



# Adams 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

**As of 2023, nearly 12,000 individuals in Adams county were food insecure according to Feeding America's most recent estimates.**



As of 2023, one in nine residents of Adams County experienced uncertain or limited access to food, meaning that nearly 12,000 individuals were food insecure according to Feeding America's most recent estimates. This included over 3,000 children who were unsure how they would get their next meal. The burden of food insecurity is not evenly spread across the county; while it weighs upon residents of every municipality and neighborhood within Adams County, the degree to which it does so varies based on demographic characteristics, geography, and many other economic and social factors.

This Community Hunger Mapping report seeks to improve understanding of the dispersion, experience, and causes of food insecurity throughout Adams County. Community-engaged research methods were used throughout the project to ensure that the food insecurity landscape and the charitable food system's response to it were depicted with detail, nuance, and compassion. The perspectives of neighbors facing

food insecurity are highlighted via their responses to surveys conducted on site at food pantries and other community resources across the county.

The thoughts of pantry staff and volunteers were included via listening sessions, surveys, and interviews. Central Pennsylvania Food Bank (CPF) researchers also visited pantries that did not host surveys to collect observational data. The results of quantitative analyses of a host of secondary data sets available from both public and private sources, including the United States Department of Agriculture, the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, the Pennsylvania Department of Health, the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and CPF's own internal agency records, is included to provide additional information and perspective on the qualitative data. Together, these mixed methods enable the development of a full-color snapshot of the charitable food network in Adams County.

This document seeks to do more than simply provide an increased understanding of local food insecurity; in the short term, it aims to make meaningful, lasting improvements in the experiences of food insecure neighbors, while in the long term it seeks to make meaningful progress toward ending hunger. To serve this goal, this report contains a series of specific, actionable recommendations that, if collaboratively implemented by food pantries, anti-poverty organizations, health systems, and other Adams County stakeholders, 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 Adams County, and where in the county is it concentrated?



Who in Adams 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 Adams 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 Adams 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 Adams 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 Adams County

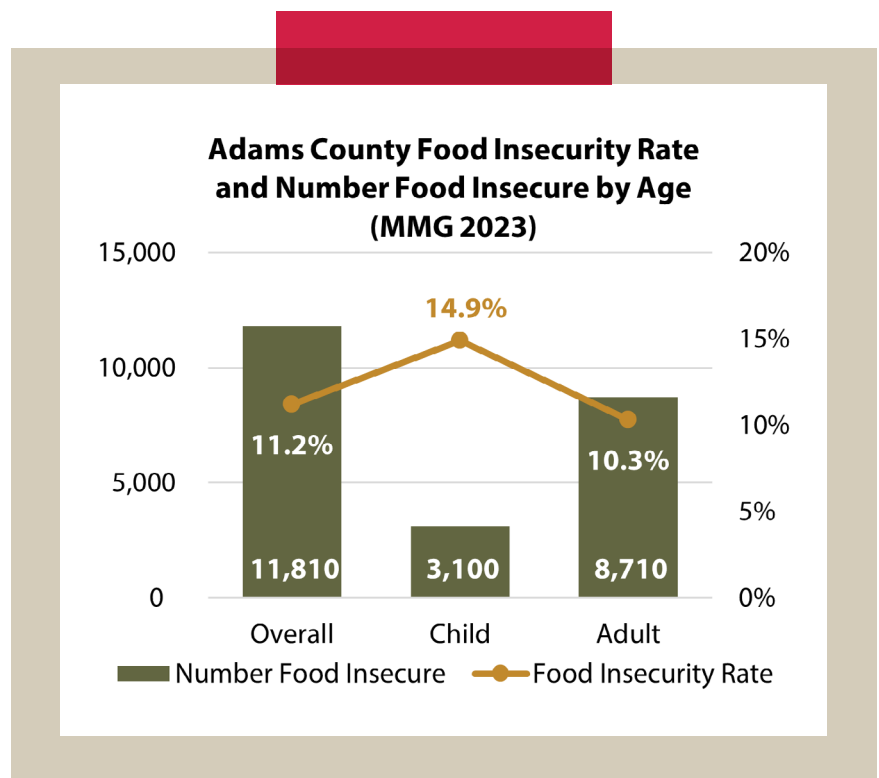
Food insecurity, or the lack of consistent access to the food needed to live an active, healthy life, is one of the most salient issues that communities across Pennsylvania and the United States must confront. Adams County is no exception; food insecurity affects every neighborhood and municipality in the county.

No Adams County census tract had a food insecurity rate below 6% as of 2023, and the overall county food insecurity rate stood at 11.2%, or one in nine residents. In total, nearly 12,000 people, including more than 3,000 children, in Adams County faced uncertain or limited access to food according to Feeding America's most recent estimates.

Adams County's children had the highest food insecurity rates, at 14.9%, or more than one in seven. Beyond this, just under a quarter (24.4%) of county children self-reported being worried about running out of food and one in eight (11.6%) said they had skipped a meal due to family finances as of the 2023 Pennsylvania Youth Survey. There were also disparities in food insecurity by race/ethnicity, as 24% of Hispanic and 20% of Black Adams County residents were unsure where their next meal would come from in 2023 compared to 9% of non-Hispanic white residents.

Food insecurity is an issue of increasing severity in Adams County and beyond; overall food insecurity rates have grown by a staggering 53% since 2021. Child food insecurity increased even faster, growing 60%.

The areas of Adams County with the highest food insecurity rates as of 2023 include Fairfield and surrounding Hamiltonban Township, Biglerville and surrounding Butler Township, McSherrystown, and Littlestown, as well as southern Gettysburg. McSherrystown has the highest food insecurity rate in the county at 16.4% and is home to 800 food insecure individuals. Other areas with 500 or more food insecure individuals include the census tracts surrounding and including Carroll Valley, Arendtsville, Biglerville, York Springs, and Bonneauville, as well as southern Gettysburg and most of Littlestown.



Three in ten (30%) pantry visitors in Adams County reported experiencing very low food security, which is characterized by a regular reduction in the quantity of food consumed due to lack of money to purchase more. Very low food security is the closest measure of hunger, so this finding means that almost a third of the county's pantry visitors often go hungry despite utilizing charitable food assistance.

Adams County households with children are the most likely to have indicated that they experience very low food security; more than two in five (41%) had survey responses consistent with very low food security, while the same was true of just one in five (20%) senior households. There was not sufficient data to assess very low food security rates for adult households without children.



This report examines three distinct and overlapping approaches that food security stakeholders and other community organizations, policymakers, and community members can leverage to reduce hunger as measured by very low food security rates among Adams County residents and pantry visitors. The three approaches are listed below, and each is discussed in detail throughout the report:

- |   |                                                                                                         |   |                                                                                                     |   |                                                                                                   |
|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Approach 1:<br>Strengthening<br>and increasing<br>the accessibility<br>of the charitable<br>food system | 2 | Approach 2:<br>Encouraging<br>robust<br>participation in<br>key government<br>nutrition<br>programs | 3 | Approach 3:<br>Addressing<br>upstream and<br>intersecting<br>issues that cause<br>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: Strengthening and Increasing Accessibility of the Charitable Food System

The charitable food system in Adams County has a demonstrable effect on food insecurity in the community, especially for households with children, who are the most likely to experience hunger.

■ *Specifically, households with children who reported visiting food pantries more than once per month have a very low food security rate 28% lower than similar households who visited once per month or less, with very low food security falling from 46% to 33%.*

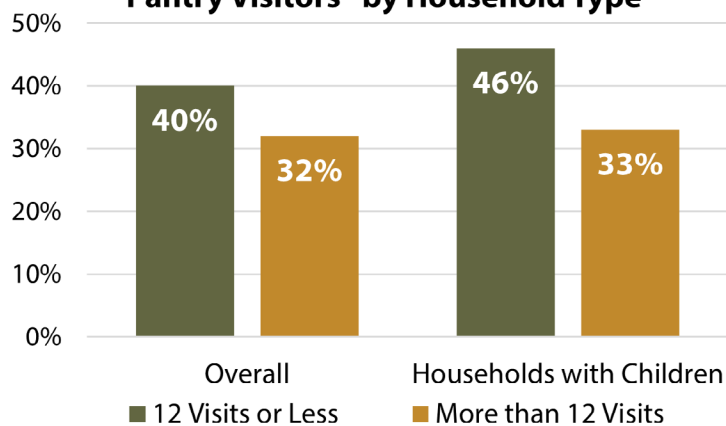
For all household types, the result of accessing charitable food more than once per month is a 20% drop in very low food security, from 40% to 32%.

The positive impact pantries have on neighbors is amplified by several key strengths of the Adams County charitable food system. Overall, pantries are geographically well-placed across the county, providing all residents access to food assistance within a reasonable drive time, and wait times to receive foods at pantries are low.

The overwhelming majority (91%) of food insecure individuals in the county have access to a choice pantry, which allows visitors to select the food they receive.

The county's widespread adoption of choice models contributes to strong satisfaction with pantry offerings – 60% of neighbors said they “often” or “always” get foods they are looking for when they visit pantries. Finally, most experiences among food pantry visitors are positive, and Adams County neighbors were less likely to report feeling judged at pantries than their peers in other counties where Community Hunger Mapping projects have been completed.

**Very Low Food Security by Pantry Visit Frequency for Adams County Pantry Visitors\* by Household Type**



\*Over a one-year period for households with incomes below 150%.

## OPPORTUNITIES TO MAXIMIZE IMPACT FURTHER

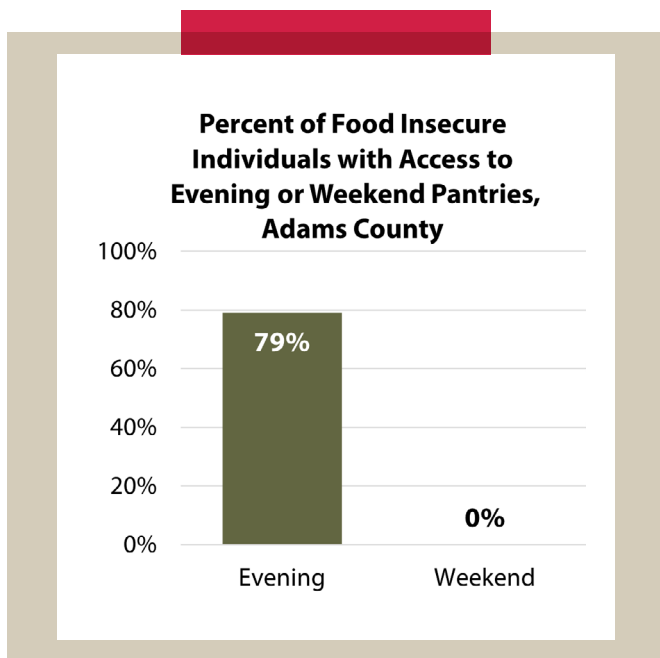
The many strengths of Adams County's charitable food system provide a solid base for further improvements in food access across the county. There are three primary ways stakeholders can work to further maximize the positive impact of Adams County charitable food providers, including increasing evening and weekend access, adjusting pantry policies to facilitate two visits per month, and increasing investments in charitable food providers

## APPROACH 1.1: INCREASE OFF-HOURS ACCESS, INCLUDING EVENING AND WEEKEND DISTRIBUTIONS.

There are currently no weekend food pantry distributions available anywhere in Adams County, and access to evening pantries is middling, but still has sizable gaps. Four in five food insecure individuals (79%) have access to an evening food pantry distribution that is open at least once a month, but access to more frequent evening distributions is limited.

Off-hours access is critically important because full-time employed households and households with children are among the most likely to face very low food security in Adams County. Households with children and those who reported working full time both have a very low food security rate of 41%, which is 11 percentage points higher than the county average.

The impact of limited hours is confirmed by the results of a survey of households who do not currently visit food pantries. Limited hours were tied for the second most common reason why food insecure respondents do not visit the charitable food system. These findings imply that the county's lack of evening and weekend distributions may be making access difficult for many of the families who would benefit most from assistance.



## APPROACH 1.2: ADJUST PANTRY POLICIES TO ENSURE NEIGHBORS IN NEED CAN VISIT AT LEAST TWO PANTRIES OR TWO DISTRIBUTIONS EACH MONTH.

Pantries should also make other policy and procedural adjustments aimed at ensuring visitors have a positive experience when they seek assistance.

Ensuring that every food insecure individual in Adams County has access to two charitable food distributions per month, regardless of if they are at the same or different physical locations, is a key step toward maximizing the impact the charitable food system can make on food insecurity.

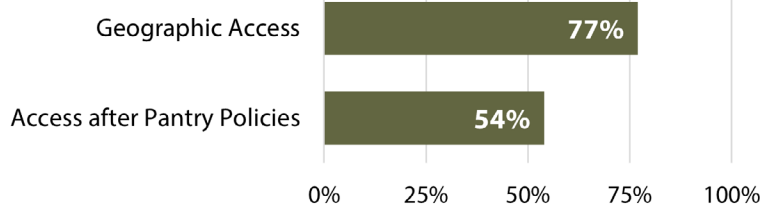
■ *One visit per month is not enough to eliminate hunger for 30% of all households who visit pantries, including almost half of households with children.*

Currently, pantry policies meaningfully curtail the access neighbors have to the help they need, even though pantries are very well-distributed across the county.

Residents of every census tract in Adams County have access to a pantry within 15 minutes' drive, and most food insecure individuals (77%) have access to two or more pantries. However, access to two or more distributions drops to 54% of food insecure individuals when restrictions on visit frequency or location are included in the analysis.

Adjusting pantry policies to allow neighbors to visit one pantry more than once per month, or to visit two different pantries a month, therefore represents a key opportunity to meaningfully expand access across the county.

### Percent of Food Insecure Individuals with Access to Two or More Pantries, Adams County



Households with the lowest incomes visit the charitable food system more frequently than households with higher incomes in Adams County, indicating that neighbors seek assistance only when they need it.

In light of this finding, pantries should not be concerned that all households will begin to visit twice per month simply because it becomes an option.

## APPROACH 1.3: INCREASE INVESTMENTS, INCLUDING PUBLIC POLICY INVESTMENTS, IN ADAMS COUNTY CHARITABLE FOOD PROVIDERS TO ENSURE PEOPLE HAVE ENOUGH FOOD.

In interviews and discussion groups, pantry coordinators expressed worry about being able to source enough product amidst an environment of increasing grocery prices and a rising number of households seeking services.

Funding for charitable food providers has stagnated while governmental supports for households have dropped in the last several years, leading to higher food insecurity rates and record numbers of visits to food pantries. Due to the federal nutrition funding cuts contained in the July 2025 budget reconciliation bill, including large reductions to SNAP, this unfortunate trend will likely continue in the future. Collective advocacy for additional state and federal support will be critical to ensuring Adams County food pantries have enough resources to serve everyone who comes to their doors in search of help.



## Approach 2: Encouraging Robust Participation in Key Government Nutrition Programs

Government nutrition programs like SNAP, WIC, school meal programs, and summer meal programs all provide crucial support to food insecure Adams County residents. Adams County has exceedingly strong performance in WIC, with one of the highest participation rates in the entire state; 84% of likely-eligible county residents participate in WIC. These high WIC coverage rates are a strength in Adams County, especially since households with children are at increased risk of food insecurity.

Outside of WIC, there are opportunities to increase participation in other federal programs throughout the county, including SNAP, school meals, and summer meals. Pantries are well-targeted outreach locations for these programs that can leverage their role as trusted community resources to help increase uptake.

### APPROACH 2.1: INCREASE SNAP PARTICIPATION THROUGH TARGETED OUTREACH

Increasing SNAP participation is one of the biggest opportunities to meaningfully reduce food insecurity in Adams County. SNAP is the largest and most effective nutrition assistance program in the United States and will remain so despite recent cuts.

Contrary to its state-leading WIC participation rates, Adams County falls near the bottom of the state in SNAP. Adams County is ranked 58th out of 67 counties in the state in SNAP participation, with a 65% participation rate. Meanwhile, many of Adams County's neighbors outperform it; Franklin County has a 76% SNAP participation rate, putting it in the middle of the pack at 37th, and York County is at 90%, placing it 15th statewide.

There are several SNAP outreach methods that could be effective in Adams County, including targeted geographic outreach to individuals residing in

high-priority areas and community location-based outreach, including at pantries. Priority areas include Biglerville (17307), Littlestown (17340), and Hanover (17331).

Furthermore, less than half of pantry visitors in Adams County reported receiving SNAP, even though 90% are likely to be eligible for the program based on their incomes. The most common reason cited for not participating was "I don't think I'm eligible," which shows that there are opportunities for education around SNAP eligibility in the county. Recent changes to SNAP, which is already difficult for many individuals to navigate, have made applications and eligibility increasingly complex, so community providers should offer tailored assistance to individuals interested in applying for benefits.

### APPROACH 2.2: EXPAND PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL MEALS AND ACCESS TO SUMMER FOOD PROGRAMS

There are major opportunities to increase breakfast participation in Adams County, as students across the county are 30% less likely to eat breakfast at school than their peers across the state. Participation is just 26.3% compared to the 37.5% statewide average.

To increase participation and maximize the benefit they and their students can receive from the Commonwealth's universal school breakfast initiative, schools in Adams County should consider implementing alternative service models, such as grab and go breakfast, breakfast after the bell, and breakfast in the classroom if they do not already do so.

There are opportunities to increase access to federally funded summer meals in Adams County, particularly in Bermudian Springs, Upper Adams, and Conewago Valley school districts as well as outlying areas of Gettysburg Area School District. There were just two SUN Meal sites in Adams County in 2024, and both were in Gettysburg even though there were several eligible areas elsewhere in the county. Most eligible areas in Adams County also qualify as USDA rural, which could allow use of the new rural non-congregate meal service waiver for these programs.

### Approach 3: Addressing Upstream and Intersecting Issues with Food Insecurity

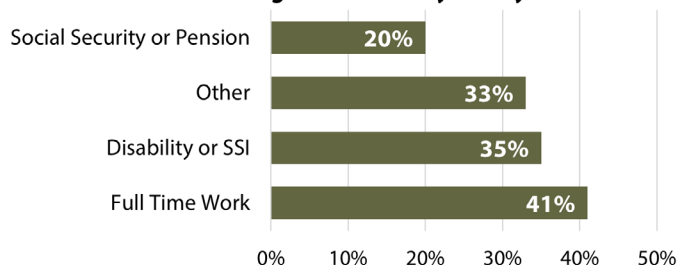
Food insecurity is caused by and associated with a variety of upstream and intersecting factors. Among Adams County pantry visitors, the foremost of these include low incomes despite full-time work, inadequate disability benefit levels, challenges around housing affordability, and chronic health conditions.

**Most working-age pantry visitor households report working full time, but a third of full-time workers had incomes below \$24,000 a year (\$11.50 per hour), and 72% reported incomes below \$36,000 a year (\$17.30 per hour).**

Two in five (41%) households who reported full-time work as their main income source experienced very low food security, which is the highest rate for any household income source.

These high rates of very low food security among the full-time employed illustrate the precarity of work for many low-income households. Policy proposals that could increase the security of work include an increase in the minimum wage, which remains at \$7.25 per hour in Pennsylvania, and “fair work week” legislation that requires companies to give employees their schedules at least two weeks in advance.

**Very Low Food Security Status by Main Source of Income among Adams County Pantry Visitors**



**Unemployment is not a significant contributor to the need for charitable food assistance in Adams County.**

Nine in ten pantry visitor households in the county stated that their primary sources of income were Social Security or a pension (38%), full-time work (29%), or Disability or SSI (19%). Anti-hunger and anti-poverty advocates should use this finding, which is consistent with the results of other Community Hunger Mapping projects, to dispel pernicious myths about people who visit food pantries and why they do so.

**Households who reported Disability or SSI as their main income source have the second highest very low food security rates at 35%; this is likely due to inadequate benefit levels and strict rules around earning or saving money that keep individuals who rely on these programs from building a personal safety net.**

Efforts to increase the sufficiency of SSDI and SSI benefits and to implement program reforms, such as the expansion of tax-exempt savings accounts that do not count against program asset limits (ABLE accounts) would help disabled neighbors live less precariously.

**Many pantry visitors mentioned having to choose between paying for food and housing-related costs like mortgage or rent (31%) or utilities (36%), showing that housing unaffordability is strongly associated with food insecurity in Adams County.**

One in nine (11%) pantry visitors had gone through an eviction, foreclosure, or other forced move in the last year, while one in five (21%) worried they would experience a forced move in the coming year.

These findings show that pantries should be cognizant that many of the people they serve may have challenges around housing and should offer foods that meet the needs of unstably or marginally housed individuals.

Beyond this, pantries and other stakeholders could promote and/or provide referrals to utility assistance programs like LIHEAP.

**Health systems and the charitable food network should collaborate on efforts to tackle food insecurity as a social determinant of health via Food as Medicine initiatives and other programs, as health and hunger are deeply intertwined.**

More than half (54%) of pantry visitor households in Adams County had at least one member with a diet-related chronic health condition, including 36% with high blood pressure, 31% with diabetes, and 9% with kidney disease.

## ■ Emphasizing Partnerships and the Unique Positionality of the Charitable Food System to Address Food Insecurity

An issue with the magnitude of food insecurity requires collective action from all stakeholders if it is to be thoroughly addressed. Every person, organization and sector has a unique contribution to make and role to play in reducing hunger throughout Adams County. For the charitable food system, this means further leveraging its position as a low-barrier social service provider and amplifying its impact in reducing hunger by adjusting policies to increase access in targeted ways.

Other stakeholders across the county, such as local government, health systems, concerned citizens, and more can take steps to make a difference; several key efforts to support our neighbors in need include investing in charitable food providers, connecting people to programs for which they are eligible, and working together to address upstream and intersecting issues through advocacy and program and policy change. Adams County has strong community organizations; together, they can work to meet the needs of neighbors today as well as strive toward ending hunger tomorrow.

## 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 Adams County, as well as the input of community leaders and food pantry providers. Data and quotes included in this report are de-identified 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

### Secondary Analysis

This report's secondary analysis draws upon data from a variety of different sources, including the American Community Survey 2018-2022 and 2019-2023 5-Year Estimates, 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, child congregate meal program site and participation data from the Pennsylvania Department of Education and USDA, and Feeding America Map the Meal Gap 2025 data with 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.



**135**  
surveys were completed  
across 5 different locations



**01**  
pantry sites were  
visited and observed

### Neighbor Surveys

In Fall 2024, CPFB researchers conducted surveys at five geographically and demographically representative food pantries across Adams County. A total of 135 surveys were completed across the five 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 10 minutes on average. \$10 gift cards for a variety of local grocery stores were provided to each participant.

### Non-Participant Observation at Food Pantries

To include as many agency partners as possible in the Community Hunger Mapping process, CPFB researchers visited 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 neighbor experience of accessing charitable food to this report.

**48**

**participants from 6  
locations completed  
surveys**

### Non-Food Pantry Neighbor Surveys

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 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 48 total participants from six locations across Adams County.

**06**

**partner agencies  
participated in  
listening sessions**

**05**

**pantries completed online  
and phone interviews**

### Partner Listening Sessions

CPFB agency partners from Adams County were invited to attend a listening session to discuss strengths and challenges at the pantry level. The discussion allowed for partners to identify and learn from each other's experiences and perspectives as pantry leaders within the community.

Discussion topics included pantry and community strengths, sourcing and logistics, and challenges related to distribution. The CPFB research team held one virtual listening session. A total of six individuals participated in the listening sessions, representing four different agencies.

### Partner Surveys

The CPFB Policy Research team distributed pantry surveys to agency partners who operate pantries that do not limit participation by age or military status across Adams 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 five pantries completed surveys via mail, email, and online. Best efforts were made to include the relevant information for non-respondents.


## ■ Conclusion and Final Recommendations

This report is the end product of a yearlong intensive research study that sought to increase understanding of Adams County's charitable food system and the experiences of the individuals it serves through a robust mixed-methods evaluation that included primary data collection, analysis of publicly available data, the incorporation of academic research, conversations with pantry staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders, and crucially, the experiences of the people who rely on food pantries to feed their families.

Throughout the project, researchers always centered Adams County's food insecure neighbors, with focus on understanding and depicting the reality of their lives and the often-difficult situations they face with care and compassion, as well as using the valuable information they shared to develop an informative, actionable resource that can guide real change throughout the charitable food network.

Although this report may seem to be the end of a project, it also begins a new one. Intentional, sustained, collaborative implementation of the recommendations made, assessment of their effects, and evaluation of longer-term outcomes will breathe further life into this document and help it reach its full potential.

This project was completed in collaboration with key Adams County stakeholders, including Wellspan Health and Healthy Adams County. Operationalizing the recommendations made in this report to their fullest extent will require a continuation of the collaboration of the collaborative spirit with which it was written, as an expansive, inclusive stakeholder group will be the key to success. Only together can we build an Adams County where no one must worry about how they will find their next meal.



**Only together will we build  
an Adams 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 Adams County Community Hunger Mapping Consultative Group, whose members included Kathy Gaskin of Healthy Adams County, Lisa Beaver and Megan Shreve of SCCAP, Brady Rodgers of Adams Economic Alliance, Mary Ann Leidigh of Shippensburg University, Jennifer Gastley, Megan Goodling, and M. Lange of Wellspan Health, Reza Djalal of Adams County Farmers' Markets, and Stephanie Esser of Service Access & Management.

Your time and expertise were invaluable; they ensured that this report could accurately reflect the vibrancy of the community and the charitable food network.

Every neighbor who shared their thoughts with us, whether that was through the Feeding America Client Survey 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 Adams 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.

Special thanks to other CPFEB staff and to consultative group members who assisted with surveys and non-participant observations, including Maddy Singer, Maria D'Isabella, Lo Whitaker Escobar, Ellen Min, and Kathy Gaskin. Thank you for sharing your valuable time to help us engage with our neighbors!



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