

# ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE, HEALTHY FOOD FOR EVERYONE

## Issue Brief



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## Food Stakeholder Regathering

Twenty five food, hunger and nutrition leaders gathered in September to check in on work related to the Healthy Polk 2020 priority ***Ensure access to affordable, healthy food for everyone.***

Discussion and problem solving was held to advance five new projects related to the priority.

Those projects are:

- Establish a mobile food pantry

- Strengthen relationships within the food community
- Improve communication within the food community
- Create a community food plan
- Develop a campaign to get agencies to help with online-sign-up for food (SNAP)



[www.healthypolk.org](http://www.healthypolk.org)

*“People are intimidated by the thought of having to file for SNAP benefits. This is mostly for a few reasons; the application is very long and hard to understand, stigma attached to food stamps, and uneducated about benefits of SNAP program. The new application is very short and done online, but lack of access to computers, funding, and people to assist with the process has limited SNAP’s sign-up success.” Terry Walker, SNAP Outreach Worker*



- A mobile food pantry is operating as a partnership and delivering fresh produce

## HIGHLIGHTS

WANT TO SEE ALL THE DETAILS? SEE THE **SUMMARIES OF NEW PROJECTS ON THE HEALTHY POLK [2020 FOOD PAGE.](#)**

- A survey is in place for understanding how to better connect the food sectors
- 150 people have signed up for food assistance
- A grant has been applied for to help plan how to build new infrastructure to support and coordinate food, hunger and nutrition efforts

**Food Insecurity** is limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable

In 2010, 48.8 million people lived in food-insecure households.

11.3 million adults lived in households with very low food security.

16.2 million children lived in food-insecure households in which children, along with adults, were food insecure

976,000 children (1.3 percent of the Nation's children) lived in households with very low food security.

On average, households with very low food security at some time during the year experienced it in 7 months during the year and in 1 to 7 days in each of those months.

## What is Food Security?

**Food Security** is access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food security includes 1) the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, 2) having sufficient resources to obtain appropriate foods for a nutritious diet and 3) appropriate use based on knowledge of basic nutrition and care.

Food security status of households have four ranges:

**High food security**—Households had no problems, or anxiety about, consistently accessing adequate food.

**Marginal food security**—Households had problems at times, of anxiety about,

accessing adequate food, but the quality, variety, and quantity of their food intake were not substantially reduced.

**Low food security**—Households reduced the quality, variety, and desirability of their diets, but the quantity of food intake and normal eating patterns were not substantially disrupted.

**Very low food security**—At times during the year, eating patterns of one or more household members were disrupted and food intake reduced because the household lacked money and other resources for food.

## Health Impacts of Food Insecurity

### CHILDREN

- Low birth weight
- Increased iron deficiency anemia
- Acute infection
- Increased illness and hospitalization
- Impairment of physical, intellectual and emotional development
- Permanent impairment of cognitive development for ages 0-3
- Increased social and behavioral problems
- Increased risk of overweight or obesity
- Increased risk of diabetes

**Food insecure children have a 90% greater chance of their health rated as “fair/poor” vs. “excellent/good” and 31% greater odds of being hospitalized since birth than similar children in food-secure households**

### ADULTS

- Increased risk of overweight or obesity
- Increased depression and other forms of mental illness
- Increased risk of development of chronic disease including hypertension, hyperlipidemia, and diabetes

**Food insecure adults are significantly more likely to rate their health as poor/fair**

## What is Food Assistance?

Food assistance programs are designed to help people with little or no income to have access to food for a healthy diet.

Food Pantries, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Women, Infants & Children (WIC) Nutrition program, county Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), community meal sites, schools' free/reduced lunch programs & summer feeding programs, Backpack Buddies program, meals at shelters, Salvation Army's Sally Wagon, and local congregations, are all local food assistance assets.

Hunger in America 2010 study, found that families are not only visiting pantries to meet temporary, acute food needs – instead, for the majority of people seeking food assistance, pantries are now a part of households' long term strategies to supplement monthly shortfalls in food.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 12.1% of Iowa households, on average, experienced “food insecurity” in 2010. The 2010 National average was 14.5%.

*“DMARC Food pantries are serving between 10%-15% more individuals this summer than last summer. At this point, our concern is that, as the economy continues to struggle, the people we serve, if they're able to find jobs at all, are continuing to see fewer hours and lower wages than are sustainable for themselves and their families. All we can hope is that the people who are able to support themselves and their families continue to be generous in their support of less fortunate families”.*  
Sarai Rice, Executive Director, DMARC

## SNAP

On October 1, 2008, the Food Stamp Program (FSP) was renamed the **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**. SNAP is a program through the United States Department of Agriculture and provides assistance to low and no-income people and families to increase access to food and a nutritious diet and improve their food security.

Households can use SNAP benefits to buy foods to eat, such as:

- Breads and cereals
- Fruits and vegetables
- Meats, fish & poultry
- Seeds & plants to produce food

Households cannot use SNAP benefits to buy:

- Beer, wine, liquor, cigarettes or tobacco
- Pet foods
- Soaps or paper products
- Household supplies
- Vitamins and medicines
- Food that will be eaten in the store or hot foods

Soft drinks, candy, cookies, snack crackers, ice cream, seafood, steak and bakery cakes are food items and are therefore eligible items.

It literally takes an Act of Congress to change the eligible or ineligible food list.

## USDA CHARACTERISTICS OF SNAP HOUSEHOLDS - 2010

In fiscal year 2010, about 40.3 million people living in 18.6 million U.S. households participated in (SNAP), on average, per month.

### **Most SNAP participants were children or elderly.**

Nearly half (47 percent) were under age 18 and another 8 percent were age 60 or older. Working-age women represented 28 percent of the caseload, while working-age men represented 17 percent.

**Many SNAP participants had jobs.** Nearly 30 percent of SNAP households had earnings in 2010, and 41 percent of all SNAP participants lived in a household with earnings. For most of these households, earnings were the primary source of income.

**The majority of SNAP households did not receive cash welfare benefits.** Only 8 percent of all SNAP households received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits and another 4 percent received State General Assistance (GA) benefits. Over 21 percent of SNAP households received Social Security and

nearly 21 percent received Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits given to the aged and disabled.

### **SNAP households had little income.**

Only 15 percent had income above the poverty line, while more than 43 percent had incomes at, or below, half the poverty line. Nearly 20 percent had no cash income of any kind. The average gross income for all SNAP households was \$731 per month.

**The average monthly benefit received by SNAP households was \$287.** Forty percent of SNAP households received the maximum benefit for their family size – \$668 for a family of four. Less than 4 percent received the minimum benefit (\$16) available to households with one or two members. Most households (75 percent) receiving the minimum benefit contained elderly or disabled members and were likely to receive Supplemental Security Income or Social Security; another 20 percent had earnings.

**Most SNAP households were small.** The average SNAP household size was 2.2 persons, but varied

considerably by household composition.

Households with children were larger, averaging 3.3 members. Households with elderly participants were smaller, averaging 1.3 members.

There have been several notable changes in the characteristics of SNAP households between 1990 and 2010. Some of the most striking changes are:

- **The primary form of income among SNAP participants shifted from welfare to work.**
- **The percentage of households with no cash income of any kind nearly tripled.**
- **Households have gotten smaller. The percentage of participants who are children remained fairly steady.**

United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Research and Analysis – September 2010

## SNAP SIGN-UP



### Food Assistance Recipients in Iowa and Polk

Jordan Vernoy, State Director of the Iowa Food Bank Association and Coordinator of the statewide collaborative effort of the eight Feeding America food banks that serve all 99 counties in Iowa reports:

The most successful group in getting people signed up for SNAP has been senior citizens at meal sites. They have identified 4,000 individuals that are possibly eligible.

Some challenges they have faced are covering a very rural state with communities that are uneducated about the benefits of SNAP.

Data from Iowa Department of Human Services Food Assistance Program shows a 13.1% increase in the number of households on Food Assistance from September 2010 (162,461) to September 2011 (183,734). The total number of recipients receiving Food Assistance as of September 2011 is 396,727, a 12.7% increase.

In Polk County the number of households on Food Assistance as of September 2011 was 31,202 (a 13% increase from 2010) and 64,452 recipients (a 13.6% increase from 2010).

Polk County has an 87.4% participation rate which is the percentage of

individuals at or below 160% Federal Poverty Level who are receiving Food Assistance in a given area (County/SA/State).

Participation rate is calculated by dividing the number of food assistance recipients in an area by the number of persons in that area at or below 160% of the Federal Poverty Level. (As counted in the 2005-2009 American Community Survey

*In 2009, 41% of client households served by the FA National Network are receiving benefits from SNAP – Hunger in America 2010 National Report*

*This report also showed that nearly 75% of individuals accessing emergency feeding sites are eligible for SNAP benefits.*

*In Iowa, 25% of those eligible had NEVER applied.*

# SAVE THE DATE

*Please Join Us for the next Re-Gathering of the Food Stakeholders!*

**Friday, December 9<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 AM**

**River Place, 2309 Euclid Avenue, Conf. Rm. 1.**

## Healthy Polk 2020

[www.polkcountyiowa.gov/healthypolk](http://www.polkcountyiowa.gov/healthypolk)

### JOIN THE MOVEMENT!

For More Information Contact: Chris Frantsvog, Public Health Planner  
Polk County Health 515-286-3430

[www.chris.frantsvog@polkcountyiowa.gov](mailto:www.chris.frantsvog@polkcountyiowa.gov)

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Childhood Hunger Coalition

Chair, Healthy Polk 2020  
Chris McCarthy, Project Manager, The Center for Healthy Communities,

This Brief was prepared by:  
Terri Henkels, Director, Polk County Health Department