



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

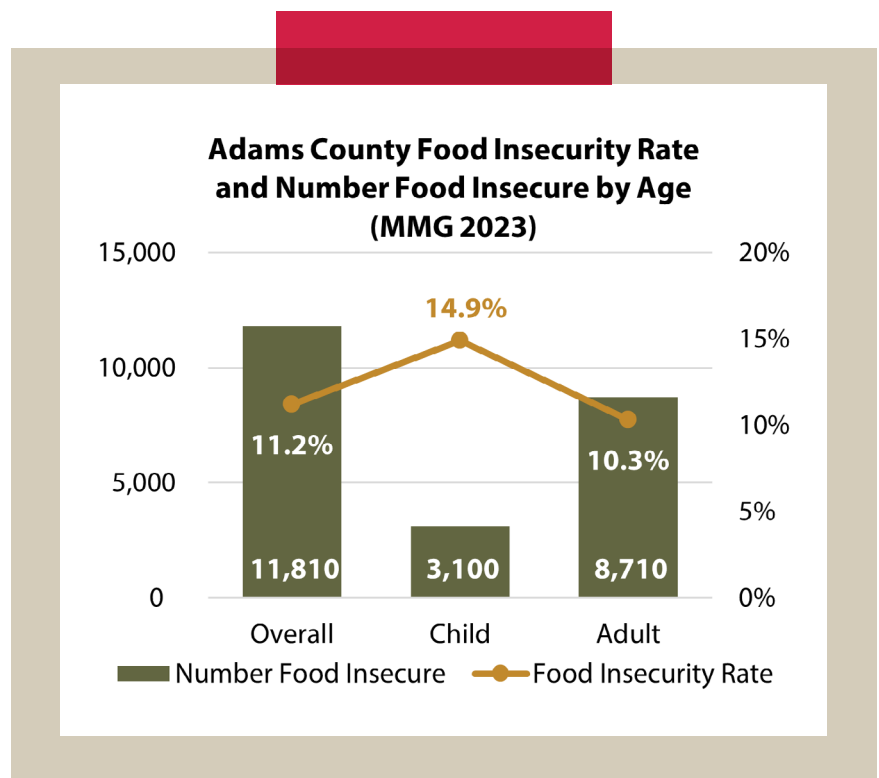
Food insecurity, or the lack of consistent access to the food needed to live an active, healthy life, is one of the most salient issues that communities across Pennsylvania and the United States must confront. Adams County is no exception; food insecurity affects every neighborhood and municipality in 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:
Strengthening
and increasing
the accessibility
of the charitable
food system | 2 | Approach 2:
Encouraging
robust
participation in
key government
nutrition
programs | 3 | Approach 3:
Addressing
upstream and
intersecting
issues that cause
food insecurity |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

■ *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%.*

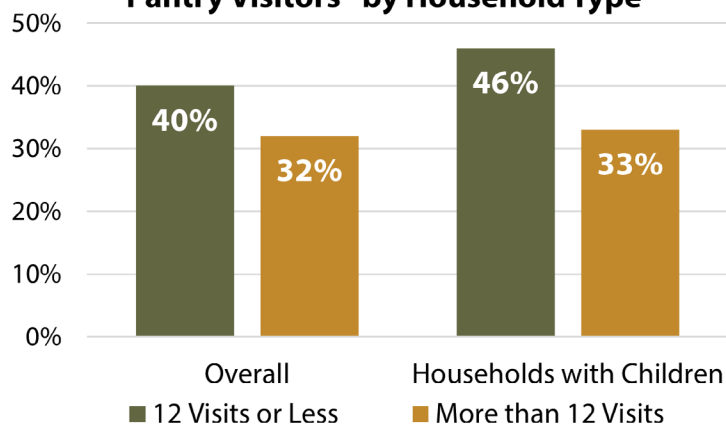
For all household types, the result of accessing charitable food more than once per month is a 20% drop in very low food security, from 40% to 32%.

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

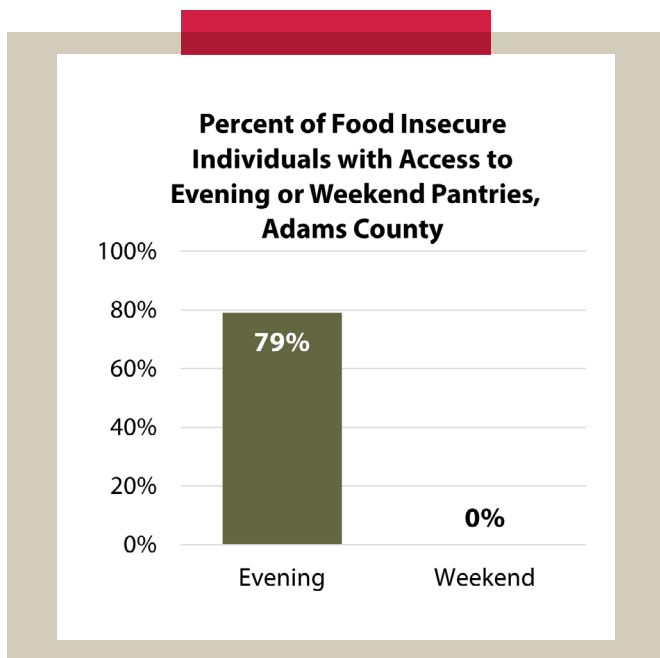
The many strengths of Adams County's charitable food system provide a solid base for further improvements in food access across the county. There are three primary ways stakeholders can work to further maximize the positive impact of Adams County charitable food providers, including increasing evening 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.

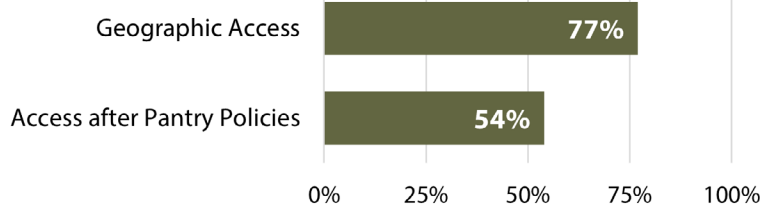
■ *One visit per month is not enough to eliminate hunger for 30% of all households who visit pantries, including almost half of households with children.*

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

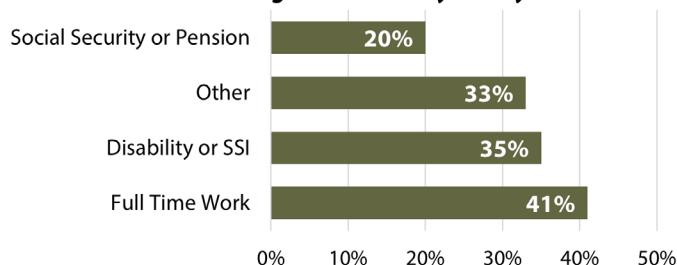
Food insecurity is caused by and associated with a variety of upstream and intersecting factors. Among Adams County pantry visitors, the foremost of these include low incomes despite full-time work, inadequate disability benefit levels, challenges around housing affordability, and chronic health conditions.

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.



■ Section One



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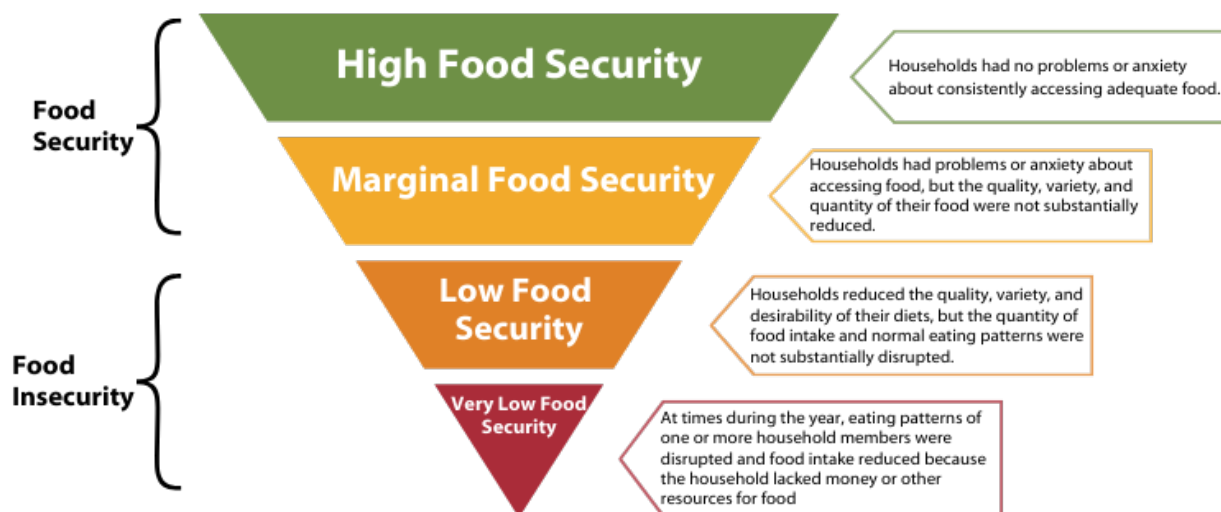
Food Insecurity Analysis

Section 1

Food Insecurity Analysis

Food Insecurity: Low Food Security and Very Low Food Security

Food insecurity is defined as lack of access or uncertainty of access to the food needed for an active, healthy life.¹ The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) definition of food security divides it into four distinct categories: High Food Security, Marginal Food Security, Low Food Security, and Very Low Food Security. These four categories are shown in the figure below.²



Food insecurity is made up of the latter two subcategories: low food security and very low food security. Low food security is defined by uncertain access to food and reduced quality and desirability of attained foods, while very low food security is defined by reduced food intake due to not having enough money for food.

Very low food security is the closest measurable approximation to hunger, though it is important to note that very low food security does not specifically measure hunger, as hunger is the physical sensation of discomfort or weakness from lack of food alongside the need to eat. Both overall and very low food security will be discussed throughout the report.

■ *The mission of traditional food banking and food pantry work is to prevent hunger, even if people lack the funds to purchase food.*

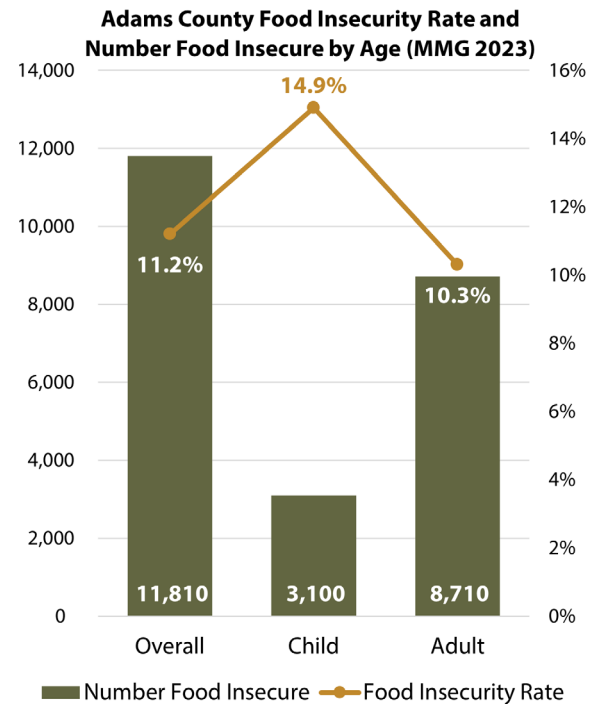
Although traditional charitable food work cannot directly reduce the economic insecurity that causes worry about food access and corresponding low food security, it has immense potential to impact very low food security. Therefore, the charitable food system in Adams County should focus first and foremost on reducing very low food security.



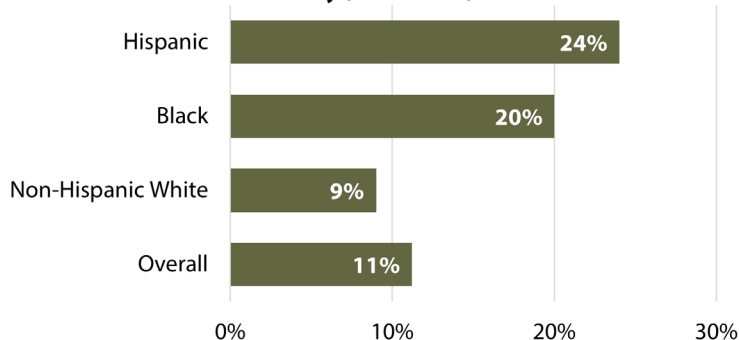
Food Insecurity in Adams County

Adams County's overall food insecurity rate stood at 11.2% as of 2023 according to Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap estimates. About one in nine residents of the county, or 11,810 people, faced uncertain or limited access to food because of a lack of money to buy more food. Food insecurity is not evenly spread across Adams County – while it affects every single community, some demographics bear a heavier burden.

For example, children in Adams County have a food insecurity rate of 14.9%, which means that 3,100 children, or one in seven, were unsure where their next meal would come from. Children and youth were 45% more likely to be food insecure than adults in the county (10.3%). This disparity is relatively small compared to other counties in central Pennsylvania, but it is still a critical issue that should be addressed; food insecurity among children is associated with long-term negative outcomes, such as decreased educational and career attainment throughout their adult lives.³



Adams County Food Insecurity Rate By Race and Ethnicity (MMG 2023)



Hispanic and Black residents of Adams County faced disproportionate food insecurity rates as well. One in four Hispanic individuals in the county experienced food insecurity in 2023 (24%), as did one in five Black individuals (20%). These food insecurity rates were more than twice both the 9% rate seen among non-Hispanic white individuals and the 11% countywide rate.

FOOD INSECURITY IN ADAMS COUNTY OVER TIME

Food insecurity rates in Adams County have varied considerably in the last few years, with the most visible changes occurring among children.

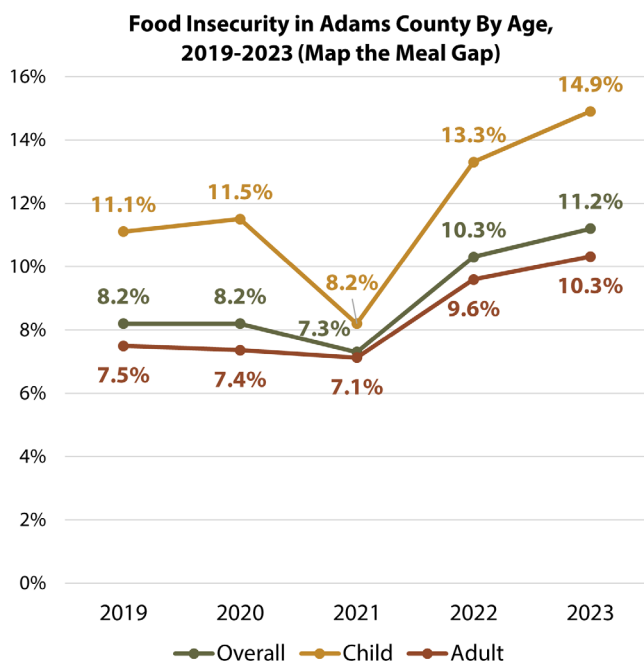
Though food insecurity has had a general upward trend since 2019, there was a sizable drop from 2020 to 2021; overall food insecurity rates in Adams County dropped 10% from 8.2% to 7.3% in that period, while child food insecurity dropped an astonishing 28% from 11.5% to 8.2%.

Unfortunately, these decreases in food insecurity were followed by even larger increases between 2021 and 2022. All-age food insecurity rebounded to 11.2% in 2023, and child food insecurity skyrocketed to 13.3%, a more than 60% increase over 2021's low.

In 2023, rates continued to rise. Overall food insecurity rates stood at 11.2%, a 36% increase over 2019 and a 53% rise over the 7.2% rate in 2021. For children, food insecurity rates were 14.9%, 34% higher than in 2019 and 81% higher than the low in 2021.

The unprecedented one-year increases in food insecurity seen between 2021 and 2022, as well as the smaller increase between 2022 and 2023 were the result of several factors, including high grocery inflation and the expiration of certain public policies that had driven sizable drops in poverty and food insecurity in 2021, especially among children.

■ *The most notable of these was the expanded Child Tax Credit (CTC), though the expiration of SNAP Emergency Allotments (EAs) in February 2023 played a role in the rise in overall and adult food insecurity in that year.*



The CTC expansion was signed into law as part of the American Rescue Plan (ARP) and was in effect only in 2021. The ARP raised the maximum child tax credit amount for that year from \$2,000 per child to \$3,600 per child under the age of six, or \$3,000 per child aged six to seventeen.⁴

Importantly, the expanded CTC was fully refundable and paid out in the form of monthly \$250 or \$300 payments rather than as a lump sum at tax time.⁵ These changes to the credit's design significantly increased its utility to very low-income households. Many would not have qualified for the traditional CTC at all, as they may not have met the minimum income thresholds.

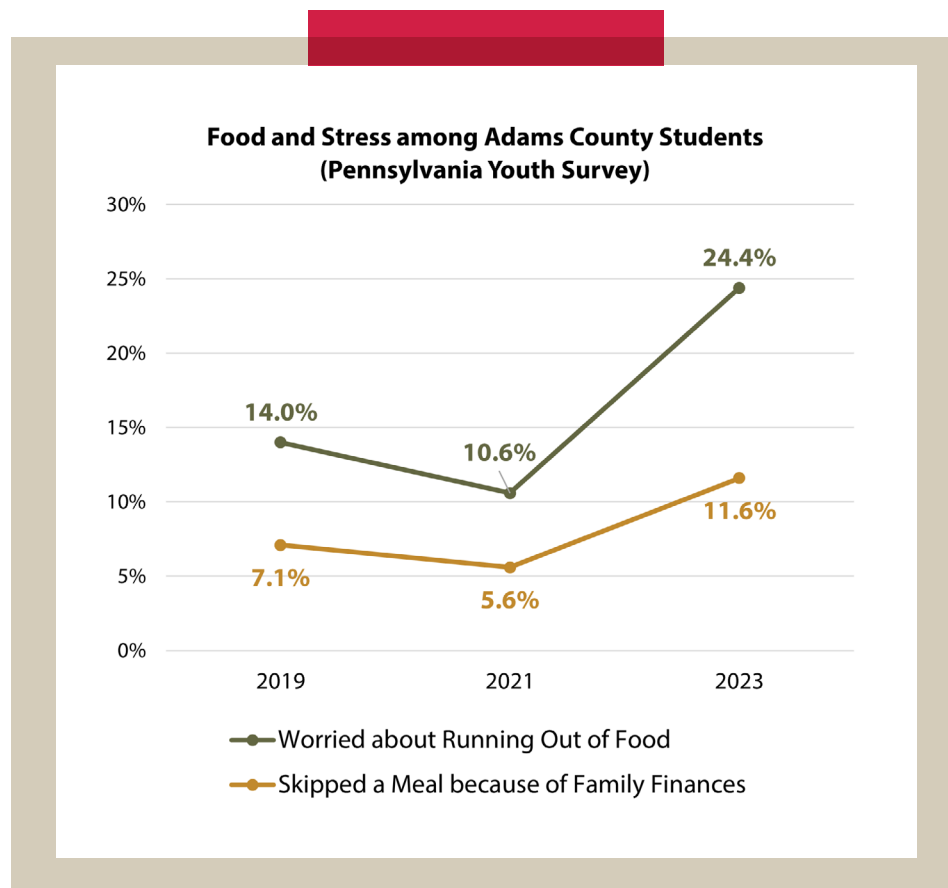
The positive impact of the expanded CTC on child poverty and food insecurity was evident both nationally and locally. Across the country, the expanded CTC lifted 2.1 million children out of poverty⁶ and was the key driver of the largest decrease in food insecurity for children on record.⁷ As mentioned previously, child food insecurity dropped by almost a third between 2020 and 2021 before rebounding even higher in 2022 following the expiration of the CTC.

This data clearly demonstrates that targeted investments of sufficient scale can meaningfully reduce experiences of food insecurity among children and push all-age food insecurity below its previous floor, a result that economic growth and low unemployment have not been able to accomplish alone. Since the expansion expired, the CTC has returned to having a maximum value of \$2,000 (although it will increase by \$200 in this tax year), is again paid annually rather than monthly, and excludes the lowest income households. These policy reversions have severely curtailed the CTC's impact on child poverty and food insecurity nationally and locally.

Data from the Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) conducted by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency reflect the same concerning trend in food insecurity rates among children as Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap estimates.

PAYS asked Pennsylvania students in 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th grades if they worried about running out of food or had skipped a meal because of their family's finances in the past year; in Adams County in 2023, almost a quarter of surveyed students (24.4%) indicated that they worried about running out of food and about one in nine (11.6%) actually skipped a meal because their family did not have enough money for food.⁸

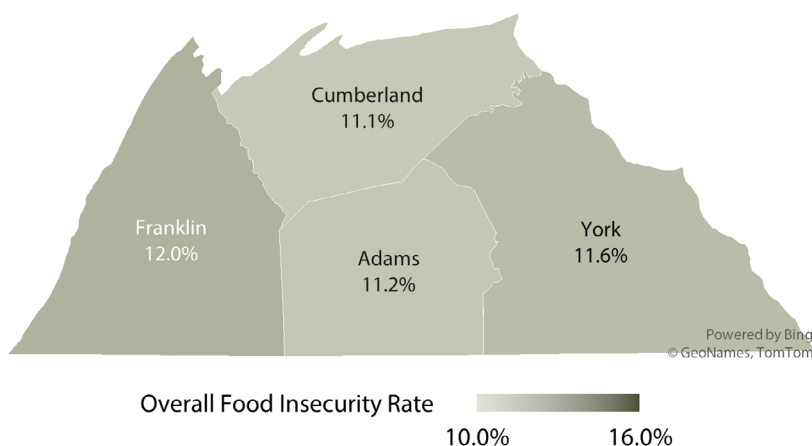
By contrast, rates for each category in 2021, the previous year in which PAYS was conducted and the year in which the expanded CTC and universal school meals were in effect, were dramatically lower at 10.6% and 5.6% respectively. These findings provide compelling evidence of the meaningful impact the expanded CTC and universal school lunch had on children and families and could have again if renewed.



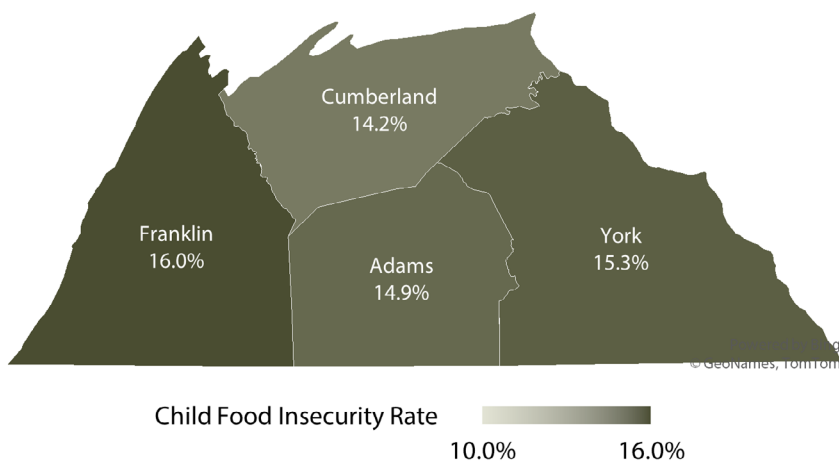
FOOD INSECURITY IN ADAMS COUNTY IN REGIONAL CONTEXT

Adams County's overall food insecurity rate of 11.2% is 15% lower than the Pennsylvania statewide rate of 13.2% as of 2023. The county lies in a region with generally lower food insecurity rates compared to the rest of the state – all-age food insecurity rates among Adams County and its neighbors ranged from a low of 11.1% in Cumberland County to a high of 12.0% in Franklin County, for a total range between counties of less than a percentage point. Adams County's child food insecurity rate is 18% lower than the statewide average as of 2023, at 14.9% compared to 18.1%. As with overall food insecurity rates, Adams sits in a region with lower child food insecurity rates. Cumberland County again had the lowest rate at 14.2% and Franklin again had the highest at 16.0%.

Overall Food Insecurity Rate by County (MMG 2023)



Child Food Insecurity Rate by County (MMG 2023)



NATIONAL FOOD INSECURITY DISPARITIES BY HOUSEHOLD TYPE

■ *Nationally, households with children are by far the most likely to experience food insecurity.*

While more specific food insecurity data by household type is not available at the local level, USDA annual reports provide breakdowns on the prevalence of food insecurity by household type at the national level.

As of the most recent USDA report, which provides statistics for 2023, food insecurity by household type broke down as follows:

- Households with children had a food insecurity rate of 17.9%.
 - Food insecurity rates were highest for single female-headed households with children at 34.7%.
 - Single male-headed households with children had lower but still elevated food insecurity rates of 22.6%.
- Households without children had a food insecurity rate of 11.9%.
- Households with seniors had a food insecurity rate of 9.3%, which is the lowest food insecurity rate of any household type other than households without children and more than one adult (8.6%).
- Elderly living alone households had a slightly higher food insecurity rate of 11.0%, but this was lower than working-age women or men households who live alone (16.1% and 14.0%, respectively).

17.9%
for households
with children



11.9%
for households
without children

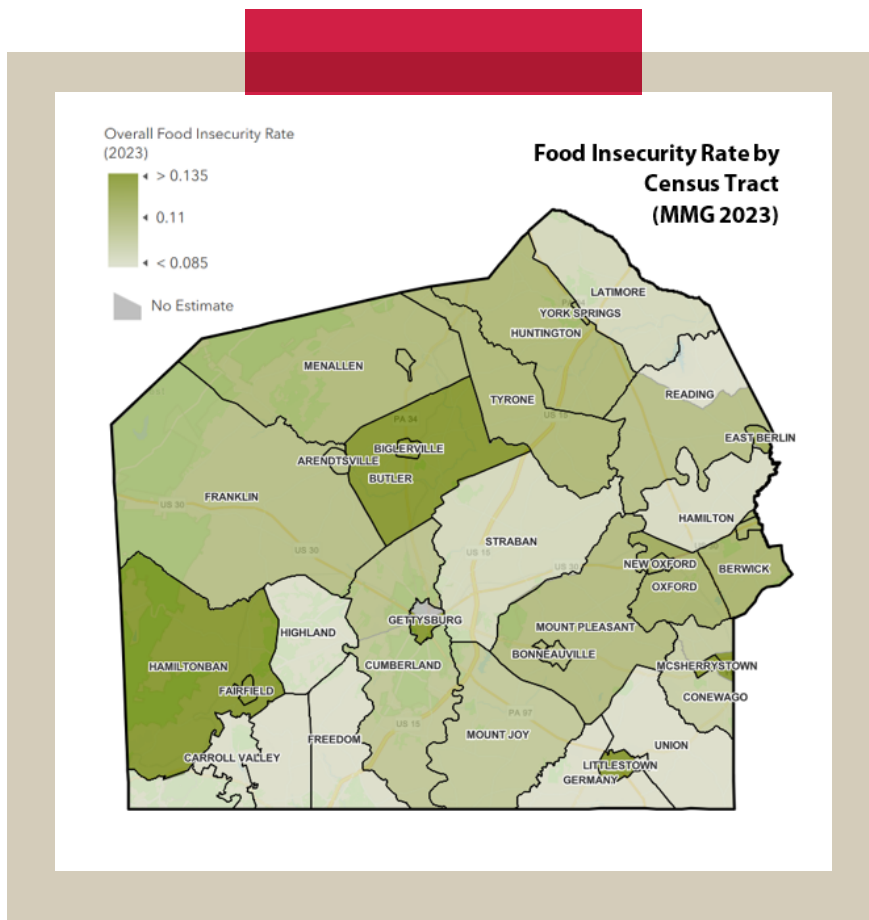
9.3%
for households
with seniors



11%
for elderly
living alone

Sub-County Food Insecurity in Adams County

Food insecurity touches every community in Adams County, but food insecurity rates and the number of food insecure individuals vary substantially across the county. This section assesses food insecurity rates and the number of food insecure individuals by census tract within Adams County as of 2023. Census tracts are used as the unit of analysis in this section for several reasons; first and foremost, they are the smallest geography for which Feeding America produces food insecurity estimates. Census tracts are also relatively even in population and, in Pennsylvania, usually align neatly with neighborhoods in cities and boroughs and municipalities in suburban and rural areas, making them helpful geographic units to use when comparing the dispersion of food insecurity across different localities.



FOOD INSECURITY RATE BY CENSUS TRACT

Food insecurity rates in Adams County's census tracts ranged from a low of 6.3% to a high of 16.4% as of 2023.

High food insecurity rates are found in a variety of places across the county, including Fairfield and surrounding Hamiltonban Township, Biglerville and surrounding Butler Township, McSherrystown, and Littlestown, as well as southern Gettysburg. Estimates are not available for the census tract covering the northern half of the borough due to the presence of Gettysburg College. The McSherrystown tract, which covers part of Conewago Township extending towards the York County border, has the highest food insecurity rate in the county at 16.4%. One in six residents of this area faced food insecurity in 2023.

More moderate food insecurity rates falling near the county average, are found across most of the rest of the county, including Cumberland Township surrounding Gettysburg, the area south and east of Gettysburg extending from Mount Joy to New Oxford and Abbottstown, as well as much of the northern portion of the county stretching from Franklin Township in the west to East Berlin in the east. Low food insecurity rates are found in the Carroll Valley area in the southwest, southeast surrounding Littlestown, northeast near York Springs, and in Straban Township to the northeast of Gettysburg.

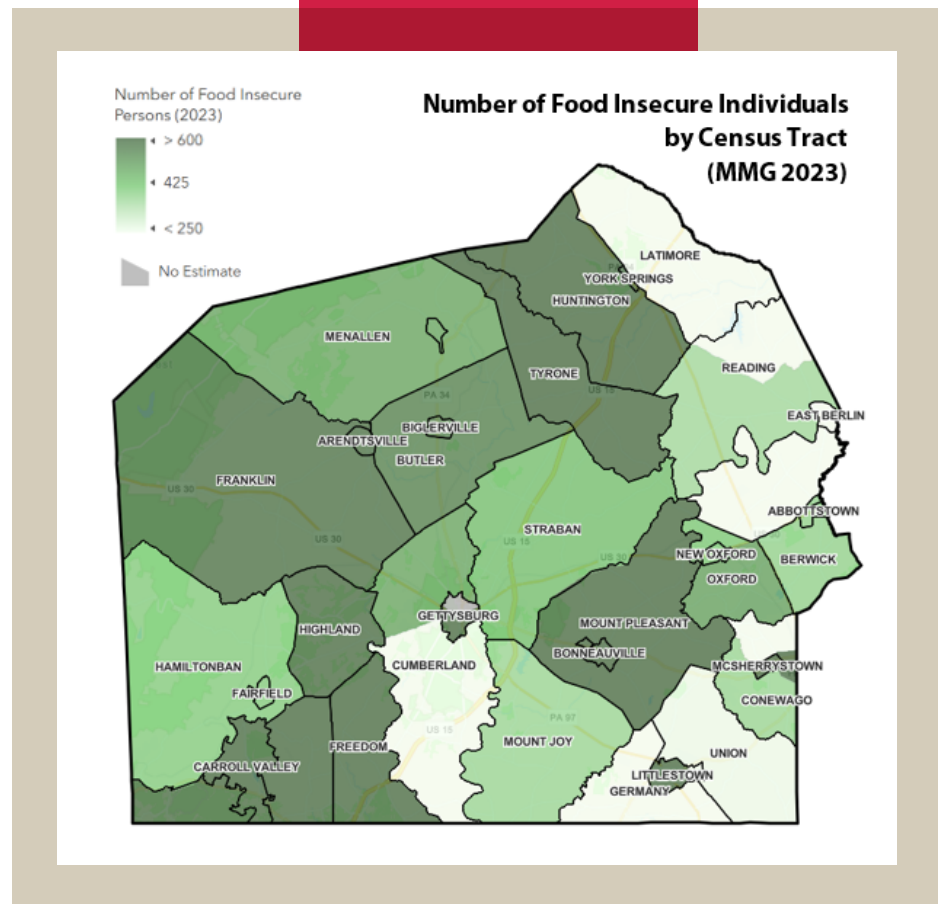
NUMBER OF FOOD INSECURE INDIVIDUALS BY CENSUS TRACT

Shifting perspective to the number of food insecure individuals by census tract reveals other patterns in the dispersion of food insecurity across Adams County. The number of food insecure individuals by census tract in tracts where estimates are available ranges from a low of 150 to a high of 800. As with food insecurity rates, the tract with the largest number of food insecure individuals is the one covering McSherrystown. This census tract alone accounts for 7.1% of the total food insecure individuals in Adams County despite making up only 4.6% of the overall countywide population.

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 most of Littlestown borough and southern Gettysburg. Estimates are again unavailable for Gettysburg north of Route 30 due to the presence of Gettysburg College.

Moderate numbers of food insecure individuals cover most of the rest of the county.

Only the Gettysburg Battlefield portion of Cumberland Township, Germany and Union townships surrounding Littlestown, northern Conewago Township, Hamilton Township and East Berlin have small number of food insecure individuals at less than 300 food insecure individuals each.



The Extent of Food Insecurity among Food Pantry Visitors in Adams County

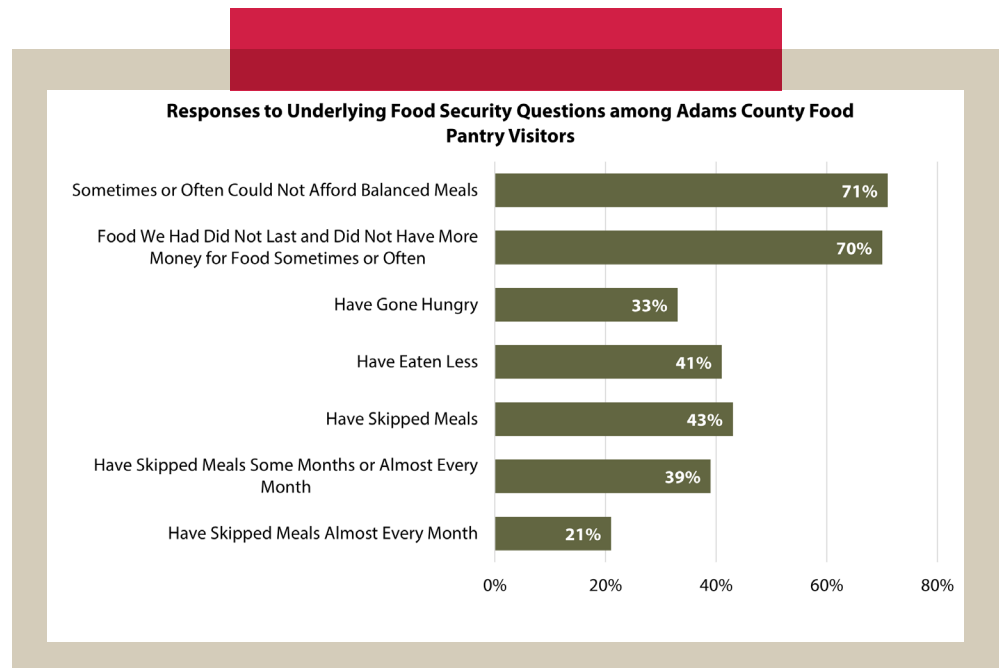
Approximately two thirds (63.0%) of food pantry visitors in Adams County reported experiencing food insecurity. This is unsurprisingly a higher proportion than the general population, but the degree of hunger is still staggering.

Just under one in three pantry visitors (30.4%) experienced very low food security, meaning they reported going hungry on a regular basis despite visiting food pantries. Since very low food security is the closest available measure of hunger in the United States, tracking the very low food security rate is a critical measure of the charitable food network's impact and progress.

CPFB researchers developed these estimates of low and very low food security by analyzing the results of pantry visitor surveys that included a six-question food security module from the USDA.

Answers to the underlying questions as answered by Adams County pantry visitors are provided in the figure to the right.

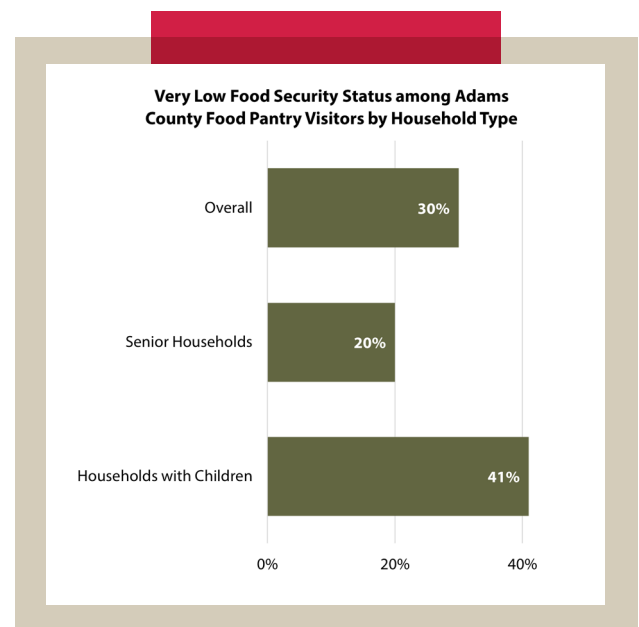
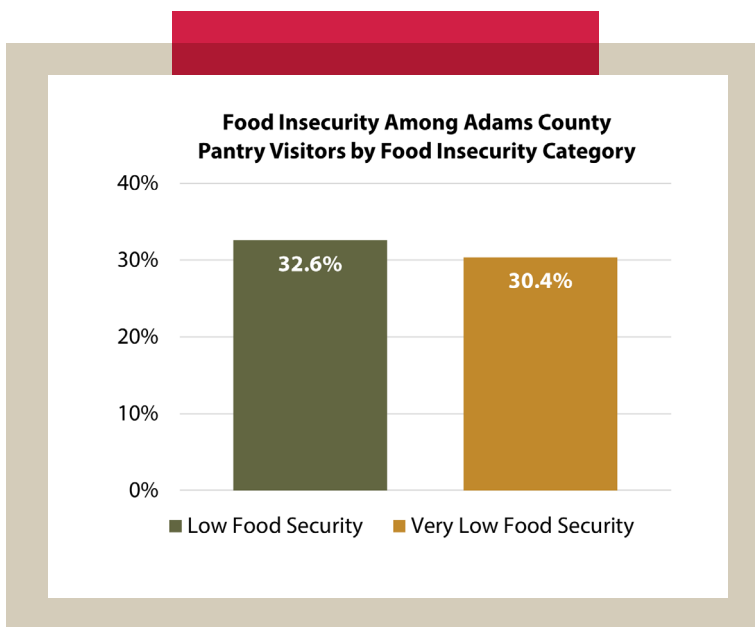
Seven in ten (70%) food pantry visitors said the food they had did not last and they did not have money to get more “sometimes” or “often,” while 71% said they “sometimes” or “often” could not afford balanced meals. A total of 41% of pantry visitors said they had eaten less and 33% said they had gone hungry because they did not have enough money for food.



This rate is similar to the overall very low food security rate among pantry visitors. 43% of households had skipped meals within the last year because they lacked sufficient money for food, including 21% that reported skipping meals almost every month.

There are major differences in experiences of very low food security by pantry visitor household composition, especially for households with children. Households with children are more than twice as likely as seniors to experience very low food security, with rates of 41% compared to 20%.

Sample sizes were not sufficient to break out the data for working-age households without children or by race/ethnicity in Adams County. Regardless, the elevated rate of very low food security for households with children relative to the rate seen among the pantry visitor population at large is a hugely consequential differential and shows that the charitable food network can amplify its impact by focusing on ways to increase access and utilization for those with children.



Food Insecurity Main Findings and Recommendations

SECTION 1 FINDING 1:

Nearly 12,000 people face food insecurity in Adams County, including more than 3,000 children. The food insecurity rate of 11.2% means that one in nine Adams County residents do not have certain access to the food they need to live active, healthy lives.

People in every single municipality in Adams County experience food insecurity, but there are considerable differences in food insecurity's prevalence by age, race, and place. Black and Hispanic households are more than twice as likely to experience food insecurity as are white, non-Hispanic households. Children are 45% more likely to face food insecurity than adults, with a food insecurity rate of 14.9% compared to 10.3%.

Recommendation:

It will take continuous collaborative work between a variety of stakeholders and sectors, including government, nonprofits, businesses, and the public, to adequately address an issue with the scope and scale of food insecurity. While food insecurity exists everywhere in Adams County, responses should be tailored to the exact needs of and situation in each community.

SECTION 1 FINDING 2:

Food insecurity has increased at alarming rates in Adams County since 2021 and continues to do so. Overall food insecurity has increased 53% over only two years, rising from 7.3% in 2021 to 11.2% in 2023. This near doubling is one of the highest rates of increase in Pennsylvania during this time. Child food insecurity spiked 82% during the same time frame, from 8.2% to 14.9%.

Food insecurity measures self-reported by children have risen precipitously in Adams County since 2021, with the percentage of children who worried about running out of food more than doubling from 10.6% to 24.4% between 2021 and 2023, and the proportion of children that reported skipping a meal doubling from 5.6% to 11.6% in the same time.

Recommendation:

The increasing seriousness of the food security situation in Adams County means that stakeholders across the county should prioritize access to food as a basic need for residents and should make investments that can help pantries meet the rising demand for help.



FOOD INSECURITY IS A RISING
ISSUE IN ADAMS COUNTY

SECTION 1 FINDING 3:

Every census tract and municipality in Adams County is home to neighbors experiencing food insecurity, but the areas with the highest rates of food insecurity as of 2023 include Biglerville, Butler Township Hamiltonban Township, McSherrystown, Littlestown, and southern Gettysburg.

The census tract covering McSherrystown and part of Conewago Township has the highest food insecurity rate in the county at 16.4%.

McSherrystown has the highest number of food insecure individuals for any census tract in the county at 800 individuals, while areas with more than 500 food insecure individuals include the census tracts in the Carroll Valley area, Arendtsville, Biglerville, York Springs, and Bonneauville, as well as most of Littlestown borough and southern Gettysburg.

Recommendation:

Food insecurity exists in every municipality and census tract in Adams County, so it is important that services exist in each area of the county and that food insecure individuals have meaningful access to them. Sustained, targeted work across the county, with focus on the areas with the highest food insecurity rates is critical to the work of reducing or eliminating hunger.

SECTION 1 FINDING 4:

Three in ten pantry visitors (30%) in Adams County reported experiencing very low food security, which means that they go without adequate food on a regular basis.

Households with children are far more likely to face very low food security than other household types, as more than 40% of households with children who visit food pantries had survey responses placing them in this category compared to 20% of senior-only households.

Recommendation:

Charitable food providers across Adams County should implement policies and programs aimed at reducing very low food security among pantry visitors, with emphasis on ensuring that households with children have access to sufficient resources. Such policies and programs may include those aimed at increasing access to the charitable food system, increasing participation in available government programs like SNAP, WIC, and school meals, and advocating for policies and programs that increase the sufficiency of income, benefits, and economic mobility opportunities.

Very low food security is a critical measure of hunger and, by extension, is a key metric of the success of the charitable food system's work in Adams County. To assess progress, food pantries should implement short annual surveys that can measure multiple dimensions of their services, including accessibility and satisfaction with pantry experiences as well as very low food security over time.





■ Section Two



02

Access to Charitable Food in Adams County

Section Two ■

Access to Charitable Food in Adams County

Strengths of the Adams County Charitable Food System

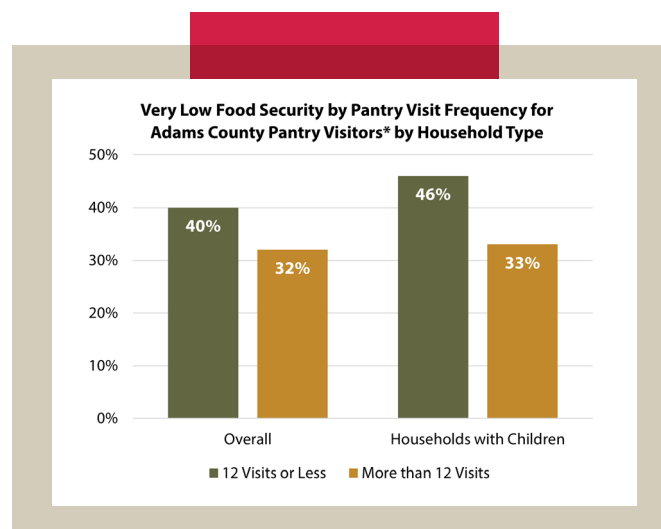
The charitable food network in Adams County has several strengths that make it successful in its work to alleviate hunger across the county. The results of pantry visitor surveys indicate that visits to food pantries truly do reduce experiences of hunger. Geographic access to pantries across the county is very strong; every food insecure individual in Adams County has at least one local pantry at which they can seek help without a substantial travel burden. Furthermore, nine in ten food insecure individuals have access to a pantry using a choice model of distribution, which allows visitors to select the food their families want and need, and wait times for service across the county are generally low.

IMPACT OF THE CHARITABLE FOOD SYSTEM IN ADAMS COUNTY

The Adams County charitable food system reduces hunger significantly among pantry visitors. Households with incomes below 150% of the federal poverty level that visited food pantries more than once a month in the last year have very low food security rates 20% lower than those in the same income bracket who visit once a month or less, at a 32% VLFS rate compared to 40%. For households with children, who are the most likely to experience very low food security by a large margin, the effect of the charitable food system and additional visits is even greater.

Low-income households with children who visited charitable food providers more than twelve times in the past year have very low food security rates 28% lower than similar households who visited less frequently (33% compared to 46%). Households with children are some of the most vulnerable to food insecurity and hunger, making the positive impact of the charitable food network on these households even more relevant.

These findings highlight the importance of lowering barriers to access, such as visit frequency restrictions, and of ensuring equitable access for households with children. One pantry visit or fewer per month does not appear to be enough to alleviate very low food security for two in five households, including almost half of households with children. Given the large reduction in very low food security seen among those who can visit a pantry more than once a month, the Adams County charitable food network should work to ensure that all neighbors can visit at least two distributions per month, whether that is at the same pantry location or spread across multiple agencies.



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

GEOGRAPHIC PANTRY ACCESS

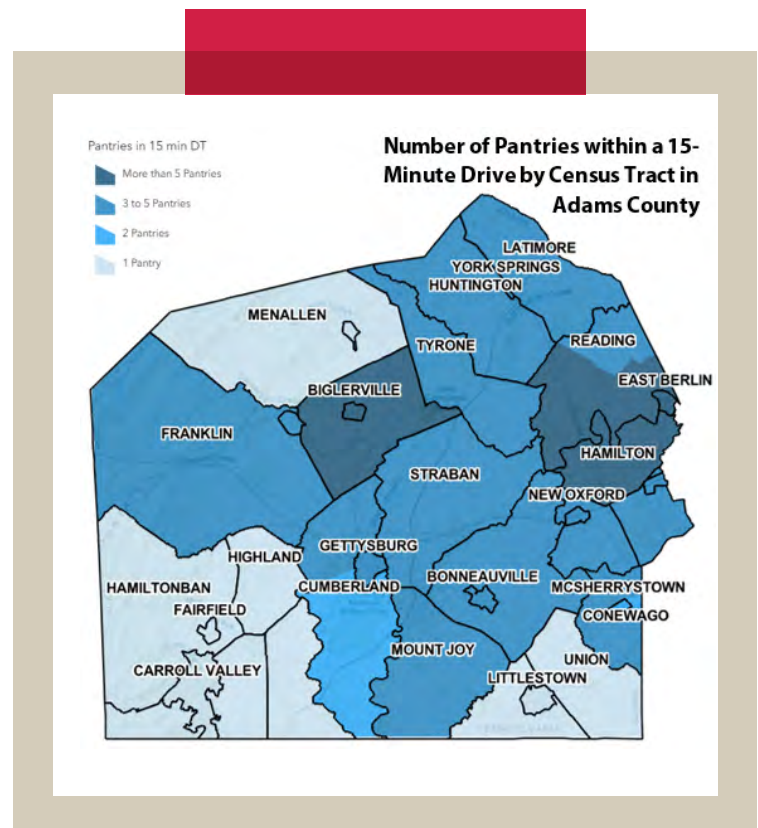
To understand pantry access at a sub-county level, this analysis examines the number of CPFB partners within a 15-minute drive of each census tract's center of population in Adams County. The analysis' parameters are limited to food pantries that everyone can access without restrictions based on demographic characteristics such as age or military history. Therefore, youth programs, MilitaryShares, and senior programs, such as CSFP and ElderShare, are not included in the following maps and discussions.

Overall, pantry access is robust in central Adams County but less so in the southern corners of the county and the Bendersville area. The map at right shows that East Berlin, Biglerville, and Hamilton and lower Reading townships have the most robust access to pantries, with all census tracts having more than five pantries within a 15-minute drive time.

Conversely, the census tracts containing Littlestown, Fairfield, Carroll Valley, Bendersville, and Union Township all have access to only one nearby pantry. These areas represent 24% of the food insecure population in Adams County and present the greatest opportunity to expand pantry access in Adams County, as there are no census tracts that completely lack a food pantry within a 15-minute drive.

Except for southern Cumberland Township, which has two local pantries, all the remaining census tracts in Adams County have reasonable drive-times to between three and five local pantries. A walk time analysis was conducted but is not pictured here; Gettysburg and East Berlin are the only areas with walkable access to a food pantry.

While this map shows the number of pantries within a reasonable drive time, it should not be considered to wholly depict meaningful access, as agencies may have program restrictions or other constraints that prevent neighbors from accessing their services despite geographic proximity, such as strict service territories, infrequent distribution hours, burdensome paperwork requirements, or limited frequency or adequacy of service. In



Adams County, several larger agencies limit neighbor visits to a single pantry visit per month.

This significantly decreases pantry access from what is shown above and leaves roughly 46% of food insecure neighbors in Adams County to rely on just one pantry distribution a month, which may not be sufficient to meet their needs. Because some agencies have policies discouraging or preventing people from visiting more than one pantry, even if they reside within the service territories of two or more, neighbors may not be benefiting from the variety of charitable food providers geographically available to them.

Given the data showing more than one visit per month reduces very low food security by half, these restrictions limit the impact of the charitable food system in Adams County. Therefore, while in some areas there may be multiple pantries within a 15-minute drive, residents of these areas are unable to receive services from all of them.

Additionally, geographic access analyses do not account for any gaps in awareness of local services. Even where services are present, neighbors may not know enough about them to effectively utilize them. As a result, this analysis provides an overestimate of access.

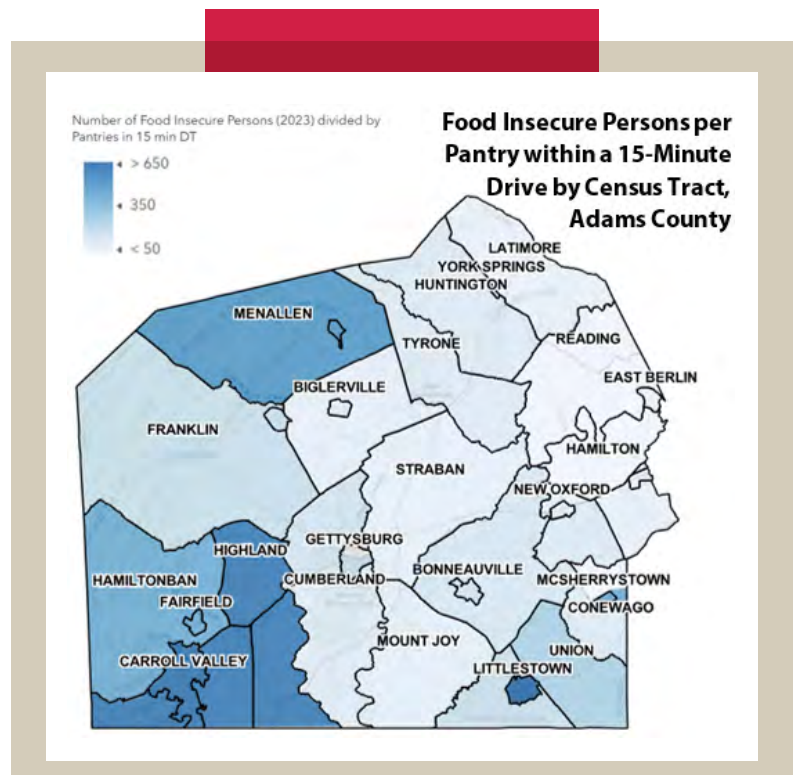
Further analyses in this report will account for some of these other potential barriers to access. Finally, 18% of respondents said that getting a ride with friends or family was their primary means of transportation to a pantry, and another 9% noted either biking/walking or using transit services for pantry access. For individuals relying on public transportation or availability of a carpool, the intersection of available pantry choices and hours of operation may also have a limiting effect on how, when, and if a neighbor can visit a pantry.

Food Insecure Individuals Per Pantry within 15-Minute Drive Time

While the map in the previous section effectively illustrates the distribution of pantries throughout the county and helps highlight areas with fewer pantries, it is important to keep the size of food insecure populations in mind when assessing sufficiency of access to pantries.

The map at right shows the number of food insecure individuals per pantry within a 15-minute drive time of each census tract's center of population. This metric is a useful tool in assessing the approximate number of food insecure individuals each pantry might be expected to serve and can help identify areas where service adequacy could be limited because there is a very large number of neighbors who have geographic access to only one or a few pantries.

As discussed in the previous section, the census tracts containing Littlestown, Fairfield, Carroll Valley, and Bendersville all have local access to only one pantry. These areas therefore have high numbers of food insecure individuals per pantry ranging from 400 to 670 food insecure individuals for each pantry. Relative to hunger mapping results in other counties, these are large numbers of food insecure individuals per pantry. The Carroll Valley census tract is an area that could see substantial benefit from another pantry provider or increased investment in the existing provider to ensure that they have sufficient resources to meet the needs of their community.



McSherrystown, which has access to two pantries within a 15-minute drive, has roughly 400 food insecure individuals per pantry due to its status as the census tract with the most food insecure individuals in the county.

All the remaining census tracts in Adams County have fewer than 200 food insecure persons per food pantry. This suggests that the census tracts containing Littlestown, Carroll Valley, Fairfield, McSherrystown, and Bendersville could benefit from expanded food pantry access to a greater extent than the rest of Adams County. Overall, these findings mostly align with the results of the previous analysis, emphasizing that the areas with the least access to pantries represent the greatest opportunity to increase pantry access in Adams County.

CHOICE PANTRY AVAILABILITY

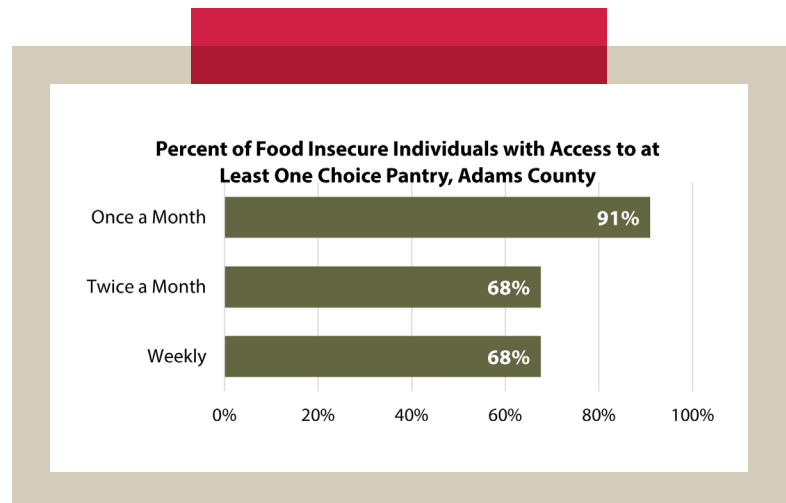
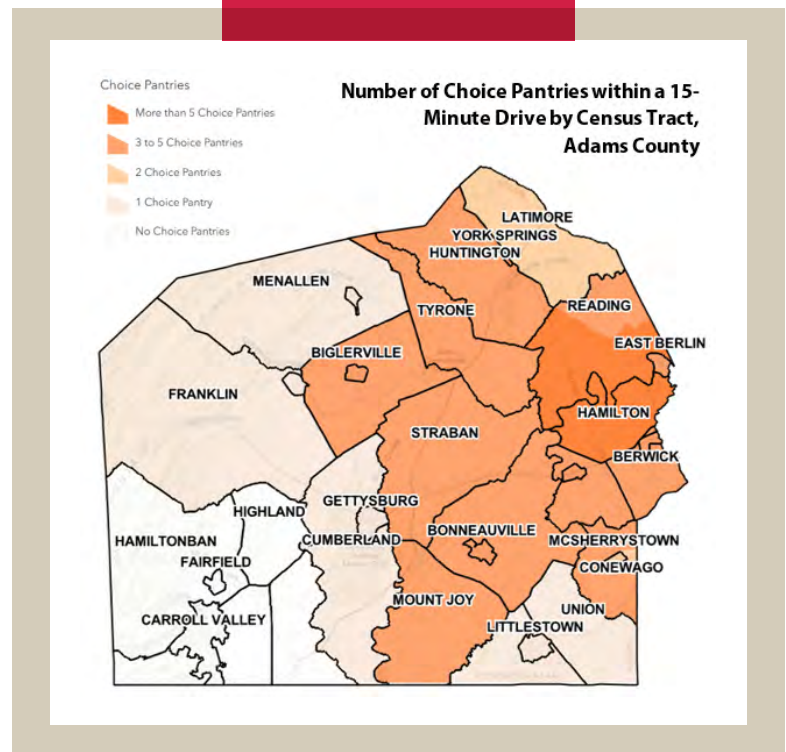
Choice food pantry models, where neighbors can select their own food much like they would at a grocery store, can help add dignity and autonomy to the neighbor experience. Providing neighbors with greater choice allows them to select foods that align with their culture, health restrictions, and dietary needs.

According to one partner at a listening session, “People seem to appreciate being able to self-select their product. They keep coming back.” Choice models have lower reported food waste and a greater percentage of visitors who say that pantries “always” or “often” have food they like, making choice models a more efficient way to manage pantry resources as well.⁹

The vast majority (91%) of the food insecure population in Adams County has access to a choice pantry distribution at least once a month. Coverage dips when accounting for the frequency of distributions, but more than two thirds (68%) of the food insecure population still has local access to a choice pantry distribution that is open as often as once a week.

The geographic coverage of choice pantry access in Adams County is quite robust as well. The only segment of the county that completely lacks local access to choice pantries is the southwest corner, in two census tracts – one including Carroll Valley borough and the other including Fairfield borough.

As mentioned in the section on geographic pantry access, this analysis overestimates access since there are several agencies with policies preventing neighbors from accessing multiple pantry services a month.



This analysis therefore shows how many of these pantries exist nearby and their frequency of operation rather than how many agencies neighbors can receive services from or how frequently they might be able to be served.

Choice models have lower reported food waste and a greater percentage of visitors who say that pantries “always” or “often” have food they like, making choice models a more efficient way to manage pantry resources as well.⁹

Opportunities for Growth in the Adams County Charitable Food System

The charitable food system in Adams County clearly has many strengths, but there are still several areas in which the county could improve if it is to reach its full potential to reduce hunger. Key opportunities for growth include:



expanding pantry hours of operation and distribution days



adjusting critical pantry policies that restrict access



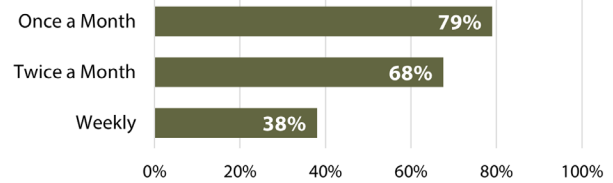
offering culturally competent, multilingual services

PANTRY HOURS AND DISTRIBUTION DAYS

Local access to pantries with evening or weekend hours varies by location throughout Adams County. Neighbors shared that there are times when the hours of operation for their local pantry conflict with work schedules, with one saying, "It would be good if they were open later for folks who are working." The following analysis identifies areas within the county where evening access by car is most limited and where by extension, efforts to extend hours may make a substantial impact in reducing food insecurity.

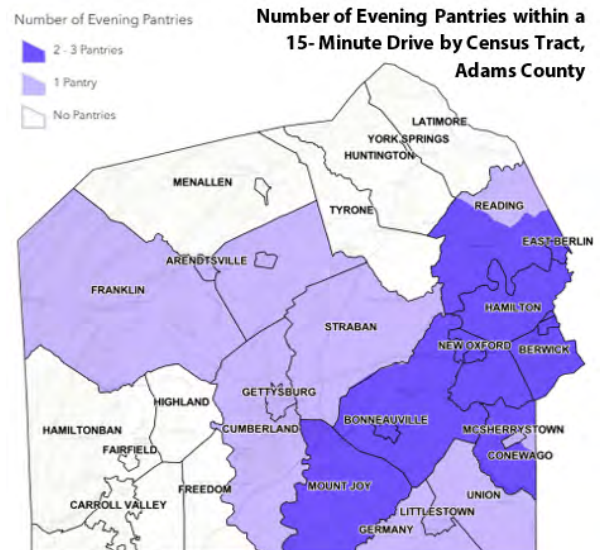
Access to evening pantries is relatively limited in Adams County. Just under four fifths (79%) of food insecure neighbors have local access to a pantry with monthly evening distributions, and a little over two thirds (68%) have access to these distributions twice a month. Even fewer neighbors (38%) have access to evening distributions that operate on a weekly basis.

Percent of Food Insecure Individuals with Access to at Least One Evening Pantry, Adams County



The map below shows that the areas with the least access to evening distributions lie in the southwestern and northern extremes of the county, covering the Fairfield/Carroll Valley area in the southwest and a larger northern region stretching from Menallen to Latimore townships.

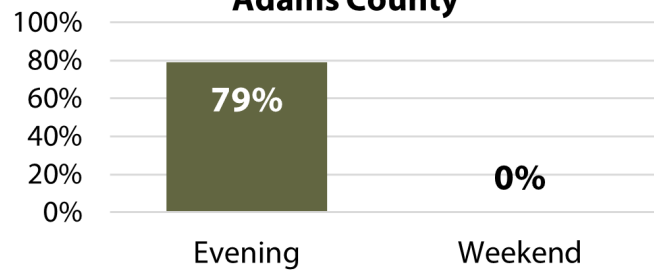
These areas are largely also the areas with the least number of nearby pantries. That is, the census tracts and municipalities that lack evening access in Adams County line up neatly with those that also have only one food pantry in a 15-minute drive time. The only exception to this pattern is the York Springs area, which has several local pantries, but none offer evening hours.



Given the overall alignment between limited geographic access and lack of evening access in the county, any new distributions established to expand geographic access in the county's southwest or north should seriously consider offering evening distributions as well, as this will address two gaps at once and increase pantry accessibility in Adams County most effectively.

■ *There are no pantries with weekend distributions in Adams County. This is a major area for improvement, as weekend hours can greatly expand the accessibility of pantry services for households with busy work schedules.*

Percent of Food Insecure Individuals with Access to Evening and Weekend Pantries, Adams County



In surveys of current non-food pantry visitors, 10% of those that screened positive for food insecurity cited inconvenient hours as the main reason they have not used a food pantry. Therefore, pantries in Adams County should seriously consider adding weekend hours, and efforts to increase pantry access in areas where it is limited should emphasize the incorporation of evening distributions.



PANTRY VOLUNTEER AND STAFF TREATMENT

■ *Pantry visitors in Adams County largely had positive things to say about the food pantries they had been to.*

Only 6.7% of neighbors reported experiencing judgment at a pantry location, which is low, but there are still opportunities to improve.

Neighbor treatment and focus on creating a welcoming environment are critical to ensuring people have access to food because the way in which visitors are treated during pantry distributions has a direct impact on their future willingness to utilize charitable food and social services.

Neighbors who have had poor experiences at pantries may not return, while those who have had good experiences are more likely to build a strong relationship with providers, which can help them get all the food they need and potentially connect them to additional resources.

Variance in feelings of judgment among food pantry visitors in Adams County was higher than in many other counties where Community Hunger Mapping projects have been completed to date. Reported experiences of judgment by pantry location ranged from a low of 2.4% at one agency to a high of 16.7% at another.

In a few instances, neighbors noted feelings of shame or embarrassment as a response to needing pantry services and not necessarily because a specific staff person or volunteer treated them negatively. These results show how important it is for charitable food providers to examine assumptions around the causes of food insecurity and the reasons why a household may seek assistance from the charitable food system.

Well-meaning volunteers may not recognize that a pantry food distribution is a sustaining resource for the families they serve, and pantry visitors should not be expected to divulge personal details in order to be deemed “worthy” of assistance. Shame and embarrassment may cause a pantry visitor to present as angry or anxious. Pantry workers can help diffuse these situations through a clear commitment to treating everyone with respect and dignity. A pantry that is committed to serving all people with respect and dignity will be better equipped to recognize the compounding impact of trauma on experiencing food insecurity and avoid causing further harm. Survey results across Adams County suggest that pantry providers are already doing this work well and can build on this strength in the future.

Other instances of reported judgment can result from conflicting challenges for neighbors and pantries. For example, one neighbor relayed a frustrating episode in which they were asked not to arrive early at a mobile distribution. This neighbor noted that an unavoidable conflict around a family member’s transportation and work schedule meant that she usually arrived at the site well before it opened but had been asked not to do so by site coordinators. The neighbor told researchers, “I wish they could be more understanding about my situation.” This feedback was discussed with the pantry coordinator, who shared that they are under scheduling restrictions as the mobile pantry site is generously offered by its host organization, and so the pantry is only permitted to show up during a certain time to accommodate the other uses of that community space. These conflicting but understandable constraints for both parties show the importance of direct communication to help find a mutually beneficial solution.

**Reported Feelings of Judgment Among
Adams County Food Pantry Visitors**

Minimum	2.4%
Median	4.7%
Average	6.7%
Maximum	16.7%

INTAKE PRACTICES AND COMPLIANCE

Almost all food pantries that are partner agencies of the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank receive federally funded products at no cost through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). In Pennsylvania, the state-funded State Food Purchase Program (SFPP) provides support to the charitable food system via grants or in-kind food provision to many TEFAP-participant agencies. Food pantries and the neighbors they serve benefit from TEFAP and SFPP by having access to free and nutritious products and additional funding, but the programs come with regulatory requirements by which participant agencies must abide.

These requirements are most visible at pantries during the registration process. One time per fiscal year, households are required to complete a “Self-Declaration of Need” form in which they must report the number of people in their household and attest to whether the household’s income is under 185% of the federal poverty line for its size. As of 2025, this threshold is \$59,477.50 for a family of four.¹⁰

The USDA and Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture set regulations about what forms of proof of address, identity, and income are required. Currently, those regulations allow pantries to ask the person completing the Self-Declaration of Need for identification but stipulate that it cannot be required, meaning that a pantry could use a visitor’s driver’s license to ensure accuracy in the spelling of names and addresses, but cannot use a lack of ID as a reason to refuse services to a household. Requiring other forms of proof of address, identity, income, or verification of household members is not allowed.¹¹

Pantries in Adams County were generally aligned with these expectations and intake processes appeared to proceed relatively smoothly during distributions, but there were still opportunities for improvement. Notably, some pantries or organizations that also offer non-food services implemented longer intake forms asking for information that is not relevant to pantry eligibility. Neighbors may not always have a clear understanding of the difference between a form they must complete for TEFAP eligibility and an intake form that asks for information regarding their employment, landlord contact information, or the names of their children’s school.

■ *Any intake form that is overly long or complex can deter someone from accessing charitable food if they are not told how that information will be used.*

For neighbors, visiting a new pantry may bring unease and uncertainty, and a negative experience at one pantry can shade a neighbor’s view of the entire charitable food system.

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. Pantry workers should give visitors grace around mistakes and confusion. Simple and efficient intake practices will make the check-in process smoother for volunteers and neighbors, reducing confusion and stress during busy food distributions. Such practices are aligned with regulations from USDA and the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, as well as the civil rights rules pantries must adhere to as program participants and CPFB partner agencies. Inconsistent adherence to basic guidelines creates confusion for neighbors navigating a complex system and arbitrarily establishes barriers in what is meant to be a low barrier system.

Pantries must make concerted efforts to ensure that their policies and procedures, both at intake and throughout a pantry service, promote positive interactions between pantry visitors, staff, and volunteers so all individuals can navigate pantry spaces with ease. This is a critical step in demystifying assistance programs and reducing the stigma around participating in them, which may encourage neighbors to access much-needed resources sooner.

ANCESTRY AND CULTURALLY COMPETENT SERVICES IN ADAMS COUNTY

Understanding the different communities living in Adams County and improving culturally competent services and culturally preferred food offerings are crucial parts of ensuring that all food insecure neighbors have access to the food they need and want. Emphasis on improving culturally preferred food offerings is important for two key reasons.

The first of these is that demographics are changing in Adams County, as they are across the country. Between the 2010 and 2020 Censuses, the Hispanic population of the county increased by 27.4%, rising from 6,115 individuals to 7,790 individuals. The Asian population grew from 737 individuals to 952, for a 29.2% growth rate. Meanwhile, the Black population grew only slightly (1.6%) and the non-Hispanic white population shrank by 2.1%, though non-Hispanic white individuals still make up the overwhelming majority of the county's total population (86.6%).

The second key reason is that, as discussed in Section One of this report, Hispanic and Black households are disproportionately likely to be food insecure. This section intends to assist in the work of improving the charitable food network's cultural competency and culturally preferred food offerings by analyzing U.S. Census and U.S. Census and American Community

Survey (ACS) data to shed light on areas that have concentrated populations of people of non-Western European descent.

It is essential to note that Hispanic populations, and all racial and ethnic groups, are not a monolith, and culinary preferences differ by nationality. To give the charitable food network some of the information it needs to begin adjusting food pantry offerings and procurement to fit the preferences of the cultures represented in the population, this analysis examines the different national ancestries in Adams County using data from the 2022 5-Year ACS.

The table below shows the six non-Western European ancestry groups with populations of 200 or more individuals in Adams County, with foreign-born populations and proportions listed where available. Puerto Rico is a United States Territory, so Puerto Rican individuals are citizens at birth.

In Adams County, five of the top six non-Western European ancestry groups are Hispanic and the sixth is Asian, aligning with the trend seen in the decennial Census. Individuals with Mexican ancestry make up the largest group, with more than 4,400 individuals that together make up 4.2% of the county's total population. The only other non-Western European group that accounts for more than 1% of the countywide population is the Puerto Rican community at about 1,600 people or 1.5% of the total population.

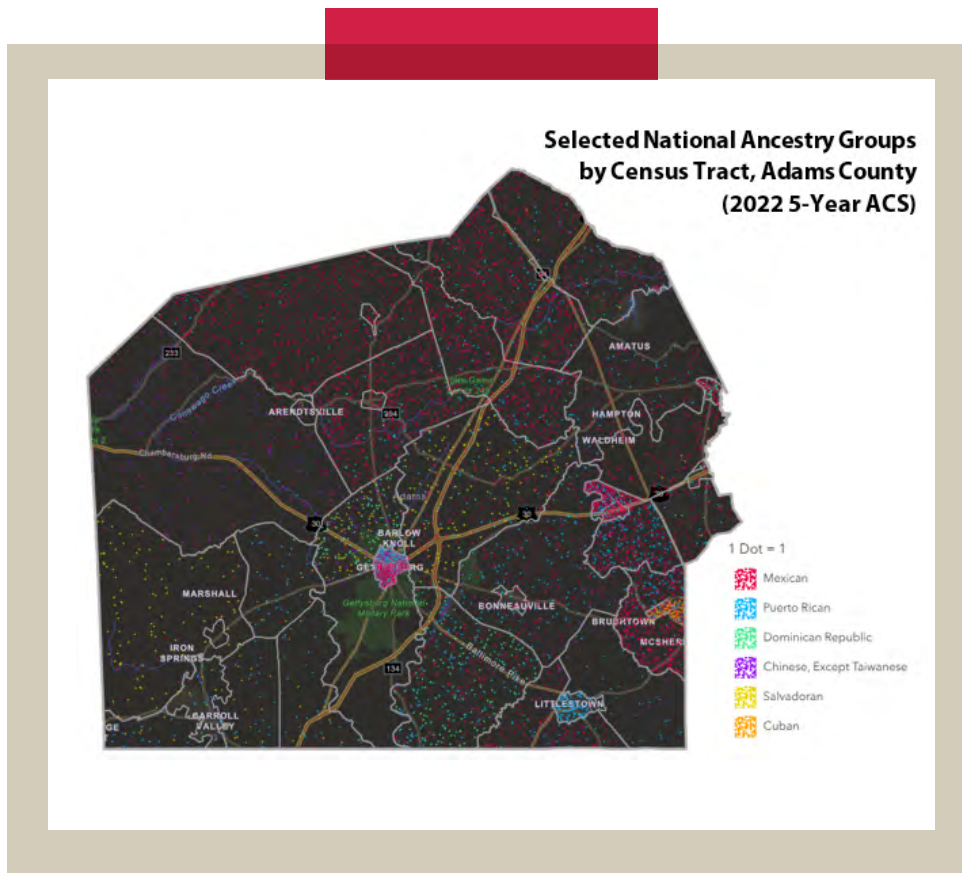
**Selected Non-Western European Ancestry Groups,
2022 5-Year ACS**

Group	Individuals with Ancestry	Foreign Born Individuals	Percent Foreign Born
Mexican	4,419	1,541	34.9%
Puerto Rican	1,607	N/A	N/A
Dominican	405	171	42.2%
Chinese, Except Taiwanese	270	176	65.2%
Salvadoran	269	116	43.1%
Cuban	243	1	0.4%

Geographic Dispersion of Non-Western European Communities in Adams County

As with the population as a whole, different ancestry groups are not equally distributed across Adams County. This section discusses areas in which members of the six largest non-Western European ancestry groups were most likely to reside as of the 2022 5-Year ACS.

The map of Adams County shown below uses a dot density plotting method in which one dot represents one individual residing in a census tract and each color signifies a different ancestry group, showing both the relative sizes and densities of each community living in any given area.



The Mexican community is widely dispersed across Adams County, but there are areas where people with Mexican ancestry were more likely to reside as of 2022. Foremost of these is the northern part of the county; the four census tracts covering the area stretching between Arendtsville and Latimore Township together accounted for 44% of the Mexican population of the county (1,949 individuals).

Even within this area, there were dense communities; about a fifth of the county's Mexican population resided in Tyrone or Huntingdon townships. Other areas with prominent Mexican communities included Gettysburg, New Oxford, and southern Conewago Township.

The Puerto Rican community in the county was more visible in denser areas of the county, with approximately 30% of the county's Puerto Rican individuals residing in Gettysburg alone. New Oxford and surrounding Oxford Township were home to another 13% of the countywide Puerto Rican community as of 2022. Littlestown also had a prominent Puerto Rican population; though it is smaller than in other areas, it is noticeable because there were few other individuals with non-western European ancestry in the borough.

Turning to the Dominican community, individuals with roots in the Dominican Republic were most likely to live in Mount Joy Township (159 individuals, 39%) and in Cumberland Township north of Gettysburg (134 individuals, 33%); these two census tracts accounted for most of the Dominican residents of the county.

The remaining non-Western European communities in Adams County tended to be highly concentrated in one or two municipalities or census tracts. For example, more than half of the countywide Chinese community lived in Franklin Township or Arendtsville, three fifths of the Salvadoran population lived in Straban Township northeast of Gettysburg, and almost half of the Cuban population lived in the McSherrystown area.

Language Access at Pantries

Neighbor survey results did not show that pantry visitors who spoke English as a second language were more likely to report having felt judged or that there were other serious issues around language access at pantries in Adams County.

■ *With that said, CPFEB researchers observed that language accessibility was still limited for Spanish speakers at pantries across the county.*

At one pantry, a Spanish-speaking surveyor documented significant language barriers that they did their best to address while on the premises and made suggestions for how to resolve the issue moving forward.

One achievable solution is to create signage for pantry products and ensure that all intake paperwork is fully translated, especially for pantries with a considerable Spanish-speaking population.

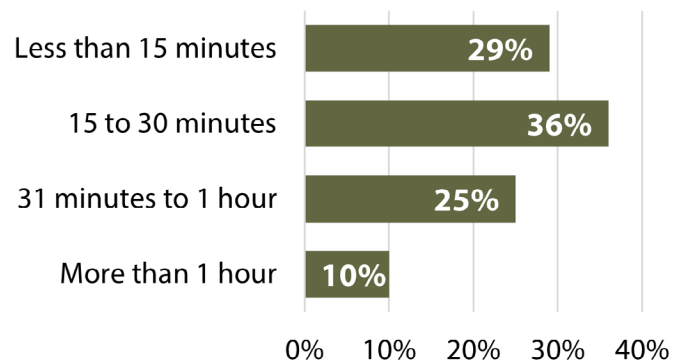
Pantries should take steps to address the challenges a language barrier can create and should work to increase language accessibility, as language is a crucial aspect of culturally competent services.

Potential options can include some of those suggested above and may range from simple ones, such as multilingual and/or symbolic signage, to more complex ones like partnerships with and volunteer recruitment initiatives through local colleges, Spanish-speaking churches, or other cultural, civic, and linguistic organizations.

WAIT TIMES AT PANTRIES IN ADAMS COUNTY

Wait times at pantries, defined as the length of a visit to a pantry from arrival to when a neighbor receives food, are not a major issue across much of Adams County. Survey results show that one in ten food pantry visitors (10%) waits longer than an hour to receive food once they arrive at a distribution, which is a smaller proportion than in other counties where surveys have been conducted. Although wait times are not severe, just over a third (35%) of pantry visitors still waited more than 30 minutes for food after arrival.

Wait Times at Adams County Pantries



Wait times are a result of a complex intersection of how neighbors navigate the process to access charitable food from any given pantry, a decision which includes assessments about travel time, weather, availability of needed food items, and their own willingness and ability to wait (or not) for a distribution. Across Community Hunger Mapping projects in many central Pennsylvania counties, CPFB researchers have noted that neighbors recognize when the food given out by a pantry differs from the start toward the end of the distribution^{12,13,14} which incentivizes some neighbors to arrive early in hopes of receiving more desirable food options at the pantry.

A number of pantry coordinators have designed their pantry space to welcome neighbors with a place to sit and chat, and offer snacks, coffee, and tea. One pantry surveyed is also the site of a community meal that is well attended by visitors. Having these friendly amenities available creates a shared community space and adds value for pantry visitors and staff, and neighbors spoke very positively about these experiences. Efficient service is noticed by neighbors, many of whom are visiting their local pantry as one of many errands for a day, which can be complicated by long wait times and should be considered by pantries.

Although most pantries did not report running out of food and took pride in always having something to offer their community, the quantity or quality of food may still diminish over the course of a distribution as stocks of highly desirable items dwindle. Neighbors view a lighter-than-usual bag of groceries with a great deal of anxiety, as many visit a pantry to offset costs they must spend on other necessities like shelter and transportation. Because pantry logistics such as sourcing and storing food are largely invisible to non-volunteers, these legitimate capacity limitations are not understood by neighbors and can be a source of tension and confusion.

In Adams County, the most likely solution to this issue is to create a charitable food network environment that lowers barriers for pantry use for households experiencing need. This can be accomplished in a multitude of ways, such as expanding pantry hours or increasing the days per week or month a pantry is open to spread demand over more time, thereby alleviating some of these struggles for both neighbors and pantry volunteers invested in meeting the need in their community. As noted earlier in this section, expanding access to weekend and evening distributions may help both neighbors and the pantries striving to serve them ensure that these options are available to as many people who need them.



Partner Experience and Food Sourcing

The experiences, concerns, and successes of pantry coordinators in Adams County were gathered through a listening session in May 2025, phone interviews, and surveys conducted over the course of Spring 2025. CPFEB researchers contacted the coordinator of each Central Pennsylvania Food Bank partner agency in the county; results from the five (83% of all agencies) that responded are summarized in this section.

Coordinators described strong community relationships and the use of choice pantry models as strengths of their programs. Multiple pantries emphasized community trust as being among their greatest strengths.

Because food pantries are the lowest barrier social service, this trust can help encourage neighbors to receive additional services and express their concerns to pantry staff and volunteers. The concerns raised by neighbors most commonly center around income and transportation. One pantry coordinator stated:

■ *“[I] really like what I do and love being able to meet the needs of our neighbors that face food insecurity because no one ... should have to go hungry.”*

When discussing challenges that their programs are facing, coordinators shared apprehensions about rising food costs, increasing levels of need, and volunteer shortages. During interviews, pantry coordinators expressed worry about being able to source enough product for a growing number of households seeking services. Sourcing concerns are exacerbated by a lack of available funding, and lower quantities of highly sought items.



Pantry coordinators discussed several examples of success in their programs through the listening session, interviews, and surveys. Adams County is unique among counties where Community Hunger Mapping has been completed thus far in that nearly all its pantries are operated in part by paid staff, though all still rely heavily on robust volunteer programs as well. Most were open daily, in contrast to neighboring counties with monthly or bi-monthly volunteer-operated pantries.



Adams County pantries universally stated that the majority of their food is sourced through Central Pennsylvania Food Bank via deliveries and retail donations. During the listening session, coordinators raised concerns about the available variety and quantity of products, especially for produce, canned fruits, and vegetables amid federal and other funding cuts.

Though there are robust offerings at many pantries in Adams County, pantry coordinators stated that finances are a concern. Financial constraints have coordinators thinking about new ways to provide more services despite stagnated budgets and rising costs.

Due to these constraints, coordinators described the ordering and sourcing process as a complex task that involves balancing getting products that neighbors want, ensuring the products are affordable for the organization, and finding items available in a quantity that meets increasing demand for services. One pantry reported shifting to sourcing basics so that the food budgets of families can be spent on more desirable products that are not often available through the pantry.

Commonly Requested Foods at Pantries in Adams County

Another key component of access is the availability of foods that are useful to and preferred by the people visiting the charitable food system. In Adams County, 60% of pantry users reported “often” or “always” being able to get the foods they need and want when they visit. The fact that three in five pantry visitors are satisfied with the food they receive is a strength of the Adams County charitable food network, but there is still room for improvement, as two in five do not regularly receive the items that they need, want, and like when they visit pantries. There was not sufficient data to assess satisfaction with food pantry offerings by race and ethnicity in Adams County.

Neighbor surveys asked participants to identify up to three items that they need or want but cannot always get from the pantry they visit. Three in five survey respondents in Adams County mentioned at least one item that they wanted but could not always get.

The most requested food items were fruit and vegetables at 32% of those who made any request, followed by meat at 28%. About one in five total neighbors expressed a preference for these items. Eggs, milk, cheese, and butter were all frequently requested items, as shown in the table below. These requests broadly align with those seen in other counties where Community Hunger Mapping has been conducted, though butter is uniquely highly requested in Adams County.

Though there was not enough data in Adams County to slice survey results for food preferences by race and ethnicity or nationality, pantry coordinators and food procurement staff or volunteers should still keep the fact that food preferences vary by culture in mind. Pantries who are interested in learning more about cultural food preferences could conduct their own food preference surveys or use other methods of collecting feedback regarding the items their neighbors are seeking. Existing resources like the cultural food preference list developed by Food Bank of the Rockies¹⁵ could be helpful for pantries who are looking to expand and diversify their food offerings.

Reported Food Preferences among Adams County Pantry Visitors

Rank	Product	Percent of Respondents with Preferences	Percent of Total Respondents
1	Fruits/Vegetables	32%	19%
2	Meat	28%	17%
3	Eggs	15%	9%
4	Milk	15%	9%
5	Cheese	11%	7%

(82 out of 135 survey respondents indicated food preferences)

Barriers to Accessing Food Pantry Services for Current Non-Participants

Non-food pantry surveys provide insight into the perspectives of individuals who may need food pantry services but are not currently accessing them.

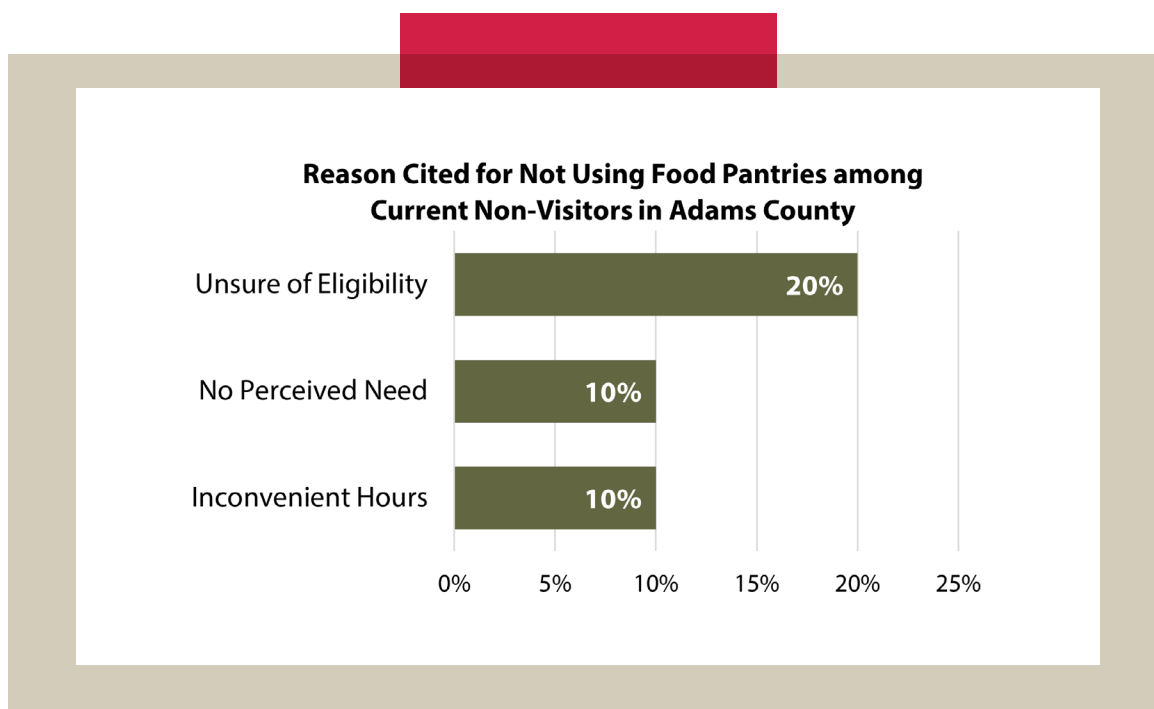
The short surveys included a two-question food insecurity screener, as well as questions that asked whether the respondent was currently using or had used food pantry services, explanations for not using or stopping use of food pantries, their ZIP Code of residence, and if they had any comments to add. Surveys were offered at seven different locations across Adams County, including farmers markets, libraries, and summer meal programs for children.

In total, 48 responses were collected, and seventeen (35.4%) respondents screened positive for some degree of food insecurity.

■ *Among those that screened positive for food insecurity, the most cited reason for not using pantries was a fear that they would be ineligible for services (20%).*

The second most common reason for not using food pantries was a tie between respondents saying they did not feel the need to visit a food pantry and inconvenient pantry hours (10%).

The concerns about ineligibility and self-reported lack of need among food insecure non-pantry users imply that a shift in messaging may be helpful in encouraging moderately food insecure neighbors to seek assistance rather than assuming ineligibility. As will be described more thoroughly in the section on hours of distribution, there is a need to expand pantry distribution times in Adams County to include evenings and weekends.



Charitable Food Access Main Findings and Recommendations

SECTION 2 FINDING 1:

The charitable food system cuts experiences of very low food security among pantry visitors by 20%, meaning that pantries' work to reduce hunger in Adams County is impactful and makes a real difference in the lives of food insecure neighbors.

Households who visited pantries more than once per month on average in the last year have a very low food security rate of 32% compared to a 40% rate for households who averaged one visit per month or fewer. The impact of the charitable food system is even greater for households with children.

Recommendation:

This data demonstrates the strong positive impact that the charitable food system has on Adams County residents. Because the effect is larger among those who visit more often and for households with children, who are the most vulnerable household type, these findings highlight the importance of lowering barriers to access, like strict service territories or visit frequency restrictions. Pantries should also ensure they are accessible and welcoming to households with children.

SECTION 2 FINDING 2:

Geographic access to pantries is robust across much of Adams County, with all food insecure individuals having access to at least one pantry within a 15-minute drive and most having access to two or more. The extent of geographic access is seriously limited by agency or program rules and policies, such as service territories or visit frequency restrictions.

Most census tracts have reasonable drive times to between two and five pantries; however, Littlestown, Bendersville, Fairfield, and Carroll Valley boroughs along with Union, Menallen, Highland, and Hamiltonban townships all have access to only one nearby pantry. Just under a quarter (23%) of the county's food insecure population lives in these census tracts.

Furthermore, the generally strong geographic access is limited in several areas across Adams County by strict service territories, infrequent distribution hours and other limitations such as allowing people to visit only one pantry per month. These restrictions mean that access is in reality less robust than the geographic estimates depict; slightly less than half (46%) of the food insecure individuals in Adams County have access to only one pantry distribution in any given month.

Recommendation:

Geographic access to pantries is an excellent position of strength for the county, although program rules can limit true access to services across the county. One pantry visit or fewer per month does not appear to be enough to alleviate very low food security for two in five households, including almost half of households with children.

Given the sizable reduction in very low food security seen among those who can visit a pantry more than once a month, the Adams County charitable food network should work to ensure that all neighbors can visit at least two distributions per month, whether that is at the same pantry location or across multiple agencies.

SECTION 2 FINDING 3:

Nine in ten (91%) food insecure individuals have access to a choice pantry distribution in Adams County.

Choice pantries allow neighbors to select foods that align with their preferences, which increases the dignity and autonomy of the pantry experience. This is a key strength of Adams County's charitable food network. Although coverage dips considerably when accounting for the frequency of distributions, a majority (68%) of the food insecure population has local access to a choice pantry distribution that is open as often as once a week.

Recommendation:

Pantries should continue to employ best practices, including implementing choice models as much as possible. A network offering both pre-packed drive-through and choice pantries can increase choice further by allowing people to select the pantry that uses their preferred distribution method.

SECTION 2 FINDING 4:

There are major opportunities to expand weekend and evening access to pantries in Adams County, as there are no pantries with weekend distributions.

Although four in five (79%) food insecure residents of Adams County have access to at least one pantry with evening hours on a monthly basis, significantly fewer can visit an evening distribution that is open twice a month or more.

Recommendation:

Pantries should work together to strategically operate distributions in the evening and weekends in Adams County, with a special emphasis on increasing weekend access. This effort will increase access for working families. Except for York Springs borough and Huntington, Latimore, and Tyrone townships, all the other areas without evening distributions only have local access to a single pantry. Areas with only one pantry and without access to evening distributions are located in the southwest and north of Adams County. Any new distributions that are established to expand geographic access in these areas should strongly consider evening and weekend distributions to most effectively increase pantry accessibility in Adams County.

SECTION 2 FINDING 5:

Most neighbors reported they have had positive experiences in pantry environments, but small changes to intake processes and language accessibility could improve the neighbor experience at food pantries further.

How neighbors are treated during a pantry visit has a direct impact on their future utilization of charitable food and social services.

Recommendation:

Pantries should work to simplify pantry processes and align them with existing USDA and Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture standards, as this simplification and standardization will reduce potential conflict points between pantry workers who understand their pantry's procedures and neighbors who may encounter new and different rules at each pantry. Grace should be given to all parties in every interaction.

Pantries should take steps to address the potential challenges a language barrier can create and should work to increase language accessibility, as language is a crucial aspect of culturally competent services. Potential options can include some of those suggested above and may range from relatively simple ones, such as multilingual and/or symbolic signage, to more complex ones like partnerships with and volunteer recruitment initiatives through local colleges, Spanish-speaking churches, or other cultural, civic, and linguistic organizations.

SECTION 2 FINDING 6:

Wait times for pantry services are not a serious issue in Adams County relative to other counties in central Pennsylvania. Survey results show that one in ten food pantry visitors (10%) waits longer than an hour to receive food once they arrive at a distribution. Although wait times are not severe, over a third (35%) of pantry visitors still waited more than 30 minutes for food after arrival.

Lines and early arrival times may reflect anxiety around accessing the highest quality and largest quantity of available foods at a pantry. Neighbors expressed fear of receiving less food if they are not among the first in line for a distribution, though pantries across Adams County did not report running out of food and took pride in always offering something to neighbors regardless of when they arrive.

Recommendation:

Pantries should experiment with ways to shorten lines and wait times for pantry visitors and should allow pantry visitors to wait inside, especially during days with poor weather conditions. Having these friendly amenities available creates a shared community space and adds value for pantry visitors and staff, and neighbors spoke very positively about these experiences. 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.

SECTION 2 FINDING 7:

Food pantries in Adams County rely on the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank as their primary source of the food they share with neighbors. When discussing challenges that their programs are facing, coordinators shared concerns about rising food costs, increasing levels of need, and volunteer shortages.

During interviews, pantry coordinators expressed worries about being able to source enough product for a growing number of households seeking services. Sourcing concerns are exacerbated by a lack of available funding and lower quantities of highly sought-after items.

Recommendation:

It is critical for programs such as the State Food Purchase Program (SFPP) to be sufficiently funded at the state level. SFPP and the Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System (PASS) are critical components of many pantries food budgets, so increases to these programs would result in fewer people going hungry. At the federal level, programs such as TEFAP and the Local Food Purchase Agreement are key to food banks and pantries being able to provide enough high-quality, nutritious food to meet the needs of visitors.

SECTION 2 FINDING 8:

The results of surveys of individuals who do not currently use the charitable food system show that the biggest barrier to accessing food pantry services is uncertainty around eligibility.

One in five food insecure individuals who do not visit food pantries at present selected this concern as the main reason they have not accessed charitable food assistance.

Recommendation:

These findings point to the importance of increasing awareness of charitable food providers through neighbor-facing tools. There are opportunities to increase the public's understanding of the charitable food system's eligibility standards, including through the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture or regional food banks like the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank. The concerns about ineligibility among food insecure non-pantry users indicate that a shift in messaging may be helpful in encouraging moderately food insecure neighbors to seek assistance rather than assuming ineligibility. As demonstrated more thoroughly in the section on hours of distribution, there is a need to expand pantry distribution times in Adams County to include evenings and weekends.



■ Section Three



03

Utilization of Key Government Programs in Adams County

Section Three ■

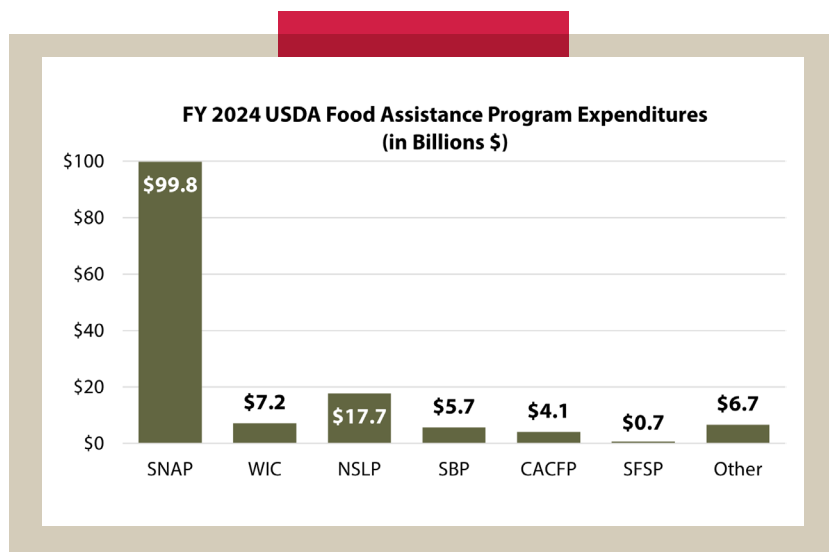
Utilization of Key Government Programs in Adams County

The charitable food network is just one piece of a more expansive system working to reduce food insecurity in Adams County and across the United States. Several government programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), provide far more meals to families in need than the charitable food system does. In fact, for every meal the charitable food system shares with neighbors, SNAP provides nine.¹⁶

The figure at right shows program expenditures for the six largest federal food assistance programs, plus aggregated totals for all other programs.

SNAP alone accounts for 70% of total federal food assistance spending at almost \$100 billion as of Fiscal Year 2024,¹⁷ making it far and away the nation's foremost nutrition assistance program.

However, it is important to note that as a result of the budget reconciliation bill passed in July 2025, the Congressional Budget Office estimates that SNAP will shrink significantly in size due to eligibility cuts at the federal level along with hefty new cost-shares to states that may force some to cut benefits further or even discontinue participation in the program.



These impacts will begin in Fiscal Year 2026 and continue into the foreseeable future.¹⁸ Initial estimates for Pennsylvania indicate that almost 144,000 residents of the Commonwealth will lose access to SNAP due to the new eligibility rules alone.¹⁹

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is the next largest nutrition assistance program at about \$18 billion in FY24, while the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) rounds out the top three in terms of federal expenditures on permanent nutrition programs at just over \$7 billion. Other smaller, federally funded nutrition programs include but are not limited to the School Breakfast Program (SBP), the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), and the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR).

Many pantry visitors and food insecure individuals perceive government programs as difficult to navigate. Paperwork may be very time-consuming, and necessary documentation can be difficult for neighbors to obtain. Eligibility requirements and income thresholds are not well understood, leading some eligible families to miss out on benefits they are entitled to receive.

To achieve the goal of reducing food insecurity, the charitable food system and other stakeholders must actively leverage available federal resources and encourage participation in federal government programs among food insecure individuals, including SNAP, WIC, the school-based meal programs, and the summer meal programs.

SNAP Participation

SNAP is by far the largest and most important nutrition assistance program in the United States; it has been shown in many studies to reduce very low food security by substantial margins.²⁰ SNAP eligibility is determined by household size and income, with benefits made available via an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card, which can be used to buy fresh and frozen foods at many grocery retailers. Because EBT works like cash, recipients have the freedom to choose items that suit their preferences, meet dietary needs, and budget their own spending over time. SNAP thus promotes dignity, autonomy, and choice, making it an especially well-designed program.

More than 9,100 individuals in Adams County participate in SNAP, which is around 8.5% of the county's total population. This figure is near the all-time high for SNAP participation by overall number and by rate, although it should be noted that the July 2025 budget reconciliation bill will almost certainly reduce this number going forward.

Trends in Adams County's SNAP participation rate have mirrored those seen in most of the rest of Pennsylvania, increasing by 78% between January 2009 and January 2015. SNAP participation has increased another 16% since 2015, with most of the increase in that time occurring since late 2021. Participation has remained elevated and continued to in the past several years due to both increased need in the county and state-level administrative and programmatic changes to SNAP that expanded eligibility and made the application process simpler for Pennsylvanians.

Pennsylvania is one of the highest performing states in terms of SNAP participation, outperforming more than 40 other states according to a recent USDA report.²¹ However, Adams County is near the bottom of the state in SNAP participation, ranked 58th out of 67 counties within the Commonwealth. Only two thirds (65%) of Adams County residents who are probably eligible for SNAP based on income participate, compared to three quarters (76%) in Franklin County (ranked 37th in the state) and nine tenths (90%) in York County (ranked 15th in the state).

This low SNAP participation ranking means that stakeholders across all of Adams County should focus on program outreach and aim to build on recent gains.

Number of Individuals Participating in SNAP in Adams County, 2009 to 2025



Adams County already operates a robust Double Dollars²² (also known as Double-Up Food Bucks or DUFB)²³ program at farmer's markets that allow SNAP participants to purchase extra fresh produce with their benefits via a matching program, meaning that enrolling in SNAP could offer even more value to county residents. Although promoting SNAP throughout Adams County will be key to increasing participation, there are areas where gaps are large and outreach efforts could therefore be most effective; these will be discussed in the next section.

ZIP CODE-LEVEL SNAP PARTICIPATION GAPS IN ADAMS COUNTY

To determine potential geographic areas of focus for SNAP outreach, this analysis employs a novel eligibility determination technique, with two underlying methods combined to determine priority ZIP Codes for outreach based on SNAP participation gaps and participation rates at both individual and family levels. This methodology uses the number of families and individuals below 150% FPL as the eligibility thresholds to avoid overestimating participation gaps.

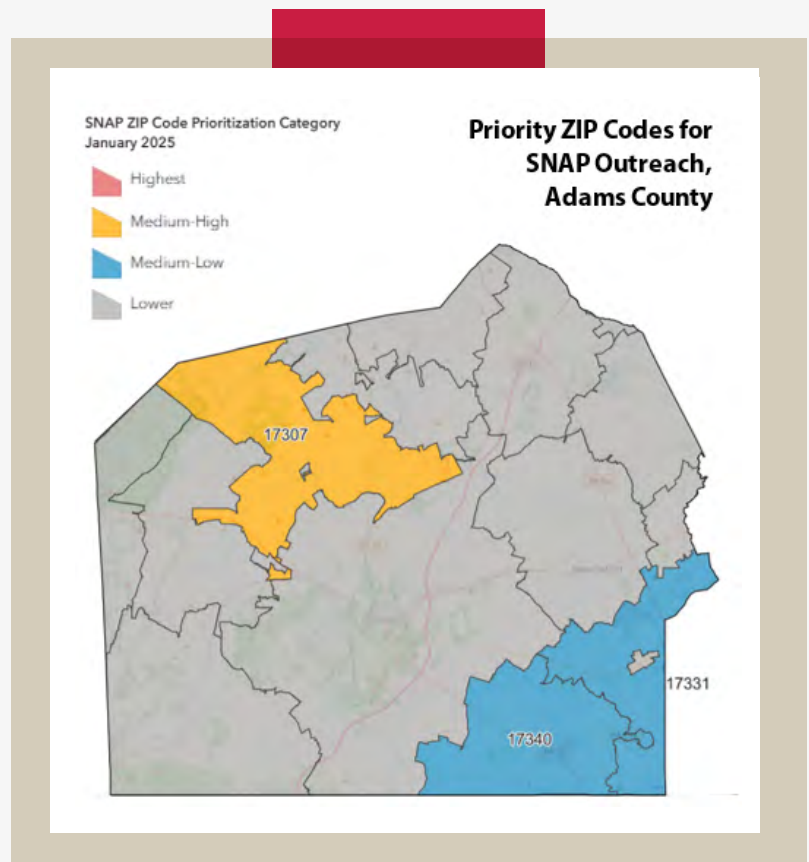
The results of the analysis produce an overestimate of participation rates because it uses income levels lower than the gross income eligibility threshold of 200% in Pennsylvania. This intentional bias provides additional confidence that any participation gaps identified are significant. The resulting priority categorizations and their criteria are shown in the table below.

SNAP Outreach ZIP Code Prioritization Category Criteria			
Priority Level	Family Participation Gap	Individual Participation Gap	SNAP Participation Rate
Highest	100 or more	500 or more	Less than 75%
Medium-High	50 or more	250 or more	Less than 75%
Medium Low	50 or more	250 or more	N/A
Lower	Less than 50	Less than 250	75% or more

Three ZIP Codes in Adams County fall into the priority categories listed above. Most notably, Biglerville (17307) is categorized as a Medium-High Priority ZIP Code with a family SNAP participation gap of 58 and an individual SNAP participation gap of 483, just shy of the Highest Priority threshold of 500.

Littlestown (17340) and Hanover (17331) are categorized as Medium-Low priority ZIP Codes. Littlestown has a bigger SNAP participation gap than Biglerville at 72 families and 569 individuals who could be eligible for but are not participating in SNAP; however, Littlestown's family SNAP participation rate is 83%, which is why it is not categorized as a higher priority.

Hanover also has very large gaps in SNAP participation at 91 families and more than 2,000 individuals, but much of the ZIP Code falls in York County, meaning that outreach efforts should be split across agencies in both counties.



SNAP PARTICIPATION AMONG FOOD PANTRY VISITORS IN ADAMS COUNTY

Slightly less than half of all pantry visitors surveyed in Adams County said that they currently participate in SNAP, with a countywide average of 49%.

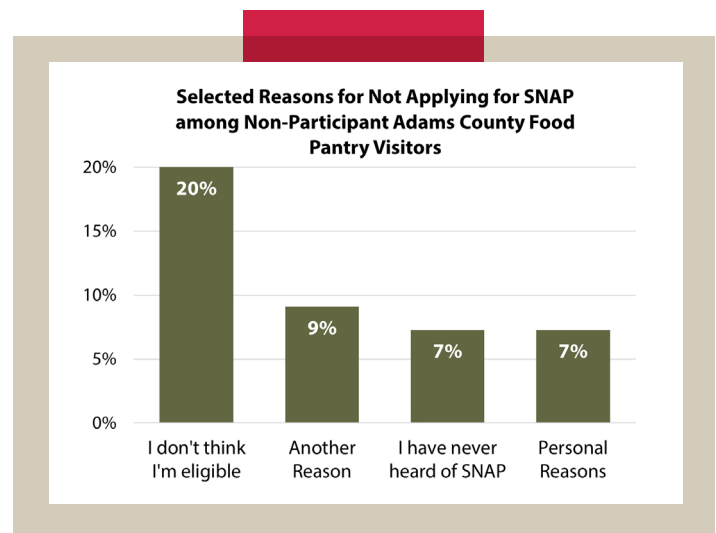
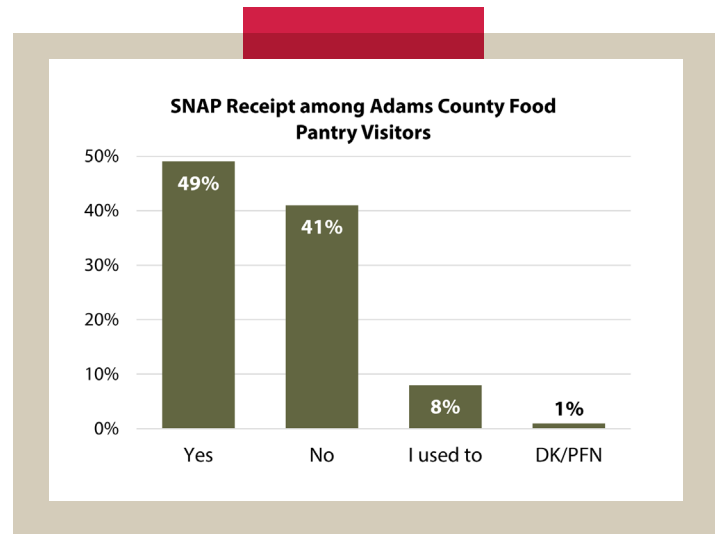
■ *These low rates are seen even though 90% of pantry visitors in Adams County have incomes below 200% of the federal poverty line (FPL), and 64% have incomes below 150% FPL.*

At these thresholds, many households could be eligible for SNAP based on income, though this does not account for other factors that may render them ineligible beyond income.

For the half of pantry visitors who reported that they do not receive SNAP at present, the most frequent reason cited was “I don’t think I’m eligible” at 20% of non-participants. Another 9% mentioned “another reason” while 7% said they “Have never heard of SNAP” and 7% cited personal reasons. Most pantry visitors who do not participate in SNAP did not cite a reason for not applying. Nevertheless, these findings imply that increased eligibility information for SNAP through targeted outreach could be effective at increasing program participation among pantry visitors in Adams County.

SNAP participation rates are similar by household type for pantry visitors in Adams County, with 51% of senior households having reported participation in SNAP compared to 49% among households with children. There are, however, substantive differences in participation by race/ethnicity. About one in three (28%) of Hispanic households said they participate in SNAP compared to over half (53%) of white, non-Hispanic households.

Overall low SNAP participation rate in the context of high expected eligibility based on income highlights the fact that that other considerations must be made around program eligibility, as SNAP has complex eligibility standards that take factors including but not limited to household composition, status, and assets into account along with income.



WIC Participation

Robust WIC coverage is a major strength of the collective response to food insecurity in Adams County, as the county has among the highest WIC participation rates in the entire state of Pennsylvania; 84% of likely-eligible individuals participate in the program as of February 2024.²⁴

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, or WIC, is the third largest federal nutrition program and is administered by the USDA, which provides cash grants to states to implement the program.

To qualify, applicants must have incomes at or below 185% of the federal poverty line (\$59,477.50 for a family of four in 2025) and be considered nutritionally at risk by a health professional. Eligible participants include pregnant, post-partum, and breastfeeding individuals, and infants and children under age five. Applicants already receiving SNAP, Medicaid, or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) are automatically considered income eligible,²⁵ but the full application for and utilization of WIC benefits is more complex than that of SNAP.



ZIP-CODE LEVEL WIC PARTICIPATION GAPS IN ADAMS COUNTY

Although WIC participation is extremely strong in Adams County, there are always opportunities to increase participation even further. The following analysis aims to assist program staff and policymakers in targeting WIC outreach geographically as effectively as possible at ZIP Code levels. To estimate WIC participation gaps at a ZIP Code level, the following analysis uses WIC participation data for children provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Health and American Community Survey 5-Year estimates of the number of children under age five in households with incomes at or below 185% of the federal poverty line.

For prioritization purposes, ZIP Codes in Adams County were classified into several distinct categories, highest, medium-high, medium-low, and lowest according to both the participation rate and the size of the participation gap. The methodology is further explained in a post on the CPFB Policy Blog; please see the blog for more details.²⁶

Highest Priority

To reach the Highest Priority ZIP Code categorization, ZIP Codes must have a child WIC participation rate below 50% and a participation gap of 500 children or more.

Medium Priority

To receive a Medium-High Priority designation, ZIP Codes must have a child WIC participation rate below 62.5% and a participation gap of 250 children or more.

Medium-Low Priority

To be classified as a Medium-Low Priority area, ZIP Codes must have a child WIC participation rate below 75% and a participation gap of 100 children or more.

Low Priority

Finally, to be classified as a Low Priority area, ZIP Codes must have a child WIC participation rate below 75% and a participation gap of less than 100 children.

Adams County Priority ZIP Codes for WIC Outreach

Zip Code	PO Name	Child WIC Participation Gap	WIC Participation Rate
17307	Biglerville	111	29%
17325	Gettysburg	118	68%
17340	Littlestown	109	44%
17344	McSherrystown	125	31%
17331	Hanover	284	65%

The results of the analysis show that five ZIP Codes across Adams County are categorized as “Medium-Low” priority ZIP Codes for WIC outreach. These priority areas include ZIP Codes across the county, including those covering Biglerville, Gettysburg, Littlestown, McSherrystown, and Hanover. These ZIP Codes together account for the majority of the child WIC participation gap in Adams County. The respective child WIC participation rates and the magnitude of the child WIC participation gaps are shown in the table above.

Survey results at pantries in Adams County show that about two thirds (62%) of likely-eligible pantry visitors participate in WIC. While there is still of course room for improvement, this is the highest WIC participation rate for pantry visitors in any of the nine counties in which community hunger mapping has been conducted thus far, a finding that aligns with the overall county data showing an extremely strong WIC participation rate throughout Adams County.

Child Nutrition Programs

The federal Child Nutrition Programs (CNP) are a key method of ensuring that all children get the nutrition they need to live healthy lives. The largest of these are the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP), which provide free or low-cost lunches and breakfasts to school-aged children in participating public and private schools.^{27, 28} The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) provides free or low-cost meals and snacks to children in daycares and afterschool programs, children in emergency shelters, and disabled adults in day care programs.²⁹ The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Seamless Summer Option (SSO), or SUN Meals, allow community organizations and school food authorities to provide meals in summer when schools are closed.³⁰ This analysis focuses on the programs for which school food authorities are intended to be the primary sponsor, which are NSLP, SBP, and SUN Meals.

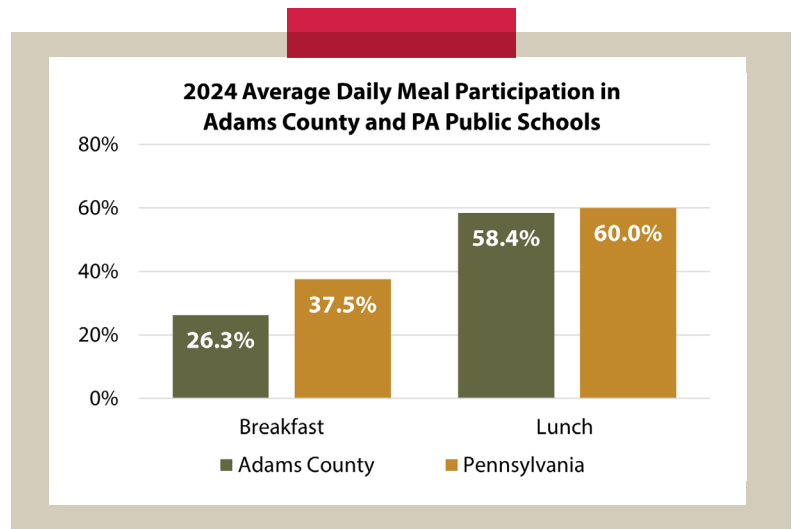
COUNTY AND SCHOOL DISTRICT-LEVEL SCHOOL MEAL PARTICIPATION

As of October 2024, average daily breakfast and lunch participation rates for Adams County's public schools stood at 26.3% and 58.4% respectively. Average daily participation is calculated for public schools in accordance with methods used by the Food Research and Action Center by dividing the number of total monthly meals served by service day, then dividing again by enrollment to produce an estimate of the proportion of students who receive a meal on an average day. Alternative education and residential schools have been excluded from this analysis, as their operation of the child nutrition programs may differ substantively from operations in more traditional public schools.

Adams County seriously underperformed the statewide average among comparable schools for breakfast and lagged in lunch, though to a much lesser degree. Students attending an Adams County public school were almost 30% less likely to eat breakfast at school than their peers across the Commonwealth, with participation rates of 26.3% compared to 37.5%. This gap is the widest seen in any county where Community Hunger Mapping has been completed to date. For lunch, the gap was much smaller at 2.6% (58.4% compared to 60.0%).

The wide differential between Adams County and the state in breakfast participation suggests that county schools should implement alternative service models and/or utilize other evidence-based strategies to increase program uptake, as school breakfast is free for all of Pennsylvania's students regardless of income eligibility. Indeed, just 60.1% of Adams County schools offer alternative breakfast models, while 73.1% of comparable schools across the state do so.

The table on the following page highlights differences in school meal participation among Adams County's school districts by showing each district with above county-average participation rates for a meal service in green, moderate participation rates in yellow, and below-average participation rates in red. The table includes information about the proportion of children residing in the district who fall below 185% of the federal poverty line, which is the threshold for free lunch eligibility for students who apply using traditional methods, as well as if schools in the district participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), which allows moderate and high-poverty schools to provide free meals to all students without requiring applications if they can prove that at least 25% of enrolled students would qualify for free meals based on participation in other government programs or certain personal statuses, such as homelessness.



2024 Average Daily School Meal Participation by Adams County School District					
School District	Percent of School-Aged Children (6-17) Under 185% FPL (2023 5-Year ACS)	Participated in CEP?	Alternative Breakfast Models?	Breakfast ADP	Lunch ADP
Bermudian Springs	16.2%	Yes	Yes, some schools	25.9%	72.6%
Conewago Valley	24.3%	No	Yes, some schools	21.5%	56.4%
Fairfield Area	33.5%	No	Yes, some schools	31.7%	46.1%
Gettysburg Area	22.8%	No	Yes, some schools	24.7%	64.0%
Littlestown Area	37.6%	No	Yes, all schools	22.1%	47.1%
Upper Adams	36.1%	No	Yes, all schools	36.9%	60.2%
Countywide	27.0%	-	-	26.3%	58.4%

The income-eligibility estimates featured in this table come from the 2023 5-Year American Communities Survey; data limitations therefore require that school-aged be defined as aged 6-17. ACS data does not account for public-school attendance, meaning that the above figures are inclusive of students who reside within a district's boundaries but are homeschooled, attending private or cyber schools, or otherwise not part of the mainstream public school system. However, these figures are still useful in providing a general idea of the proportion of free- and reduced-eligible children within a district regardless of identified student percentage (ISP), CEP utilization, or traditional lunch application rates and approvals.

■ *There were no school districts in the county that had above-average participation rates for both meal services.*

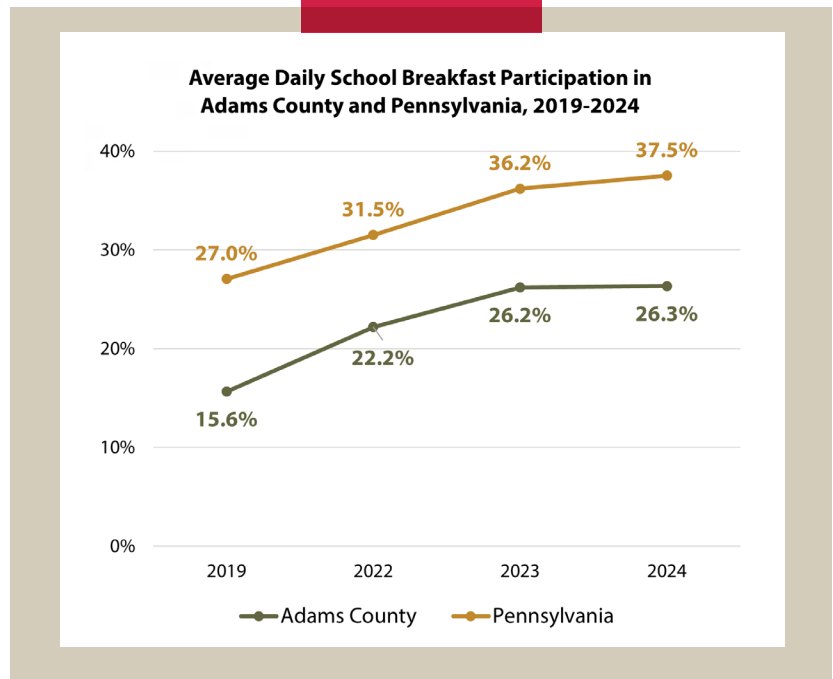
Fairfield Area and Upper Adams both performed well in breakfast, though they were still below the statewide average. For lunch, Bermudian Springs and Gettysburg Area had robust participation above both the county and state average, with Bermudian Springs doing very well at 72.6%.

This finding is unsurprising given that Bermudian Springs is the only district in the county that participates in CEP. The fact that Bermudian Springs offers CEP is remarkable given that the district's Identified Student Percentage is 35.75%, meaning that the reimbursement rate is 57.2% of the full paid rate and the school district must make up for the differential; the school board voted to invest in their students by committing to funding the full cost of meal service above the federal and state reimbursement rate beginning with the 2024-2025 school year.³¹

The Impact of Universal School Breakfast in Adams County

In fall 2022, the Wolf administration announced a \$21 million investment in Pennsylvania's children by providing free breakfast to all students at schools participating in the School Breakfast Program without the need for families to complete an application and regardless of a school's CEP participation.³² Governor Shapiro's administration has since continued the program and expanded it to eliminate the reduced-price lunch category in 2023.³³ Over that time frame, universal breakfast has had a huge impact on participation in Adams County's public schools.

As of October 2024, breakfast participation in Adams County has increased more than ten percentage points over 2019, the last year prior to the implementation of universal free breakfast for which comparable data is available. This equates to an approximately 70% increase in participation, which is a much higher growth rate than seen among comparable schools across Pennsylvania. However, this explosive growth rate is primarily a function of the fact that Adams County's average breakfast participation rate in 2019 was just 15.6%. For context, the 26.3% participation rate as of 2024 is a huge gain but still lags the 27.0% statewide average from five years prior.



These findings show that there is a major opportunity for Adams County schools to capitalize and expand upon the availability of universal school breakfast, beginning with broader implementation of alternative service models or adjustment of which model is employed. Of the fourteen county schools that reported using any alternative breakfast model as of early 2025, only five offered breakfast in the classroom, which is associated with the highest participation rates.³⁴ Beyond alternative models, schools might consider creative strategies to boost participation like contests and raffles or could join the Governor's School Breakfast Challenge, which offers recognition to schools that promote breakfast, incorporate more nutritious and local food into the meal, and raise participation.³⁵

UNIVERSAL BREAKFAST HAS HAD A HUGE IMPACT ON PARTICIPATION IN ADAMS COUNTY'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS.



SUN Meal Site Location Analysis

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the National School Lunch Program are federally funded child congregate meal programs intended to alleviate child food insecurity in the summer, when schools are not open and school breakfasts and lunches are not available.³⁶

■ *These programs, referred to collectively as SUN Meals, are crucial supports at a time when children, who are already much more likely than average to face food insecurity, are at most risk of going hungry.*

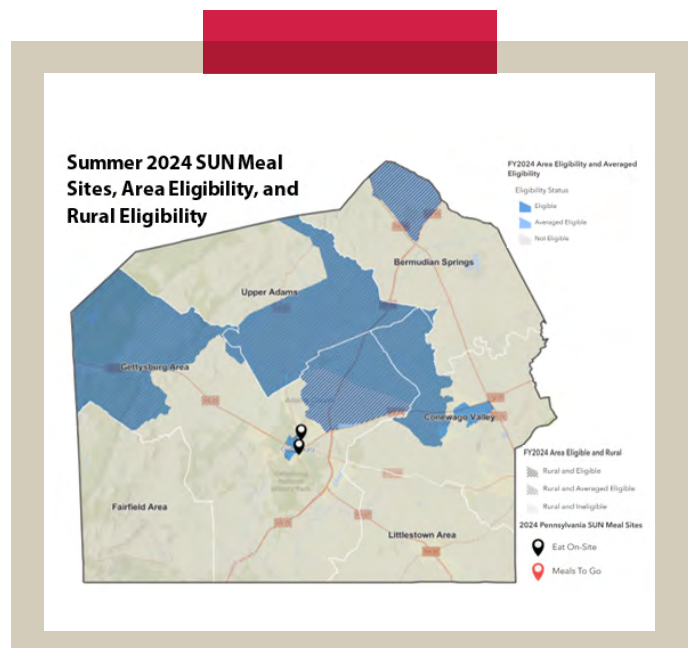
SUN Meal sites are broadly similar and will usually be referred to under this term for that reason throughout this section, but there are distinctions between SFSP and SSO that may occasionally be relevant. For example, both school districts and community organizations may sponsor SFSP sites, while only school food authorities can take advantage of SSO to provide year-round meal service with a minimum of administrative barriers.³⁷

In general, SUN Meal sites are located within census tracts in which at least 50% of resident children are at or below 185% of the federal poverty level and would therefore be eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches. Census tracts that qualify in 2024 are shown in blue on the map to the right. Sites can become individually eligible if they are close enough to an individual school that qualifies for the program, or if a sponsor can prove that 50% or more of participating children who attend a site meet the income thresholds. For more information about SFSP site eligibility, please see the Pennsylvania Department of Education.³⁸

This analysis uses site data from the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). At the state level, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) administers these programs. The map uses area eligibility data provided by No Kid Hungry in conjunction with rural eligibility data available from USDA.

There were two SUN Meal sites in Adams County in 2024. The two sites were sponsored by the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank and by the Gettysburg Area School District; CFPB's site operated under SFSP, while the Gettysburg Area School District site used SSO. Both were traditional congregate meal sites and operated as open sites, meaning that children did not have to register or be enrolled in any specific program to receive a meal. One offered lunch only, and one offered both breakfast and lunch. SUN meal service began in June and ended in August, as is traditional for the program. One site ran for more than six weeks, while the other only operated for ten days.

As shown in the map below, SUN meal sites were unevenly distributed across the county. Both sites were in Gettysburg, even though the western portion of the district along the Franklin County border had a large eligible area. Bermudian Springs, Conewago Valley, and Upper Adams School Districts all lacked sites despite having sizable eligible areas, most of which were designated as rural as well, making them eligible to offer meals to go under the non-congregate rural provision, which may be more suitable for these areas than traditional on-site meals.



Findings and Recommendations on the Utilization of Government Programs

SECTION 3 FINDING 1:

Adams County has one of the highest WIC participation rates in the state, at an estimated 84% of eligible individuals. This is a noteworthy achievement for the county that sets a standard for the rest of the central Pennsylvania region and the Commonwealth to follow.

There remain some locally targeted opportunities to increase WIC participation in Adams County, including in Biglerville (17307), Gettysburg (17325), Littlestown, (17340), McSherrystown (17344) and Hanover (17331). Each of these ZIP Codes has more than 100 children who are eligible for but are not currently participating in WIC.

Recommendation:

Adams County stakeholders should continue their strong work in WIC outreach and participation, with a particular emphasis on the five identified ZIP Codes. Pantries in these areas may represent ideal outreach locations as under two-thirds of likely-eligible pantry visitor households reported participating in WIC.

SECTION 3 FINDING 2:

Adams County has among the worst SNAP participation rates in the state, ranking 58th out of 67 counties. Just 8.5% of the Adams County population participates in SNAP, which is considerably lower than surrounding counties and the state.

Biglerville (17307), Littlestown (17340), and Hanover (17331) are the ZIP Codes with the biggest opportunities to increase participation.

Less than half of pantry visitors in Adams County said they were receiving SNAP, even though over 90% of county pantry visitors stated they had incomes below 200% of the federal poverty line, making them eligible for the program based on income. The most common reason cited for not participating was “I don’t think I’m eligible,” which indicates some important opportunities for education on the SNAP program.

Recommendation:

Stakeholders across a variety of different sectors and areas of work should work together to increase SNAP participation as it is one of the biggest opportunities to reduce food insecurity among Adams County residents.

Pantries are well-targeted locations for SNAP outreach in Adams County because they are relatively low-barrier service points and there are low SNAP participation rates among visitors. Agencies located in high-priority ZIP Codes are effective outreach sites. Stakeholders should make efforts to increase awareness of SNAP and its eligibility guidelines across Adams County since current non-participants cited these as the main reasons they are not utilizing the program.

SECTION 3 FINDING 3:

There is substantial room for improvement in school meal participation for Adams County's public schools, especially for breakfast. Adams County's students are about 30% less likely to eat breakfast at school than their peers elsewhere in Pennsylvania, with a participation rate of 26.3% compared to 37.5% statewide as of October 2024.

This gap exists even though participation has grown almost 70% in the county over 2019 thanks to the statewide universal breakfast initiative that started in 2022. One key contributing factor may be that Adams County schools are less likely than schools across Pennsylvania to offer alternative service models, which research has shown help to increase participation.³⁹

Recommendation:

Adams County school should consider offering alternative breakfast models, such as grab and go breakfast, breakfast after the bell, and breakfast in the classroom if they do not already do so. For schools already implementing alternative breakfast service, creative promotion strategies like those mentioned in the Governor's School Breakfast Challenge⁴⁰ could help increase participation. Adjustments to which alternative model is in use at schools already offering an alternative service may be worthwhile, as only five schools in the county offered breakfast in the classroom, which is associated with the highest participation rates,⁴¹ as of 2024.

SECTION 3 FINDING 4:

There were only two SUN Meal sites in Adams County in summer 2024, and both were in Gettysburg.

Bermudian Springs, Upper Adams, and Conewago Valley school districts all had eligible census tracts but lacked sites; most areas of the county qualify as USDA rural, which would allow for non-congregate meal service.

Recommendation:

Stakeholders across the county should collaborate to ensure that children have access to food over the summer, as breaks from school can be challenging times for food insecure families. Because of Adams County's rural nature, there is significant opportunity to expand SUN Meal access to previously unserved areas using the non-congregate rural provision. Privately funded summer food programs for children, including backpack, pantry, and independent meal programs have a role to play in areas that are ineligible for SUN Meals or where the federal program is not a good fit for the community's needs.

A close-up photograph of several green cucumbers. The cucumbers are arranged diagonally across the frame, with their surfaces covered in small, glistening water droplets. The background is dark, making the vibrant green of the cucumbers stand out. The lighting highlights the texture of the cucumber skin.

■ Section Four

A close-up photograph of several green cucumbers, showing their bumpy texture and vibrant green color. The cucumbers are arranged diagonally across the frame. A large, light beige number '04' is overlaid on the top half of the image.

04

Intersecting and Upstream Issues

Section Four ■

Intersecting and Upstream Issues

Drivers of Food Insecurity

To better understand the root causes of food insecurity in Adams County, this section combines extensive secondary data analysis with primary data from food pantry visitor surveys collected at agencies throughout the county. Food insecurity is a household-level economic and social condition largely resulting from economic insecurity and the related factors of household income, employment status, disability status, and race or ethnicity.^{42, 43} Food insecurity is inversely related to household income, making poverty status and the ratio of income to the poverty level some of the strongest predictors of food insecurity status.⁴⁴ Homeownership status and housing insecurity are also strong predictors of household food insecurity,⁴⁵ and several of these underlying factors vary dramatically by race and ethnicity in Adams County, making rentership and housing burden key contributors to the disparate food insecurity rates seen among different racial and ethnic groups.

Overall, this analysis finds several key upstream and intersecting factors contributing to food insecurity in Adams County, including:



low and inconsistent income



unstable housing



lack of access to the financial system



chronic health conditions



Income and Income Sources

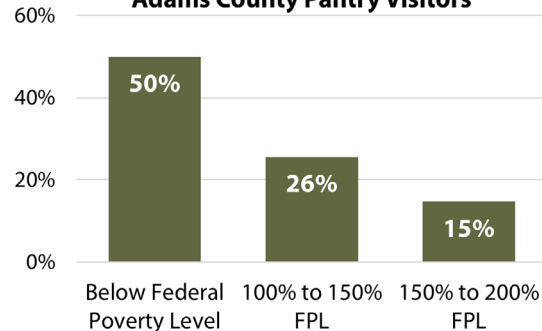
The strongest predictor of very low food security status nationally is household income. This relationship is seen among Adams County food pantry visitors as well. Half of all Adams County food pantry visitors with incomes below the poverty level had survey results that indicated they face very low food insecurity. Approximately one in four (26%) households with incomes between 100% and 150% of the federal poverty level experience very low food security, while only 15% of households with incomes between 150% and 200% experience very low food security; this finding demonstrates a clear correlation between income and very low food security.

Social Security or pension is the most common source of income for pantry visitors at two in five households (38%), followed by full-time work for one in three households (29%) and Disability or SSI for about one in five (19%). Only a combined 13% of pantry visitors either work part-time (6%) or could not find work, receive unemployment benefits, or receive other sources of income (7%). Together, these findings show that the overwhelming majority of pantry visitors who can work do so, and that many pantry users visit pantries because of challenges around making ends meet on limited budgets rather than unemployment.

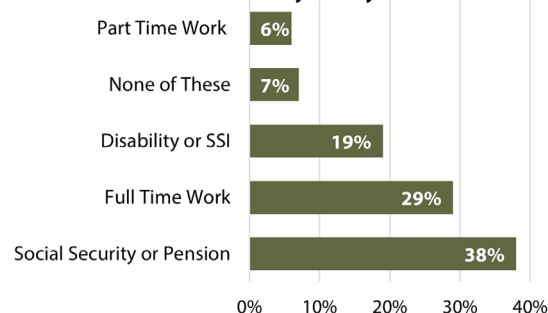
There are considerable differences in income source by household type among Adams County pantry visitors. Unsurprisingly, the most common source of income for working-age households with and without children is full-time work, while the most common source of income for senior households is Social Security or pension.

Very low food security is quite prevalent across all food pantry visitors in Adams County regardless of income. Full-time workers were the most likely to experience very low food security at 41%, followed closely by individuals receiving Disability or SSI at 35% and those who had other sources of income, such as unemployment or child support, or no income at all at 33%. Seniors receiving Social Security or a pension faced very low food security at the lowest rate, 20%.

Very Low Food Security by Ratio of Income to Poverty Level among Adams County Pantry Visitors



Main Household Income Sources among Adams County Pantry Visitors

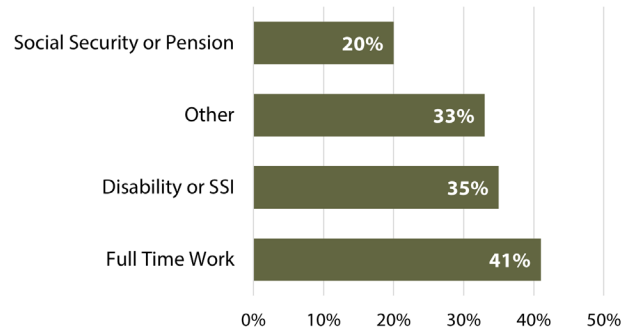


These findings show that full-time workers in Adams County may be facing issues around low wages, seasonal work, and irregular hours that make it difficult for them to make ends meet.

In fact, a third of households that work full time earn less than \$2,000 per month. Just over a third (36%) of full-time working households are below the federal poverty level for their household size, and roughly three quarters (74%) earn less than 150% of the federal poverty level.

1/3
of households that
work full time earn
less than \$2,000
per month.

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



Disabled neighbors and those between jobs are at elevated risk of very low food insecurity for a variety of reasons, which may include but are not limited to: challenges around applying for and maintaining eligibility to receive governmental assistance programs, low benefit amounts, the increased costs people with disabilities may have around their medical needs, and limited ability to work or find a job.



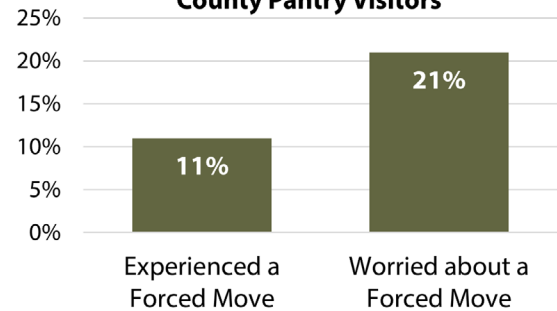
Housing, Utilities, and Evictions

Housing stability is a key pillar of overall economic stability and therefore, of food security. In Adams County, neighbors communicated that housing was a key issue for them. When asked if they had needed to choose between paying for food and another basic need in the previous twelve months, around a third of pantry visitor households mentioned making tradeoffs between utilities (36%) or housing costs (31%).

Reported economic tradeoffs varied by household composition. Most households with children (52%) had to choose between utilities and food, compared with about a quarter (23%) of households without children. Similarly, households with children were nearly three times as likely to have chosen between rent or mortgage and food than households without children at 48% vs. 18%.

Neighbor surveys asked pantry visitors about their experiences with evictions, foreclosures, and other forced moves within the last year as well as their worries about a potential forced move in the coming year.

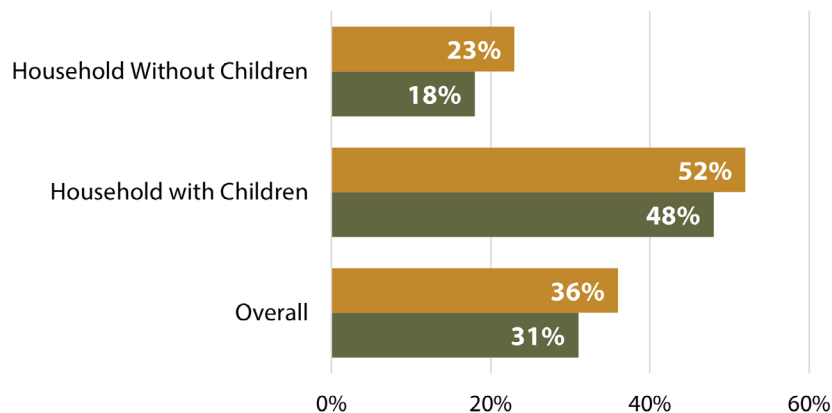
Experiences of and Worries about Forced Moves Among Adams County Pantry Visitors



In Adams County, 11% of survey respondents had been evicted, foreclosed upon, or forced to move in the previous twelve months, and 21% worried they would go through a forced move in the next twelve months.

There were not major differences in experiences of or worries about forced moves by household type; both households with and without children had rates within a percentage point of the countywide average. However, there was a notable disparity in experiences of and worries about forced moves for Adams County visitors based on food security status.

Reported Economic Tradeoffs Among Adams County Pantry Visitors by Household Type



Neighbors experiencing very low food security were more than twice as likely as the average pantry visitor to have gone through a forced move in the last year, with a rate of 24%, and were a little more likely to be worried about facing one in the coming year at 26%. These findings further support the strong relationship between food and housing security.

Financial System Access

A little less than a third of food pantry visitors in Adams County lack adequate access to financial systems like banks. Roughly one in seven pantry visitors (14%) are considered unbanked, as they said they do not have a checking or savings account and are disconnected from traditional financial services.

A similar proportion (16%) are considered underbanked, as they mentioned that they have access to a bank account but still rely on alternative financial systems such as check-cashing services or payday loans.

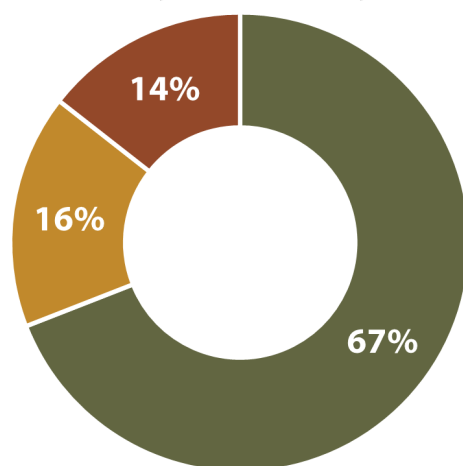
High rates of no or limited financial access among pantry visitors is a concern because mainstream financial system access helps connect people to opportunities for economic mobility and is linked with greater financial well-being at both the individual and community level.⁴⁶

Without access to traditional banking, households are forced to rely on costly alternative financial services, such as check-cashing and payday loans. These services can take up a sizable portion of low-income individuals' take-home pay; unbanked households spend on average 5% of their income on fees for alternative financial services.⁴⁷

■ *Financial health has an effect on food insecurity across a variety of dimensions due to its impact on economic security.*

People without credit scores have difficulty obtaining or applying for a loan, renting an apartment, or qualifying for other financial tools.⁴⁸ Furthermore, people with subprime credit and without access to mainstream financial markets pay more for goods and services than other households, making it more expensive to be poor.⁴⁹

**Banking Access Among
Adams County Food Pantry Visitors**



■ Fully Banked

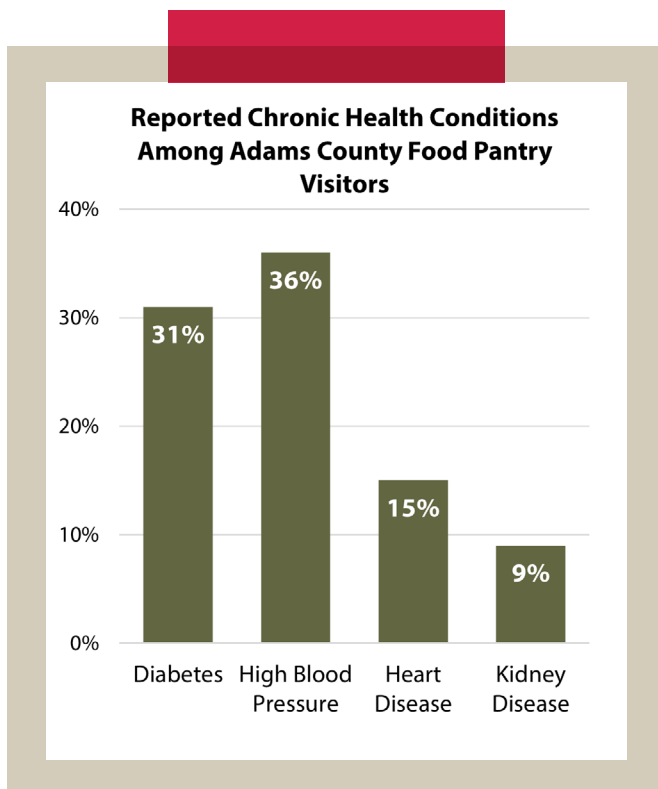
■ Underbanked

■ Unbanked

Health Conditions

Chronic health conditions are another major intersecting issue with food insecurity. Households who face food insecurity may be more susceptible to suffering from chronic health conditions for a variety of reasons, including having insufficient purchasing power to access a diet of sufficient quality and variety as well as chronic stress. These factors contribute to and are exacerbated by food insecurity.⁵⁰

In Adams County, a slim majority (51%) of pantry visitors reported that they or a member of their household had at least one diet-related chronic health condition. High blood pressure was the most frequently mentioned ailment among those who mentioned any condition at 36%, followed by diabetes at 31%. Heart disease and kidney disease affected smaller slices of the population at 15% and 9% respectively.



Although it was much less common than other reported conditions, the 9% kidney disease rate observed in Adams County was the highest seen in any county where a Community Hunger Mapping Project has been completed since questions about health conditions began to be included in neighbor surveys.

This unique finding is potentially related to Adams County's rural nature and large population of agricultural workers, as studies have shown that people living in rural areas or who work in agriculture are disproportionately likely to develop renal conditions.⁵¹

In the charitable food context, it is important for pantry coordinators and food procurement staff or volunteers to be cognizant that many treatment plans for diet-related health conditions emphasize the consumption of foods with low amounts of sugar, saturated and trans fats, and sodium. Highly nutritious, fresh items meeting these criteria are often the foods that food insecure neighbors find most difficult to purchase since they are usually more expensive than less healthy, highly processed options.

Pantries should therefore work to source items that are lower in sugar, sodium, and saturated and trans fats that can allow visitors to meet their specific dietary needs. This work may present opportunities for pantries to partner with healthcare organizations or other interested stakeholders to implement Food as Medicine programming or other collaborative efforts to address food insecurity as a social determinant of health as well.

Intersecting and Upstream Issues Main Findings and Recommendations

SECTION 4 FINDING 1:

As with households nationwide, income is the strongest predictor of very low food security for Adams County households. Half (50%) of pantry visitors with incomes below the poverty line experienced very low food security.

One in four (26%) households with slightly higher incomes (between 100% and 150% FPL) did the same, and rates dropped to only one in seven (15%) for those with incomes between 150% and 200% FPL.

Recommendation:

Poverty is one of the strongest determinants of food insecurity. Low incomes, including low wages, have a major impact on food pantry visitors and are key drivers of the demand for charitable food. The charitable food network should be cognizant of this and advocate for policies and programs that can support neighbors and lift them out of poverty, including a robust safety net.

SECTION 4 FINDING 2:

Nine in ten Adams County pantry visitors stated that their primary source of income is either Social Security or pension (38%), full-time work (29%), or Disability or SSI (19%).

The most common source of income for working-age households is full-time work, while seniors most often said their income comes from Social Security or pension.

Among households who reported working full time, a quarter (41%) experienced very low food security as well, and more than a third (36%) were under the federal poverty line for their household size. Three quarters (75%) of full-time workers who visited pantries fell below 150% FPL for their household size.

Recommendation:

Unemployment is a very small contributor to the need for charitable food in Adams County. Instead, low wages, irregular or seasonal work, and low fixed incomes drive visits to the charitable food system. Charitable food network stakeholders should use this finding to help dispel myths about who visits food pantries and why. Pantries should ensure that opening hours and other policies accommodate working households and that everyone in need, regardless of their employment status or income source, has access to food assistance.

SECTION 4, FINDING 3:

Two in five (41%) Adams County food pantry visitors who reported full-time work as their primary source of income experience very low food security, as do one in three who receive Disability or SSI (35%) or have other sources of income (33%).

One third of pantry visitors who work full time earn less than \$2,000 per month, and three quarters (74%) fall below 150% of the federal poverty line for their household size.

Recommendation:

Food security and anti-poverty stakeholders should emphasize the importance of family-sustaining wages and consistent, stable jobs as they communicate with business partners, donors, and elected officials about food insecurity and its root causes. Advocacy points that could increase the security of 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.

Households with disabled members or members who are between jobs are at higher risk of experiencing very low food security. To better support disabled neighbors, stakeholders should back efforts to increase the sufficiency of SSDI and SSI benefits and to implement program reforms that would help recipients live less precariously, such as the expansion of tax-exempt savings accounts that do not count against program asset limits (ABLE accounts) or policies that discourage work beyond a certain income. Similar efforts around benefit adequacy for UI could assist unemployed neighbors while they conduct a job search.

SECTION 4 FINDING 4:

Housing and related expenses like utilities are strongly associated with food insecurity in Adams County.

About a third of pantry visitors reported needing to choose between paying for food and utilities (36%) or housing costs (31%) in the prior year. Households with children were the most vulnerable, as approximately half had had to make the choice between groceries and utilities (52%) or rent/mortgage (48%).

One in nine pantry visitors (11%) had been foreclosed upon, evicted, or forced to move in the last year, and one in five (21%) was worried they would face one in the coming year; those who were also experiencing very low food security were about twice as likely to have gone through a forced move than the average pantry visitor at 24%.

Recommendation:

Housing stability and food security are very tightly linked; food pantries should be aware of and responsive to the housing issues the neighbors they serve may be experiencing. For example, pantries should make sure that foods tailored to the needs of unstably or marginally housed individuals are available. Pantries 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.

SECTION 4 FINDING 5:

Three in ten (30%) Adams County pantry visitors are disconnected from the traditional financial system, with one in seven (14%) being fully unbanked, meaning that they do not have a checking or savings account.

Households who are unbanked or underbanked (meaning that they have a bank account but still use alternative financial services like check-cashing services) end up sacrificing portions of their pay in fees simply to access the funds, which further limits their already tight budgets.

Recommendation:

Financial inclusion literature points to the importance of trusted local community partners like food pantries in helping to reach unbanked individuals. The charitable food system can work with local financial institutions and other nonprofits to connect unbanked populations to mainstream financial services. “Bankable” moments, like tax time, are key opportunities to increase financial system access. Stakeholders should focus on increasing access to financial services that work well for people in a variety of circumstances, including bank accounts tailored to low-income households.

SECTION 4 FINDING 6:

A majority (51%) of food pantry visitor households in Adams County have at least one member living with a diet-related chronic health condition.

The most common condition was high blood pressure at 36%, followed by diabetes at 31% and heart disease at 15%. Kidney disease came in last at 9%, but this rate was higher than that seen in any other county where questions about health conditions have been asked as part of Community Hunger Mapping.

Recommendation:

Pantries should take potential dietary restrictions among pantry visitors into account when ordering and source fresh, nutritious food as much as possible to ensure that neighbors can receive food that they want, need, and that suits any medical requirements they have. Food insecurity is a social determinant of health, so the charitable food network and health systems should pursue potential opportunities to collaborate, including but not limited to partnerships around Food as Medicine work, Medicaid 1115 waivers, and HealthShare programs.


■ 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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