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Study Finds Majority of Ohio Foodbank Clients Forced to Choose Between Affording Food or Other Basic Household Expenses

The findings are from a survey of more than 2,000 foodbank network neighbors who visited Ohio foodbanks between April 15 to May 12

COLUMBUS, OH – A study conducted by the Ohio Association of Foodbanks found that an alarming number of Ohioans are being forced to choose between buying food and paying for other essential expenses including medication, household utilities and childcare. The findings, released today, are from an anonymous statewide survey, which included 2,301 validated responses from residents in 30% of all Ohio zip codes.

“The stark reality revealed by this study is a wake-up call for all of us. It is unacceptable that so many Ohioans are forced to make impossible choices between feeding their families and covering basic needs like transportation and housing,” said Joree Novotny, executive director for the Ohio Association of Foodbanks. “Ohio's foodbanks are operating at full capacity, yet the demand continues to grow. The fact that so many people are skipping meals and struggling to balance essential expenses highlights the urgent need for action.”

Key Findings from Study

After enduring over a year of above-average inflation and rising costs for food and other essentials, paired with the expiration of pandemic-era Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits in March 2023, Ohioans are visiting Ohio's foodbank network at record rates. To gain insight into the impact of these challenges, a study gathered survey responses from Ohio foodbank clients who attended food distributions in rural, suburban, and urban communities between April 15 and May 12, 2024.

Among the study's highlights:

- Nearly two-thirds (65.2%) of Ohio Association of Foodbanks' neighbor households reported that the adults in their households skipped meals in the past year because they did not have enough food, including more than a third (34.9%) that reported doing so every month or almost every month over the past year.
- Nearly 3 in 5 households surveyed are not participating in SNAP. For those that are participating, nearly two-thirds report that their SNAP benefits are exhausted in two weeks or less each month.
- Findings also underscored that most Ohioans who are able to work are working. Of those households without current employment, they reported multiple reasons for not working, with some reporting more than one reason. More than half (58%) said they were not working because they are ill or disabled; 40.9 percent said they are retired; and others said they were

taking care of their home or family (9.6 percent), going to school (6 percent), or were looking for work or had been laid off (4.5 percent).

- When asked how often they expect to need to seek help from Ohio's foodbanks in the next 12 months, 89.6 percent said they would need help as often or more often than in the past 12 months, including a third (33.7 percent) who said they would need help more often.

When Ohio foodbank clients were asked about whether they had to choose between paying for food or other household expenses, the study found:

- 72.5% had to choose between food and transportation/gas.
- 65.2% had to choose between food and utilities.
- 57.8% had to choose between food or medicine/health care.
- 49.5% had to choose between food and housing.
- 23.3% had to choose between food and educational expenses.
- 14.9% had to choose between food and affording childcare.

The summary of key findings from the study can be accessed [here](#).

State & Federal Legislative Support Needed to Meet Increasing Demand on Ohio's Foodbanks

As the State of Ohio works to develop its biennial budget and as Congress works to reauthorize the Farm Bill, it is imperative that funding and safeguards are included to protect and further strengthen federal and state nutrition programs.

2026-2027 Ohio Biennial Budget

Ohio's hunger relief network is requesting that the State of Ohio invest **\$50 million per year in the 2026-27 biennial budget** to support state funded food sourcing programs. This investment will enable the statewide network to distribute tens of millions of pounds of nutritious, wholesome foods to food insecure families across all 88 counties in Ohio. Funding will also be used for essential non-food household items, such as shampoo, toothpaste, diapers, and toilet paper.

This funding will empower the Ohio Association of Foodbanks to direct critical state resources to those who need them most, ensuring Ohio families have food on their tables, supporting children's health and readiness to learn, protecting the well-being of older Ohioans, and setting a leading example in anti-hunger and pro-agriculture initiatives among states.

The Ohio Association of Foodbanks and other advocates and stakeholders also urge the State of Ohio to invest in a [state-funded minimum SNAP benefit for older adults, commit to hunger-free campuses across the state, and ensure universal school meals for all students](#).

Farm Bill

Additionally, the Ohio Association of Foodbanks joins Feeding America and foodbanks throughout the country in imploring Congress to strengthen the nation's commitment to ending hunger by supporting critical anti-hunger programs in the Farm Bill, including funding for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and SNAP.

As demand for food remains high at foodbanks, a reliable and continuous stream of TEFAP foods is essential. TEFAP also has a strong impact on the farm economy. TEFAP purchases give U.S. growers and producers an average of 27 cents per dollar¹ – by contrast, just around 16 cents of every retail food dollar go back to farmers. Lawmakers must **increase TEFAP baseline funding to \$960 million a year indexed to inflation for TEFAP food purchases**. Congress must also authorize **\$200 million per**

¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service

year for TEFAP storage and distribution funds and \$15 million per year for TEFAP infrastructure grants.

In addition, SNAP is the cornerstone of the nation's federal nutrition programs, providing around 40 million people in the U.S. with monthly food benefits via a grocery debit card. **SNAP benefits should be set at an adequate level so families can purchase healthy foods.** Strengthening SNAP benefits would also help older adults, people with disabilities, people working low-wage jobs, and others who are most likely to qualify for the minimum benefit.

The Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) program, known in Ohio as Ohio CAN (Community Agriculture and Nutrition), is also in need of immediate and permanent funding. The program was designed by USDA to maintain and improve food and agricultural supply chain resiliency. The cooperative agreements allow states, tribes, and territories to procure and distribute local and regional foods and beverages that are healthy, nutritious, unique to their geographic areas and that meet the needs of the population. [Nationwide polling](#) by Siena College Research Institute found that **82% of those surveyed support making the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program (LFPA) a permanent program in the next Farm Bill**, but without urgent action to extend funding for the popular program, Ohio will not have resources to continue its LFPA program past June 2025..

“As our state and federal leaders deliberate on the biennial budget and the Farm Bill, it is critical that they prioritize robust funding and protective measures to support state funded food sourcing programs. Investing \$50 million annually in Ohio's hunger relief network will be a vital step in addressing rising demand and ensuring that every family has access to essential food and household items,” said Novotny. “It is also crucial that we reinforce and improve programs like TEFAP and SNAP at the federal level and secure continued funding for LFPA. These programs make a lasting impact in our fight against hunger. We are calling on our state and federal leaders to make a firm, demonstrated commitment to ensure that no Ohioan goes hungry.”

For more information about the survey or to learn about the current impacts on Ohio's foodbanks, visit OhioFoodbanks.org.

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About the Ohio Association of Foodbanks

The Ohio Association of Foodbanks is Ohio's largest charitable response to hunger, representing Ohio's 12 Feeding America foodbanks and 3,600 member charities including food pantries, hot meals, and other hunger relief programs. In SFY 2023, the association and its member foodbanks were able to acquire and distribute more than 256 million pounds of food and grocery items. Follow the association on Twitter, stay connected on Facebook and visit them on the web at www.ohiofoodbanks.org.

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