



Hunger Close to Home

Hunger is a **real** problem for Wisconsin families. Statewide, over half a million people live in households that are food insecure¹ — they do not always have enough food for an active, healthy life.

This means that **1 out of every 11 Wisconsin households** is food insecure.²

What do “food insecurity” and “hunger” mean?

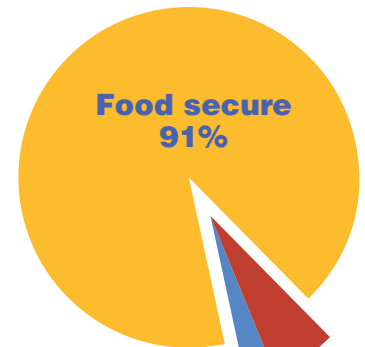
Food insecurity exists when people have uncertain or limited access to food. They may worry about having enough food. Or they may need to juggle what little money they have to meet basic needs such as rent, heat, medicine and food.

Food insecurity happens at different levels. When most severe, food insecurity includes hunger. Households may experience **hunger** if adults or children reduce the amount of food they eat because they cannot afford what they need.

How many people are hungry?

In the most recent 3-year period reported, 2002 to 2004:³

- One in 11 (9 percent) of Wisconsin households were food insecure — representing approximately 540,000 people.
- One in 36 households (2.8 percent) experienced hunger.

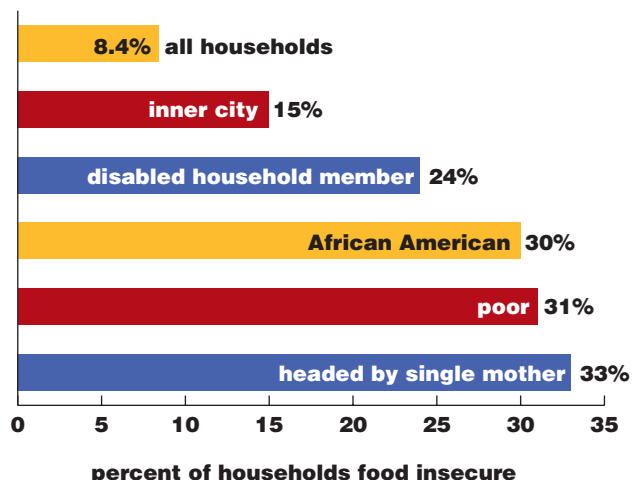


Who is most at risk?

While hungry families live throughout the state, some households at greatest risk are:⁴

- Headed by a **single mother**
- **Poor** (See the poverty guidelines on page 2.)
- **African American**
- Those with a **disabled** household member
- Living in the **inner city**

Food insecurity in Wisconsin
Rates among households with selected characteristics, 1996-2000



Need for help is growing

Relative to other states, Wisconsin households have become more food insecure.⁵

People are also seeking more food assistance. For example, participation in the Food Stamp program (now called FoodShare in Wisconsin) is on the rise. In Wisconsin, participation increased 82 percent between October 1999 and October 2004.⁶ This recent increase has been among the **highest in the nation**.

Use of food pantries and other emergency food outlets continues to rise. More than half of Wisconsin food pantries in the America's Second Harvest network report seeing more clients.⁷ In 2005, requests for emergency food increased by an average of 12 percent in U.S. cities.⁸

Why are people hungry?

Poverty

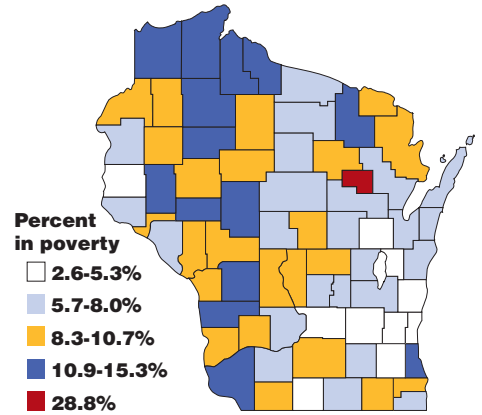
Poverty is closely linked to hunger. The federal government uses income guidelines to determine the poverty level. For example, in 2005, a family of four with a yearly income of \$19,935 or less was considered **poor** — living in poverty.

Nearly a third (31 percent) of poor households in Wisconsin are food insecure.

Many people with incomes above the federal poverty line are still considered "low-income." In 2005, a **low-income** family of four made less than \$35,797. Statewide in 1999, 21 percent of households were low-income — yearly income below 185 percent of the federal poverty line.

While poverty is strongly related to food insecurity, not all poor households are food insecure. Many people use assistance programs such as Food Stamps and housing assistance to have enough money for food.

Percent of population below poverty level in Wisconsin in 1999
Census 2000



And not all food insecure households are poor. In fact, 65 percent of Wisconsin's food insecure households have incomes above the poverty line.

Limited access to food

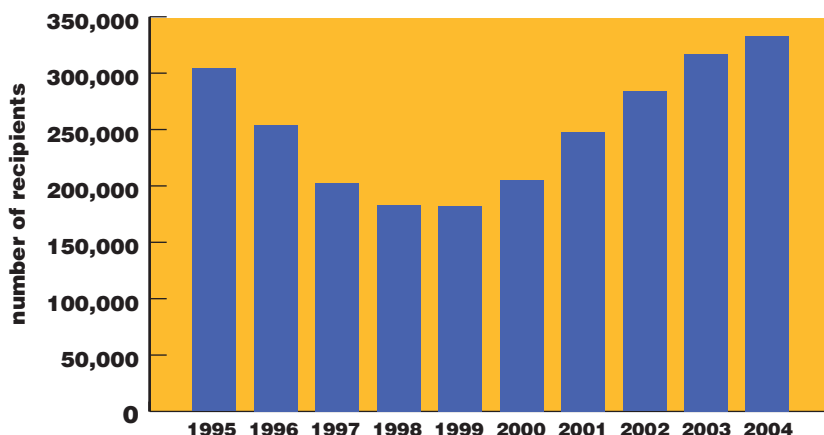
Limited access to food may also contribute to food insecurity. Rural residents may face transportation challenges as they try to get to distant grocery stores. This may also be true for inner city residents.

A report by Hunger Task Force of Milwaukee found that in general, stores in an economically distressed, inner-city area have fewer products and higher prices than stores outside the area.⁹

A recent national study found that when there was at least one supermarket nearby, residents ate more fruits and vegetables.¹⁰

Number of Wisconsin FoodShare (Food Stamp) recipients

October monthly totals 1995–2004



Limited access to and participation in food assistance programs

These limitations act as barriers to food security. For example, the nation's largest food assistance program is the Food Stamp Program, which helps low-income people buy food. Yet, only half (49.5 percent) of Wisconsin residents that appear to be eligible for the program actually participate. Wisconsin ranks 49th in the nation by this measure of program access.¹¹

What are the barriers to participating in food assistance programs?

Confusion/lack of awareness

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) identified confusion and lack of awareness of program rules as key barriers to participating in the Food Stamp Program.¹²



Difficulties applying

America's Second Harvest found more than a third (35 percent) of their food pantry clients had not applied for Food Stamps because it was too much hassle.

To improve accessibility, Wisconsin's Food Stamp program (called FoodShare) provides online information that allows individuals to estimate their eligibility and check the status of benefits.¹³ In the near future, Wisconsin residents will also be able to apply for benefits online.

You can learn more about FoodShare participation in your county on the next page.

Lack of programs

Government-subsidized free and reduced-price school meals are important programs in combating hunger. School breakfast and summer meal programs provide vital nutrition for low-income children before school or when school is out.

Wisconsin ranks among the **last in the nation** in access to school breakfast.¹⁴

- Only a half (50.4 percent) of Wisconsin schools that offer lunch programs also offer breakfast programs. (Only Connecticut ranks lower.)
- A quarter (26.5 percent) of low-income students who receive subsidized school lunch also receive school breakfast, putting Wisconsin last, nationally.

For specifics about the availability of school breakfast in your county, refer to *School Breakfast Programs* in this series.

Do food pantries help?

Food pantries and other emergency food outlets can play a key role in deterring hunger. These outlets are often volunteer-run, and receive significant amounts of donated food from communities.

Families who rely on emergency food outlets are food insecure, precisely because they have to use emergency food to meet their needs.

Initially, food pantries and soup kitchens were set up to provide for the unusual emergency need, such as when someone lost a job or became ill. Unfortunately, the need to rely on emergency food outlets has become a chronic situation for many people.

In one Wisconsin county, 43 percent of food pantry users visited a pantry once a month, and 37 percent had been getting food from a food pantry for 2 years or more. Approximately one in five (21 percent) reported getting most of their food from pantries and free meal sites.¹⁵

What else do we know about Wisconsin food pantry clients?¹⁶

- Almost half (44 percent) have at least one employed person in their household.
- Almost half (43 percent) have at least one child under age 18.
- One-third (33 percent) are single parents.
- Nearly one-fourth (24 percent) report having a long-term disability or health problem that limits their ability to work.

How does Sawyer County fare?

Much like comparing poverty rates, we can look at other clues related to whether people have enough to eat. Such county information might include local economic data and participation in food assistance programs.

You can find detailed county data like the following examples and more on the Wisconsin Food Security Project web site: www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/cfs

Population figures for these tables are based on the 2000 U.S. Census.



Population in poverty

	Sawyer County	Wisconsin	County rank*
Total population	16,196	5,363,675	59
Poverty rate	12.7%	8.7%	6
Percent of population with income below 185% of poverty	32.9%	20.9%	2

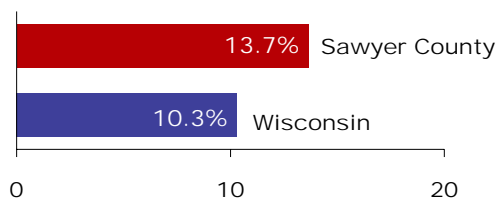
Self-sufficiency standard¹⁷ (Full-time hourly wage)

Estimates how much income a family would need to cover basic costs such as housing, food, child care, health care, transportation, and taxes—without public or private assistance.

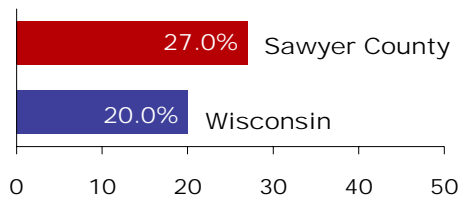
	Sawyer County	Wisconsin**	County rank*
Single working adult, one preschool-aged child, one school-aged child	\$11.63	\$14.14	68
Two working adults, one preschool-aged child, one school-aged child	\$7.01/adult	\$8.55/adult	68

FoodShare (Food Stamp) Program participation¹⁸

Percent of entire population receiving FoodShare, 2005



Percent of child population receiving FoodShare, 2005



In Sawyer County, 2,211 people received FoodShare in 2005.

* Counties are ranked from 1 to 72. Rank 1 always indicates the highest number. For some data, a high number is desirable whereas for other indicators, a low number is desirable.

** Average self-sufficiency wage across Wisconsin counties.

What are some effects of hunger?

In addition to not having enough food, hunger and food insecurity are linked to other problems. For children, for example, negative outcomes related to food insecurity include:¹⁹

- Poor health
- Behavior problems
- Learning and academic problems

How can you help?

Aside from familiar activities such as food drives and hunger walks, communities work to prevent hunger in a variety of ways.

Here are some ideas:

- Participate in or create a local hunger task force.
- Help build awareness of hunger in your community.
- Improve access to grocery stores.
- Talk to your local school about starting a breakfast program.
- Help start a summer meal program for children when school is out.

Learn more about hunger and the issues that affect your county at the Wisconsin Food Security Project web site: www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/cfs

Notes

- ¹ Nord, Mark. U.S. Department of Agriculture. Personal communication citing data from 2001 through 2003. 2004.
- ² Nord, Mark, Margaret Andrews and Steven Carlson. October 2005. *Household Food Security in the United States, 2004*. USDA/ERS Economic Research Report No. 11. 65 pp.
- ³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴ Bartfeld, Judith, and Cecile David. 2003. *Food Insecurity in Wisconsin, 1996–2000*. University of Wisconsin, Institute for Research on Poverty. Special Report No. 86: www.irlp.wisc.edu/publications/sr/pdfs/sr86.pdf
- ⁵ Nord, *Household Food Security* (see note 2).
- ⁶ Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services—Eligibility Management: dhfs.wisconsin.gov/em/rsdata
- ⁷ America's Second Harvest of Wisconsin. 2002. *Hunger in Wisconsin 2001*.
- ⁸ United States Conference of Mayors—Sodexo, Inc. 2005. *A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities 2005*: www.usmayors.org/uscm/hungersurvey/2005/HH2005FINAL.pdf
- ⁹ Hunger Task Force of Milwaukee. *Hunger in Milwaukee: Some Food for Thought*.
- ¹⁰ Morland, K., et al. Neighborhood characteristics associated with the location of food stores and food service places. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. 2002. 22:23–29
- ¹¹ Food Research and Action Center. *2004 Food Stamp Program Access Index (PAI) State-by-State*: www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/FSP/Participation_Rates_04.html
- ¹² U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. 2001. *The Decline in Food Stamp Participation: A Report to Congress*. Nutrition Assistance Research Report Series. Office of Analysis, Nutrition and Evaluation. Food Stamp Program Report No. FSP-01-WEL.
- ¹³ State of Wisconsin, Access to Eligibility Support Services for Health and Nutrition, access.wisconsin.gov
- ¹⁴ Food Research and Action Center. 2005. *School Breakfast Scorecard: 2005*. www.frac.org/pdf/2005_SBP.pdf
- ¹⁵ Hunger Prevention Council of Dane County, Inc. (Wisconsin). 2004. *Survey of Users of Dane County's Food Pantries During October 2003*: www.madison.com/communities/hpcdc/library/files/surveyreport03_II.doc
- ¹⁶ Bartfeld, Judith. 2000. *Summary of Findings from the Wisconsin Survey of Food Pantry Clients*: www.uwex.edu/ces/wnep/files/fdpntsvy.pdf
- ¹⁷ Pearce, Diana, and Jennifer Brooks. 2004. *The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Wisconsin*. Education Fund of the Wisconsin Women's Network: www.wiwomensnetwork.org/selfsuffbody2004.pdf.
- ¹⁸ Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services—Eligibility Management: dhfs.wisconsin.gov/em/rsdata
- ¹⁹ Center on Hunger and Poverty, Brandeis University. 2002. *The Consequences of Hunger and Food Insecurity for Children*: www.centeronhunger.org/pdf/ConsequencesofHunger.pdf

Hunger Close to Home is the first in the series *Wisconsin Families and the Communities Where They Live and Work*. The complete list of titles is on the UW-Extension Family Living web site at: www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/demographics.

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Wisconsin Families and the Communities Where They Live and Work: Hunger Close to Home

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