



Franklin County Community Hunger Mapping Final Report

**Identifying Localized
Food Access Gaps and
Increasing Understanding
of Intersecting Issues for
the Charitable Food System**

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■ Introduction

Nearly one in eight residents of Franklin County shouldered the heavy weight of not knowing where their next meal would come from in 2023.



In total, nearly 17,000 people were food insecure in the county; of these, 5,500 were children. The burden of food insecurity is not evenly spread across the county. Though it weighs upon citizens of every municipality and neighborhood across the county, the degree to which it does varies based upon geography, demographics, and many other factors.

This Community Hunger Mapping Report aims to understand the dispersion, experience, and causes of food insecurity across and within Franklin County. Community-engaged research methods were used to depict the food insecurity landscape and the charitable food network's response to it with detail, nuance, and compassion. Specific emphasis is placed upon highlighting the perspectives of neighbors experiencing food insecurity as expressed through surveys conducted at food pantries and other

community resources across the county, as well as semi-structured one on one interviews.

Listening sessions and surveys allowed the inclusion of the perspectives of charitable food providers, and Central Pennsylvania Food Bank (CPFEB) researchers visited many of the pantries in the county to collect observational data about the charitable food network holistically. Quantitative analysis of secondary data available from both public and private sources, including the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and CPFEB's own internal records, is included throughout the report to provide important context for the qualitative data. Together, these mixed methods allow the final report to paint a complete picture of the Franklin County charitable food system.

Increased understanding of local food insecurity is a distinct advantage, but this report seeks to do more; its goal is to guide meaningful, lasting improvements in the experiences of food insecure neighbors and to make progress toward ending hunger in the long term. To that end, this report contains dozens of actionable recommendations that, if implemented intentionally and collaboratively by food pantries, antipoverty organizations, health systems, and other stakeholders across Franklin County and beyond, can help us together build a south central Pennsylvania where no one goes hungry.

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



What is the extent of food insecurity in Franklin County, and where in the county is it concentrated?



Who in Franklin 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?



How accessible is charitable and retail food throughout Franklin County, and how does access vary in different areas of the county? How does access vary, if at all, by demographics?



What barriers do neighbors face in accessing charitable food services? Where do food distribution and access gaps exist in Franklin County? What is the neighbor experience at food pantries like?



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?



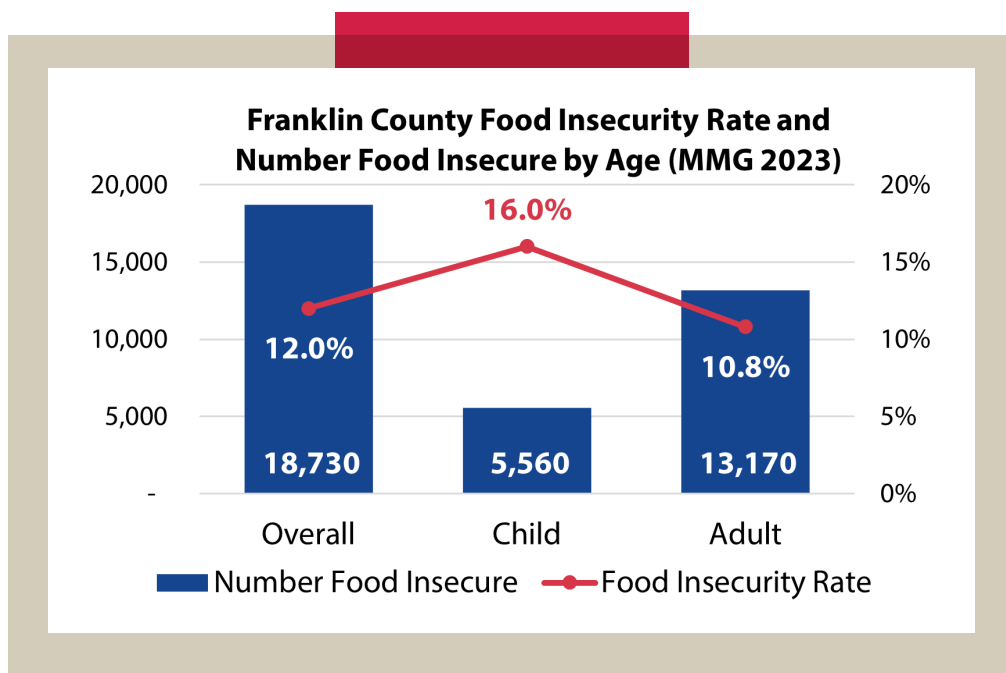
What other issues impact food insecurity in Franklin County? What can the charitable food system and other relevant stakeholders do to better address the root causes of food insecurity?

Executive Summary ■

Working to End Hunger in Franklin County

Nearly 19,000 individuals, or about one in eight (12.0%), experienced food insecurity in Franklin County as of 2023. This included almost 5,600 children, meaning that one in six children was unsure where their next meal would come from. There were substantial disparities by race/ethnicity as well, as Hispanic and Black residents of Franklin County faced food insecurity rates of 25% and 24% respectively compared to 10% among non-Hispanic white individuals.

The extent of food insecurity in Franklin County is largely in line with that of the rest of the state, but it is an increasing issue locally as well as statewide. Food insecurity rates have risen almost 40% in Franklin County since 2021, with the bulk of the increase coming between 2021 and 2022. The increase in food insecurity for children was more severe, with rates spiking 48% for children between 2021 and 2022 alone and remaining elevated in 2023.



In fact, the proportion of children in schools who self-reported worries about running out of food or skipping meals because of family finances nearly doubled between 2021 and 2023, rising to 23.9% from 11.4%.

Within Franklin County, every single municipality and census tract in the county had a food insecurity rate above 7% as of 2022. The areas with the highest food insecurity rates include Chambersburg borough and its surroundings, stretching south to the northern part of Waynesboro, including parts of Guilford and Quincy Townships.


Nearly a third of pantry visitors who participated in surveys in Franklin County (32%) reported experiencing very low food security, which is characterized by a regular reduction in the quantity of food consumed due to not having enough money for food. One third of pantry visitors still report going hungry on a regular basis, a devastatingly high proportion.

Few differences in very low food security rates exist among pantry visitors in Franklin County by both household type and race/ethnicity. Every household type had a very low food security rate around one third as did both Hispanic and white, non-Hispanic pantry visitors. This finding indicates that it is critical for pantries to ensure all household types have sufficient access to charitable food providers.



This report will review three overlapping approaches that concerned stakeholders can use to reduce and prevent experiences of very low food insecurity among Franklin County residents and pantry visitors. Each approach is listed below and examined in turn in the body of the report:

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Increasing the
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Ensuring strong
participation in
key government
nutrition
programs | 3 | Approach 3:
Addressing
upstream and
intersecting
issues that cause
food insecurity |
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 *Behind every statistic is a neighbor with a story—when we understand the landscape of hunger, we can begin to reshape it.*

Approach 1: Increasing the Accessibility of the Charitable Food System

Food pantries in Franklin County dramatically reduce hunger among pantry visitors. Households who averaged more than one pantry visit per month over the last year had a very low food security rate of 24%, versus 49% for households who visited less than once per month in the last year on average.

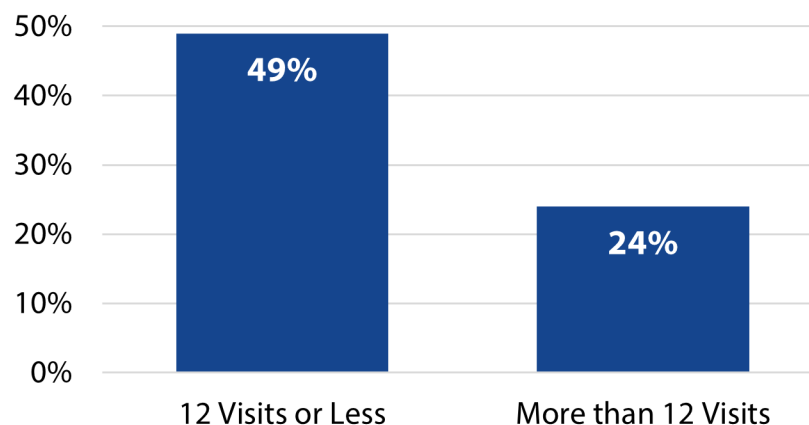
■ *This decrease in very low food security rates is an astounding level of impact for pantries in the county and clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of the work being done across the county to reduce hunger.*

The impact pantries make for neighbors is bolstered by the county's robust geographic access to pantries. Most food insecure residents of Franklin County have access to at least two pantries within a 15-minute drive.

Nearly all food insecure residents have access to at least one choice pantry, and the variety of distribution models, including drive-throughs, is robust. The diversity of models and incorporation of choice means that the frequency with which people reported receiving foods they need, want, and will use is relatively strong compared to other counties. Although there is still room for improvement, 60% of pantry visitors said they receive foods they like "often or always".

Furthermore, CPFEB researchers have found that pantries across Franklin County are eager to improve their services, to increase collaboration across the county, and to ensure that people who visit pantries across the county have positive experiences.

Very Low Food Security for Households with Incomes Below 200% FPL by Pantry Visit Frequency over a One-Year Period in Franklin County



OPPORTUNITIES TO MAGNIFY IMPACT

The existing strengths across Franklin County's charitable food system can be leveraged to maximize the impact pantries have in reducing food insecurity. Opportunities to increase impact can be grouped into two main areas. The first includes the adjustment of pantry policies across the county to lower barriers to access while the second focuses on cultivating collaboration between pantries and other stakeholders to improve knowledge and utilization of pantry services and other needed resources.

APPROACH 1.1: ADJUSTMENT OF RESTRICTIVE PANTRY POLICIES

The impact the charitable food system has in reducing hunger can be maximized by ensuring that people have access to a minimum of two pantries or one pantry twice per month. While nearly every food insecure individual in Franklin County has access to at least two pantries within a 15-minute drive, this strong geographic access is often limited by restrictive policies implemented by agencies across the county, including:

Nearly half of Franklin County pantries require ID, proof of address, or both as a prerequisite to service.

CPFB researchers witnessed several pantry visitors being turned away from food pantries because they forgot or did not have an ID with them while attempting to receive service. Refusing service based on lack of ID runs counter to state and federal rules and, importantly, may result in severely negative experiences that can dissuade people from visiting pantries again in the future. Only a self-declaration of need certifying that a household has an income less than 185% of the federal poverty level is required to receive state or federally funded food; people with higher incomes can receive donated food. Identification can be requested to ensure a smoother intake process but may never be required.

Some agencies in Franklin County explicitly bar neighbors from visiting more than one pantry.

Restrictions on the number of pantries a household may visit in a month are likely noncompliant with state and federal requirements and can increase experiences of hunger for vulnerable households, since many neighbors need access to at least two pantries to avoid experiencing hunger on a regular basis.

Complex rules and policies at pantries can add potential conflict points between staff or volunteers and neighbors.

No two pantries are alike, which means that neighbors must learn an entirely new set of rules from volunteers who already understand the process fully. This difference in understanding, along with the unequal power dynamic inherent in pantry distributions, may cause experiences of judgment. Trauma-informed care training and the placement of suitable volunteers in neighbor-facing roles could help ensure everyone is treated with respect. Pantry workers should give visitors grace around mistakes and confusion.

Modifying the restrictive pantry policies outlined above would help to reduce conflict and negative experiences neighbors may experience when interacting with the charitable food system.

While most pantry visitors reported positive experiences with pantries, nearly 10% said they had experienced judgment while visiting a pantry, which is the highest rate measured in any Community Hunger Mapping project to date. There was, however, substantial variance between pantries in reported experiences of judgment, which reflects the effect specific pantry policies may have in preventing or engendering conflict.

Reported Feelings of Judgment Among Franklin County Food Pantry Visitors

Minimum	0.0%
Median	7.2%
Average	9.2%
Maximum	13.4%

APPROACH 1.2: INCREASED COLLABORATION BETWEEN PANTRIES AND OTHER SERVICE PROVIDERS

■ *Pantries are among the lowest-barrier social service providers and may be the first places people turn to when they need help. Food pantries are therefore uniquely positioned to act as key resource connectors.*

Program referrals and opportunities for individuals to connect with case management services were largely absent among pantry providers. Furthermore, there is a major lack of awareness of available pantry resources among community members who are food insecure but are not currently utilizing a pantry.

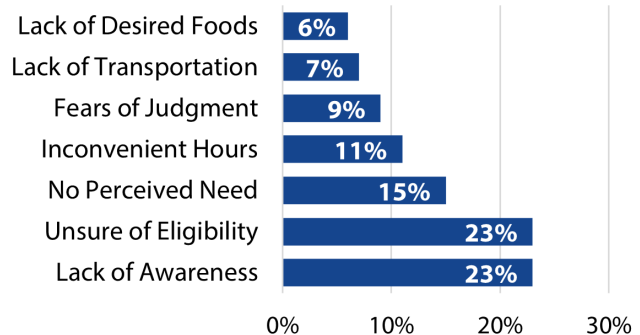
In a listening session and in interviews, Franklin County pantries reported that they were either not aware of other resources to refer neighbors to or said they did not believe case management resources were available to the neighbors they were serving. Additionally, referrals to SNAP, WIC, or other key government programs were not robust.

These gaps signify that there are opportunities for further collaboration between pantries, which are among the best targeted locations for resource outreach, and local providers of other resources. Key stakeholders could include health systems, organizations with case management functions, and SNAP and WIC outreach organizations. Franklin County is already working to assess food access with GIS mapping, but it is important to strengthen neighbor-facing guides to the resources available in the area, including food pantries.

Pantries expressed a desire for increased collaboration between pantry providers, including the sharing of resources where possible.

Pantry coordinators appreciated the opportunities to connect with one another as part of the hunger mapping process, and several of these interactions led to concrete and productive joint ventures across agencies.

Reasons Cited for Not Visiting Food Pantries among Current Non-Visitors in Franklin County



Leading stakeholders should work to bring pantries together regularly to create open and regular lines of communication among pantries in Franklin County so they can learn from each other, share resources, and solve problems together. An initial issue to tackle together could be the expansion of evening and weekend hours to areas of the county that currently lack access.

Franklin County pantries cited funding as the number one issue they face, as limited funds force them to find ways to serve more people with fewer resources.

This can lead to cutting back on services provided. Collective advocacy for additional state and federal resources to support pantries in the county is critical to ensuring pantries have enough resources to serve every neighbor who comes to their door seeking help.

Approach 2: Ensuring Strong Participation in Key Government Nutrition Programs

Nutrition programs like SNAP, WIC, school meal programs, and summer meal programs all provide significant support to Franklin County's food insecure neighbors. Opportunities to increase program participation exist throughout the county, and pantries are some of the best places for outreach.

APPROACH 2.1: INCREASE SNAP PARTICIPATION THROUGH TARGETED OUTREACH

Franklin County is middling in SNAP participation relative to the state overall.

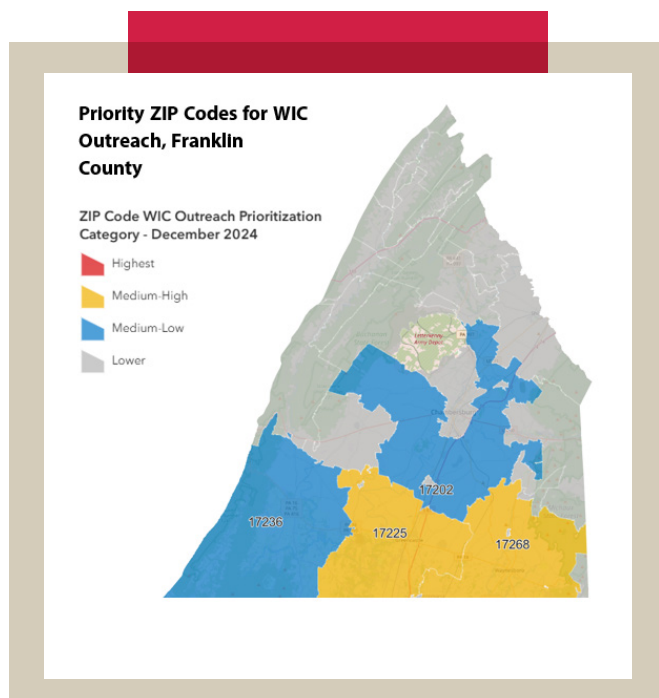
■ *There are major opportunities to increase participation via two major pathways: geographic outreach and pantry-based outreach.*

ZIP Codes covering the northern and southern ends of the county are home to major SNAP participation gaps, and countywide, less than half (49%) of pantry visitors said they received SNAP, even though nearly all (95%) are likely to be eligible based on income. Given these low participation rates among visitors and their lowbarrier services, pantries are well-targeted locations for SNAP outreach; those in high-priority ZIP codes are particularly likely to be effective.

APPROACH 2.2: FOCUS WIC OUTREACH ON SOUTHERN FRANKLIN COUNTY

Franklin County has one of the lowest WIC participation rates in the state, with an estimated coverage rate of 55%, nearly 30 percentage points lower than neighboring Adams County.

WIC outreach is critical to increasing participation. In Franklin County, outreach should focus on several ZIP Codes in the southern part of the county, with emphasis on Waynesboro and Greencastle as they both have child participation gaps of more than 250 likely eligible non-participating children.



APPROACH 2.3: EXPAND PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL MEALS AND ACCESS TO SUMMER FOOD

School breakfast participation in Franklin County is around 10% below the statewide average even though a high percentage of schools offer alternative breakfast models. Schools should continue to offer these alternative models and consider the most effective model, breakfast in the classroom, to improve participation.

In the summer, there are opportunities to increase access to federally funded summer meals across the entire county, especially in Greencastle and Fannett-Metal School District. Most areas qualify as rural, which could allow them to make use of the recently implemented rural non-congregate meal service waiver for USDA SUN meal programs.

Approach 3: Addressing Upstream and Intersecting issues with Food Insecurity

Food insecurity rarely occurs on its own; rather, it is the product of and associated with a variety of upstream and intersecting issues. In Franklin County, the most salient issues identified by food pantry visitors include limited income, housing insecurity, chronic health conditions, and limited mainstream financial access.

Low wages and limited benefit levels increase the likelihood that households will experience food insecurity, including very low food security.

Unemployment is a minimal contributor to charitable food demand in Franklin County, as more than 80% of pantry visitors stated that their main source of income was full-time work, Social Security or pension, or Disability or SSI. Households who stated that they receive Disability or SSI are the most likely to experience very low food security (54%); this is likely due to low benefit levels, increased expenses, and reduced ability to work. Households who reported full-time work as their main income source are the least likely to experience very low food security.

However, wages remain low; 55% of full-time workers reported incomes below \$2,000 a month (\$24,000 a year or \$11.50 an hour).

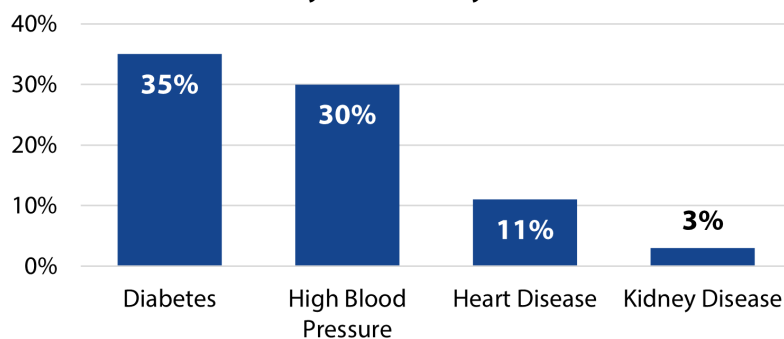
Housing insecurity is a major driver of very low food security, as around 60% of households who worried about or experienced a forced move in the last year also faced very low food security.

A staggering 10% of pantry visitor households experienced a forced move in the last year, and 22% are currently worried about being forced to move in the next year. Considering these findings, pantries should ensure that foods tailored to the needs of unstably or marginally housed individuals are available. Beyond this, the charitable food system could promote and/or provide referrals to utility assistance programs like LIHEAP or collaborate with other organizations to offer eviction and foreclosure mediation and prevention programs.

Nearly a quarter of all pantry visitors (24%) in Franklin County are unbanked, meaning they lack access to a checking or savings account.

Hispanic pantry visitors are the least likely to have a bank account, with nearly two in five (37%) having reported being unbanked. The charitable food system can work with local financial institutions and nonprofits to connect unbanked populations to mainstream financial services.

Chronic Health Conditions Among Franklin County Food Pantry Visitors



There are significant opportunities for health systems and the charitable food system to collaboratively address very low food security as a social determinant of health, including via Food as Medicine initiatives.

More than half (54%) of pantry visitor households in Franklin County had at least one member with a diet-related chronic health condition, including 35% with diabetes and 30% with heart disease.

■ Better Together: Leveraging the Charitable Food Network's Advantages and Partnerships to Their Fullest Potential



The findings contained in this report show that everyone in Franklin County has their own role to play in reducing food insecurity. Every organization and person has unique relationships and positionality within the county that allow them to make unique contributions to the effort to end hunger. The charitable food networks' unique role and comparative advantage is that it is one of the lowest barrier social service providers. Pantries should lean into this status and adjust policies to further their status as easily accessible, trusted community institutions. Together, stakeholders across Franklin County and its charitable food system are well-positioned to play a unique leading role in building a south central Pennsylvania where no one must wonder where their next meal will come from.

Methods ■

This final report is the outcome of an intensive, mixed-methods research endeavor, focused on rigorous quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. The report emphasizes the voices and experiences of neighbors who visit food pantries in Franklin County, as well as the input of community leaders and food pantry providers. Data and quotes included in this report are anonymized to the greatest extent possible to maintain the privacy of participants. Each method of data collection is described in turn below.



Data from multiple state and national organizations

This report's secondary analysis draws upon data from a variety of different sources, including the American Community Survey 2018-2022 5-Year Estimates, SNAP participation data from the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, WIC participation data from the Pennsylvania Department of Health, child congregate meal program site and participation data from the Pennsylvania Department of Education and USDA, and Feeding America Map the Meal Gap 2024 and 2025 data with 2022 and 2023 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 a technical appendix, available upon request.

Section 1 discusses food insecurity rates and numbers for Franklin County as a whole using 2023 food insecurity data published by Feeding America in May 2025. However, throughout the rest of the report, food insecurity rates and numbers use 2022 estimates, as the 2023 data publication date was too near to the final publication date of this report for CPFB researchers to have sufficient time to update analyses for any geography smaller than the county.



174
surveys were completed
across 4 different locations



06
pantry sites were
visited and observed

In Fall 2024, CPFB researchers conducted surveys at four geographically and demographically representative food pantries across Franklin County. A total of 174 surveys were completed across the four different pantry locations. Food pantry visitors were provided various options for survey completion: take the survey at the pantry on a CPFB-provided device, have the survey read to them by a CPFB 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 designed to take ten minutes on average. \$10 gift cards for a variety of local grocery stores were provided to each participant. Survey results were cleaned for potential duplicate or erroneous entries.

To include as many agency partners as possible in the Community Hunger Mapping process, CPFB researchers visited six pantries that were not survey sites to observe pantry operation during food distribution/pantry hours. These observations helped CPFB researchers bring a broader understanding of pantry practices and the experience of accessing charitable food to this report.

**03****randomly selected
interviews****882****participants from 7
locations completed
surveys**

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. CPFEB researchers developed a flexible interview guide and conducted four 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.

Non-food pantry surveys were conducted at various community locations to determine why some potentially food insecure individuals do not currently visit a food pantry. The surveys were anonymous and included four questions, including two food security screening questions. Individuals were asked if they visit a food pantry; those who responded 'No' or 'I used to' were asked to describe the reasons why, from a list of potential options and a free response blank. The non-food pantry survey results reflect responses from 882 total participants from seven locations across Franklin County.

**06****partner agencies
participated in
listening sessions****10****pantries completed online
and phone interviews**

CPFEB agency partners from Franklin County were invited to attend a listening session to discuss strengths and challenges at the pantry level. The discussion-style session allowed for partners to identify and learn from each other's experiences and perspectives as pantry leaders within the community. Discussion topics include pantry and community strengths, sourcing and logistics, and challenges related to distribution. Six partner agencies participated in a listening session in January 2025.

The CPFEB Policy Research team administered pantry surveys to agency partners who operate pantries that do not limit participation by age or military status across Franklin County. The surveys asked questions regarding distribution type and frequency, operating hours, policies for food pantry visitors, other services offered, and pantry capacity. A total of ten pantries completed surveys via phone and online. CPFEB researchers made efforts to include the relevant information for non-respondents.


■ Conclusion and Final Recommendations

This report is the capstone of a yearlong intensive project that aimed to increase understanding of Franklin County's charitable food network and the experiences of those it serves through a robust mixed-methods evaluation that included analysis of publicly available data, the incorporation of academic research, conversations with pantry staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders, and most importantly, the perspectives of the people who rely on food pantries.

The authors of this report always strove to center Franklin County's food insecure neighbors, with emphasis on not only understanding and depicting the reality of their lives and the challenging circumstances they face with care and compassion but also using the precious information they shared with us to develop an actionable, informative resource that can be leveraged to create real change throughout the charitable food network and beyond.

At first glance, the publication of this report appears to be the end of a project, but it is just the beginning. Developing this document into the force for good that it has the potential to be will take dedicated, cooperative, and sustained work to implement recommendations, assess their effects, and evaluate longer-term outcomes.

This project was undertaken in collaboration with key stakeholders across Franklin County, including Wellspan Health, the Franklin County Food Security Task Force and South Central Community Action Programs. Applying this report to the fullest will require extension of the collaborative spirit with which it was written well into the future, as an inclusive, expansive stakeholder group will be the key to successful implementation.



**Only together will we build
a Franklin County where no
one goes hungry.**

Acknowledgments ■

Thanks and Recognition

Thank you to Wellspan Health for their generous funding of this project. We are incredibly grateful for your partnership and for your investment in the charitable food system that serves so many of your patients and our neighbors.

Many thanks to the Franklin County Community Hunger Mapping Consultative Group, whose members included Sheryl Snyder of F&M Trust; Hali Finniff, Stacie Horvath, Erica Kershner, Kara Shindle, and Nicole Smith of Franklin County government; Alice Elia, Ann Sylvester, and Jill Yaich of Franklin County Library System; Barb Houpt; Heather Goshorn, Christina Methner, and Stephanie Strickler of Keystone Health; Dave Keller of Luminest; Anne Machowski; Network Chambersburg; Bernadette Armstrong, Cheryl Brown, and Angie Peck of SCCAP; Shippensburg Community Resource Coalition; Julia Brown of Solomon's United Church of Christ; Amy Hicks of United Way of Franklin County; Melinda Gahan of Waynesboro Community and Human Services; Ashley Corradino, Nickie L. Fickel, Pat W. McCulloh, Blanca Nizama, Noel Purdy, Claudia M. Schuchardt-Peet, and Joe Anne Ward-Cottrell of Wellspan Health. Your time and expertise were invaluable; they ensured that this report could accurately reflect the vibrancy of the community and the charitable food network.

Special thanks to Noel Purdy, chair of the Franklin County Food Security Task Force, for generously allowing CPFB Impact and Policy Research to borrow the Task Force as the core of our consultative group.

Every neighbor who shared their thoughts with us, whether that was through the Feeding America Client Survey, phone interviews, or the non-pantry location surveys, provided priceless insight into the reality of their lives and the true experience of food insecurity. Of all the words in this document, the most valuable are those of our neighbors. Endless thanks to all who took time out of their days to speak with us.

Many thanks to the food pantry coordinators and volunteers of Franklin County, without whom the charitable food network would not serve anyone. Similarly, without their flexibility around surveys so we could meet our neighbors, their willingness to let us conduct non-participant observations so we could understand the pantry network holistically, their feedback via the pantry surveys and listening sessions, and most importantly their dedication to the individuals and families they serve, this project would not have been complete.

The content of this report was greatly enhanced by the efforts of Keystone Health employees who joined the CPFB researchers at food pantries to ensure we could connect with neighbors. To Heather Goshorn, Heather Lehman, Heather Whitter, and Areli Macias-Torres: your commitment to your community is evident and we thank you for your time and support.

We would not have been able to hear from our neighbors who do not visit food pantries without the effort and kindness of staff at Keystone Health in Chambersburg, the Franklin County Library System, and Wellspan Chambersburg, who made the non-food pantry survey available to their patients and patrons. Thank you for encouraging so many people to take a little time to share information with us.

Special thanks to CPFB staff and volunteers outside the Impact & Policy Research team who assisted with surveys and non-participant observations: Ellen Min and Maddy Singer. Thank you for sharing your valuable time and for your willingness to brave inclement weather to help us engage with our neighbors!

Additional thanks to Lo Whitaker Escobar, a former food banker and valued colleague, who was an integral part of our primary data collection process.



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