programs across the country – approximately double the number in *Hunger in America 2010* – to better capture the diversity of programs and clients in the Feeding America network. However, programs feeding children exclusively were notably underrepresented due to the inability to survey minors. While this expansion allowed for the inclusion of more programs, previous studies' findings are not comparable to the 2014 results.

FEEDING AMERICA IS A NATIONWIDE NETWORK OF 200 MEMBER FOOD BANKS



46,000 AGENCIES

IN THE FEEDING AMERICA NETWORK OPERATE  
58,000 FOOD PROGRAMS

51%        
RELY ENTIRELY ON VOLUNTEERS

62%        
ARE FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS



PROVIDE  
GROCERIES



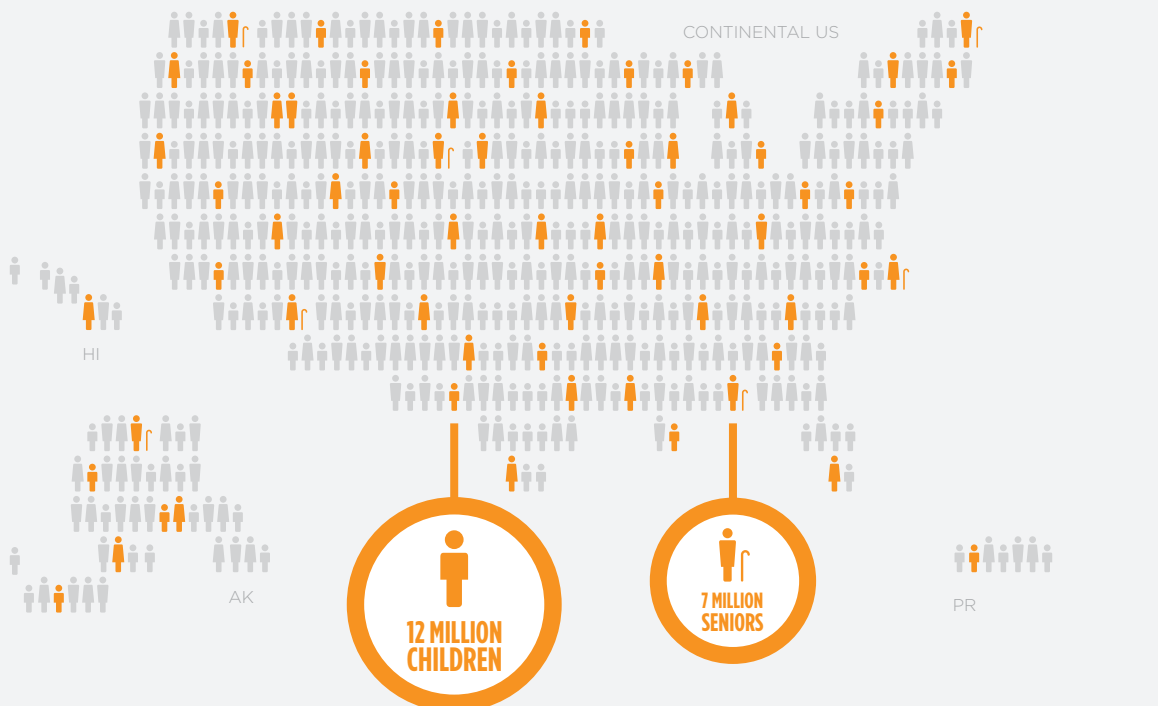
33%

SERVE  
MEALS

THE FEEDING AMERICA NETWORK SERVES  
46.5 MILLION  
PEOPLE EACH YEAR

OR

1 IN 7        
PEOPLE IN THE U.S.







## HOW FEEDING AMERICA NETWORK AGENCIES SERVE CLIENTS

Food banks in the Feeding America network distribute food to more than 46,000 partner agencies in order to reach clients at risk of hunger.

Partner agencies act as the mechanism for the distribution of food directly to clients through food programs that provide either meals or groceries. Some partner agencies also operate non-food programs with a primary focus on other types of assistance, such as nutrition education, food-related benefits outreach, clothing assistance, or job training. The majority of partner agencies identify as faith-based (62%), while

the balance are governmental agencies, Community Action Programs (CAP), or other nonprofit or private organizations. In addition to distributing food through their partner agencies, some food banks also distribute food directly through their own programs. Overall, food banks in the Feeding America network and their partner agencies operate 58,000 food programs and more than 35,000 non-food programs nationwide.

### AGENCIES AND FOOD PROGRAMS

A majority of food programs operated by agencies are grocery, although some provide both meals and groceries.




For the purposes of *Hunger in America 2014*, charitable food programs are categorized into meal programs and grocery programs. Meal programs provide prepared meals or snacks on site or in the client's home to clients who may or may not reside on the agency's premises. Grocery programs distribute non-prepared foods, grocery items and other household supplies for off-site use, usually for preparation in the client's home. Many meal and grocery programs provide support to individuals of all ages, while others may specifically serve children or seniors.

Of the 58,000 food programs operated by the Feeding America network, nearly 40,000 food programs (67%) are grocery programs. Grocery programs are categorized into ten different program types. The majority of grocery programs are food pantries

(81%). Grocery programs also include Commodity Supplemental Food Programs (CSFP) for seniors (5%), Backpack Programs for children (4%), Mobile Pantries (4%), and Community Gardens (1%).

There are nearly 20,000 meal programs operated by the Feeding America network, representing 33 percent of all food programs. Fifteen program types fall under the meal program category. Kitchens are the most common meal program type in the network, representing 20 percent of all meal programs. Nearly one in three (30%) meal programs targets children, such as Afterschool Snack or Kids Cafe programs, while more than one in ten (12%) meal programs target seniors, including Meals on Wheels or other home-delivered meal programs.

## HUNGER IN AMERICA 2014 PROGRAM TYPES AND SUBTYPES

|  | GROCERY  | MEAL   | FOOD-RELATED BENEFITS   | NON-FOOD  |
|--|--|--|---|---|
|  <b>MIXED AGE GROUP</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Garden</li> <li>• Food Bank-Operated Pantry Program</li> <li>• Food Pantry</li> <li>• Home-Delivered Grocery Program</li> <li>• Mobile Market/Mobile Pantry</li> <li>• School Pantry Program</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Kitchen</li> <li>• Food Bank-Operated Meal Program</li> <li>• Group Home</li> <li>• Rehabilitation Program</li> <li>• Residential Program</li> <li>• Shelter</li> <li>• [Soup] Kitchen</li> <li>• Transitional Housing</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nutrition Education</li> <li>• Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Outreach</li> <li>• Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Assistance and Outreach</li> </ul> | Assistance with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clothing/Furniture</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Employment</li> <li>• General Referrals</li> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Housing</li> <li>• Legal Issues</li> <li>• Transportation</li> <li>• Utilities</li> </ul> |
|  <b>CHILDREN</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BackPack Program</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Afterschool Snack</li> <li>• Child Congregate Feeding Program (non-Kids Cafe)</li> <li>• Day Care</li> <li>• Kids Cafe</li> <li>• Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Outreach</li> <li>• School Breakfast Program (SBP) Outreach</li> </ul>  |   |
|  <b>SENIORS</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)</li> <li>• Senior Brown Bag</li> <li>• Senior Grocery Program</li> <li>• Senior Mobile Pantry</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home Delivered Meal (or Meals on Wheels)</li> <li>• Senior Congregate Meal</li> </ul>   |   |   |

About half of all partner agencies (51%) report having no paid staff. Among agencies with paid staff, the median number of paid full-time equivalent staff members reported is five, or the equivalent of 200 staff hours per week. As a result, partner agencies often rely heavily on the efforts of volunteers to operate and support their food programs. In an average month, nearly two million volunteers across the Feeding America network provide more than 8.4 million hours of assistance to partner agencies at food programs. Volunteers span all age groups from adults (54%) to seniors (38%) and even children (7%). Nearly half of programs in the Feeding America network report some degree of difficulty recruiting volunteers (44%). However, two thirds (68%) of programs report no difficulties in retaining existing volunteers.

Partner agencies obtain food for their meal and grocery programs from a variety of sources. The majority of food

(62%) comes from Feeding America network food banks, while smaller proportions are purchased directly by the agencies (22%) or donated directly to these programs (13%). There are some differences between how grocery programs and meal programs source food. At grocery programs, a larger proportion of food comes from a Feeding America food bank (70%) compared to meal programs (45%), and meal programs purchase a higher share of the food distributed (43%) than do grocery programs (12%). These differences may stem from the fact that grocery program distributions may contain whatever items are currently available from food banks and donations, while meal programs may need to purchase specific supplemental items to prepare complete meals.

Partner agencies receive funding from a number of sources, including local, state, and federal governments; individual contributions; corporate support; and



donations. Though most agencies rely on a diversified stream of funding sources, the most common source of funding for partner agencies is individual contributions, with 85 percent of agencies receiving some level of funding from this source and 28 percent of agencies relying on it for more than half of their total funding.

These funding sources have multiple, intertwined implications for agencies. Individual giving tends to correlate to the health of the economy. In the wake of the recent recession, total giving to all charitable organizations fell by 7 percent in 2008 and by an additional 6 percent in 2009.<sup>1</sup> The decrease in donations caused by a weakened economy is often accompanied by an increased need for assistance, which can have a significant impact on the ability of agencies to provide food and services. More than

12 percent of agencies report reductions in hours of operation during the past year. Nine percent of partner agencies report having reduced staffing in the past year. In the majority of these cases (73%), decreased availability of money or food led to the reduction.

**NEARLY 2 MILLION  
VOLUNTEERS CONTRIBUTE MORE THAN  
8.4 MILLION HOURS  
IN A TYPICAL MONTH**

## OUTREACH AND OTHER NON-FOOD SERVICES

Forty percent of agencies provide services related to SNAP and more than one-third of agencies offer services to help clients with non-food needs.

In addition to operating food programs, many Feeding America network partner agencies also operate programs beyond food distribution, including programs that conduct outreach to assist clients with accessing federal nutrition assistance. These agencies play an important role in helping clients access federal benefits that can increase their food resources, particularly the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which currently helps provide cash benefits to purchase food to 47.6 million people.<sup>2</sup>

Forty percent of partner agencies provide some form of assistance connecting clients to SNAP benefits, such as screening clients for eligibility, engaging in outreach activities to educate clients about the program, or helping clients recertify for the program to maintain benefits they already receive. About one in four agencies (26%) provide information about or assistance in accessing the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).

Overall, more than one-third of Feeding America network partner agencies (35%) also offer non-food services that assist individuals and families in connecting with benefit programs or with other goods and services that address non-food needs. Almost one-third of partner agencies (30%) provide assistance with enrollment in Medicaid, and more than one-fifth offer programs that assist clients with government housing programs (23%), Supplemental Security Income or SSI (22%) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or TANF (23%). Other frequently reported non-food programs offered by agencies include clothing, furniture, or housing assistance, utility and heat assistance, health clinics, job training, financial assistance and general information and referrals to other services. In addition to the Feeding America network's core services of food distribution, the wide array of non-food services throughout the network helps clients address the other economic and social hardships they may face.

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Rosenberg, Patrick Rooney, C. Eugene Steuerle, and Katherine Toran, "What's Been Happening to Charitable Giving Recently? A Look at the Data," *The Urban Institute Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy*, November 1, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation and Costs: Fiscal Year 2013," *U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service*, last modified July 11, 2014.

## ANNUAL DUPLICATED CLIENTS

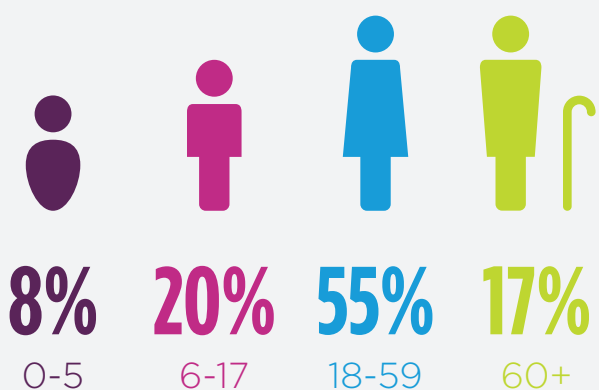


**58,000 FOOD PROGRAMS REACH 46.5 MILLION CLIENTS**



**389 MILLION  
TIMES EACH YEAR**

## CLIENT AGE

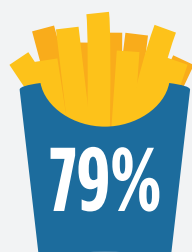


## HOUSEHOLD FOOD INSECURITY

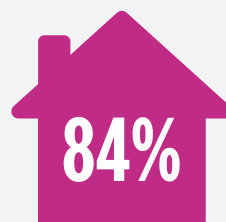


**89% OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN ARE FOOD INSECURE**

## HOUSEHOLD COPING STRATEGIES



**79%**  
OF HOUSEHOLDS REPORT PURCHASING  
INEXPENSIVE, UNHEALTHY  
FOOD TO FEED THEIR FAMILY



**84%**

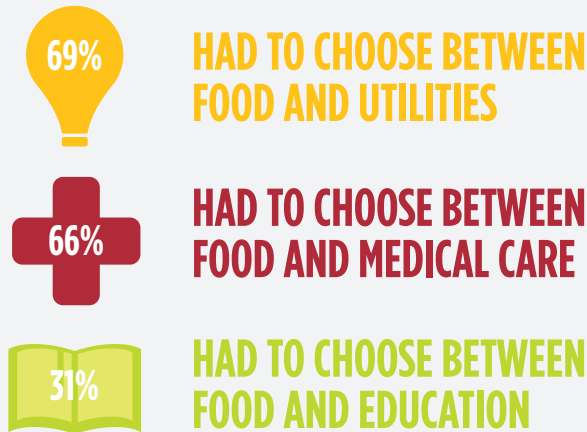
**OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH  
CHILDREN REPORT  
THIS COPING STRATEGY**



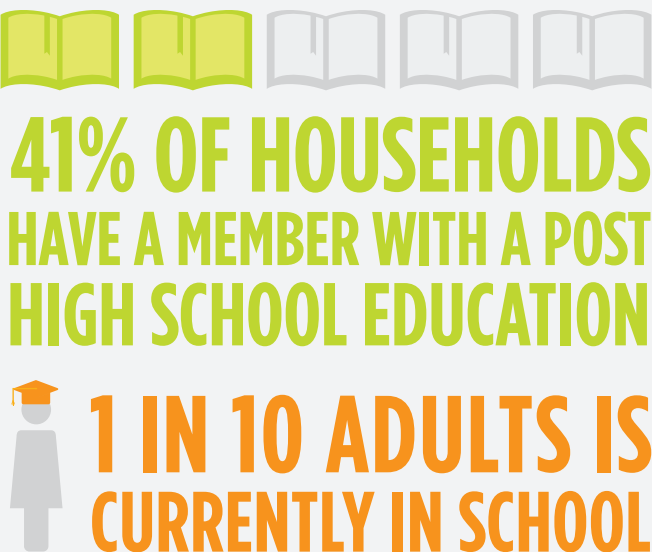


## 20% OF FEEDING AMERICA HOUSEHOLDS HAVE A MEMBER WHO HAS SERVED IN THE US MILITARY

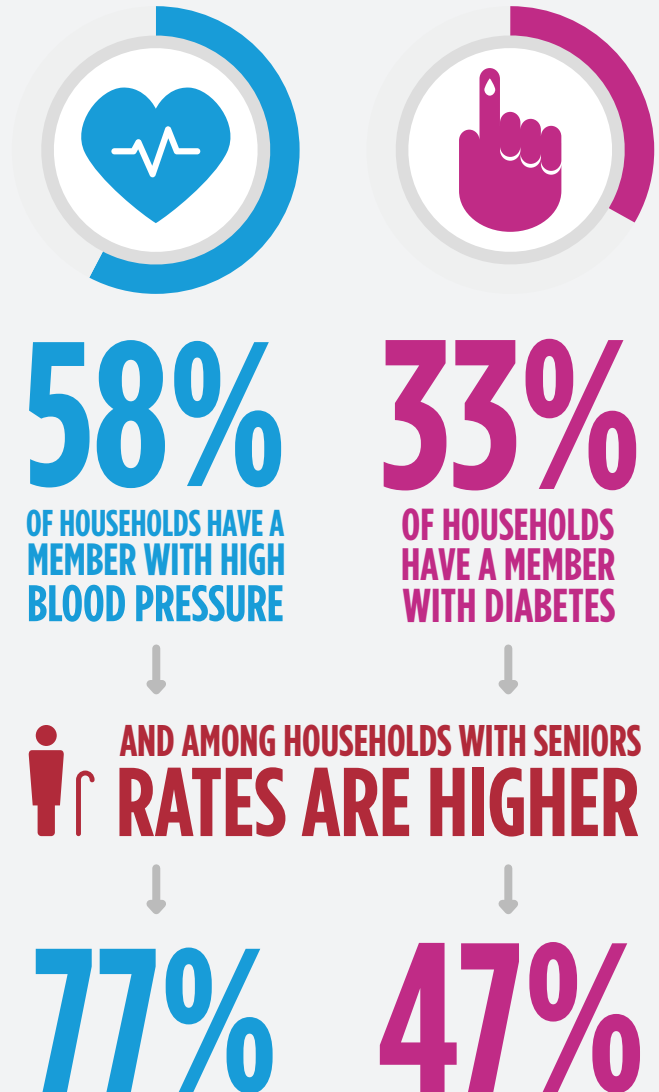
### HOUSEHOLD SPENDING TRADEOFFS



### EDUCATION



### HOUSEHOLD HEALTH





# THE PEOPLE SERVED BY THE FEEDING AMERICA NETWORK

Households served by the Feeding America network represent a diversity of sizes and compositions, races and ethnicities, ages and languages spoken. In addition to their diverse characteristics, clients also

face a wide array of obstacles to food security, such as health status, education levels, housing instability, unemployment and insufficient income.

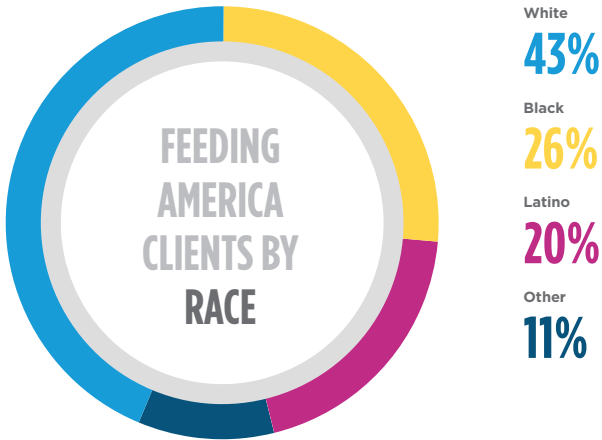
## DEMOGRAPHICS

Feeding America client households are diverse in size, age, and race, with many containing vulnerable household members such as children or seniors.<sup>3</sup>

Among Feeding America client households, 32 percent include children and no seniors; nearly 27 percent include seniors and no children; and over six percent of all client households have at least one child and one senior, indicating the possibility of multigenerational households. This means that nearly 39 percent of client households include at least one child, a rate higher than in the general population (32%).<sup>4</sup>

Overall, the Feeding America network is serving an estimated 7 million seniors and 12 million children, although the actual number of children served is under-represented in this estimate because we are unable to collect client-level interviews at child-only programs. Children and seniors are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of food insecurity. For children, inadequate nutrition is associated with adverse effects in school that have other, long-term consequences.<sup>5</sup> Seniors living in food insecure households are often missing out on nutrients that are critical to the unique conditions related to aging.<sup>6</sup>

Among all Feeding America network clients, 43 percent identify as white, 26 percent as African American, and 20 percent as Latino. Although minorities form a smaller share of the Feeding America client base, they are much more likely to receive assistance than their white non-Hispanic peers. More than one in four



<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this report, seniors are defined as those age 60 and over.  
<sup>4</sup> "America's Families and Living Arrangements," 2013 Current Population Survey (CPS), U.S. Census Bureau.  
<sup>5</sup> J.M. Murphy, C.A. Wehler, M.E. Pagano, M. Little, R.E. Kleinman, and M.S. Jellinek, "Relationship Between Hunger and Psychosocial Functioning in Low-Income American Children," *Journal of American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 37, no. 2 (1998): 163-170.  
<sup>6</sup> "Spotlight on Senior Health: Adverse Health Outcomes of Food Insecure Older Americans," *Feeding America and the National Foundation to End Senior Hunger*, 2014.



## CLIENTS SERVED

One in seven Americans turns to the Feeding America network for food assistance.

*Hunger in America 2014* reveals that each year, 46.5 million unduplicated individuals receive charitable food assistance through the Feeding America network.<sup>7</sup> This translates to an estimated 15.5 million households served by the network each year. Each week, 5.4 million unduplicated individuals receive charitable food assistance through the Feeding America network.

Many non-emergency programs, such as residential facilities or senior congregate meals, may distribute food on a more frequent basis than emergency programs such as food pantries. In addition, analysis of *Hunger in America 2010*

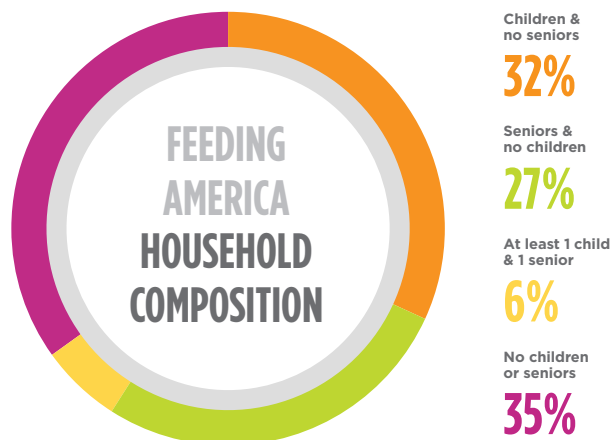
client visitation patterns found that many clients are seeking services on an ongoing basis, reflecting persistent need.

Studying the regularity of use of programs among clients gives us a duplicated client count: the number of times individual clients are reached through food distributions on an annual basis. Using this definition, the Feeding America network provides assistance to 389 million duplicated clients each year, illustrating that many individuals are routinely turning to the Feeding America network to meet their nutrition and food budget needs.

African Americans and one in six Latinos in the U.S. is served by the Feeding America network, compared to one in ten white non-Hispanics.<sup>8</sup> A much smaller proportion of clients identify as America Indian or Alaska natives (2%); Asians (1%); Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (1%); and other races not specified (2%). While 85 percent of these clients live in a household with others of the same race, nearly 15 percent of client households are multi-racial. Among client households with at least one child, nearly a quarter (24%) are multi-racial, a possible indication of growing diversity among younger generations of clients.

**39%** OF CLIENT HOUSEHOLDS INCLUDE AT LEAST ONE CHILD

Language barriers present challenges to some clients facing hunger. For nearly 91 percent of Feeding America client households, the primary language spoken by adults at home is English, although many clients indicated that their household speaks more than one primary language. More than 13 percent of



client households use Spanish as the primary language spoken by adults. For a small percentage of clients, the primary language spoken by adults in the home is an Indo-European language other than Spanish (1%) or an Asian or Pacific Island language (2%). In addition, close to a half of a percent of client households use Arabic as the primary language spoken by adults. Since the Client Survey was only offered to respondents in five languages (English, Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, Russian, and Vietnamese), these are likely underestimates of the primary languages spoken by adults at home.

<sup>7</sup> This estimate falls within a 90 percent confidence interval ranging from 44.5 to 48.5 million unduplicated clients.

<sup>8</sup> "ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates," 2012 American Community Survey (ACS), U.S. Census Bureau.

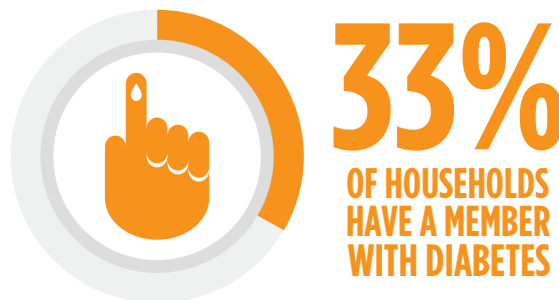
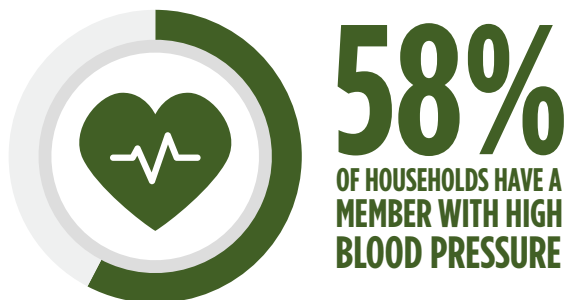
## HEALTH

Feeding America's client population faces significant health challenges, including diabetes and high blood pressure.

Nearly half (47%) of all survey respondents report having fair or poor health. In addition, 24 percent of households reports that at least one member of their household other than the respondent is in poor health. Households who are facing both poor health and food insecurity must overcome multiple challenges, including maintaining a good diet to manage disease.

For the first time, *Hunger in America 2014* included questions about diet-related diseases. Illnesses like high blood pressure and diabetes are prevalent among households served by the Feeding America network. In more than half (58%) of client households, at least one member has high blood pressure. In 33 percent of client households, at least one member has diabetes. Among households with seniors, the rates of high blood pressure (77%) and diabetes (47%) are notably higher. These health conditions likely increase household expenses related to medical care, especially for individuals without health insurance.

In general, health challenges create additional financial strains, especially for households with already limited budgets or that lack access to sufficient medical coverage. Twenty-nine percent of client households report that no members of the household have health insurance, including Medicaid or Medicare; however, it is important to note that data collection was completed before the full implementation of the Affordable Care Act and thus, client coverage may have improved. Even with insurance, medical debt can accumulate due to deductibles and uncovered services. More than half (55%) of client households report having unpaid medical bills. Budget constraints related to healthcare are further revealed in the spending tradeoffs reported by client households. Nearly two-thirds (66%) of households report choosing between paying for food and paying for medicine or medical care in the past year, with 31 percent reporting facing this tradeoff every month.



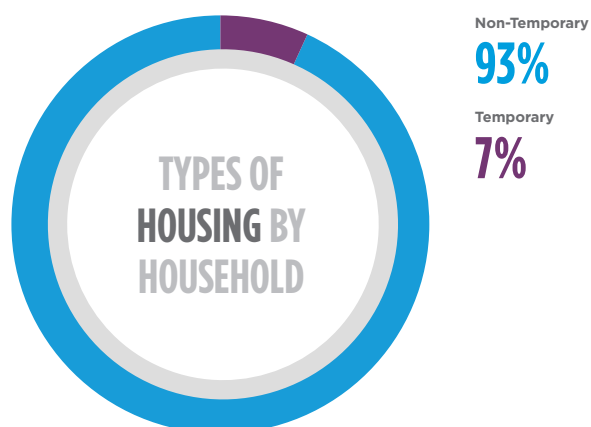


## HOUSING

Most Feeding America client households reside in stable housing, but many clients have experienced recent housing transitions.

The overwhelming majority (93%) of client households reside in non-temporary housing, meaning that housing is either stable or has the potential to be a long-term living situation. Clients most commonly live in houses/townhouses (43%) or apartments (34%). Twenty-seven percent of households living in non-temporary housing own their residence either outright or with a mortgage, while 64 percent rent or lease their home.

The remaining seven percent of client households report living in temporary housing or housing that is not intended to be a long-term residence, such as a shelter, motel, car, or on the street. Temporary living situations are much more common among households at meal programs (34%) than households at grocery programs (5%).



**1 IN 6 HAS EXPERIENCED A FORECLOSURE OR EVICTION IN THE PAST 5 YEARS**

Households at meal programs are also more likely to meet the definition of "homeless" as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).<sup>9</sup> Approximately five percent of all households served by the Feeding America network are considered homeless by this definition, compared to 27 percent of meal program households.<sup>10</sup> It is important to note, that while a larger proportion of meal program households reside in temporary housing, meal program clients represent a significantly smaller share of Feeding America's client base than grocery program clients.

Many respondents report recent housing transitions, indicating some level of instability in their living situations regardless of their type of residence. More than one in four (27%) respondents has lived in two or more places in the past year. Nearly one in six (16%) respondents has experienced an eviction or foreclosure in the past five years. Some types of housing transitions may reflect clients' strategies for making ends meet. For example, 22 percent of respondents began living with another person or family in the past year.

<sup>9</sup> McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, U.S. Code 42 (2009), § 11302, "General Definition of Homeless Individual."

<sup>10</sup> These percentages include client households who report living in abandoned buildings, bus or train stations, parks, campgrounds, or airports; in cars, vans, boats, or recreational vehicles; on the street; and in shelters, missions, or transitional living situations.

## EMPLOYMENT

Feeding America client households struggle to secure adequate employment.

Employment status is a critical factor affecting client households' income and, thus, access to food. More than half (54%) of client households report that at least one household member has been employed in the past year. This rate is even higher for households with children (71%) and slightly lower for households with seniors (34%).

For one in three (34%) households, the longest-employed person, meaning the person that has worked the greatest number of months in the past year, has worked for pay more than six months during the last year. However, 57 percent of employed households report that the longest-employed person worked part-time, suggesting limitations in the household's earning potential.

**54%** OF HOUSEHOLDS  
WERE EMPLOYED  
IN THE PAST YEAR

For many households, securing and maintaining employment can be challenging and require a significant amount of time. Factors such as age and health status also can directly impact a household member's ability to seek employment. Forty-six percent of client households have no member employed, which includes client households where at least one member is unemployed and has sought work in the past four weeks as well as households where at least one member is out of the workforce due to a disability, poor health, or retirement.

## EDUCATION

Many Feeding America clients are educated beyond high school; many adult clients are currently enrolled in school.

Forty-one percent of households have at least one adult member with education beyond high school. This includes those with a business, trade, or technical license/certificate, some college, as well as those with two or four-year college degrees. Looking at all adult clients, 28 percent have an educational level beyond high school. While the most common level of educational attainment among adult clients is a high school diploma (36%), many have also attended or graduated from college (21%).

In addition to past educational attainment, many adult clients are working towards future educational goals. Ten percent of adult clients are currently students, including two million who are full-time and one million who are part-time students. Juggling competing responsibilities, including school, household budget management, and food security, can be challenging. Thirty-one percent of households report having to choose between paying for food and paying for education for a child or an adult each year.

**1 IN 10 ADULTS IS A STUDENT**   
**2 MILLION ARE FULL-TIME & 1 MILLION ARE PART-TIME**

## INCOME AND POVERTY

Feeding America clients subsist on lower incomes, with a majority reporting that they live below the poverty line.

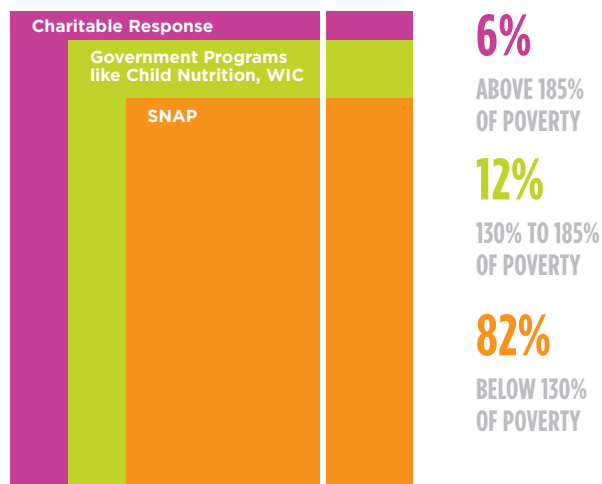
# 72% OF HOUSEHOLDS LIVE IN POVERTY

An overwhelming majority of client households report subsisting on minimal income. The median monthly household income among all households is \$927, while the median annual household income is \$9,175. Median household incomes among families with any children or any seniors are slightly higher; however, a larger household size may also increase household expenditures, which can be difficult to manage if some household members are not in the workforce such as children or retirees. Households with children have a median household size of four, whereas households with seniors and all households have a median household size of two.

A majority (72%) of client households are living in poverty with annual household incomes at or below the federal poverty level. Furthermore, 77 percent of client households with children and 64 percent of client households with seniors are living in poverty. In 2013, the year in which the data were collected, the federal poverty guideline for a family of two was \$15,510 while the guideline for a family of four was \$23,550.<sup>11</sup>

The federal poverty guidelines are used to determine income eligibility for federal assistance programs such as SNAP and WIC. Although eligibility for federal nutrition assistance programs is contingent on a variety of criteria, including household size, assets, and citizenship status, household income can be an indicator of a household's potential eligibility for these safety net programs.

### HOUSEHOLD ANNUAL INCOME ELIGIBILITY



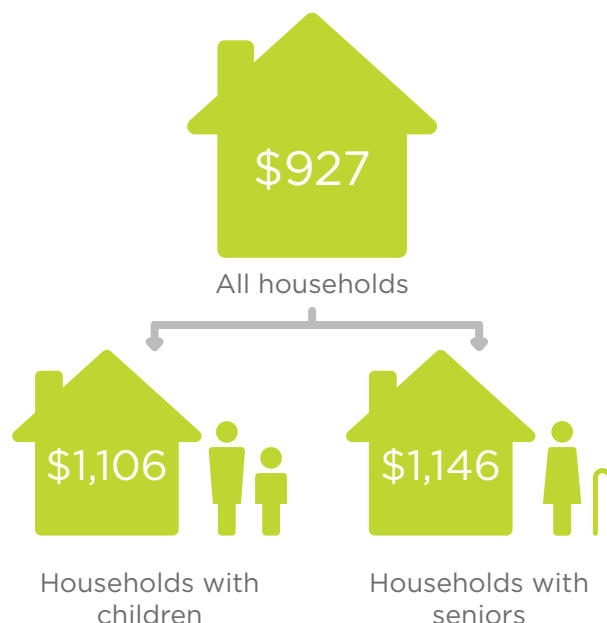
<sup>11</sup> "2013 Poverty Guidelines," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.



There majority of client households (82%) fall at or below 130 percent of the poverty guidelines, which is the federal income threshold for SNAP eligibility.<sup>12</sup> An additional 12 percent of households fall between 130 and 185 percent of the poverty guidelines. Although these households may not be eligible for SNAP, they may be eligible for WIC, The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), or reduced price meals through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP). Six percent of households report incomes at 186 percent or above the poverty guideline, and thus are likely ineligible for any federal assistance, leaving the charitable sector as one of the few sources of food assistance that they receive.

It is critical to note that even among client households that may appear income-eligible for federal assistance, some may have assets or other extenuating circumstances that preclude them from being eligible for federal nutrition programs.

## HOUSEHOLD MEDIAN MONTHLY INCOME



<sup>12</sup> Although the federal income threshold for SNAP eligibility is 130 percent of the federal poverty guidelines, some states may elect to use higher thresholds, up to 200 percent.



# CLIENT FOOD INSECURITY AND COPING STRATEGIES

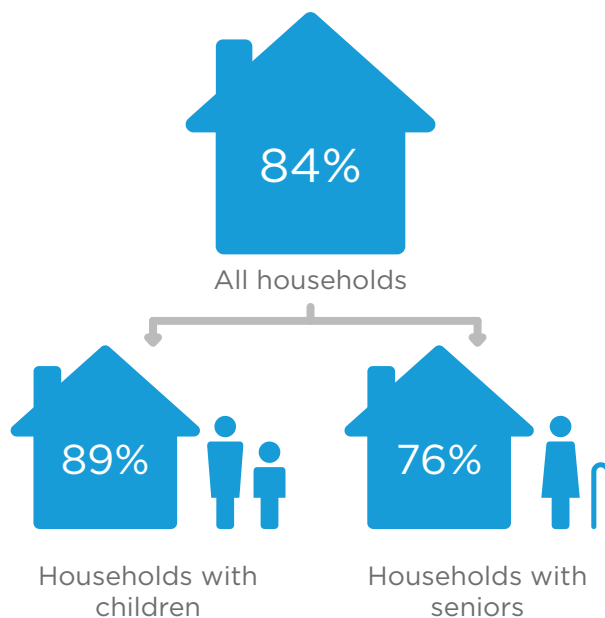
## FOOD INSECURITY

A large majority of Feeding America client households are food insecure.

Food security refers to the household-level economic and social condition of reliable access to an adequate amount of food for an active, healthy life for all household members. Using the USDA Economic Research Service's validated six-item Core Food Security Module, *Hunger in America 2014* reveals that 84 percent of Feeding America client households are food insecure, meaning that they were without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food at some point during the past year. Nationally, according to the USDA, only 14.5 percent of households are food insecure, highlighting the heightened need among Feeding America client households.<sup>13</sup>

Children are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of food insecurity because of the association between food insecurity, health, and cognitive development.<sup>14,15</sup> Feeding America client households with children face an increased risk of food insecurity, with nearly 89 percent classifying as food insecure.

### HOUSEHOLD FOOD INSECURITY



<sup>13</sup> Alicia Coleman-Jensen, Mark Nord, and Anita Singh, "Household Food Security in the United States in 2012," *U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service*.

<sup>14</sup> K. Alaimo, C.M. Olsen, and Edward A. Frongillo, "Food Insufficiency and American School Children's Cognitive, Academic, and Psychosocial Development," *Pediatrics* 108, no. 1 (2001): 44-53.

<sup>15</sup> Diana F. Jyoti, Edward A. Frongillo, and Sonya J. Jones, "Food Insecurity Affects School Children's Academic Performance, Weight Gain, and Social Skills," *Journal of Nutrition* 135 no. 12 (2005): 2831-2839.

Households with seniors are only at slightly lower risk of food insecurity than all Feeding America client households, as 76 percent of client households with seniors are food insecure. Seniors can also face

unique barriers to accessing nutritious food, such as decreased mobility, fixed incomes, health issues, or specific dietary needs.<sup>16</sup>

## FEDERAL PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

More than half of Feeding America client households receive SNAP benefits.

Client households may also receive assistance through federal nutrition assistance programs. Chief among these federal nutrition programs is SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. While state-specific SNAP income eligibility ceilings range from 130-200 percent of the poverty guidelines, other factors such as a household's overall assets, net income, or restrictions based on household composition are also used to determine eligibility for participation.

More than half (55%) of all households report currently receiving SNAP benefits. Among households with children, 59 percent report receiving SNAP benefits, and among households with seniors, 47 percent report receiving benefits through this program.

One in five client households (20%) reports never having applied for SNAP benefits. Of these households that have never applied for SNAP, approximately half (52%) indicate not doing so because they didn't believe they were eligible. However, analysis of reported household income shows that, among client households currently not participating, 72 percent report incomes that would suggest that they may be eligible to receive SNAP. As such, these results suggest that additional education and outreach on SNAP could benefit many households served by the Feeding America network.

## FOOD INSECURITY REMAINS HIGH IN THE UNITED STATES

The sustained use of the Feeding America network through the years reflects a broader need for food assistance that is also reflected in the national food-security figures that are released annually by the USDA. In 2008, coinciding with the start of the recession, national household food insecurity rates climbed to 14.6 percent, reflecting a 31 percent increase

over the prior year. USDA food insecurity rates have held steady since 2008. In 2012—the most current national estimates available at the time of the study—the figures remained high, with 14.5 percent of households or 49 million people living in food insecure households.

<sup>16</sup> James Ziliak and Craig Gundersen, "The Health Consequences of Senior Hunger in the United States: Evidence from the 1999-2010 NHANES" (report prepared for the National Foundation to End Senior Hunger, February 2014).

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## HOUSEHOLD SNAP PARTICIPATION



**55% OF HOUSEHOLDS CURRENTLY RECEIVE SNAP**

**72% OF HOUSEHOLDS NOT RECEIVING SNAP MAY BE ELIGIBLE**



*Hunger in America 2014* also explores client usage of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), which provides supplemental foods for low-income pregnant and post-partum women and children up to age five to meet their special nutritional needs. Eligibility for WIC is typically restricted to families with incomes at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty level, though states may elect to use different income cut offs. Twenty-four percent of households with children under the age of 18 report current receipt of WIC benefits. The study does not allow for analysis of WIC receipt among eligible households (households with a child five years old or younger or households with a pregnant woman). Isolating WIC-eligible households would show a greater percentage of client households reporting current receipt of WIC benefits.

Key federal nutrition programs targeted at older children include the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP). These programs allow low-income children to receive

free or reduced-price lunch and breakfast at school. Among households with school-aged children age 5 to 18 served by the Feeding America network, there is near full participation in free or reduced price school lunch (94%). Despite this high level of participation, less than half of the same households participate in free or reduced price school breakfast (46%). Lower participation in school breakfast may be explained by the fact that not all schools operate the program; nevertheless, the lower participation rates point to opportunities for School Breakfast Program outreach and program promotion.

Together, charitable food assistance and federal nutrition assistance programs weave a nutritional safety net for households in need; however, despite participation in one or both of these modes of assistance, many Feeding America client households continue to struggle with food insecurity, which can lead to difficult choices, including spending tradeoffs and coping strategies.



## SPENDING TRADEOFFS AND COPING STRATEGIES

Client households frequently face difficult decisions in an effort to ensure they have sufficient food.

Feeding America client households often survive on limited budgets and are confronted with choices between paying for food and paying for other essentials. These dilemmas can put households in the position of choosing between competing necessities. A majority of client households report having to choose between paying for food and paying for utilities (69%), transportation (67%), medical care (66%), or housing (57%) at some point during the year. Among households making these spending tradeoffs, typically one-third report doing so every month. Households make choices between food and educational expenses least frequently, perhaps because not all households contain students, although 31 percent of households still report choosing between food and education at some point in the past year.

Notably, many households served by the Feeding America network have incorporated charitable food assistance into their monthly food budgets to help cope with the need to make tradeoffs between accessing

food and other everyday essentials. Across the Feeding America network, 63 percent of households plan to acquire food at meal or grocery programs on a regular basis to help with their monthly food budget. This indicates that most households contain at least one regular client who depends upon charitable programs to assist their household in managing their food needs. For such households, charitable food assistance is not just a safety net; it allows clients to address core food expenses so that limited income can be allocated elsewhere in the household budget to address other basic necessities such as rent and utilities. Additionally, households with seniors were much more likely to rely on charitable food programs, as slightly more than three out of four (76%) plan to visit food programs on a regular basis.

Although many households plan for monthly food assistance, more than one in three (37%) reports that they wait until they have run out of food to seek help from a charitable food program. This strategy was

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### HOUSEHOLD SPENDING TRADEOFFS IN THE PAST YEAR



## HOUSEHOLD COPING STRATEGIES IN THE PAST YEAR

# 55% OF HOUSEHOLDS REPORTED USING 3 OR MORE COPING STRATEGIES IN THE PAST YEAR



**79%**

**PURCHASE  
INEXPENSIVE,  
UNHEALTHY FOOD**



**53%**

**RECEIVE HELP  
FROM FRIENDS  
OR FAMILY**



**40%**

**WATER DOWN  
FOOD OR DRINKS**



**35%**

**SELL OR  
PAWN PERSONAL  
PROPERTY**



**23%**

**GROW FOOD  
IN A GARDEN**

more common among households with children, with 43 percent reporting that they wait until they have run out of food before turning to a food program.

In addition to using federal and charitable nutrition assistance programs and making spending tradeoffs, many households also engage in a number of other coping strategies in order to feed their families. Across all households, purchasing cheaper food, even if it's not the healthiest option, is the most common coping strategy (79%) and households with at least one child, as compared to all households, are more likely to report using this strategy (84%). This strategy has known risks for negative health outcomes. For example, filling foods with low nutritional value but higher fat, sodium, and sugar content can contribute to obesity, heart disease, diabetes, low energy levels, and poor nutrition.<sup>17</sup>

Client households also report engaging in other coping strategies in an effort to secure enough food,

such as purchasing food in dented or damaged packages (52%) and watering down food or drink (40%). More than half of all client households (53%) receive help from family and friends as a strategy to get enough food. Furthermore, more than one in three households (35%) reports selling personal property in order to obtain enough food for their household. While growing food in a home or community garden is the least common coping strategy among Feeding America network clients, it remains a strategy employed by more than one in five households (23%).

The array of spending tradeoffs and coping strategies exercised by clients highlights the level of need nationwide. These strategies and choices also signal the need for both a strong system of charitable food assistance and effective federal nutrition assistance policies that combat the problem of hunger.

<sup>17</sup> W.P. James, M. Nelson, A. Ralph, and S. Leather, "Socioeconomic Determinants of Health. The Contribution of Nutrition to Inequalities in Health," *BMJ* 314, no. 7093 (1997): 1545-1549.



## IMPLICATIONS

*Hunger in America 2014* illustrates that addressing food insecurity in America will take the collaborative efforts and services of both the government and the charitable sector, as many clients rely on both federal nutrition programs and the services of local charitable food programs to secure food for themselves and their families.

Feeding America partner agencies regularly report that they are observing a high demand for charitable food assistance. Collecting data for the *Hunger in America* series once every four years allows Feeding America to quantify the breadth and intensity of this need. The results of this research illustrate that receiving support

from hunger-relief charities is a growing and crucial component of the coping strategies that individuals in need turn to in order to secure food for themselves and their families. While the charitable sector is critical to hunger-relief efforts, it is a supplement to, not a replacement for, a strong federal anti-hunger safety net.



The data also suggest that the recovery from the Great Recession in 2008 and 2009 has been slow to reach people in the direst economic circumstances. Although many clients who visit programs in the Feeding America network are working towards an education and/or searching for work if they are not already employed, they still experience challenges with food security, underemployment, limited income, and poor health. Feeding America clients often survive on limited budgets and are confronted with choices between paying for food and paying for other essentials like rent or medicine. These dilemmas can put households in the position of choosing between competing necessities and, thus, many clients are relying on federal nutrition programs, as well as routinely turning to the Feeding America network, in order to meet their nutrition and food budget needs.

In addition to undertaking this research in order to better understand the needs of our clients and our network, Feeding America also does so with the goal of collecting accurate and much-needed data that can be used by the public, other researchers, and policymakers to better support individuals facing hunger. The findings from *Hunger in America 2014* include evidence that, in addition to the more than half (55%) of Feeding America clients households who currently make use of SNAP as one form of assistance to feed themselves and their families, the majority of those not currently enrolled in SNAP are potentially income-eligible (72%), but may not have applied due to misperceptions about their eligibility. In addition to making sure SNAP is a strong and effective program for those enrolled, these findings suggest that policymakers and community stakeholders should consider how to strengthen outreach to individuals struggling with food insecurity who are not benefitting from this key federal nutrition assistance program.

A significant body of research has demonstrated that access to good nutrition is an important factor in long-term development and health. In addition to SNAP, federal nutrition programs that target particularly vulnerable groups, such as pregnant women, children, and seniors can play an important role in supporting the well-being of those with special nutrition needs. About 25 percent of Feeding America client households with children receive WIC benefits, which are designed to help meet the needs of pregnant women and families with young children. Nearly all client households (94%)

with school-aged children benefit from free or reduced-price meals from the National School Lunch Program, but fewer than half of the same group (46%) participates in the School Breakfast Program, suggesting that there is still significant opportunity to increase the reach of this program among eligible families.

Feeding America is also serving a significant number of individuals who are 60 and older – 7 million annually – and the changing demographics in the country suggest that the needs among seniors may continue to grow. Thus, strong federal nutrition programs like SNAP, which provides participants with monthly benefits to buy groceries, and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), which provide food resources that can be distributed directly to senior households, will continue to be critical in helping to ensure low-income seniors can access the nutrition they need.

The *Hunger in America* studies capture information about the scope of services that the Feeding America network provides to clients facing hunger, as well as the challenges, barriers, and coping methods that these clients experience each day. The data illuminate the importance of a strong network of food banks, partner agencies, and programs, coupled with federal policies and programs that support efforts to fight hunger. Fortunately, the Feeding America network is supported by the efforts of reliable, committed volunteers to operate their food programs. Approximately half of all partner agencies are run wholly by volunteers without any paid staff, highlighting the critical role of volunteers in maintaining a strong network.

The breadth and complexity of reported need demonstrates that there are a wide array of opportunities within the Feeding America network for food banks and partner agencies to develop supportive programs. As these data show, many families need both public and private assistance in order to meet their household food needs. There are also opportunities for policymakers to strengthen federal anti-hunger programs and policies, for advocates to raise their voices, and for all of us, as concerned citizens, to take steps each day to contribute to the fight to end hunger. Collaboratively, we can address the root causes of food insecurity so that every individual has the food and nutrition they need to build a stronger community.





# WHAT CAN I DO?

Feeding America and its nationwide network of 200 food banks depend on the generosity and support of individuals, foundations, corporations, and manufacturers in order to provide charitable food relief to millions of Americans each year.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer, financial donor or hunger advocate, or if you would like more information about the Feeding America network, please visit [www.feedingamerica.org](http://www.feedingamerica.org)

## LEARN ABOUT HUNGER IN YOUR COMMUNITY

We at Feeding America believe that addressing the problem of hunger requires a thorough understanding of the problem itself. *Map the Meal Gap*, an annual study that began in 2011, is a groundbreaking tool that provides critical information that has never been previously available: food insecurity rates for every county and congressional district in the country, among both the general population and the child population.

Feeding America has undertaken this project to continue learning about the face of food insecurity at the local level. By understanding the population in need, communities can better identify strategies for reaching the people who most need food assistance. To learn more about hunger in your community, please visit [www.feedingamerica.org/mapthegap](http://www.feedingamerica.org/mapthegap).







*Hunger in America 2014* is based on independent research conducted on behalf of Feeding America by Westat, a leading social policy research firm based in Rockville, Maryland, and the Urban Institute, a premier center of policy and research based in Washington, D.C. A collaborative research team comprised of staff at Westat, the Urban Institute, Feeding America, and 196 participating network members designed and implemented the study. All aspects of the study were overseen by an independent Technical Advisory Group (TAG) composed of noted social scientists who reviewed survey instruments, the analysis plan and the final results of the study. Through the expert and integral efforts of the TAG and its rigorous scrutiny of the survey methods, Feeding America ensures that *Hunger in America 2014* achieved a high standard of research.

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For more information about Feeding America, please visit [feedingamerica.org](http://feedingamerica.org). For a more detailed technical explanation of the study, please see the Technical Volume of the National Report.



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