

FOOD SECURITY UPDATE

More People Seeking Help to Meet Food Needs

From the desk of Kadi Row
February 2002

Many of you have been hearing reports, and perhaps seeing first-hand, that more people are seeking help to meet their family food needs. Unfortunately, recent studies show us that this is, indeed, the case. Demand at local food pantries is certainly up: Second Harvest Food Bank of Southern Wisconsin reports an all-time high distribution in October 2001. Participation in the Food Stamp Program has begun to rise after the dramatic declines seen since the mid-1990's. Some of the recent studies that document these trends are America's Second Harvest's Hunger in America report and the US Conference of Mayors' Hunger and Homelessness in America's Major Cities.

Hunger in America 2001: A Report from America's Second Harvest

Billed as the largest study of its kind, Hunger in America 2001 surveyed over 32,000 individuals face-to-face at food pantries, meal sites and shelters and collected surveys from more than 24,000 local emergency hunger relief agencies, in order to characterize clients and their use of the emergency provider network. Major findings include:

- The America's Second Harvest system serves an estimated 23.3 million different people annually, including 21.3 million pantry users and 1.3 million kitchen users
- 39% of the members of households served are children under 18 years old; 11% are elderly
- 39% of households include at least one employed adult
- 64% have incomes at or below the official federal poverty level
- 6% are receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and 8% are receiving General Assistance
- Among all clients, 71% are classified as food insecure, using the USDA's official food security scale; 37% are classified as experiencing hunger
- 45% of clients report having to choose between paying for food and paying for utilities or heating fuel; 36% between paying for food and paying their rent or mortgage bill; and 30% between paying for food and paying for medicine or medical care

For the complete Hunger in America report and analysis, visit the America's Second Harvest Website: <http://www.secondharvest.org/>

For local reference and comparison, you may want to refer to the food pantry client survey conducted in 27 Wisconsin counties in 1999
(<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/wnep/p7/pdfs/fdpntsvy.pdf>)

Increases in Food Stamp Participation

According to preliminary USDA data, the number of persons participating in the Food Stamp Program in Wisconsin jumped 20.7% between October 2000 and October 2001.

An increase was also seen nationally, growing by 8.3% during the year. A significant portion of these increases occurred between September 2001 and October 2001 (3.7% in Wisconsin, 3.3% nationally), pointing to a possible connection with events of September 11th. These increases follow a period of several years of dramatic participation declines.

For summaries of participation in all Federal Nutrition Assistance Programs, including state by state summaries, visit: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/fspmmain.htm>

Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities 2001

The 17th annual survey by the US Conference of Mayors reports that both hunger and homelessness rose sharply in major American cities over the last year. Highlights of the results include:

Request for Emergency Food

- Of the 27 cities surveyed, 25 reported increases in requests for emergency food assistance, with an average increase of 23 percent.
- Fifty-four percent of people requesting emergency food were families with children
- Thirty-seven percent of the adults requesting food assistance were employed.

Meeting the Need

- Only one-third of cities reported that they were able to provide an adequate quantity of food.
- Eighty-five percent of the cities surveyed reported that emergency food assistance facilities have had to decrease the quantity of food provided and/or the number of times families or individuals can come to get food.

The Future

Officials in all survey cities predicted that food assistance requests for emergency food assistance will increase again in 2002. Nearly all agree that more people will experience hunger and homelessness in 2002.

This survey, along with numerous reports on hunger and homelessness have been conducted by the US Conference of Mayors since 1983. A full report of the 2001 report is available at: <http://www.usmayors.org>