

# LEBANON COUNTY COMMUNITY HUNGER MAPPING:

*IDENTIFYING LOCALIZED FOOD ACCESS GAPS  
AND INCREASING UNDERSTANDING OF INTERSECTING ISSUES  
FOR THE CHARITABLE FOOD SYSTEM*



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## INTRODUCTION

**One in ten (9.8%) Lebanon County residents experiences food insecurity, and a similar proportion (9.7%) visited a food pantry in the last year.** In total, nearly 14,000

individuals in the county are impacted by food insecurity and the charitable food network's response to it. Importantly, food insecurity does not impact people of all ages, household types, geographies, or race/ethnicities equally. With this understanding, this report assesses the causes and distribution of these differences and discusses ways stakeholders can work to reduce these inequities.

Given a problem of this breadth and complexity, it is critically important for stakeholders in the charitable food network to better understand the issues at play. This report aims to provide that understanding and to chart a path forward to reducing food insecurity in the near and long-term.

The voices of neighbors who currently experience food insecurity, as gathered through surveys conducted at food pantries and community locations, one-on-one interviews, and focus groups, are spotlighted throughout this report. Through agency surveys and interviews, the perspectives of charitable food providers are also included. Alongside these qualitative methods, innovative quantitative analyses regarding access to pantries across a variety of metrics and participation in government programs at sub-county and pantry levels are also used, resulting in a final report that leverages a mixed-methods approach that brings both quantitative rigor and robust qualitative components. All this work was done with the specific aim of listening deeply to food insecure neighbors in Lebanon County and bringing their thoughts, ideas, and needs to the fore.

Merely understanding the causes and scope of food insecurity in Lebanon is not enough to create a county where no one is hungry. To help make progress toward that goal, this report also provides actionable recommendations around better serving and improving the experiences of the neighbors who utilize Lebanon County's charitable food network in the short term as well as eliminating food insecurity in the long term.

Meaningful progress toward ending hunger will require intentional, sustained collective efforts by the entire Lebanon County community, including social service organizations, health systems, government officials, concerned citizens, and more. Throughout this work, the Lebanon County charitable food network will build on its existing strengths while seeking continuous improvement as it strives to ensure that everyone in the county has enough nutritious food to live a healthy life, free of worry about how they will get their next meal.

**The main research questions that this report seeks to address are as follows:**

1. What is the extent of food insecurity in Lebanon County, and where in the county is it concentrated?
2. Who in Lebanon County is most impacted by food insecurity? How do food insecurity rates and the main drivers of food insecurity differ by age, race and ethnicity, or other factors?
3. How accessible is charitable and retail food in Lebanon County and how does access vary in different areas of the county? How does access vary, if at all, by demographics?
4. What barriers do neighbors face in accessing charitable food services? Where do food distribution and access gaps exist in Lebanon County? What is the neighbor experience at food pantries like?
5. What are utilization rates of key government nutrition-related assistance programs and how do they vary across the county? What is the charitable food system's role in this space?
6. What other issues impact food insecurity in Lebanon County? What can the charitable food system and other relevant stakeholders do to better address the root causes of food insecurity?





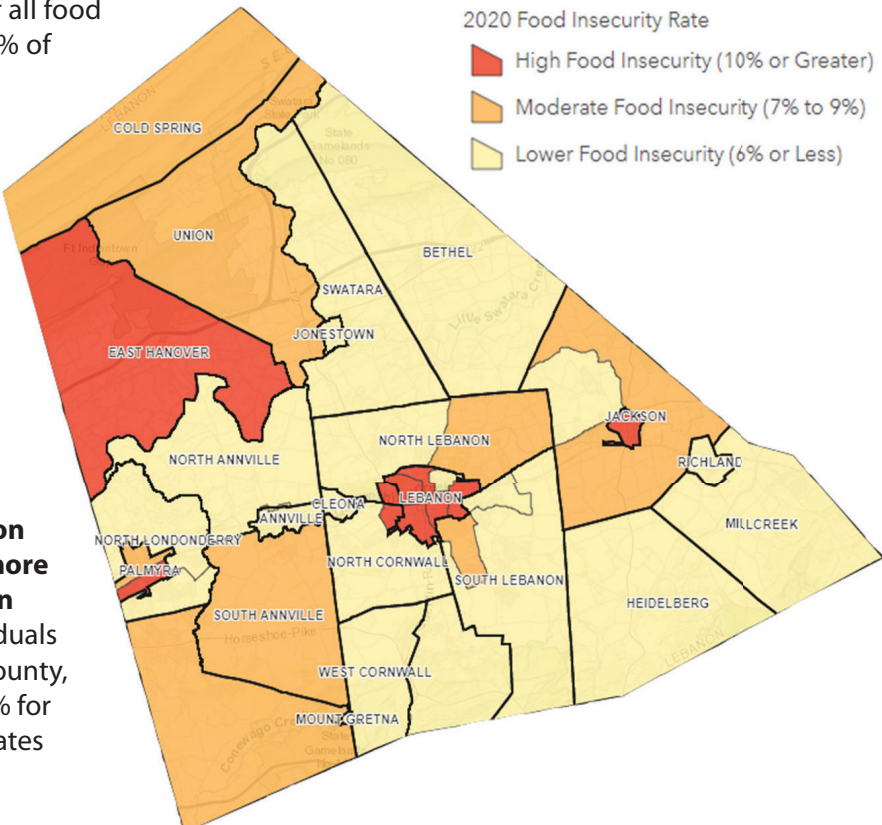
## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The highest food insecurity areas in the county are concentrated in Lebanon City, West Lebanon, Palmyra, East Hanover, and Myerstown. These areas contain 26% of the population of Lebanon County but 53% of all food insecure individuals. Lebanon City is home to 18% of the total population but 39% of all food insecure individuals in the county.

**Child food insecurity in Lebanon County is a particularly acute issue.** Children are 71% more likely to experience food insecurity than adults in Lebanon County, with a food insecurity rate of 14.4% compared to 8.4% for adults. This is one of the largest differentials in Pennsylvania and is driven by elevated child poverty rates (38% on average in the High Food Insecurity areas).

**There are significant disparities in food insecurity rates by race and ethnicity in Lebanon County as Black and Hispanic individuals are more than 2.5 times as likely to be food insecure than non-Hispanic white individuals.** Hispanic individuals are the most likely to face food insecurity in the county, with a food insecurity rate of 23% compared to 7% for white, non-Hispanic individuals. Food insecurity rates among Black individuals are in between, at 18%.

## Food Insecurity Rate by Census Tract





**Very low food security, which is characterized by reduced food intake, is extremely prevalent among food pantry visitors in Lebanon County.** A staggering 41% of all food pantry visitors experience reduced food intake on a regular basis. Reducing very low food security, the most severe form of food insecurity, among pantry participants should be the foremost goal of the charitable food system and one of the main barometers with which to measure success.

Very low food security is directly impacted by several main factors, including 1) the neighbor experience and utilization of the charitable food system, 2) SNAP participation and participation in key government programs, and 3) household income and other systemic economic factors.

### ***Key Findings 1. Focusing on Improving the Neighbor Experience, Building on Best Practices, and Increasing Capacity Investments within the Charitable Food System in Lebanon County***

**The charitable food system reduces very low food security. Rates of very low food security in Lebanon County fall when pantry visitors report utilizing the charitable food system more frequently,** holding key factors such as income and SNAP participation constant. Utilization of the charitable food system is impacted by pantry policies, pantry capacity, and the neighbor experience when visiting food pantries. Each of these factors impacts people's willingness and ability to use the charitable food system.

**Improving the Neighbor Experience: A sizable percentage of neighbors (as high as 10% at certain pantries and 6% on average) report negative experiences with the charitable food system and can recount specific negative experiences.**

**Focusing on the neighbor experience is not tangential to traditional charitable food system work. It is essential in ensuring that neighbors do not go hungry.**

The frequency with which people are willing to utilize the charitable food system is directly impacted by the neighbor experience at food pantries, as interviewees and focus group participants reported not visiting pantries for long periods of time after particularly negative experiences with volunteers and staff.

Improving the neighbor experience at food pantries will require a multi-faceted approach. The food pantry experience is impacted by both the built pantry environment and the behaviors of the individuals staffing the pantries.

**Four of the main components of improving the neighbor experience include:**

- 1. The charitable food system should develop and implement pantry volunteer and staff trainings to set expectations of behavior and treatment and to empower pantry workers with trauma-informed care practices that equip them to treat all neighbors with dignity and respect.** Pantry coordinators should also assess volunteer suitability for neighbor-facing roles and re-assign them as appropriate.





2. **Extended wait times and long lines are also a neighbor experience issue across food pantries in Lebanon County. The wait time and line experience are often worsened by being outside, even in inclement weather.** Pantries should work to reduce lines by ensuring that the quality and quantity of food offerings are similar from the start to end of a distribution and by testing appointment methods while retaining flexibility for pantry visitors. Pantries should work in the immediate term to move lines inside, as neighbors reported that inclement weather can be dangerous for their health and prevent them from visiting a pantry even when they need help.

3. **Hispanic and Asian households are the least likely to report finding foods they desire “often or always” at food pantries.** Pantries should solicit food preference feedback from neighbors and the larger charitable food system should support efforts to provide requested foods more regularly.

4. **One third of individuals who screened as food insecure in non-food pantry surveys reported not knowing where to find a food pantry.** This is a clear opportunity to increase awareness of pantry offerings in public places such as libraries, government offices, and other key locations.

***Building on Best Practices:*** Pantry policies in Lebanon County are generally in line with best practices across the broader charitable food network; many pantries offer choice models, provide evening and/or weekend access, and allow households to visit regardless of income. Furthermore, pantries in Lebanon County allow neighbors to visit twice per month or more, which increases the accessibility of charitable food and allowed CPFBS researchers to determine the marginal impact of additional food pantry visits on very low food security status. While these procedures and policies are a significant strength of the Lebanon County charitable food system overall, there is still room for improvement in areas like distribution model and weekend hours access at specific pantries.

***Capacity Investments:*** Lebanon County has relatively few food pantries available per food insecure individual. Pantries report difficulty sourcing adequate amounts of quality and diverse food to meet high levels of demand, difficulty with volunteer capacity, and overall difficulty with sufficient resources to meet the high level of need. The relatively low number of pantries available means stakeholders should invest further in existing pantries and consider other ways to increase access, such as additional pantry locations, mobile locations, or pop-up distributions, among other strategies.



**Improving the neighbor experience at food pantries will require a multi-faceted approach. The food pantry experience is impacted by both the built pantry environment and the behaviors of the individuals staffing the pantries.**





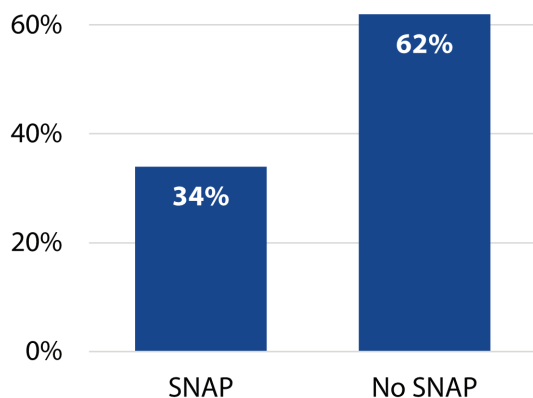
**Key Findings 2. SNAP Participation and Utilization of Key Government Programs**

The charitable food system and SNAP are inextricably linked, as a 41% drop in SNAP benefits in the first half of 2023 corresponded directly with a 39% increase in visits to food pantries in the county.

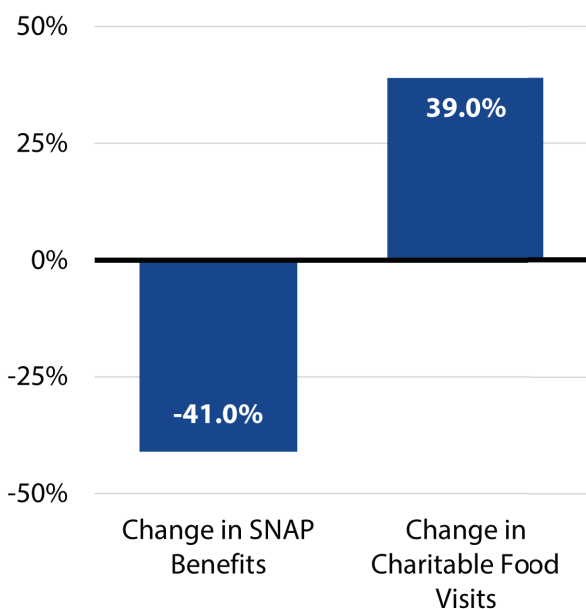
SNAP participation cuts very low food security rates by nearly half (45%) among food pantry visitors in Lebanon County when holding incomes below the poverty level and pantry visit frequency constant.

**SNAP participation is just 45% among food pantry visitor households and is middling across the entire county, leaving significant room for improvement.**

**Very Low Food Security for Households below the Federal Poverty Level**



**Percent Change in SNAP Benefits and Charitable Food Visits, Feb - Jun 2023**



Increased outreach to drive additional SNAP participation will likely reduce very low food security further among both food pantry visitors and food insecure households who do not utilize the charitable food system.

County stakeholders should establish strong relationships with food pantries, healthcare organizations, the county assistance office, and other social services providers to provide clear directions and SNAP application assistance. There is a reported need to make SNAP eligibility requirements less confusing and daunting as well as to ease application burdens.

Other key government nutrition programs such as WIC and school breakfast and lunch programs are also underutilized. Testing and implementing innovative methods to expand outreach and participation would have a significant impact on very low food security across the county, especially among children, who are the most likely to experience food insecurity in Lebanon County.



**Key Findings 3. Household income and systemic economic factors such as financial exclusion, housing burdens, low wages, and transportation impact very low food security significantly.**

**Income is one of the most important factors that impact a pantry visitor's household food security status, but 40% of those households who work full time earn less than the federal poverty level.** Irregular and inconsistent hours have a major impact on total monthly earnings and corresponding food security status, as households who report "no weeks not working" in the last year have poverty rates close to half of households with less reliable work arrangements. Stakeholders should advocate for family-sustaining wages and for increased consistency in working schedules.

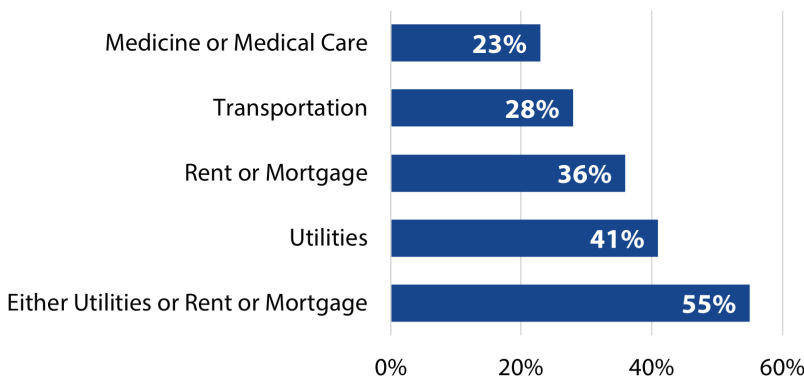
**Over half of pantry visitor households report choosing between food and utilities or rent/mortgage,** which were the most highly reported economic trade-offs. A total of 8% of households have been forced to move in the last year, and 20% are worried about being forced to move in the next year. The charitable food system should provide foods suitable to marginally housed individuals, as well as continue and expand utility and housing assistance programs where possible.

**Over half of pantry visitors do not drive to their food pantry, and a fifth of households report difficulty getting to a pantry due to transportation issues.** These neighbors likely also face compounding issues related to transportation in other areas of their lives. Pantries could work to address transportation barriers by experimenting with delivery models or opening mobile distributions.

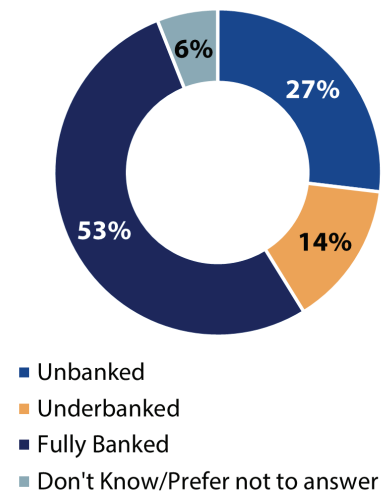
**Nearly a quarter of pantry visitor households do not have a high school diploma.** Survey results indicate that neighbors are interested in continuing educational opportunities; pantries should consider partnering with community organizations that offer resources like GED courses or career development training.

**More than 40% of pantry visitor households are unbanked (27%) or underbanked (14%),** which reduces the economic mobility pathways available to food insecure households in Lebanon County. Food pantries have an opportunity to partner with financial institutions to increase access to checking and savings accounts, especially around "bankable" moments such as tax time.

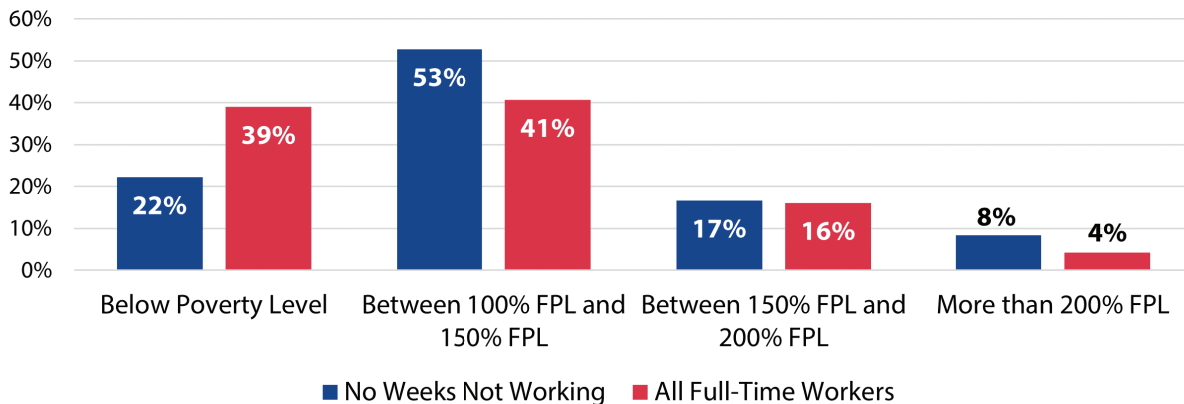
**Reported Economic Tradeoffs with Food**



**Banking Access among Pantry Visitor Households**



**Full-Time Workers by Ratio of Income to Poverty Level**







## METHODS

This final report represents the culmination of a multi-faceted approach to data collection and analysis, with an emphasis on listening to Lebanon County residents who visit food pantries and gaining an understanding of their experiences. The report combines both quantitative and qualitative methods to triangulate findings and support recommendations. Contributions included in this report are deidentified to the extent possible to maintain the privacy of participants. Each method of data collection is described in turn below.

### SECONDARY ANALYSIS

In the first phase of the project, the secondary analysis utilized data from a variety of different sources including the American Community Survey 2016-2020 5-year data, 2020 Census Data, USDA retailer and food desert data, SNAP participation data from the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, WIC participation data from the Pennsylvania Department of Health, United Way ALICE 2023 data, child congregate meal program site and participation data from the Pennsylvania Department of Education and USDA, and Feeding America Map the Meal Gap 2022 data with 2020 food insecurity estimates. A detailed explanation of the SNAP priority outreach methodology, ArcGIS network analyses for drive and walk times, and methodology used to identify target schools for child nutrition outreach is provided in the technical appendix.

### NEIGHBOR SURVEYS

In March and April 2023, CPFBR researchers conducted surveys at four geographically and demographically representative food pantries across Lebanon County, with a final pantry surveyed in August 2023. A total of 436 surveys were completed across the five total pantry locations. Food pantry visitors could take the survey at the pantry on a CPFBR-provided device, have the survey read to them by a CPFBR researcher, or scan a QR code on a postcard that enabled them to complete the survey on their own device at their convenience. Surveys were available in both English and Spanish and were designed to take 10 minutes on average. \$10 gift cards were provided to each participant. Survey results were cleaned for potential duplicate entries and the sample size needed to achieve a 90% confidence interval and 10% margin of error was achieved and exceeded at all pantry locations.

### NEIGHBOR INTERVIEWS

Interview subjects were randomly selected from a pool of individuals who participated in pantry visitor surveys. All individuals surveyed were given the option to provide a phone number for follow-up contact in the form of a 15- to 20-minute phone or Zoom interview in English or Spanish.



CPFBR researchers developed a flexible interview guide and conducted all 10 interviews. The interviews asked about visiting a food pantry from the perspective of pantry users. The open-ended nature of the interview questions allowed pantry visitors to speak about the most relevant or pressing matters related to their own experiences.

### NEIGHBOR FOCUS GROUPS

Four in-person focus groups were held across Lebanon County. A total of 20 pantry visitors participated across the four focus group locations. Focus groups brought neighbors together to discuss their use of the pantry, gain additional perspective on the needs of pantry visitors, and represent their concerns and ideas about the role of pantries in their communities. PR Works, Inc. was contracted by CPFBR to recruit, facilitate, and record the meetings, and collaborated with the Policy Research team to develop the discussion guide. All participants were compensated for their participation.

### NON-FOOD PANTRY NEIGHBOR SURVEYS

Non-food pantry surveys were conducted at non-food pantry locations to determine why some individuals who may be food insecure do not currently utilize a food pantry. The surveys were anonymous and included four questions, including two food security screening questions used in healthcare settings. Individuals were asked if they attend a food pantry; those who responded 'No' or 'I used to' were asked to explain their answers, both from a list of potential options and a free response blank. The non-food pantry survey results reflect responses from 268 total participants at four locations.

### PARTNER SURVEYS

The CPFBR Policy Research team distributed pantry surveys to CPFBR agency partners who operate pantries that do not limit participation by age or military status across Lebanon County. The surveys asked questions regarding distribution type and frequency, operating hours, policies for food pantry visitors, other services offered, and pantry capacity.

### PARTNER INTERVIEWS

CPFBR Researchers conducted one-on-one partner interviews with five CPFBR agency partners in Lebanon to discuss strengths and challenges at the pantry level. Discussion topics include pantry and community strengths, sourcing and logistics, challenges related to distribution, and opportunities for advocacy.

### PARTNER DATA SHARING AND SERVICE INSIGHTS

To develop the census tract level food pantry access gap map, this report utilized data from Service Insights on MealConnect, an electronic neighbor intake tool developed by Feeding America, from the three participating pantries in Lebanon County. In addition, one large pantry with independent electronic tracking systems shared anonymized ZIP Code level data. This was not incorporated into the official census tract level analysis, but it helped to generally determine that utilization gaps around the Myerstown area are not highly significant. Altogether, 60% of the CPFBR partner food pantries in Lebanon County are included in the data. These partners are among the largest pantries in the county and comprise a sizable majority of the food pantries who report collecting electronic data. Additional information about the methodology used in the gap analysis is in the technical appendix.



**436 Household-Level Surveys across 5 Pantries**



**Food Pantry and Service Provider Interviews**



**4 Neighbor Focus Groups**



**Food Pantry Coordinator Surveys**



**Extended One-on-one Neighbor Interviews**



**4 Pantries with Census Tract Level Anonymized Data Sharing**



**Secondary Data Collection and Interim Report Analyzing Quantitative Data from many sources**

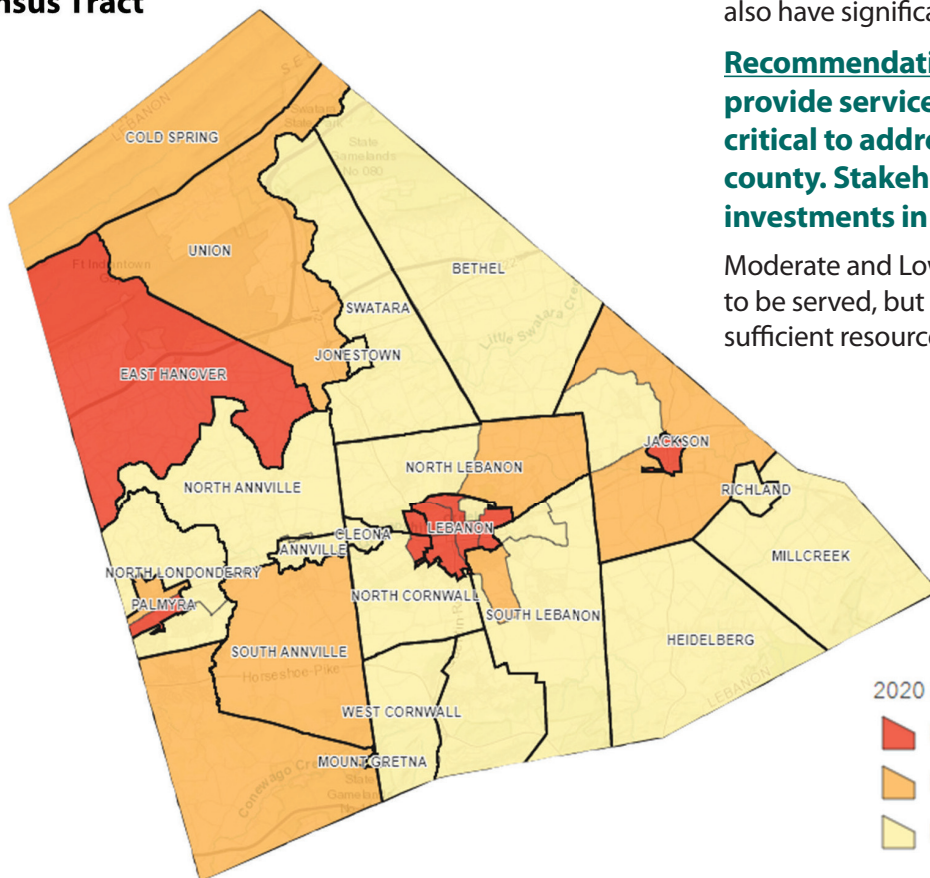




## Food Insecurity Main Findings and Recommendations

**Section 1 Finding 1: Lebanon County has a food insecurity rate of just under 10%. This is about one percentage point less than Pennsylvania overall, but the countywide rate masks significant inequities within the county, as areas of High Food Insecurity (greater than 10%) are primarily concentrated in Lebanon City and West Lebanon as well as in Palmyra, East Hanover, and Myerstown.**

### Food Insecurity Rate by Census Tract



These census tracts have just 26% of the total Lebanon County population but 53% of all food insecure individuals.

Lebanon City has a high concentration of food insecurity, as four of six neighborhoods have food insecurity rates higher than 16% and the northwest portion of the city has food insecurity rates over 20%. Lebanon City has 18% of the county population but 39% of food insecure individuals.

Notably, South Londonderry Township has Moderate Food Insecurity rates but is home to the most food insecure individuals outside of Palmyra and Lebanon City. Parts of Jonestown, West Lebanon, Myerstown, and North Lebanon also have significant numbers of food insecure individuals.

**Recommendation: Sustained, targeted work to provide services in High Food Insecurity areas is critical to addressing the high level of need in the county. Stakeholders should continue and increase investments in areas of High Food Insecurity.**

Moderate and Lower Food Insecurity areas should continue to be served, but ensuring High Food Insecurity areas have sufficient resources will make the biggest impact.

#### 2020 Food Insecurity Rate

- High Food Insecurity (10% or Greater)
- Moderate Food Insecurity (7% to 9%)
- Lower Food Insecurity (6% or Less)

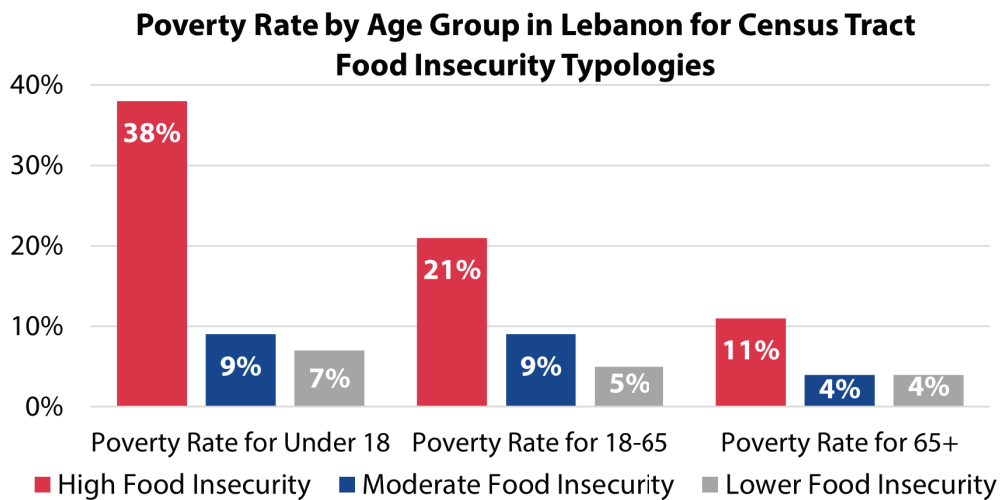


**Section 1 Finding 2: Food insecurity among children is 71% higher than adults; this differential is significantly greater in Lebanon County than most other counties in Pennsylvania. Child food insecurity and child poverty are the most important differentiators between High Food Insecurity areas and other areas in the county.**

While children in all areas of Lebanon County have higher food insecurity and poverty rates than working-age adults and seniors, the issue is especially acute in Lebanon City and West Lebanon. These areas have just 23% of the county’s children, but 51% of children in poverty. Several High Food Insecurity census tracts in Lebanon City have child poverty rates over 40%.

**Recommendation: It is important to invest in programs that support households with children in Lebanon County overall and particularly in Lebanon City. Addressing child poverty and child food insecurity in Lebanon City would have outsized impacts on food insecurity overall, both in the near and long-term.**

Programs that target children should include the whole family where possible, because while children are the most likely to be food insecure, parents are the most likely to go hungry.

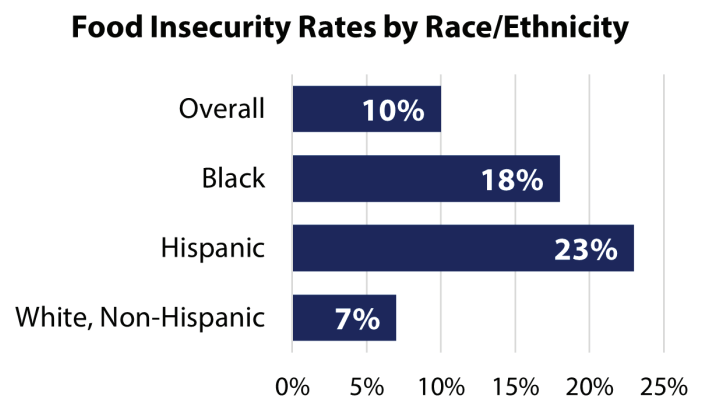


**Section 1 Finding 3: Food insecurity among Hispanic individuals is 23%, more than three times the rate of white, non-Hispanic individuals in Lebanon County at just 7%.**

Two of the three majority-Hispanic census tracts in Lebanon County lie in the northwestern portion of Lebanon City and have the highest food insecurity rates in the county, with food insecurity rates over 20%. A portion of the difference in food insecurity rates by ethnicity is likely attributable to population effects because Lebanon County has a high child food insecurity rate, and 23% of Lebanon County residents under 18 are Hispanic, compared to just 12% of Lebanon County adults.

Pantries in Lebanon City should ensure they have Spanish-speaking staff or volunteers on a consistent basis and partnerships with Hispanic and Latino churches and community organizations could be pivotal. Focusing on reducing child food insecurity could also reduce disparities by ethnicity because the demographic distribution of race/ethnicity is significantly different between children and adults in Lebanon County.

**Recommendation: Given the large differential in food insecurity rates by ethnicity in Lebanon County, culturally relevant and competent services catered to Hispanic households are critical to the charitable food system.**







**Section 1 Finding 4:** The expanded child tax credit caused child food insecurity rates to drop 28% from 14.4% in 2020 to 10.4% in 2021, their lowest level on record in Lebanon County, demonstrating the impact of strategically targeted government investments.

**Recommendation:** Stakeholders should continue to advocate for the reinstatement of the expanded child tax credit with policymakers as this would have the largest impact on child food insecurity of any potential program or government investment.

Pantries and other interested stakeholders should take lessons from the simplicity of the program design of the expanded child tax credit and the dignity and autonomy the design promoted. In the charitable food context, this could mean switching from pre-packed distributions to choice models, providing gift cards rather than purchasing foods at retail prices, or other innovations that allow neighbors the freedom to choose the products and services that best meet their needs.



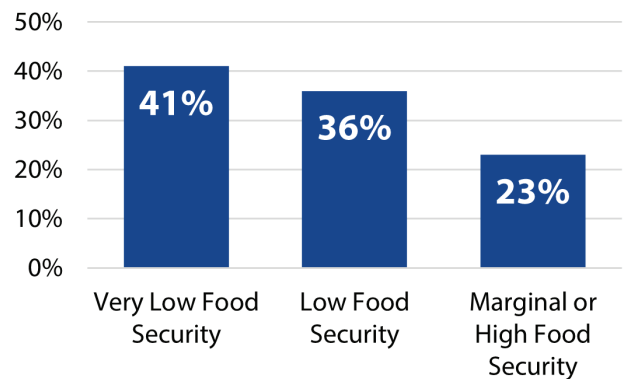
**Section 1 Finding 5:** More than 40% of food pantry visitors in Lebanon County experience very low food security, which is characterized by the consistent reduction of quantity of food intake, in addition to a reduction of the quality of food intake.

Over half of food pantry visitors (54%) report having cut or skipped meals because there was not enough money for food at some point in the last year, with 19% of food pantry visitors reporting that they had to do so almost every month in the last year.

**Recommendation:** The charitable food system should use the goal of reducing very low food security as its main measure of success and work to implement and promote policies and programs that make progress to this goal.

These strategies should be holistic and include improving the neighbor experience, providing desired foods, reducing other identified barriers to charitable food access, and working to increase utilization of government programs.

**Household Food Security Status among Food Pantry Visitors**



**Section 1 Finding 6:** Very low food insecurity among working-age food pantry visitor households is more than double the very low food security rate among senior households who visit food pantries.

Working-age households with children face the highest rates of very low food security at 49% compared to 42% of working-age households without children. Just 23% of senior households experience very low food security. These differences are largely driven by the more consistent, though still low, incomes of senior households and government and non-profit programs targeted specifically towards seniors.

**Recommendation:** The charitable food system and other stakeholders should continue to invest in senior-specific programs because they are effective at reducing very low food security and should expand programming and offerings to working-age households where possible.





## Charitable Food Access Main Findings and Recommendations

**Section 2 Finding 1: The charitable food system in Lebanon County has significant strengths in key areas, such as the availability of choice pantry offerings, varied hours of operation, a relatively high frequency of allowable visits, and consistent policies to serve households over 185% of the federal poverty level.**

A total of 98% of Lebanon County residents have access to a choice pantry and an evening pantry distribution within a 15-minute drive. For households who earn more than 185% of the federal poverty level, but still may need assistance from the charitable food system, there are consistent policies across the county that ensure these households are still served with donated food.

**Recommendation: These policy strengths provide a good basis for improving the neighbor experience in the charitable food system, and findings around the impact of some of these policies can be informative for other counties and at a state level.**

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**Section 2 Finding 2: Neighbors who visit food pantries more are much less likely to experience very low food security, holding income categories and SNAP participation constant.**

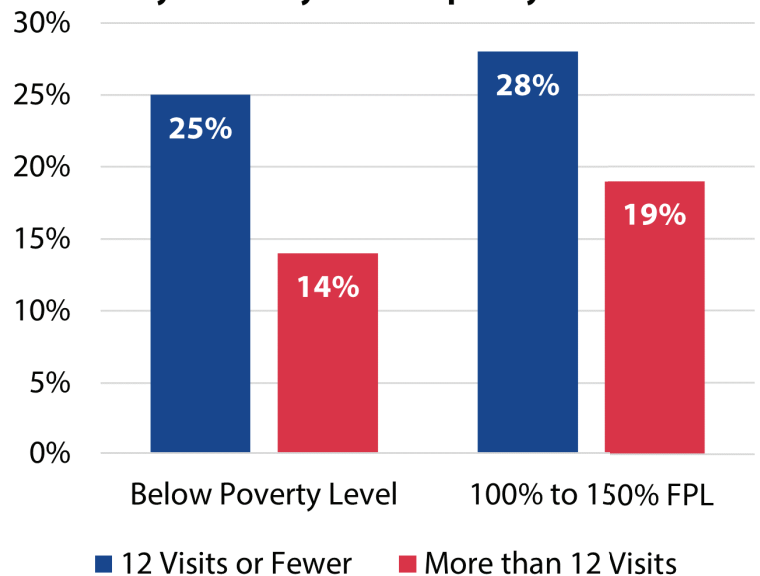
Allowing people to visit pantries more than once per month has a major impact on experiences of very low food security, including the frequency with which people report skipping meals or going hungry because there is not enough money for food.

Households with incomes below the poverty level who have visited a food pantry more than 12 times in the last year report skipping meals at a 44% lower rate than households who visited 12 times or fewer in the last year.

**Recommendation: This data from Lebanon County represents some of the first evidence quantifying the charitable food system's impact on very low food security.**

It demonstrates that, where capacity allows, pantries should allow visitors to come more than once per month. This policy is important in Lebanon County because service territories throughout the county mean many people have access to just one pantry option.

**Food Pantry Visitors Skipping Meals Almost Every Month by Visit Frequency and Income**





**Section 2 Finding 3:** There are relatively few food pantries available per food insecure person. This issue is most acute for census tracts in Lebanon City, and southwestern Lebanon County including Palmyra and South Londonderry Township; these areas have the most food insecure people per food pantry within a 15-minute drive.

Lebanon City has more than 4,300 food insecure individuals, and each of these individuals has access to just one pantry within a 15-minute walk time. A total of 1,750 food insecure individuals in the western half of the city have access to just two pantries within a 15-minute drive time.

**Recommendation:** The relatively low number of pantries available means that stakeholders should invest further in existing pantries and consider other ways to increase access, such as additional pantry locations or mobile or pop-up distributions. All existing pantries need to be operating at a high level to meet the current level of need in the county.

Food distribution locations should consider dropping any existing restrictions. For example, senior-only distributions at housing authorities should allow people of all ages to access food if possible. Pooling more informal pop-up efforts in supporting existing pantries or a consistent additional pantry is another opportunity to increase access.

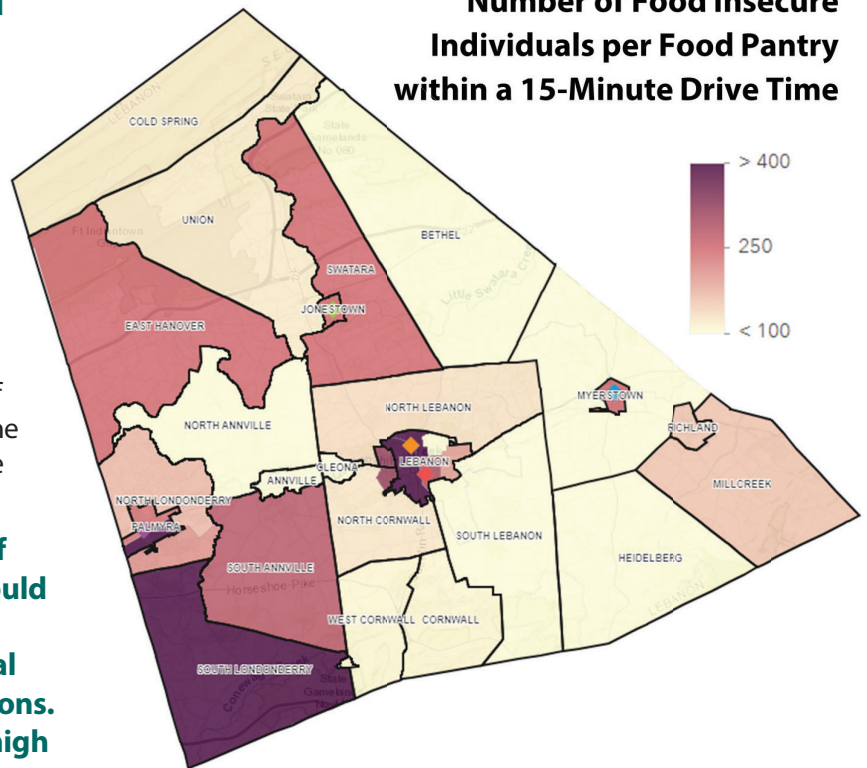
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**Section 2 Finding 4:** Lack of transportation is a significant barrier to pantry utilization in Lebanon County, with 15% of households who visit food pantries countywide and 21% in Lebanon City reporting lack of easy access to a car or public transport as a barrier to get to the food pantry.

In addition, 15% of food insecure individuals surveyed at non-pantry locations reported transportation as a major barrier to utilizing the charitable food system. A quarter (24%) of survey respondents who walk to pantries reported having difficulty carrying food home, something that 11% of all food pantry visitors report trouble with as well.

**Recommendation:** If capacity allows, pantries could work to increase the availability of transportation services for neighbors or make deliveries to people who struggle with transportation to and from the pantry.

**Number of Food Insecure Individuals per Food Pantry within a 15-Minute Drive Time**



Potential opportunities could include offering more formalized on-call volunteer transportation services, expanding delivery activities to senior and non-senior households, and coordinating pantry opening times with local bus routes. Pantries should work to provide bags of food over boxes to make it easier for people who walk to transport food home.

**Section 2 Finding 5:** An estimation of food pantry utilization gaps at the census tract level reveals that West Lebanon, north-central Lebanon City, South Londonderry Township, and southern Palmyra have the largest number of food insecure individuals not currently utilizing the charitable food system.

In addition, not all pantries were included in the analysis, so some additional service gaps may exist around the Myerstown area, but the maps currently are less precise in the southeast corner of the county.

**Recommendation:** Pantries should conduct outreach to identified areas near their sites and test mobile or pop-up distributions where the largest gaps exist.

This census tract level access map represents one of the first estimates of lived food pantry utilization gaps at the census tract level, but it does not contain all data due to data sharing and electronic tracking limitations. Additional pantries should work to adopt electronic tracking tools, such as Service Insights on MealConnect, both to simplify the neighbor intake process and improve data sharing. This would allow the accuracy of these utilization maps to improve over time and enable charitable food system stakeholders to make major investment decisions based on a holistic picture of pantry service and utilization at sub-county levels.



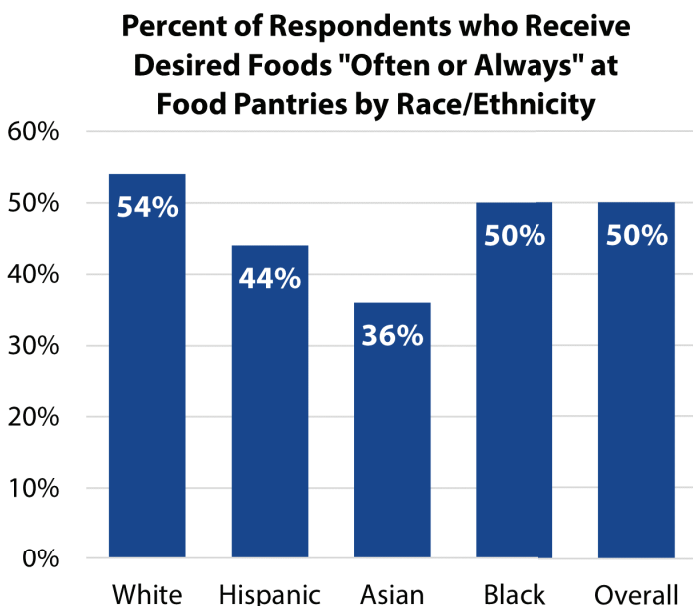
**Section 2 Finding 6: Asian and Hispanic households are much less likely to report receiving foods they “often or always” desire at food pantries than are white, non-Hispanic food pantry visitors. Lebanon County is experiencing rapid demographic change across all areas of the county, so it is important for pantries to adapt their services accordingly.**

There are many similarities in the top five foods that people request by reported ancestry, but rice is a major differentiator between the preferences of Dominican, Puerto Rican, and South Asian neighbors compared to the overall population. The overall top five foods that people report wanting but not always finding are meat, produce, milk, eggs, and rice, with meat and fresh produce at the top of the overall list.

Every census tract saw an increase in the Hispanic population between 2010 and 2020, especially in the central part of Lebanon County. Additionally, places such as Palmyra are experiencing demographic change not yet reflected in Census Bureau data, with a large Nepali population visiting the food pantry.

**Recommendation: Food pantries should be cognizant that the neighbors they serve are diverse and have diverse preferences. Pantries should solicit regular feedback from neighbor visitors about specific food preferences and work in coordination with retail donations, farmers, and the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank to procure requested foods more regularly.**

Focused research and inquiry into neighbor food preferences should be conducted to increase understanding of what foods are most desired but least available. In the meantime, at a minimum, rice should always be available as a staple at food pantries, as a need for rice was very clearly expressed in neighbor surveys.



**Section 2 Finding 7: Many neighbors have had negative experiences at food pantries and have pointed to poor treatment from volunteers and staff, long lines, and food that runs out before the end of a distribution or is dramatically different from the beginning to the end of a distribution as major causes of these bad experiences.**

Neighbors report that the way they are treated while visiting a food pantry directly impacts their willingness to utilize the charitable food system in the future. This means that every single interaction with a neighbor matters and all pantries need to be operating at high capacity to meet the high levels of need.

**Recommendation: The neighbor experience is not tangential to the charitable food system. It is an integral component; as such, working to improve the neighbor experience in Lebanon County across a range of dimensions in the short-term should be a priority.**

There has already been substantial progress made by some agencies in adjusting policies and distribution methods to improve the charitable food system experience in Lebanon County, but further improvements around the neighbor experience before, during, and after food is received are crucial to increasing trust in the charitable food system. Even after changes are implemented, trust will take time to build, and prioritizing the neighbor experience must be a sustained effort.

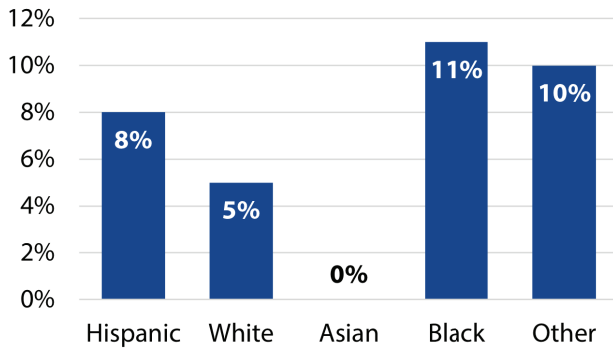


**Section 2 Finding 8: The main driver of poor neighbor experiences at food pantries across the county is negative interactions with pantry staff and volunteers. Food pantry visitors could recount specific instances of poor treatment in detail. These instances cause trauma and increased stigma around visiting pantries, which dissuade neighbors from utilizing the charitable food system.**

It is important to note that the need for charitable food assistance is particularly severe relative to the number of food pantries in Lebanon County, and that many neighbors persist in visiting food pantries despite poor treatment because they simply need the food. Neighbors report being over-policed by volunteers, being shamed or embarrassed in front of their kids and peers, and feeling judgment from specific volunteers about their socioeconomic status and taking efforts to avoid those volunteers.



**Percent of Respondents Feeling Judged at Food Pantries by Race/Ethnicity**



Pantry experiences also vary significantly by race/ethnicity, with Black and Hispanic households reporting feeling judged at rates double those of white pantry visitors (11% and 8%, compared to 5%), with significant differentials by pantry location as well.

**Recommendation: The charitable food system should prioritize the development and implementation of trainings for pantry workers that can help them provide thoughtful, compassionate services and facilitate positive interactions with neighbors as an immediate next step to improving the pantry experience.**

Expectations around how staff and volunteers will treat and interact with neighbors should be outlined before work begins at pantries, and neighbor-facing pantry workers should be trained in trauma-informed care practices so that they are equipped to treat all visitors with respect and dignity. Key organizations should collaborate to develop tailored materials and leverage existing trainings in the charitable food space for this purpose. Culture change takes time, as has been articulated by many pantry leaders across the county, so training practices and materials should evolve as time goes on.

Pantry coordinators should feel empowered to assess the suitability of volunteers for neighbor-facing roles within food pantries and to reassign volunteers as appropriate. It is possible that some volunteers will welcome a change in roles to be non-neighbor facing, as negative interactions can be stressful for both parties.



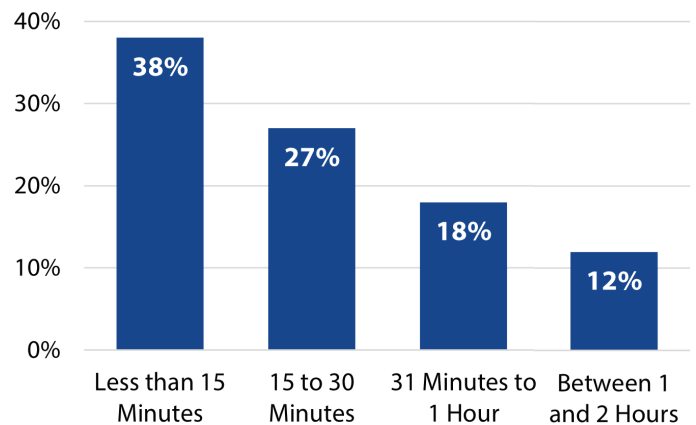
**Section 2 Finding 9: Extended wait times and long lines to receive food are a major problem across the Lebanon County charitable food system and affect visitors at different pantry locations. The negative neighbor experience related to waiting in long lines is often exacerbated by having to stand outdoors. Poor weather conditions can be dangerous for pantry visitors and may dissuade people from utilizing a food pantry.**

Neighbors report that they line up for food in large part because food quality and quantity changes significantly from the start to the end of distributions at some pantries. Many neighbors even arrived several hours beforehand to ensure they could access the full variety of food available at the beginning of the distribution.

Around 30% of pantry visitors report waiting longer than 30 minutes to receive food, while at two pantry locations, over a third report waiting longer than an hour for food.

The neighbor experience begins when a person arrives at a pantry location, so the waiting experience should be taken as seriously as the quality of food offerings. Long lines and differential food quality and quantity at different points in a pantry distribution can exacerbate feelings of scarcity and create a more unwelcoming environment where conflict is more likely to occur, both between neighbors and with neighbors and pantry workers.

**Number of Minutes to Receive Food Services after Arriving at the Pantry**



**Recommendation: Pantries should experiment with several ways to shorten lines and wait times for pantry visitors and should allow waiting pantry visitors to wait inside, especially during days with poor weather conditions. One of the most impactful options to reduce wait times and long lines is to ensure that food quality and quantity is the same from the start of a distribution to the end of a distribution.**

Once pantry offerings are consistent across the food distribution, pantries should advertise that fact, but must recognize that it will take time and experience to increase trust on this front, especially if there have been significant differences in the past.

Appointments could be a useful tool for reducing wait times and long lines. While the flexibility of not requiring a pantry appointment in all cases is important, particularly for people without access to reliable transportation, pantries in other counties have utilized appointments as a means of ensuring that people can arrive and leave within a more condensed time frame.



For pantries operating from buildings with multipurpose spaces available, a shift to creating indoor space as a waiting area will provide protection from the elements. This is an immediate opportunity to demonstrate care and concern for neighbors and improve the neighbor experience.



**Section 2 Finding 10: Pantry constraints related to funding, sourcing, and volunteer capacity limit partners’ ability to carry out services to their full potential.**

These constraints lead partners to make difficult decisions regarding the quantity and quality of foods they order and can provide. Limited volunteer capacity can disrupt the flow of services during distribution, put strain on existing volunteers, and restrict pick-up opportunities for retail donations.

**Recommendation: The charitable food system should further invest in the capacity of pantries to guarantee that all organizations are consistently meeting the community’s needs. Pantries should also connect with nearby churches and community organizations to recruit volunteers.**

Some neighbors have shown interest in volunteering at the pantries they visit. Pantries should consider having neighbors volunteer, but only if they express interest is unprompted by pantry staff.

**Section 2 Finding 11: The hours of operation of food pantries in Lebanon County are generally well-distributed and accessible, with 98% of the population having access to an evening distribution and 65% with access to a weekend distribution.**

One in 10 pantry visitors in Lebanon City reports that only weekends work the best for them, and among food insecure non-food pantry survey respondents, 11% reported that existing hours of operation were a barrier to accessing food pantries.

**Recommendation: There is an opportunity to increase weekend access to pantries in Lebanon County, and especially in Lebanon City, which has no pantries with weekend hours.**

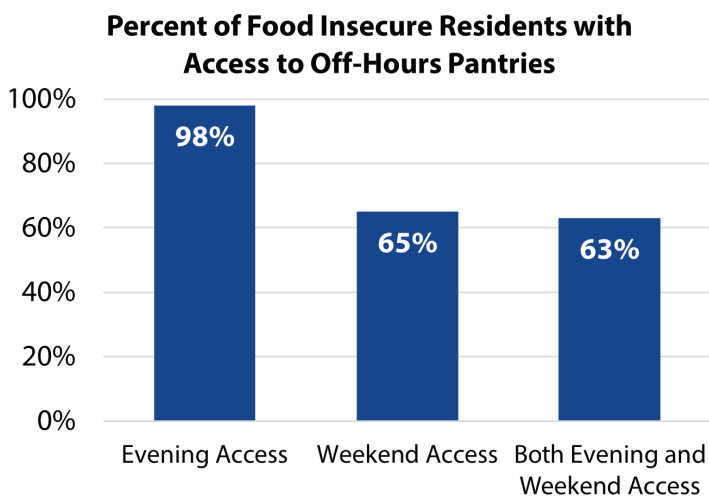
Stakeholders in Lebanon City should evaluate existing weekend resources, even if they are informal, to further consider whether more could be done to increase weekend food access. No food pantry can be everything for everyone, but strategies such as pop-up distributions or expanding hours in the city on weekends could increase access for people who work during the week or have other evening obligations that make it difficult to visit food pantries in non-weekend hours.

**Section 2 Finding 12: The most important finding from short surveys conducted at non-food pantry locations across Lebanon County is that 33% of food insecure individuals who do not visit a food pantry currently report that they do not know where to find a food pantry.**

This represents a significant opportunity to increase awareness of food pantry offerings to food insecure Lebanon County residents not utilizing the charitable food system.

**Recommendation: Food pantries and other stakeholders should work to advertise food pantry offerings and their criteria at key locations across Lebanon County.**

This could include public libraries, schools, social service providers, healthcare service locations, and in government offices, among other potential locations.



**1/3** of food insecure individuals at non-food pantry sites, such as libraries, who do not currently visit a food pantry, report that they do not know where to find a food pantry.





## Recommendations on the Utilization of Government Programs

### **Section 3 Finding 1: Just 45% of food pantry visitors participate in SNAP, and Lebanon County generally underperforms in SNAP participation compared to the rest of the state, with large geographic participation gaps in North Lebanon Township, northwest Lebanon City, Myerstown, and the Palmyra area.**

SNAP is by far the largest food security social safety net program in the United States, providing nine meals for every meal provided by the charitable food system, making it exceedingly important to ensure that Lebanon County and its residents do not leave these critical federal funds unused.

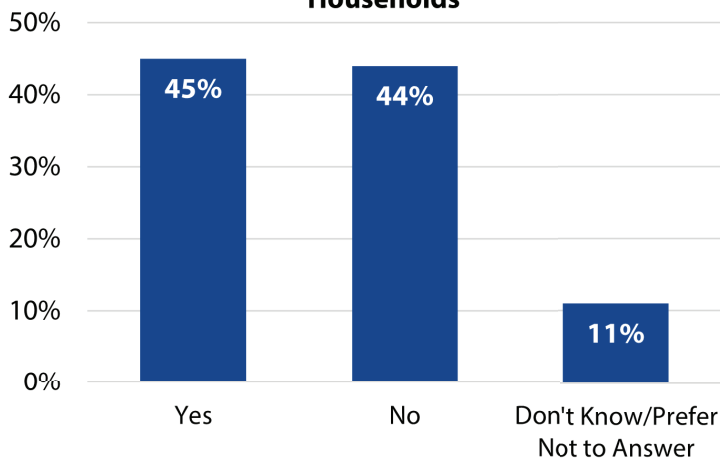
Approximately 85% to 95% of food pantry visitors may be eligible for SNAP based on their reported monthly incomes, leaving significant room for improvement in utilization rates at the food pantry level.

**Recommendation: County stakeholders should establish strong relationships between healthcare organizations, the county assistance office, other community social service providers, and the public to provide clear directions and robust assistance regarding SNAP eligibility and application processes.**

Food pantries can be a well-targeted location for specific SNAP outreach efforts given the relatively low participation rates and likely high eligibility. Food pantries should partner with outside entities to conduct this SNAP outreach, as some food pantry visitors expressed that in the past, they have been told they should not be visiting the pantry if they receive SNAP. Therefore, another voice and organization may be best suited to conduct these outreach activities onsite. Pantries should work to make clear that participating in SNAP will in no way impact people's eligibility for receiving pantry services.

SNAP utilization rates have improved in the county in the last year, up 3.6% in 2023 alone, for a total of a near record 13.0% of the Lebanon County population (18,650 individuals). This rise in SNAP participation occurred despite a fall in average SNAP benefits, which is an encouraging sign for future SNAP outreach efforts. Lebanon County stakeholders should continue to build on this recent improvement to advance SNAP participation rates even further.

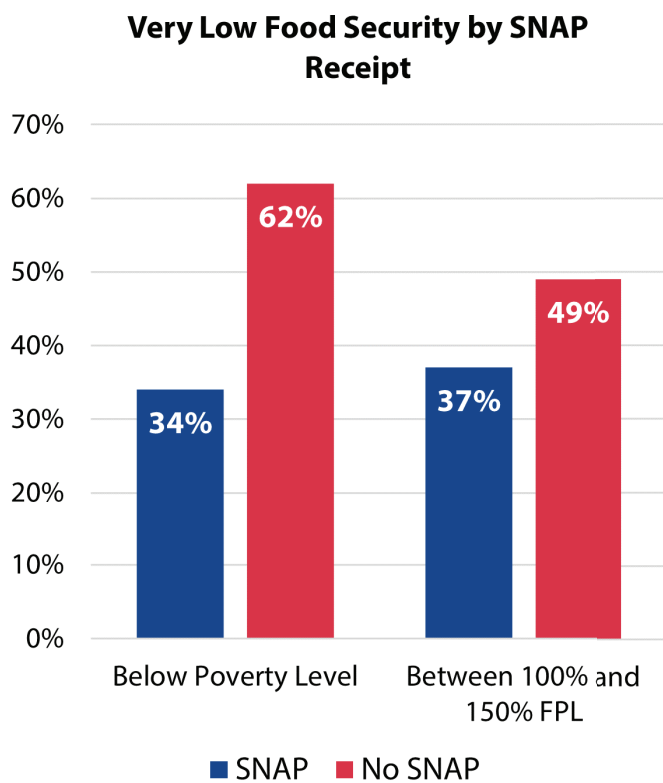
**SNAP Participation among Pantry Visitor Households**





**Section 3 Finding 2: Participation in SNAP reduces experiences of very low food security among food pantry visitors in Lebanon County substantially. Very low food security rates are 45% lower for pantry visitors with incomes below the poverty level who participate in SNAP than for pantry visitors below the poverty level who do not participate in SNAP (34% compared to 62%).**

SNAP has been proven to improve food security at a national level, but this data shows that it also has a major impact on very low food security status among the pantry visitor population when holding both income and frequency of food pantry visits constant. This localized data indicates that increasing SNAP participation should be a key component of efforts to reduce very low food security among pantry visitors in particular.



SNAP participation and the frequency of pantry utilization have a compounding impact on very low food security status, as pantry visitors with incomes below the poverty level who do not receive SNAP and who visited a food pantry 12 times or fewer during the last year have the highest very low food security rates. Neighbors meeting these criteria are 15 percentage points more likely to report going hungry because there was not enough money for food than any other group that participates in SNAP or who visited pantries more than 12 times in the last year. This further demonstrates the significant connection between SNAP and pantry utilization in impacting food security status.

**Recommendation: Prioritizing promotion of SNAP in Lebanon County at the non-profit and governmental level will have a significant impact on reducing very low food security in the county, especially among people who visit food pantries.**



**Section 3 Finding 3: The main reasons individuals report not applying for or participating in SNAP are that they do not think they are eligible, it is too hard to apply, or personal reasons. Over half of food pantry visitors who are not participating in SNAP have never applied for it.**

This equates to one-fifth of pantry visitors (22%) who have never applied for SNAP. Another fifth of food pantry visitors (20%) are not currently participating but have reported having applied or participated before. The main other reasons people report not applying for SNAP is that they do not need it, they did not know how, or they were immigrants without citizenship.

**Recommendation: Community institutions and food pantries should collaborate to increase availability of SNAP eligibility criteria and address potential misconceptions about SNAP.**

The large proportion of likely-eligible food pantry visitors (22% of all pantry visitors) who have never applied for SNAP before represents a significant opportunity to increase participation in the county.

Neighbors have legitimate concerns about how participating in SNAP may impact them, so these need to be addressed thoroughly in both written materials and in conversations with trusted community partners. Many statements that neighbors made about SNAP reflected information that was incomplete or inaccurate about the application and benefits process, indicating significant opportunity for trusted entities in the county, such as healthcare organizations, to clear up confusion regarding SNAP eligibility.

**There is significant opportunity for trusted entities to clear up confusion regarding SNAP eligibility.**

**Section 3 Finding 4: Average SNAP benefits in Lebanon County fell by 41% (\$108 per person per month) between February and June 2023 due to the end of a COVID-19 pandemic SNAP program flexibility known as SNAP Emergency Allotments. This dramatic drop in average SNAP benefits corresponded with a similarly large 39% increase in food pantry visits during the same period.**

Food pantries in Lebanon County report difficulty keeping up with the increase in demand for charitable food services since the end of the SNAP Emergency Allotments. The drop in SNAP benefits equates to a \$1.9 million per month loss in benefits in Lebanon County that is difficult for the charitable food system alone to replace. Lebanon County experienced a \$15 greater loss per person per month in SNAP benefits than the statewide average (\$108 vs \$93).

**Recommendation: State, federal, and local policymakers, as well as the public, should work to increase support to the charitable food system. In the long term, policymakers should also invest further in SNAP as it has been proven to combat food insecurity at scale.**

SNAP and the charitable food system are intricately connected, as people work to put together sufficient resources to make ends meet on any given month. The loss in SNAP benefits means that people in Lebanon County will face increasingly difficult choices between food and other necessities such as utilities, rent/mortgage, and medical care.



**Section 3 Finding 5: WIC participation is down 10% since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, with most of the losses concentrated in ZIP Code 17046, particularly in the northern part of Lebanon City.**

Stakeholders in Lebanon County have been innovative in addressing the issue with targeted outreach and a mobile WIC clinic. These efforts have resulted in some significant recent gains in WIC participation across the county, but participation still has not yet fully recovered to pre-pandemic levels.

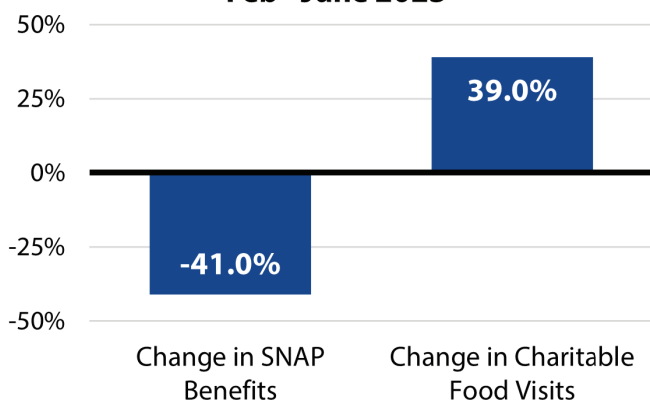
ZIP Codes 17046 and 17042 have seen the largest drops in WIC participation, with a drop of more than 250 and 150 participants between May 2020 and May 2023, respectively. Census tract level analysis reveals that the western and northern neighborhoods in Lebanon City have the most WIC eligible children under six.

**Recommendation: Geographically targeted WIC outreach in northern Lebanon City could be an effective way to increase WIC participation. Survey results further indicate that food pantries would be valuable places to do outreach.**

Unfortunately, administrative burdens imposed at the state level, such as recharging benefits in person every three months, makes WIC a more difficult program to use. Program administrators and stakeholders who conduct WIC outreach should acknowledge these significant difficulties upfront in the outreach process, while also providing information about the very real benefits of the program for young children.

WIC participation rates among food pantry visitor households with children under six are 46% on average, with a median of 50% across pantry sites.

**Percent Change in SNAP Benefits and Charitable Food Visits, Feb - June 2023**





Interested stakeholders should work on state-level advocacy to help reduce these administrative burdens and bring them in line with other states in the near-term. Advocates should talk to federal legislators about the importance of making WIC more accessible to its well-targeted demographic.



**Section 3 Finding 6: School meal participation is low across all school levels in the Palmyra area and in high-poverty secondary schools elsewhere in Lebanon County. Breakfast participation is significantly lower than lunch participation across Lebanon County.**

The universal free school breakfast program that began in October 2022 had a huge impact – breakfast participation increased 43% countywide following the policy change, while lunch participation remained flat, but there is still significant room for improvement.

**Recommendation: Schools should be encouraged to implement strategies to increase participation in school meals, especially if they are high-poverty target schools. There should be a special emphasis in all schools on increasing participation in breakfast in light of the program’s recent shift to universal eligibility, which both makes the program easier for children to utilize and can increase revenue to school food service authorities thanks to increased reimbursements.<sup>24</sup>**

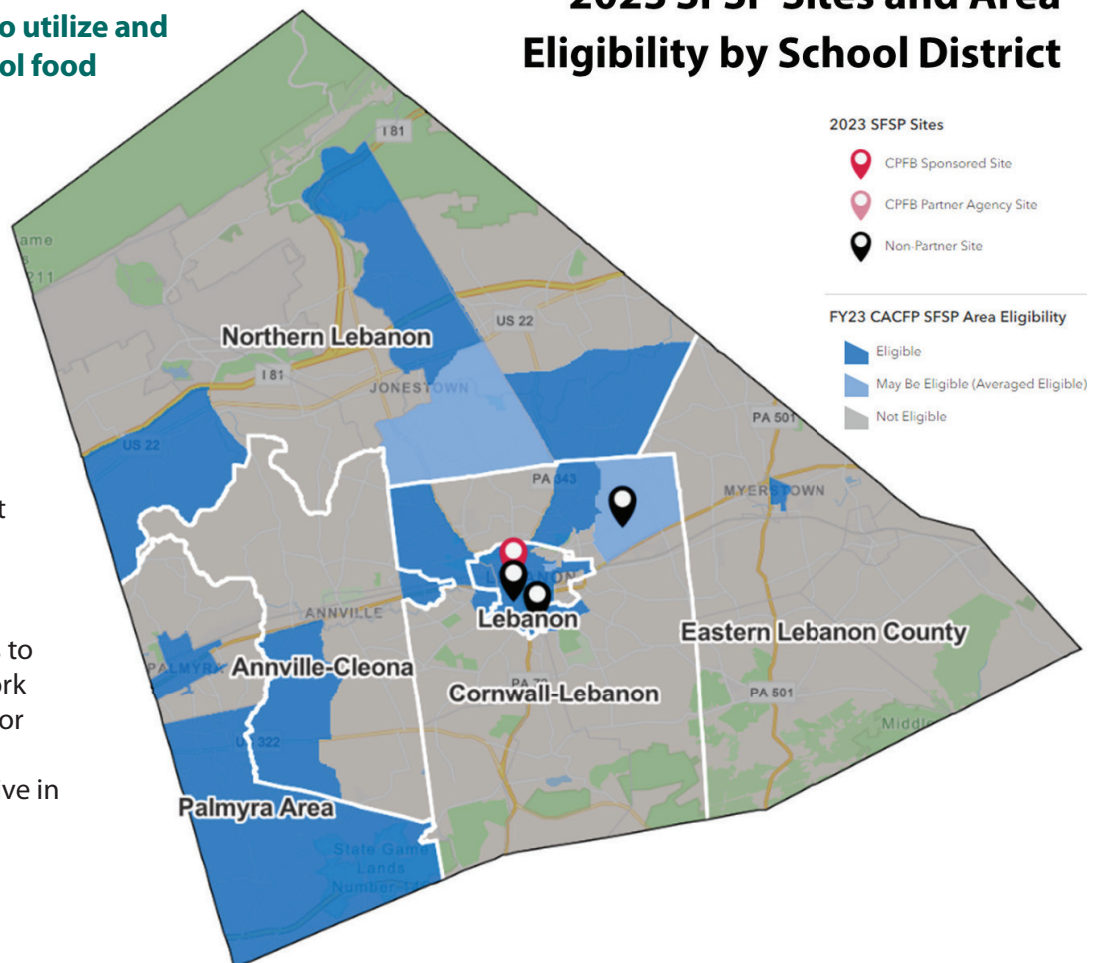
There are several evidence-based alternative service models that can help increase participation in breakfast. These models include breakfast in the classroom or breakfast after the bell, which make breakfast a formal part of the school day inside the classroom and are best suited for elementary schools, and grab-and-go or second-chance breakfast, which are models that allow older students to receive breakfast in ways that work for their more flexible schedules or later in the morning than is traditional; these are most effective in secondary schools.<sup>25</sup>

**Section 3 Finding 7: Federally funded summer meal sites for children are currently not available in most of Lebanon County, including densely populated eligible areas such as Palmyra and Myerstown. However, privately funded summer meal or grocery programs reach every school district in the county.**

A new rural non-congregate SFSP rule may make it possible for Northern Lebanon School District to increase access to federally funded summer meals in that area of the county, but this rule does not apply to any other district. Additionally, there are many food insecure children across the county who live in areas ineligible for SFSP or in communities where congregate meals are not an appropriate service model.

**Recommendation: With the goal of ensuring that children and their families have access to the same amount and type of food during the summer as during the school year, the charitable food system should seek out potential SFSP sites or sponsors in the identified areas. Meanwhile, stakeholders must continue to invest in privately funded summer programs for children, especially in areas that are ineligible or otherwise not well-suited for SFSP.**

**2023 SFSP Sites and Area Eligibility by School District**





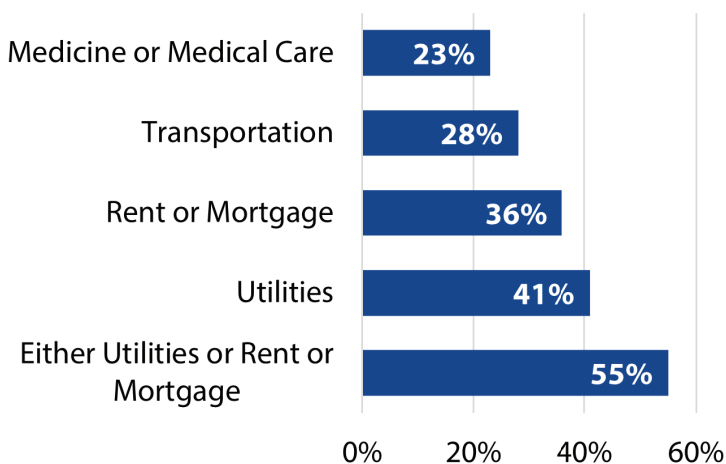


## Intersecting and Upstream Issues Recommendations

**Section 4 Finding 1: Housing and utility costs are the main economic tradeoff households must consider when buying food, as more than half of households reported needing to make a choice between paying for rent/mortgage or utilities and food. A total of 8% of food pantry visitors reported experiencing a forced move such as an eviction or foreclosure in the last year, while 20% are worried about being forced to move in the next year.**

Fully 55% of households report having to choose between food and utilities (41% of respondents) or between food and rent/mortgage (36% of respondents).

### Economic Tradeoffs with Food



Neighbors report that forced moves create chaotic “doubled-up” arrangements with family or friends, and that the potential loss of control over their housing situation would be devastating to their family’s well-being. It is physically and emotionally exhausting for people to not have control of their living situation, especially when experiencing homelessness.

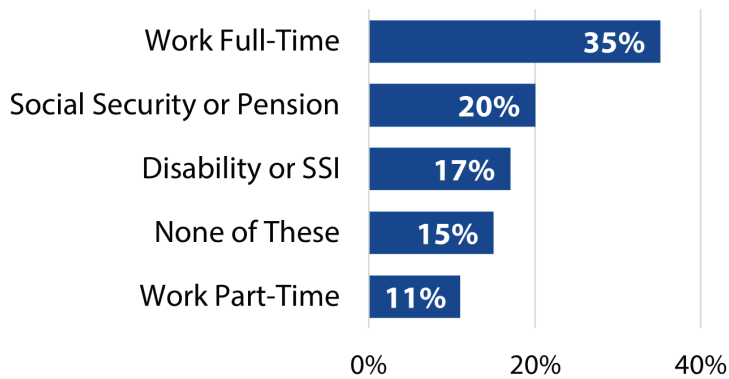
**Recommendation: Food pantries should be cognizant of the housing issues the neighbors they serve may face. For example, they should ensure that they have foods tailored for unstably or marginally housed households and make these items easily accessible.**

In addition, voluntary eviction mediation programs, in tandem with eviction prevention assistance, could be a valuable tool for the county. Similar programs have been developed in neighboring counties, although not always on a sustained basis.

Pantries should continue utility assistance programs and advertise if other housing assistance is available. Pantries report that many neighbors wait to ask for help until they are very far behind on their utility or housing bills, and this makes it more difficult to help. The trust-building that occurs when working to improve the neighbor experience at food pantries may lead to more increased willingness to seek help earlier.



## Main Source of Household Income



**Section 4 Finding 3:** Income is one of the most important factors impacting a household’s food security status, but 40% of households who work full time earn less than the federal poverty level. A total of 80% of households who report working full time earn less than 150% FPL.

Irregular work has a major impact on the rate of full-time workers with incomes below the poverty line. Just over a fifth (22%) of households who report no weeks not working had incomes below the federal poverty line, which is significantly lower than households who report more irregular working status.

Most pantry visitors who can work, do work. More than 70% of visitors either work full time, receive Social Security, or receive SSI or SSDI. An additional 11% of households work part time.

**Recommendation:** Low wages and irregular working hours dramatically affect the incomes of full-time workers who visit food pantries in Lebanon County. Interested stakeholders and the charitable food system should advocate for family-sustaining wages.

Other changes that can help reduce the instability of low wage work are an increase in the minimum wage and “fair work week” legislation that requires companies to give employees their schedules at least two weeks in advance. Further engagement with pantry visitors about the most important issues they see as they navigate work could better inform program design and advocacy.

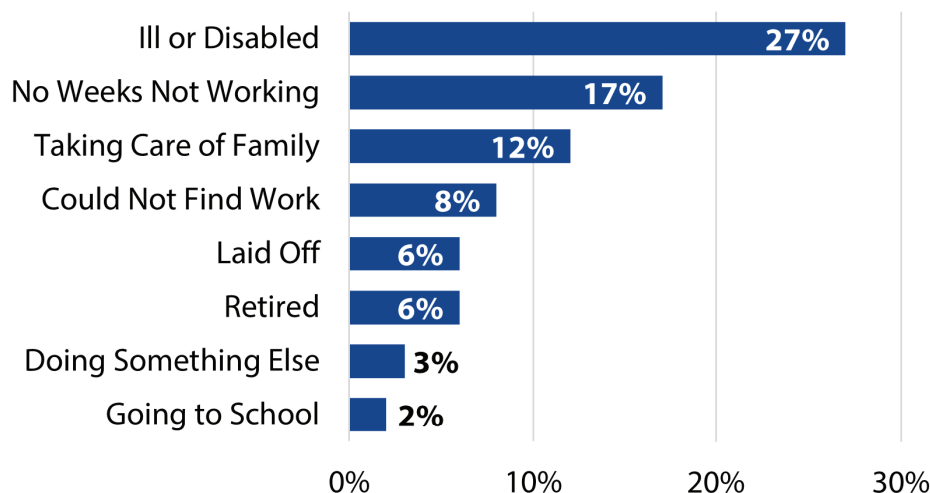


**Section 4 Finding 4:** The primary reason pantry visitors report not working is being ill or disabled. 27% of households who are not working point to that barrier, more than double that of taking care of family, the second most-cited reason. However, disability payments are very low and are often not enough to keep people from facing very low food security.

Households with a disabled individual and who report receiving SSDI or SSI experience higher rates of very low food security than the general population, even though nearly 80% of SSDI or SSI recipients report receiving SNAP. Recipients of SSDI and SSI are nearly twice as likely to report having incomes between \$500 and \$999 per month (42% compared to 22% overall).

**Recommendation:** Disability policy and payment amounts have an outsized impact on very low food security status. Interested stakeholders and the charitable food system should continue to work to connect disabled individuals to other available resources to supplement their low SSDI and SSI benefits and advocate for more adequate benefits with federal policymakers. Stakeholders should further advocate against work requirements for SNAP and other safety net programs, as many households who report a disability or other barrier to work but who do not receive SSDI or SSI will be left out of crucial safety net programs.

## Main Reasons Pantry Visitors Report for Not Working

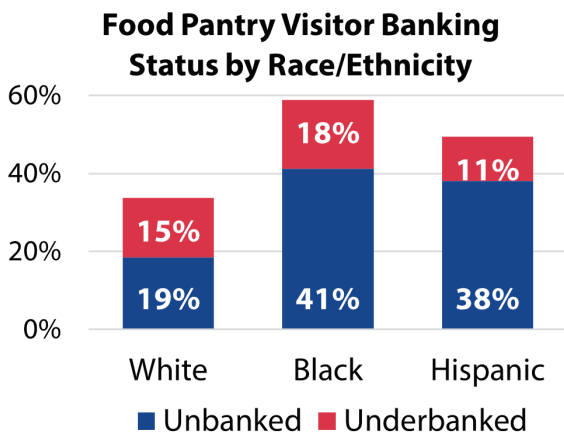


**Section 4 Finding 5: More than one-fourth (27%) of pantry visitors in Lebanon County are unbanked, while an additional 14% are classified as underbanked, meaning they have access to a bank account but still utilize expensive alternative financial services. In total, more than 40% of pantry visitors have limited access to mainstream financial services.**

Access to financial services varies dramatically by race/ethnicity among the pantry visitor population, mirroring national trends. Around 40% of Black and Hispanic households are unbanked compared to just 19% of white households. Lower-income households are also much less likely to have access to a bank account, including more than half of households who report zero income in the last month and 40% of households who report between \$0 and \$1,000 in income. A quarter of households (24%) who earn between \$1,000 and \$2,000 and a fifth of households (18%) who earn between \$2,000 and \$3,000 a month are unbanked.

While the survey of food pantry visitors did not ask why households did not have a bank account, national surveys show that the main reasons for not having a bank account are not having enough money to meet minimum balance requirements, lack of trust in banks, and high or unpredictable fees.<sup>45</sup>

**Recommendation: The charitable food system should consider partnering with financial institutions to connect people to financial services that work for their circumstances, such as bank accounts targeted towards low-income individuals.**



Tax time is a potentially effective time to connect people to mainstream financial services, as it represents a “bankable” moment, when individuals have access to their refunds and can deposit them in a newly opened account. Recent research has pointed to the impact of “bankable” moments in connecting people to accounts that work for them.

It is crucial that financial institutions offer accounts that work for low-income individuals, as there are good reasons that people currently do not participate in the mainstream financial system. Initiatives like Bank On can help create financial products that work for low-income households and connect unbanked populations to mainstream financial services, while some financial institutions also offer other accounts catered to low-income customers.



**Section 4 Finding 6: There are relatively few traditionally defined severe food deserts in Lebanon County, with southwest Lebanon City and Myerstown as the primary exceptions. However, income has a much more dramatic impact on the accessibility of fresh foods.**

**Recommendation: The Lebanon Better Together Healthy Food Access Action Team could consider working on a Double-Up Food Bucks program at key grocery stores in Lebanon County, providing a match for every \$1 spent with SNAP benefits on fruits and vegetables. These programs increase choice and have proven to increase fruit and vegetable consumption.**

The Lebanon Better Together Healthy Food Access Action Team could collaborate with local health systems and grocery stores to pilot a DUFB program in select areas of Lebanon County locally, such as in western Lebanon City and advocate for implementation of a statewide program.

In addition, to address the significant lack of vehicle access in areas of Lebanon County, especially in areas without nearby grocery stores or public transportation, stakeholders could consider working with local retailers on piloting free grocery delivery programs to SNAP recipients. This partnership could both make fresh food more readily accessible in Lebanon County and increase incentives for neighbors to sign up for SNAP.

**To address the significant lack of vehicle access in areas of Lebanon County, stakeholders could consider working with local retailers on piloting free grocery delivery programs to SNAP recipients.**





## CONCLUSION AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2023 Lebanon County Community Hunger Mapping Report is the capstone on the end of a year-long effort to better understand the charitable food network in Lebanon County by analyzing publicly available data with innovative and rigorous analysis techniques, reviewing and synthesizing existing research, engaging with community stakeholders, and crucially, listening to and learning from the people who visit the county's food pantries. All the effort that went in to building this report was in service of working to accurately portray the experiences of the neighbors who are served by Lebanon County's charitable food providers and providing an informative, actionable resource that can be used to improve those experiences as well as eventually end hunger in the county.

Although this report marks the end of a project, it is also just the beginning. The insights provided in this report are valuable in their own right, but ongoing implementation of recommendations and evaluation of progress are what will truly make a difference for Lebanon's food insecure neighbors.

The research and data collection infrastructure that was built as part of primary data collection for this report will help provide some of the ongoing metrics that will be needed to measure progress over time.

However, stakeholders, including but not limited to the Lebanon County Healthy Food Access Action Team, WellSpan Health, the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank, its partner food pantries, and other key parties across Lebanon County must also intentionally implement and assess the impacts of the recommendations in this report to work towards a Lebanon County in which no one is hungry.



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report would not have been possible without the generous financial support of WellSpan Health, as well as the input and insights of the Lebanon County Community Hunger Mapping Consultative group, whose members included Bryan Smith of Lebanon County Christian Ministries, Donna Williams of Lebanon Family Health Services, Capt. Ivonne Rodriguez of The Salvation Army in Lebanon, Laurie Crawford and Erika Mollo of Penn State Health, Nicole Maurer Gray of the Community Health Council of Lebanon County, Shila Ulrich of the Caring Cupboard, and Joe Arthur, Tara Davis, and Maria D’Isabella of the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank. Thank you all for the time and care you invested into this project and that you continue to invest in the Lebanon County community.

Our neighbors who were generous enough to share the reality of their lives with us via surveys, focus groups, and interviews provided priceless insight into the challenging circumstances they face on a daily basis. Their words are the most important ones in this entire report. Endless thanks to each and every neighbor who took time out of their day to complete a survey or speak with us.

The voices of our neighbors would also not have been able to be included in this report without the patience and kindness of many pantry coordinators across Lebanon County who allowed the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank’s Policy Research team to conduct surveys during distributions. Thank you for your grace and for all you do for those you serve. Focus groups were conducted by Jason Kirsch and Lauren Gorbey of PR Works Inc.

Special thanks to the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank staff outside the Policy Research department who assisted in survey administration, especially Loyna DeJesus, without whom we would not have been able to connect with our Spanish-speaking neighbors nearly as deeply.

