

Rising to the Challenge:
Preventing Hunger in Ohio
Before, During, and After the
COVID-19 Pandemic



March 2020

In 2019, our food pantry network served **more than 1.6 million** different people*, or nearly 1 in 7 Ohioans. On average, **each person visited our pantry network 5.8 times during the year.**



Some food pantry visitors came only once or twice during the year, when an unexpected crisis occurred, such as a car breaking down or a parent losing wages at work to stay at home with a sick child.



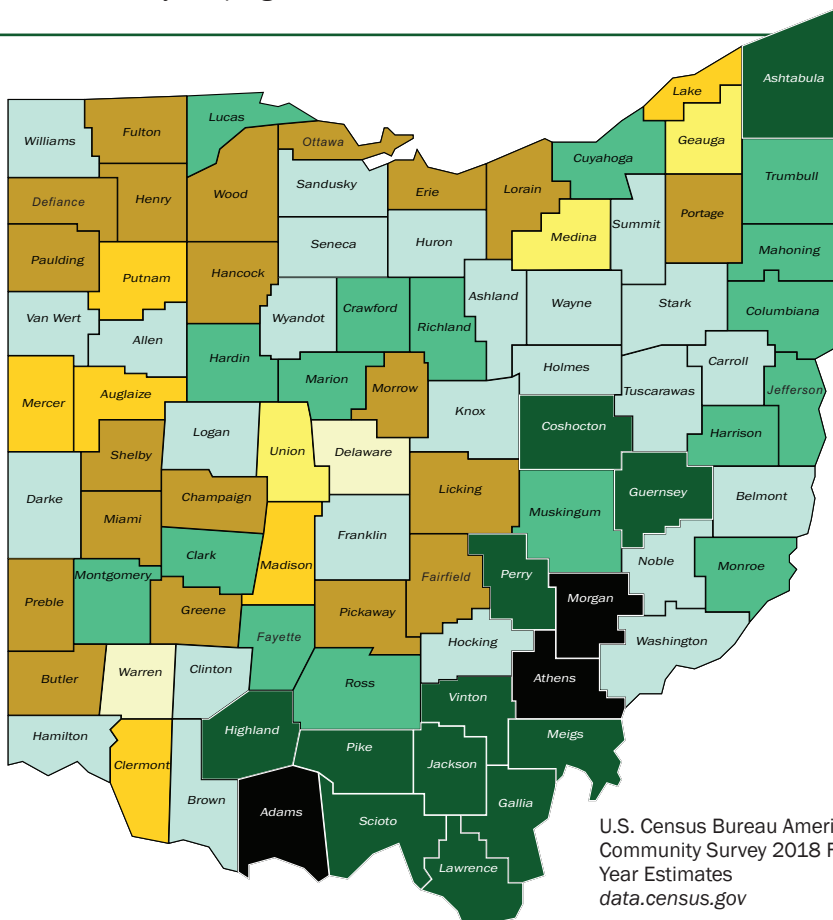
Others came once every two or three months, sometimes more often in the summer for families with children missing out on school meals, or more often in the winter when utility bills are high. A chronic medical condition or diet-related disease may mean a family or individual needed more help. A job loss may have hurt a family's budget for a longer stretch of time.



We also served more than **15 million additional meals** in 2019 through hot meal sites and shelters.

Still other food pantry visitors relied regularly on our help. These often included seniors living on fixed incomes that don't stretch far enough. It also included people living with disabilities, families with young children, and unemployed adults without access to other safety net programs like SNAP.

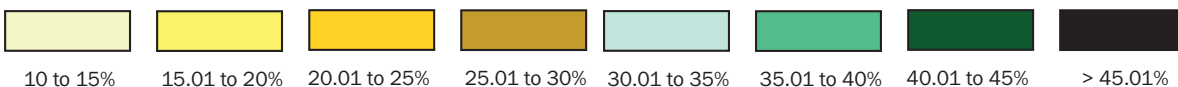
*Analysis of FreshTrak (formerly PantryTrak) data for unduplicated individuals served in 2019 by all participating food pantries and duplicated individuals served as reported by remaining food pantries



Before this crisis began, more than **3 in 10** Ohioans already had incomes low enough to qualify for help from our foodbank network

The most recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey found that 3,617,825 Ohioans – or **32 percent of the state's population** – lived in households with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level, roughly \$3,560 per month for a family of four, before taxes – and before the COVID-19 virus ever took hold in Ohio. These families live paycheck-to-paycheck, working hard for wages that don't always leave enough for food after the bills are paid. The share of families in this situation has not significantly changed over the past decade.

Percentage of Residents in Households Eligible for Foodbank Services (income ≤ 200% federal poverty level), by County



Then, a **novel coronavirus** began spreading across the globe and took root here in Ohio and across the country.



Critical Public Health Intervention

Governor Mike DeWine, Lt. Governor Jon Husted, and Ohio Department of Health Director Dr. Amy Acton began implementing bold, necessary steps to protect public health and slow the spread of COVID-19 so that Ohio's health care system could prepare to provide care to the infected.



Immediate Economic Impact

As more Ohioans heeded the Governor's recommendation, and then order, to Stay At Home, businesses quickly began furloughing and laying off workers. Businesses and workers in nearly every industry were immediately impacted by loss of demand for their services.



Demand for Help with Food Surges

The Federal Reserve most recently estimated that nearly 4 in 10 American adults don't have enough saved to cover a \$400 emergency. That reality came to bear quickly on Ohio's foodbanks, which experienced immediate 50% to 100% increases and more in requests for help with food.



Delay and Inadequacy in Federal Safety Net Response

H.R. 6201, signed into law by President Trump on March 18, 2020, will send additional commodities to the country's hunger relief network, but that relief will take months to come. SNAP (food stamp) benefits will take time to rollout to displaced workers and will be inadequate.



Loss of Traditional Fundraising Dollars

Ohio's foodbanks, like many nonprofits, rely on giving campaigns and in-person fundraising events to generate critical operating dollars. Those events have been cancelled and those dollars will be harder to come by as individuals and corporations feel pressure on their budgets.



Challenges to Community-Based Food Access

Ohio's foodbanks traditionally rely on 3,600 food pantries, soup kitchens, and other feeding programs to reach people in need across Ohio's 88 counties. Many of those agencies are beginning to close out of concern for volunteer safety or orders to suspend services.



Shift to Focus on Social Distancing

Normally, Ohio's foodbanks promote client choice and community, offering an experience similar to grocery shopping at food pantries, as well as congregate, communal feeding at hot meal sites. The hunger relief network has quickly had to shift to pre-packed food and "to-go" meals.



Lack of Volunteer Support and Reduced Staff

Like many employers, Ohio's foodbanks are coping with reductions in staff due to school closures and quarantine measures. Additionally, Ohio's hunger relief network has had sharp declines in needed volunteer support as older adults and corporate volunteer groups have pulled back.



Threats to Food Supply Chain

With added pressure on grocers and food retailers as schools, daycares, and restaurants close, product that may have been donated to a foodbank will now be sold in primary or secondary markets. Further strain on the larger food supply chain will increase costs and limit availability.

The economic toll of this public health crisis **will be long-lasting** for low-wage workers and vulnerable people. Ohio's foodbanks have identified key needs **now and in the months to come** as they struggle to serve millions of Ohioans who have no other lifeline for access to food.

Monetary Support

Within the first two weeks of this crisis, Ohio's foodbanks have spent millions of dollars beyond their normal spending to purchase additional food to meet the incredible demand for their help. Freestore Foodbank reported that, as of March 23, they had already ordered an additional \$500,000 worth of food over and above their normal orders; meanwhile, several of their largest fundraising events, which normally generate more than \$2 million to support their work, are likely to be cancelled due to social distancing orders. The Greater Cleveland Food Bank saw its operating expenses surge by \$175,000 weekly and expect that will continue to grow as need compounds. It takes money to source food, transport food, store food, and handle food. Switching to pre-packaged foods costs even more; with boxes costing \$0.65 each, the cost of boxes alone will be hundreds of thousands of dollars.



Food and Food Sourcing

Ohio's foodbanks and the member agencies in their network that remain open to help their local communities need to quickly source large quantities of food and continue to move it quickly out of their warehouses and into neighborhoods. The Foodbank, Inc. in Dayton reported a 250% increase in demand for help, with no outreach and no publicity. The Second Harvest Food Bank of North Central Ohio distributed 450,000 pounds of food and supplies in one week, six times higher than a normal week in March. Freestore Foodbank has seen a 300% increase in demand at their Liberty Street Market. Local agencies often partner with the foodbank to pick-up donated retail items from nearby grocers, but with rampant purchasing at area stores and pressure on the supply chain, there's little to no food left for grocers to donate to foodbanks.



Transportation Support

Normally, Ohio's foodbanks rely on 3,600 food pantries and hunger relief agencies to distribute food to Ohioans in need. Many of these community-based access points for food have closed or may soon close for one or more of several reasons: elderly volunteers who operate the food pantries have self-quarantined; feeding programs operating at senior centers, homeless shelters, libraries, schools, faith-based organizations, community centers, and more have shuttered due to orders to close; or staff and volunteers have been required to quarantine or stay at home to care for young children. Ohio's 12 Feeding America foodbanks do not have the vehicles or staffing to make widespread pick-up and distribution of food in outlying counties possible without additional transportation support. Foodbanks will need trucks to pick-up donated food and deliver that food to underserved counties.



Health, Hygiene, PPE, Cleaning, and Sanitizing Supplies

This need is two-fold. Ohio's foodbanks and their member agencies are front-line workers in this crisis and need access to cleaning and sanitizing supplies and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for their staff and volunteers. Like the rest of the supply chain, foodbanks are currently unable to source these much-needed items. What's more, foodbank clients are also struggling to access and afford the products they need to protect their household health and safety. Foodbanks need widespread access to personal care, personal hygiene, and household cleaning items, from infant and adult diapers to toilet paper to hand soap and hand sanitizer. The 1.6 million different Ohioans that were already served by Ohio's food pantries prior to this crisis have little to no ability to afford or access these items on their own.



Warehouse Equipment

Foodbanks are rapidly hiring where possible, and where funds allow, to staff their warehouses and continue to unload, stock, pick, and place orders for food, as well as sorting and inventory of product. However, like all other staffing, that infrastructure is precarious and dependent on the continued health of workers. Ohio National Guard members have provided a critical boost to warehouse operations, for which Ohio's foodbanks are grateful. But foodbanks do not have adequate warehouse equipment to cope with the rapid pace of delivery and distribution of product. Additionally, they are grappling with necessary modifications to their operations, including social distancing of warehouse staff, volunteers, and Guard members, and do not always have appropriate conveyor capacity, floor space, or staging areas to handle the volume of food with these further limitations.



Additional Warehouse Capacity

Due to significant lag times from point of order to delivery, and other pressure on the food supply chain, foodbanks are ordering more items than they can realistically store in their warehouses at one time so that they have supplies available to keep moving through the hunger relief network. Foodbanks need additional dry storage space as well as frozen and refrigerated storage to keep needed food supplies moving through their distribution channel. Traditionally, food pantries in outlying counties travel to their regional foodbank to pick-up food supplies to transport back to their agencies; with limited capacity to transport food to outlying counties and unprecedented demand, additional warehouse and storage capacity at satellite sites would make food more accessible to community-based food pantries and feeding programs.



Streamlined Regulatory Relief

This country's hunger relief network is a sophisticated operation that sources food and funding from a variety of federal, state, and private sources and that is subject to myriad layers of bureaucracy, from required household verifications and income eligibility guidelines to audit standards to public health and food safety regulations and more. In this pandemic, foodbanks need to be able to distribute food without requiring any person-to-person contact between clients and staff/volunteers - that means that tracking requirements in programs like TEFAP and TANF need to be temporarily suspended. Other swift regulatory relief will continue to be necessary in other areas that make up our nation's nutrition safety net to help foodbanks do their work efficiently and safely, protecting their workforce and streamlining their critical missions.



Distribution Support

Certain populations are especially vulnerable to food insecurity during this crisis. While many K-12 schools have implemented modified means to deliver or distribute to-go meals to students, school districts are not required to do so, and many school food service departments are not operating. Older adults and individuals with underlying conditions, as well as households under quarantine due to illness, cannot leave their homes safely to pick-up food. Ohio's foodbanks do not have the infrastructure, transportation, or staff to get food the "last mile" through direct delivery to these particularly at-risk Ohioans. The use of existing infrastructure - from public transportation to city services to school buses to ride-sharing services - should be explored to help foodbanks get emergency food supplies to isolated households.



Communications and Technology Support

Ohio's foodbanks have longstanding and well-established relationships with their local media outlets. They are also generally savvy and experienced in navigating internal and external communication. However, in this uncharted territory, foodbanks are struggling to clearly and widely communicate accurate and helpful information to their internal networks and stakeholders and their external clients and communities. In this crisis, news reports are often inadequate means for communicating in a rapidly changing environment; support for paid media or local public service announcements could help. Additionally, with more non-essential staff teleworking, foodbanks and their partner agencies need more laptops, video conferencing equipment, and video conferencing licenses. They often also need technology like tablets and WiFi capability to conduct food distributions in remote areas.



On behalf of its 12 member Feeding America foodbanks and their 3,600 partner agencies, the Ohio Association of Foodbanks is requesting **immediate relief to help us respond to short-term need** and **additional, long-term support** to help us keep our doors open for the millions of Ohioans that need us.



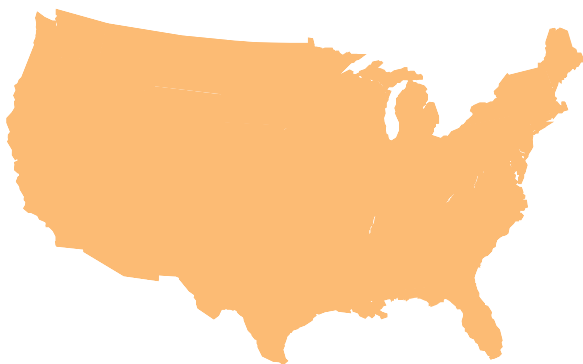
Support from the State of Ohio

Ohio's foodbanks need a minimum of an additional \$25 million in funding to: purchase, pack, and distribute over 1 million emergency food boxes that will likely be needed over the next month; store, handle, and distribute food; source and purchase other personal care, personal hygiene, and household cleaning items; and replace lost community-based outlets for food distribution with more costly direct distribution and home delivery models. We may also need to call on additional Ohio National Guard resources as our traditional supply chain continues to deteriorate.



Support from Philanthropy

Ohio's foodbanks will lose millions of dollars in traditional fundraising revenue, just as their general operating costs (additional warehouse and logistical staff, fuel and trucking expenses, overhead for new warehouse space, and overtime for payroll) are skyrocketing. We encourage the philanthropic community to be as flexible and responsive as possible to help us meet immediate and long-term basic needs. In 2019, our 12 foodbanks collectively generated \$431,688,030 in revenue and expended \$429,702,330. We do not have a cushion to absorb these additional costs and loss of revenue. Your support will be our foundation in the challenges ahead.



Support from the Federal Safety Net

The federal nutrition safety net – which includes the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) – is the first line of defense against hunger. Average SNAP benefits are currently lower than they were prior to the Great Recession. SNAP benefits should be boosted as they were under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to provide an immediate economic stimulus to Ohio's economy and immediate relief to Ohio's families. All program flexibility and regulatory relief should be granted for programs like TEFAP, TANF, and CSFP to allow our emergency network to do its job safely and efficiently.



Ohio Association of Foodbanks

*Ohio's largest charitable
response to hunger*

For more information about our response to COVID-19, visit
ohiofoodbanks.org/coronavirus