



Food For Thought



Central Pennsylvania Food Bank
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A LOOK AT FOOD INSECURITY IN CENTRAL PA

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the reality of hunger in the United States and in central Pennsylvania, and it shined a spotlight on its disproportionate impact on certain communities. Many families, individuals, and seniors who had never needed help before found themselves visiting a food pantry for the very first time. People of color and people residing in rural communities have been hit harder with the health and economic consequences of the pandemic, and studies show signs of recovery are lagging.

The Economic Policy Institute ranked Pennsylvania as having the highest Black unemployment rate in the nation in the second half of 2020, with 16.5 percent unemployed in the fourth quarter. Feeding America, the national organization of regional food banks, predicts more than 21% of Black Americans (1 in 5) will face food insecurity in 2021, compared to 1 in 9 white Americans. Rural communities are also hard hit. **Food insecurity rates among the Food Bank's most rural counties have increased in magnitude from 25% to 30% from 2019 to 2021.**

The Central Pennsylvania Food Bank is looking at the current needs of these communities and examining how to best respond now and in the future. With a grant from Feeding America, we've hired a consultant to lead our team through equity, diversity, and inclusion training to better

study, respond to, and serve everyone who needs help in central Pennsylvania.

"Having access to enough food to sustain a healthy, productive life is a basic human right," said Joe Arthur, executive director of the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank. "There is dignity in having food that tastes good, respects your culture, and is good for you. Based on the consultant's research, we will find sources for culturally preferred foods and enhance our inventory to better meet the needs of our neighbors. We are also increasing our local farm sourcing capacity to benefit our local producers and build more supply resiliency."

The Feeding America grant will help the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank promote culturally relevant foods to its partner agencies, waive the fees to provide them, and incentivize partners to carry these new products.

The Food Bank also knows it cannot provide all food assistance needs alone. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the most effective anti-hunger program in the United States. For every meal the Food Bank provides, SNAP provides nine.

The grant has allowed the Food Bank to implement a new language line and texting service for its SNAP Helpline and Agency Services team. The team already includes



Economic recovery is slower in rural communities and communities of color. The Food Bank is working to address these disparities through a variety of new programs.

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JAVA WITH JOE

Dear Friends of the Food Bank,

We are so excited to once again celebrate September as Hunger Action Month! But I have to tell you, every month of the last eighteen has been a "hunger action month" as our donors, volunteers, partner agencies, and friends worked and gave tirelessly to keep hunger at bay during the pandemic. Friends of the Food Bank, you were extraordinarily generous when our neighbors needed you most, and we are thankful.

As we cheer on the continued improvement in our national and local economies, we are also mindful that our recovery is not yet complete. COVID exposed glaring gaps and inequities in so many of the systems and structures we rely on for everyday life. We believe a worthy recovery means solving inequities that are keeping people food insecure, and we are not content to just return to 2019.

As we survey the recovery landscape we, unfortunately, see widened food insecurity gaps in Central Pennsylvania communities that were experiencing them before COVID changed our world. Our neighbors in rural areas and our communities of color continue to face high unemployment, food deserts, food swamps (an overabundance of unhealthy food options), substandard technology access, and underinvestment. There is more to worry about, but you get the picture.

As we move forward, you will see the Food Bank speaking more often and more plainly about issues of inequity. We are proud to be a player in the movement to bring more of America's prosperity to communities excluded for far too long. We are proud to work in these fields of abundance and struggle and grace with wonderful Friends like you.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



It is widely believed the best way to engage students in their studies is to provide hands-on experience. This June, Dr. Ryan Adams, chairman of the Lycoming College Anthropology Department, put

that philosophy into action by taking his "Food in America" class to volunteer at the Williamsport Healthy Food Hub. There, Dr. Adams and his class packed and assembled boxes for our senior programs.

The purpose of the summer course, Dr. Adams said, was to help students understand what scholars call the "foodways" of America. This anthropologic term includes everything from how food is produced to the distribution and sociology of food. An important part of this concept is understanding why certain people have a hard time accessing the nutrition they need.

"To make sense of the food system, you have to understand the people that fall through the cracks and face food insecurity," Dr. Adams

explained. "The Food Bank was a key part of helping (my students) understand how food in America works."

For Aaron Clarke, a "Food in America" student and recent graduate of Lycoming College, volunteering at the Food Bank for the first time was gratifying. While he has served at pantries in the Bronx, NY (his home city), packing boxes of food for senior citizens felt particularly important.

"Everyone needs a helping hand. It's important to always remember that; to not take my own circumstances for granted. Remembering that I have the power and ability to make an impact on someone's day, whether I know it or not."

Another student, Lauryn Laidacker, also had a fulfilling volunteer experience. When her family lost their house to flooding in 2011, they needed community aid to get by. By volunteering at the Food Bank, she was happy to pay it forward to someone else.

"It's so important to help people whenever you can," Laidacker said. "Even if it's something as simple as giving the only free time you have. There's no shame in needing help, and there's no shame in helping."

CELEBRATING SUCCESS DURING HUNGER ACTION MONTH



September is Hunger Action Month, a time set aside to mobilize the public to act on the issue of ending hunger in our communities.

Our territory is wide, but our impact is local and over the past year, neighbors have stepped up in remarkable ways. You reached out, volunteered to pack our Crisis Recovery boxes, made generous gifts, and called your local representatives asking them to vote for programs that help to end hunger. Your neighbors in need are so grateful for your support. Thousands of lives were improved in central Pennsylvania because of you.

In 2020, just as Austin and his wife were expecting their first child, Austin lost his job as a butcher. The couple suddenly faced anxiety over how they were going to get money to purchase necessary items for their baby, plus have enough food. They also began living in a shelter with a program designed to help residents get back on their feet. To get the food they needed, they reached out to their local food pantry. At the time, Austin told us, “We love it! There’s lots of produce — that’s our favorite part.”

One year later, Austin’s wife has found a new job, while Austin continues to apply. They’ve been able to save money and are now living in their own apartment. They haven’t needed the services of the Food Bank for several months.

“We went through a tough spot and we weren’t able to afford food,” said Austin. “The Food Bank helped push us farther until we could get the finances to afford food.”

Austin’s is just one of the many success stories made possible by your support.

However, thousands are still working hard to get back on their feet and continue to need your support. How will you choose to end hunger this September? Please consider joining our HAM Virtual Food Drive, spending some time volunteering, or call your local legislators and urge them to support programs and funding that help people have access to the food they need. Together, we can ensure that no one goes hungry in our communities.



Food shouldn't be an impossible choice. Thank you for all you've done over the past year to help thousands have access to healthy, nutritious food.

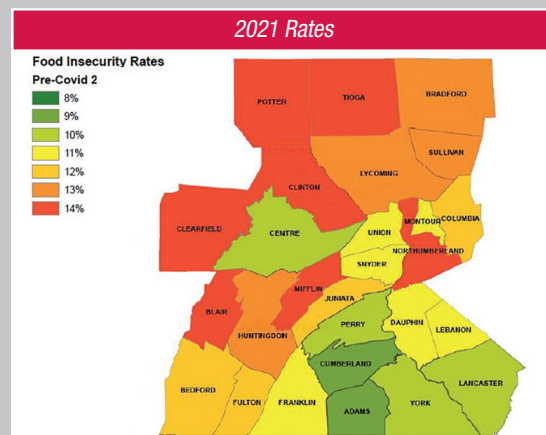
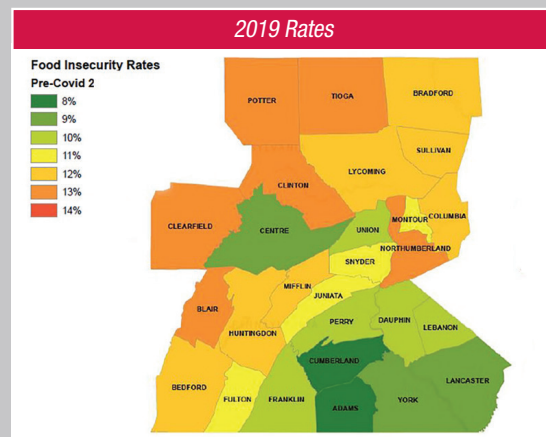
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bilingual speakers, but this language line is key to better serving diverse communities, both through SNAP application assistance and the charitable food network. Additionally, the texting service will allow the Food Bank to engage with clients in a new way.

“Our language line is set up to serve seven additional languages. The language line service is a game-changer for our SNAP team and will help remove one of the many barriers non-English speaking households face,” said Tara Davis, Director of Agency Services and Outreach. “Not only will our team be able to assist households in signing up for SNAP benefits, but they will also be able to help find additional resources such as food pantries, soup kitchens, and summer feeding sites in their local communities.”

The Central Pennsylvania Food Bank is committed to its mission of fighting hunger, improving lives, and strengthening communities. Its vision that no one should be hungry extends to everyone, no matter where they live, or their race. There should be no barriers to food security for any person, and the Food Bank is continuing to work every day to make sure that all barriers are eliminated, but its work is far from over.

To help the Food Bank, and to learn more about its programs and services, visit www.centralpafoodbank.org.





FRESH FROM THE FARM

To sustain the mission of feeding our neighbors in need at the local level, the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank shares its resources to invest in our critical partners in all our 27 counties. The Food Bank offers Bold Goal Grants so partners can improve their capacity, provide more refrigerator and freezer space, expand their selection of food items, and set up efficient distribution methods. This year we are also launching an initiative to connect local farms with agency partners. The new Farms to Agency Resource Market (FARM) Grants will support both partners and food producers to capture even more fresh fruits, vegetables, dairy, and protein to share with neighbors in need right in their own community.

Throughout the pandemic, more than 69 percent of the food we shared was fresh, healthy Foods To Encourage (F2E). It's not enough for us to provide more pounds of any kind of food; high quality nutrition is imperative. The FARM Grant program will match sources of fresh-from-the-farm commodities, especially smaller growers and farmers markets, with pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters within just a few miles. The food will be shared locally; it won't need to pass through the Food Bank's hubs. It is hyper-local, hyper-fresh, and very healthy. **We commit to brokering these local relationships as well as purchasing the nutritious products that we will need to meet whatever demand levels require; and we will make available a wider variety of foods that appeal to varied cultural preferences.** There is dignity in having access to food that tastes good, respects culture, **AND** is good for you.

We look forward to it becoming safe enough to return to client choice pantries and group meals at soup kitchens. The Central Pennsylvania Food Bank will maintain the crisis recovery as long as needed, while at the same time investing in the emerging rebuilding work by strengthening and expanding the capacity of our network of local providers. Our territory is wide, but our impact is local. Our local partners are on the front lines of ending hunger.

A HEALTHY JOURNEY WITH THE FOOD BANK

The Central Pennsylvania Food Bank's Health Innovations Program connects food pantries and their clients with our partner health care providers to promote health, wellness, and nutrition education. We provide health care partners with boxes of healthy, nutritious food to patients facing an array of health issues, including diabetes.



Jerry, a veteran living in Williamsport, takes part in the Health Innovations Program with our partner, River Valley Health and Dental. He was part of their pilot program for people living with diabetes.

"Self-control is so important when you're learning how to eat healthy," said Jerry. "I'm learning to control how much I take in daily." Jerry is also challenging himself to try new things like eggplant and squash.

"I like squash, but I never knew how to cook it," he said. "I love the recipes [we receive] and I love to make different things. The boxes always have a few things I haven't tried before. It encourages me when I go to the market to be more creative and willing to try new things."

In addition to our Health Innovations Program, we are also participating in the PA Healthy Pantry Initiative (PA HPI) through Feeding Pennsylvania. The PA HPI is working with us to increase access to healthy food in our partner food pantries and increase consumption of healthy food by pantry clients. The long-term goal of the program is to reduce the burden of diet-related chronic disease and increase the quality of life for Pennsylvanians who use food support systems.

We have two nutrition coordinators on our staff who are working to implement the PA HPI in 20 partner pantries this year. They are working to increase availability of healthy items, train pantry staff on nutrition information, provide equipment to nudge clients to healthier options, as well as holding nutrition and cooking classes.

Through our Health Innovations Program and Healthy Pantry Initiative, we are committed to providing access to healthy, nutritious food and working "better together" with our community partners.