

Executive Summary

Feeding America and its nationwide network of food banks have conducted the most comprehensive study of hunger in America every four years since 1993. Like the prior studies, Hunger in America 2014 (HIA 2014) documents the critical role that food banks and their partner agencies play in supporting struggling families in the United States. HIA 2014 details how the various agencies operate, including the sources of food available to them, the types of programs they run, their use of volunteers, and the challenges they face. It also documents the number and characteristics of clients that seek assistance from the charitable food assistance network, including what other sources of food assistance are available to them. Its results are based on nationally representative surveys of food banks' partner agencies and their clients in 2013.

This report presents results from HIA 2014 for Vermont Foodbank. For a discussion of the findings from the national study, see the Hunger in America 2014 National Report.

Methods

HIA 2014 follows the pattern of past Hunger in America studies by implementing two surveys—an Agency Survey and a Client Survey—through the collaborative effort of an extended research team. The first step of the study design was conducting the Agency Survey, which included all partner agencies identified by Vermont Foodbank on the agency list it compiled and provided to Feeding America. The Agency Survey, conducted from October 2012 to January 2013, was used to enumerate eligible food programs and obtain basic information about those programs. Following the Agency Survey, a client sample was obtained using a multistage design. Food bank staff and volunteers carried out the Client Survey from April through August 2013.

The information in this report is based solely on the agencies and programs that participated in this study, adjusted by weighting to account for sampling and nonresponse. When findings cannot be presented due to small sample size (fewer than five unweighted observations), the symbol "++" is shown. The Agency Survey yielded responses from 255 eligible agencies (97 percent). Of the 1,056 eligible clients sampled, 699 (66 percent) responded to the Client Survey. Because children were not eligible respondents for the Client Survey, HIA 2014 focuses on the services provided to adult clients and their household members. Consequently, the study will generally underestimate the services provided to children by the Feeding America network.

Key Findings ¹

Within the area served by Vermont Foodbank, the food bank and its partner agencies continue to serve many clients facing various challenges. Key findings are as follows:

- **Agency Staff:** An estimated 64 percent of the food bank's partner agencies reported employing paid staff. The median number of paid full-time-equivalent staff (assuming a 40-hour work week) was 5.
- **Program Volunteers:** A median of 7 volunteers a week provided a median of 31 volunteer hours to programs each week.
- **Unduplicated Number of Clients Served:** The unduplicated client count measures the number of unique individuals or households who access food from the charitable food assistance network. Within this food bank's service area, 18,700 unique clients are served in a typical week and 153,100 are served annually. An estimated 8,200 unique households are served in a typical week and 61,800 are served annually.
- **Duplicated Number of Clients Served:** The duplicated client count estimates the number of times individuals or households are reached through food distributions during a given time. Within this food bank's service area, clients are reached 24,400 times in a typical week and 1,269,800 times annually. Households are reached 11,500 times in a typical week and 599,000 times annually.
- **Client Demographics:** Nationally, the most common racial and ethnic groups are white, black or African American, and Hispanic or Latino. Within this food bank's service area, 88 percent of clients identify themselves as white, 1 percent as black or African American, and 2 percent as Hispanic or Latino. Among all clients, 24 percent are children under age 18, and 17 percent are seniors age 60 and older.

¹ Here and throughout the report, percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

- **Food Insecurity:**² An estimated 76 percent of households are food insecure, and 24 percent are food secure.³
- **Income and Poverty:** An estimated 2 percent of client households have no income, 40 percent have annual incomes of \$1 to \$10,000, and 33 percent have annual incomes of \$10,001 to \$20,000. Taking into consideration household size, 57 percent of client households have incomes that fall at or below the federal poverty level.⁴
- **Health:** An estimated 23 percent of households report at least one member with diabetes; 46 percent of households report at least one member with high blood pressure. Additionally, 10 percent of client households have no members with health insurance of any kind, and 56 percent of households chose between paying for food and paying for medicine or medical care at least once in the past 12 months.
- **Education:** An estimated 77 percent of all clients have attained a high school degree or General Equivalency Diploma (GED) or more, and an estimated 24 percent of all clients have post-high school education (including license or certification, some college, or a four-year degree).

² Food security means all people at all times can access enough food for an active, healthy life. The US Department of Agriculture (<http://www.usda.gov>) defines four levels of food security. High food security indicates no reported food-access problems. Marginal food security indicates reported problems that are typically anxiety over food sufficiency or shortage of food in the house, but with little or no indication of changes in diets or food intake. Low food security indicates reports of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet and little or no reduced food intake. Very low food security indicates reports of multiple disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake. The food security measure used in HIA 2014 combines high and marginal food security into one category (*food secure*) and low and very low food security into another category (*food insecure*).

³ Though most client households are food insecure, there are a variety of reasons why some may identify as food secure. When answering the questions on the food security module, clients may take into account the food they receive through the charitable food system or federal programs like SNAP, indicating that their food secure status is contingent on the help they receive. Additionally, households may make tradeoffs to ensure that they have enough food on the table (discussed later in this report). HIA 2014 also included non-emergency programs in its scope for the first time, thus capturing clients who are in need but may not classify as food insecure. A food secure status does not indicate a lack of need for charitable feeding support.

⁴ Poverty guidelines vary by household size. In 2013, a single person falls under 100 percent of the poverty level with annual cash income of \$11,400 or less, two people live in poverty with income of \$15,510 and below, and families with three people live in poverty if income is \$19,530 or below. For all guidelines, see US Health and Human Services Department “Annual Update of the HHS Poverty Guidelines,” Federal Register, January 24, 2013.

- **Coping Strategies and Spending Trade-offs:** An estimated 63 percent of households reported that they had to choose between paying for food and utilities in the past 12 months, and 58 percent of households chose between paying for food and transportation in the past 12 months. An estimated 71 percent of households reported using multiple strategies for getting enough food in the past 12 months, including eating food past its expiration date, growing food in a garden, pawning or selling personal property, and watering down food or drinks.
- **Housing:** An estimated 94 percent of households reside in nontemporary housing, such as a house or apartment, and 6 percent of households reside in temporary housing, such as a shelter or mission, a motel or hotel, or on the street. 52 percent of households chose between paying for food and paying their rent or mortgage at least once in the past 12 months. An estimated 15 percent of respondents have experienced a foreclosure or eviction in the past five years.
- **Employment:** An estimated 60 percent of households have a household member who had worked for pay in the last 12 months; in 57 percent of client households the most-employed person from the past 12 months is currently out of work.
- **SNAP Participation:** The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program and known in different states under alternative names) is the largest nutrition assistance program. Participating low-income households receive monthly SNAP benefit allotments in the form of electronic debit cards (also known as EBT, or electronic benefit transfer). An estimated 66 percent of client households currently receive SNAP benefits. An estimated ++ percent of client households neither currently receive SNAP nor have ever applied for SNAP benefits.