



FACT SHEET
HUNGER IN WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS 2010

Introduction

According to the new findings reported in *Hunger in America 2010*, 37 million people, one in eight Americans, is receiving emergency food assistance through the Feeding America network, comprised of regional food banks around the country.

Hunger in America 2010 is the first comprehensive research study that captures the connection between a weak economy and increased needs for emergency food assistance. The data was collected in the heart of the 2009 economic downturn (February-June 2009).

The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts participated in the *Hunger in America* study by conducting dozens of client interviews at emergency food sites across Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden and Hampshire Counties.

The data below are based on surveys conducted at emergency feeding centers, such as meal sites and food pantries, but do not factor in many individuals also served at non-emergency locations in The Food Bank's network, such as childcare centers and senior centers.

Top line Findings

- In Western Massachusetts, an estimated 91,000 people receive food from emergency food sites annually. That is about 84% of all people served by The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts. About 15,000 different people receive emergency food assistance every week in our region.
- The number of people served through The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts' emergency food network has increased by 22% since 2006.
- The 91,000 people served annually by the emergency food network of The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts include nearly 32,000 children and nearly 7,300 elders.
- The number of children (those under age 18) needing emergency food assistance has increased by 8% since 2006. 10% of all children served are between the ages of 0 to 5 years old.
- Among all households served through the emergency food network, 71% are food insecure according to the U.S. government's food security scale, meaning they don't always know where they will find their next meal. Among households with children, 69% are food insecure.

- 29% of all clients have very low food security, meaning they are sometimes completely without a source of food. Among households with children, 19% have very low food security.
- 71% of all clients have incomes below the federal poverty level.

Client Households

- Although 31% of households have at least one employed adult, 71% of all households are still living below the federal poverty level.
- 33% of adult clients at meal sites had lost a job in the six months prior to the survey (which was conducted between February-June 2009)
- 42% of people seeking emergency food assistance report having to choose between paying for food and paying for utilities or heating fuel. 36% had to choose between food and paying rent or mortgage. 26% had to choose between food and medicine or medical care.
- 55% of adult clients ate less than they felt they should because of lack of money for food. 20% of adult clients went one entire day without eating because they didn't have enough money for food.

Role of Federal Government

- 53% percent of households served by The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts are receiving SNAP (formerly food stamps) benefits, as compared to an average of 41% nationally.
- 63% of client households with children ages 0 to 3 participate in the WIC program.
- Among households with school-age children, 54% and 43%, respectively, participate in the federal school lunch and school breakfast programs.

Food Assistance Agencies

- The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts provides 75% of all food distributed by food pantries, 51% of food distributed by meal sites, and 42% of food distributed by shelters.
- 75% of all food pantries said that if The Food Bank were to close down, it would have a "devastating" affect on their ability to serve people in need.
- 94% of adult clients are satisfied with the amount and type of food available from their local emergency food provider.
- Among local emergency food sites, 80% of food pantries and 70% of meal sites report an increase in the number of clients served since 2006.

National Study Methodology

Hunger in America 2010 is a scientific study conducted by Mathematica Policy Research in conjunction with Feeding America and regional food banks. The study involved more than 62,000 face-to-face interviews with people seeking emergency food assistance from one of the nearly 61,068 agencies served by a Feeding America food bank.

More than 37,000 agencies across the country also participated in *Hunger in America 2010* by completing an agency survey.

Background: The Economic Landscape

The economic recession of 2009, resulting in dramatically increasing unemployment and poverty nationwide, has driven sharp increases in need for emergency food assistance and enrollment in federal nutrition programs.

During 2005, when the last *Hunger in America* data was collected, the national unemployment rate averaged 5.1%.¹

When the data collection for the 2010 study commenced in late winter and spring of 2009, the recession was in full swing and the unemployment rate was rising rapidly, jumping from 4.9% at the start of recession² in December 2007, to 9.5% when client data collection was completed in June 2009.

In addition, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that when individuals with “marginal labor force attachment” and those who were working part-time involuntarily were considered, more than 17 percent of the population was affected in late 2009 by the shifting employment trends.

About The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts

The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts is the leading provider of emergency food that reaches individuals and families with lower incomes in western Massachusetts. In addition, The Food Bank is working with the community to develop strategies that will reduce the number of people in the four counties of western MA who must rely on emergency food. The Food Bank seeks to make nutritious and affordable food accessible to all residents in our region.

For more information, contact The Food Bank at 413-247-9738.

¹ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Found on the web December 16, 2009 at http://data.bls.gov/PDQ/servlet/SurveyOutputServlet?data_tool=latest_numbers&series_id=LNS14000000

² The National Bureau of Economic Research dates the beginning of the 2008-2009 recession from December 2007. NBER defines a recession as a significant decline in economic activity spread across the economy, lasting more than a few months, normally visible in production, employment, real income, and other indicators (Found on the web December 16, 2009 at <http://www.nber.org/cycles/dec2008.html>).