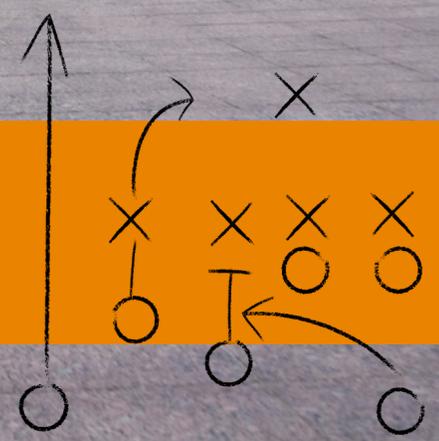




# ANTI-HUNGER PLAYBOOK

**Ohio's 136th General Assembly**  
A legislator's guide to addressing hunger

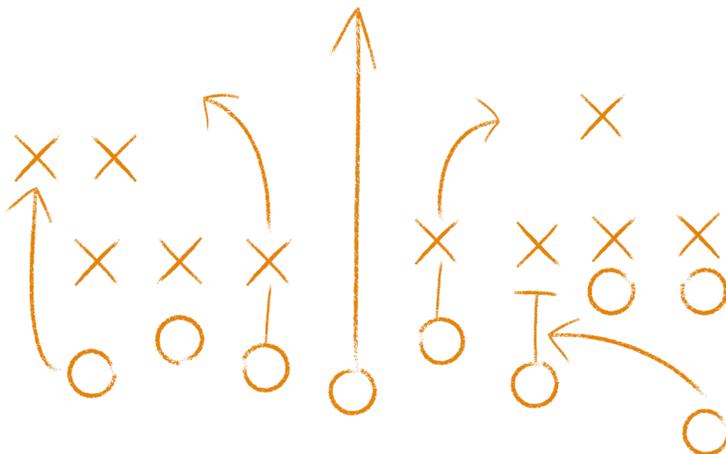


Adapted with thanks from the Association of Arizona Food Banks

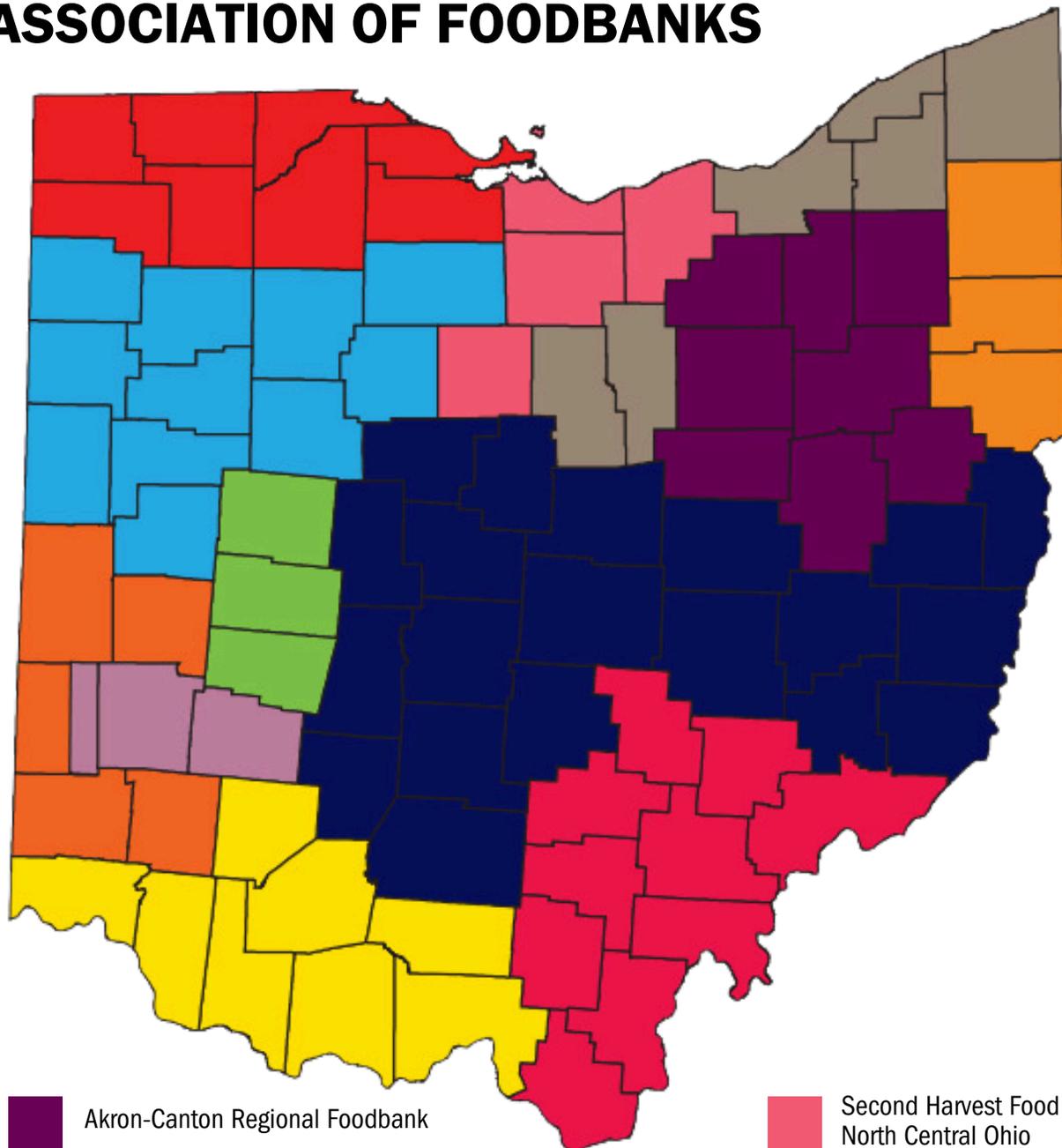


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# OUR TEAM: OHIO'S 12 FEEDING AMERICA FOODBANKS & MEMBERS OF THE OHIO ASSOCIATION OF FOODBANKS



- Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank
  - Freestore Foodbank
  - Greater Cleveland Food Bank
  - Mid-Ohio Food Collective
  - Second Harvest Food Bank of Champaign, Clark, and Logan Counties
  - Second Harvest Food Bank of the Mahoning Valley
- Second Harvest Food Bank of North Central Ohio
  - SE Ohio Foodbank + Kitchen
  - Shared Harvest Foodbank
  - The Foodbank. Inc.
  - Toledo Northwestern Ohio Food Bank
  - West Ohio Food Bank



## FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

### **Congratulations on your election to the 136th Ohio General Assembly!**

Food insecurity is present in every zip code, county, and House and Senate district across Ohio. It is a symptom of larger, systemic issues: poverty, growing disparities in wage and wealth equity, weakened social safety nets, rising costs for basic needs like housing, transportation, and health care, gaps in access to healthy food, and much more. Years of cumulative inflationary pressure have further exacerbated rising rates of food insecurity. To respond effectively, we need the public, private, and charitable sectors working together on the same team. Ohio has a remarkable history of bipartisan support for effective public-private partnerships that alleviate and prevent hunger. State legislators like you can be champions for the hundreds of thousands of Ohio families that rely on foodbanks for help each year. We're proud to have worked with legislators on both sides of the aisle to develop and implement proven, win-win programs and sound policies. This playbook gives you the information you need to use your influence to raise awareness about the issue of hunger, pass legislation that strengthens our response to hunger, and work with state agencies to ensure effective policies are in place. We look forward to working on your team to promote the nutrition and well-being of all Ohioans as we work to promote food security, health, and household stability for children, parents and caregivers, workers, older adults, and disabled Ohioans.

Joree Novotny, executive director  
Ohio Association of Foodbanks  
[jnovotny@ohiofoodbanks.org](mailto:jnovotny@ohiofoodbanks.org)



# THE OPPONENT: HUNGER IN OHIO

## Ohio's poverty rate remains higher than the national rate and 2nd highest in the Midwest<sup>1</sup>

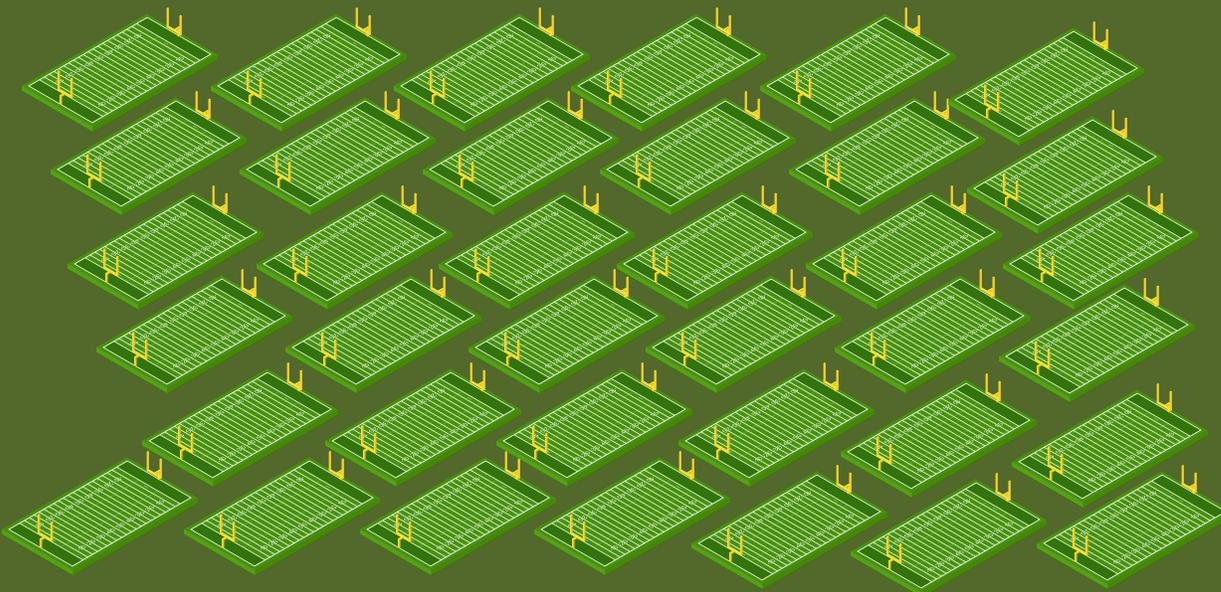
Ohio's poverty rate was 13.3% in 2023, though the national poverty rate declined to 11.1%. More than 1 in 6 Ohio children (17.3%) were living in poverty in 2023, the highest child poverty rate in the Midwest region.

### The Ohio Foodbank network continues to hit record levels of neighbors served

We served 35% more children, 39% more adults, and 58% more older adults in 2023 than in 2019, a trend that continued in 2024.

### More older adults are living in poverty

The rate of poverty among older adults is on the rise in Ohio, with 11.0% of Ohioans 60 or older living below the poverty level in 2023, compared to 9.2% just five years earlier in 2018.



### Child food insecurity continues to grow

In 2023, the Ohio Foodbank network served 3,812,789 children - enough children to fill Ohio Stadium more than 37 times.

## Inflation has affected food and household costs<sup>2</sup>

Rising food prices driven by inflation are making it increasingly difficult for families to afford groceries. Factors such as higher transportation costs, supply chain disruptions, and increased demand for essentials have caused the cost of food to outpace general inflation in many areas. Staples like eggs, meat, and dairy have seen significant price spikes, disproportionately affecting low- and moderate-income households.

### Housing costs in Ohio are at record highs

In 2021, 25% of Ohio renters spent at least half their income on housing. The median share of income spent on rent (28%) is increasing after a decade of decline.

### Food prices and pressure on the supply chain remain high

Like many other household expenses, food costs are 20% higher than they were four years ago.

# HOW WE TACKLE HUNGER EACH DAY



## About the Ohio Association of Foodbanks

Our mission is to provide food and other resources to people in need and to pursue areas of common interest for the benefit of people in need. We proudly represent Ohio's 12 Feeding America foodbanks, their nearly 3,600 member food pantries, soup kitchens, and other hunger relief agencies, and the millions of Ohioans they serve each year.

### **Securing and distributing emergency food**

Our statewide hunger relief network distributed 292 million pounds of food to Ohioans in fiscal year 2024. About 20 percent of that food came from the state-funded Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program (OFPACP). Those products made up some of the most wholesome foods available to Ohioans struggling to afford food on their own.

### **Support small and emerging farmers, growers, and producers local farmers, growers, producers, and supply chain partners**

We are dedicated to local agricultural partnerships that help build and maintain a resilient food supply chain capable of feeding every person, now and into the future. Across all of our food procurement and hunger relief programs, we procure tens of millions of pounds of locally grown, raised, and produced foods each year from more than 100 vendors. We know these investments not only prevent hunger today, but bolster Ohio's agricultural economy so that it remains strong for generations to come.

### **Addressing health through food access<sup>3</sup>**

Access to nourishing food is vital for everyone, regardless of age, as it directly impacts overall health and well-being. When individuals face food insecurity or can only afford foods with low nutritional value, their risk of chronic conditions like diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease increases significantly. Poor nutrition also makes managing existing health issues far more challenging, creating a cycle of worsening health and financial strain. Our health and nutrition programs go beyond providing meals—they focus on how food access can improve health, reduce disparities, and promote wellness. Collaborating with food banks, healthcare providers, and community partners, we prioritize initiatives like "Food as Medicine," where food banks work with healthcare facilities to connect patients facing food insecurity to nutritious meals. We also promote culturally responsive food sourcing and nutrition education, empowering individuals to make informed, healthier choices. These efforts aim to achieve health equity, reduce disparities linked to poverty and diet quality, and support healthier communities now and for future generations.

### **Connecting Ohioans with SNAP**

The federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps) remains the nation's most vital line of defense against hunger, providing critical support to individuals and families in need. However, navigating the SNAP application process can be daunting, especially for those already facing crises. For over 15 years, we have partnered with the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services to provide comprehensive SNAP outreach across Ohio, helping eligible individuals access this essential program. SNAP not only reduces hunger but also bolsters local economies, as every dollar spent by participants circulates back into grocery stores and communities, creating a ripple effect of economic benefits.

# A HUNGER BLITZ WE CAN'T AFFORD



## Food Insecurity Worsens Health Outcomes<sup>4</sup>

Food insecurity has profound impacts on both physical and mental health, contributing to a range of chronic conditions. Research from the USDA's Economic Research Service highlights the strong correlation between food insecurity and ten chronic conditions, such as hypertension, coronary heart disease, and diabetes. As the severity of food insecurity increases, so does the likelihood of being diagnosed with one or more of these conditions. Adults in households with very low food security are 40% more likely to be diagnosed with at least one chronic disease than those in food-secure households.

### Food Insecurity is linked to higher care usage and costs

Likelihood of having a health care expenditure relative to food secure households.



### When surveyed, Ohio's Foodbank Network reported:<sup>5</sup>



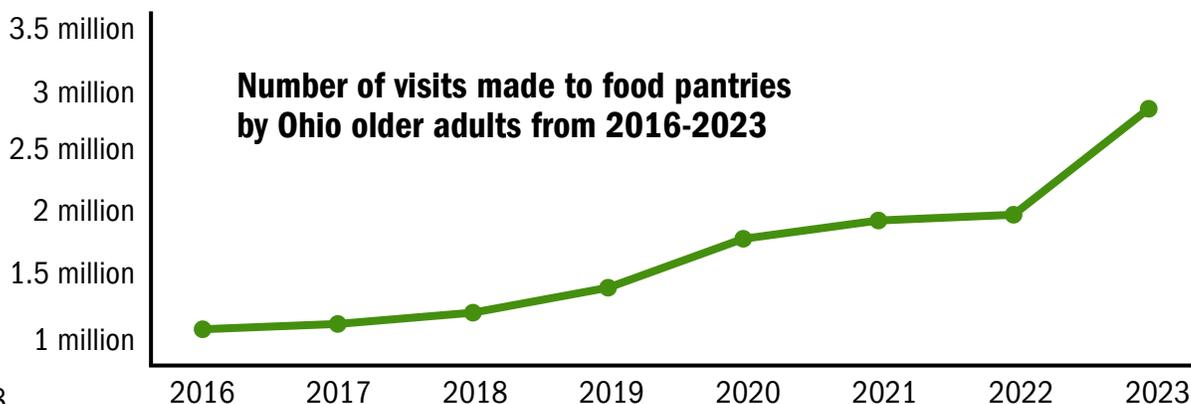
More than half (57.8%) of food pantry visitors reported that they were forced to choose between affording food or affording medicine or medical care, including over one in four that reported doing so every month.

Three out of five (59.3%) of food pantry visitors reported that at least one member of their household has a chronic condition, including 42.9% with a diet-related condition.

More than one in ten food pantry visitors report that they are uninsured.

## Older Adults Increasingly Rely on Help from Foodbanks

As Ohio's population continues to age, projections indicate that by 2030, more than one in four Ohioans will be 60 or older.<sup>6</sup> Many older adults rely on fixed incomes due to retirement, declining health, or low wages, leaving them especially vulnerable to food insecurity. Hunger among older adults is a growing issue nationwide, with approximately 6.9 million seniors aged 60 and older experiencing food insecurity in 2022. Certain groups are disproportionately affected, such as seniors living with grandchildren, who face food insecurity rates of 18.1%—more than double the 8.3% rate for those without.<sup>7</sup>



Food insecurity in older adults worsens and exacerbates aging issues.

Rates of high blood pressure, asthma, depression, chest pain, and limits to activity are higher for food insecure older adults.

# SNAP: OUR MOST IMPORTANT DEFENSE AGAINST FOOD INSECURITY



## SNAP Linked to Many Health Improvements and Lower Costs<sup>4</sup>

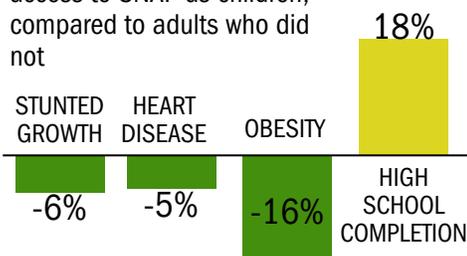
The federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides about 1.5 million Ohioans with an average of \$178 per person, per month to help purchase food.<sup>8</sup> Access to SNAP significantly improves health outcomes and reduces costs by addressing food insecurity. It allows families to access nutritious foods tailored to their needs, helping to prevent and manage chronic illnesses while bringing dignity and stability to households.

### SNAP is associated with improvements in health.

Research found that SNAP improves health outcomes and lowers medical costs by reducing food insecurity. Older adults benefit from fewer skipped medications and increased independence, while children gain better access to preventive care. SNAP participants also incur significantly lower annual healthcare costs, especially those with chronic conditions like hypertension or heart disease.

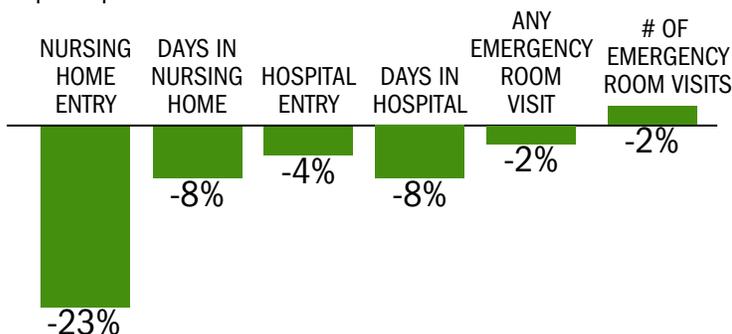
### Children with access to SNAP fare better years later<sup>10</sup>

Percentage-point difference in outcomes for adults who had access to SNAP as children, compared to adults who did not



### Older Adults on SNAP are less likely to use health care services<sup>9</sup>

Percent relative to low-income older adult non-participants



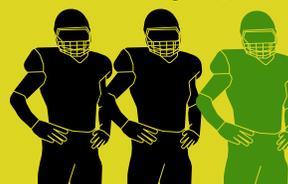
### SNAP Boost Local Economies<sup>11</sup>

SNAP recipients redeem benefits at nearly 10,000 retailers in Ohio - primarily supermarkets and superstores. In 2023, SNAP recipients redeemed over \$2 billion in completely federally-funded food assistance dollars at grocers and other food retailers in their local communities. These funds not only alleviate food insecurity but also stimulate the state's economy by supporting local businesses and jobs. In Ohio, 1 in 11 workers (about 496,100 statewide) participate in SNAP. These workers earn low wages, working unpredictable and demanding schedules, and they rely on SNAP to keep food on the table for their families.

### Foodbank network fills the gap for many Ohioans.

Although the recent (October 2024) increase in the SNAP gross income eligibility threshold to 200% of the federal poverty level will assist some, most households with gross incomes between 130 and 200 percent FPL still don't qualify due to complex eligibility requirements including an additional net income test at 100% FPL. And for those that do qualify, SNAP benefits are insufficient, putting them in foodbank lines.

### When surveyed, Ohio's Foodbank Network reported:



Nearly 2 in 3 neighbors (64.3%) exhaust their SNAP benefits within 2 weeks.<sup>5</sup>



# OHIO PLAYER PROFILES

Hear directly from Ohioans who are in foodbank lines

**JENNIFER**



Northwest Ohio



Jennifer, 52, and her husband face significant challenges as a disabled household of two. They receive \$137 in monthly SNAP benefits, which covers just one trip to the grocery store, leaving little room for meat or protein. To supplement, they rely on the food pantry twice a month and make tradeoffs between food, gas, and utility payments. Jennifer also sacrifices her own meals to ensure her husband, who requires full meals to take his medications, has enough to eat.

Their SNAP benefits and reliance on food assistance remain critical, especially as her husband’s COPD and Ménière’s disease require careful nutrition, which they cannot afford. Jennifer worries they will need the food pantry even more in the future, given ongoing cuts to their support systems and escalating expenses. Despite their best efforts, they remain in a precarious situation, highlighting the gaps in essential services for disabled and low-income families.



**NICOLE**



Northwest Ohio

Nicole, 24, a stay-at-home mom of five, and her husband are doing their best to make ends meet for their family of seven on a single income of \$23/hour. With childcare costs being unaffordable, Nicole stays home while her husband works full-time. The family relies on \$494 in monthly SNAP benefits, which help cover food for nearly three weeks if Nicole shops carefully. Despite these supports, they face constant tradeoffs, like skipping

meals, cutting back on utility payments, and foregoing “non-essential” foods. Nicole and her husband prioritize feeding their children, often going without meals themselves. Having overcome homelessness in the past through the help of community resources, they have built a stable home but continue to struggle with the rising cost of living, making it difficult to meet their family’s basic needs.

**JOSEPH**



Northern Ohio



Joseph, 70, is a single older Ohioan living on a fixed income in Section 8 housing. With only \$23 in monthly SNAP benefits—the minimum amount—he struggles to meet his nutritional needs, often using it to buy a small piece of meat and orange juice. To make ends meet, Joseph must turn to his local food pantry for additional support. Food assistance programs are crucial in helping Joseph maintain his health as he navigates the challenges of aging and managing his diabetes and other chronic conditions.



# COMPLETING THE PROVEN PLAY: OHIO'S PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP WITH FOODBANKS AND FARMERS

## Providing wholesome food to families in need for pennies on the pound

The Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program (OFPACP) has received bipartisan support from 5 governors and 14 Ohio General Assemblies since its creation in the 1998/99 state budget. OFPACP provides about 20 percent of all of the food distributed statewide by Ohio's 12 Feeding America foodbanks and their 3,600 member food pantries, soup kitchens, and other hunger relief agencies.

### Ohio Food Program

- Provided 20.8 million pounds of food in state fiscal year 2024
- Distributed items include proteins and shelf-stable foods, like eggs, soup, milk, pasta, canned fruits and vegetables, and peanut butter
- Average pound of food cost 93 cents
- Keeps wholesome, staple foods on the shelves of 3,600 hunger relief agencies

### Ohio Agricultural Clearance Program

- Provided 33.5 million pounds of fresh, nourishing foods in state fiscal year 2024
- Distributed products include apples, onions, potatoes, cabbage, tomatoes, corn, and more
- Average pound of food cost 30 cents
- Salvages surplus agricultural items that would otherwise go to waste



**A WIN-WIN-WIN  
for the State of  
Ohio!**

## Making an economic impact while fighting hunger

An independent economic impact analysis by Dr. Howard Fleeter has consistently shown that OFPACP helps prevent hunger and supports household stability for Ohioans in need. In SFY24, the program generated \$23.5 million in income, created 585 jobs, and contributed tens of millions in indirect economic impact to local communities. It also provided critical support to Ohio farmers and food producers while delivering 59.3 million meals to those in need.

SFY 2024	Direct Economic Impact	Indirect Economic Impact	Total Economic Impact
Value of Output	\$34.8 million	\$42.7 million	\$77.5 million

# OHIO CAN BE CHAMPIONS IN ADDRESSING HUNGER AND ITS ROOT CAUSES



## Preventing hunger longer-term through sound policy and innovative solutions

Addressing food insecurity requires comprehensive basic needs support for families, as food insecurity is deeply intertwined with other social determinants of health. Housing stability, access to health care, transportation, education, and safe and affordable childcare all influence one's ability to obtain and maintain access to nutritious food.

Unfortunately, the federal SNAP program, which provides about 9 meals for every 1 meal Ohio's foodbanks are able to provide, is under attack across the country by organized crime rings who are stealing benefits from vulnerable households. Just in Ohio in the past year, millions of dollars intended to help people with low incomes buy groceries, like older adults, disabled Ohioans, and families with children, have been stolen through point-of-sale skimming devices. What's more, as of December 20, 2024, these stolen benefits will no longer be replaced by the federal government, leaving hungry Ohioans with nowhere to turn other than Ohio's foodbanks. The State of Ohio, the U.S. Congress, and the USDA must work together to improve SNAP Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card security and protect the nation's most important line of defense against hunger. The State of Ohio should also direct additional resources for food purchases to Ohio's foodbanks so that we do not have to turn desperate families away without the food they need.

Ohio must prioritize addressing college student hunger to strengthen its higher education system and economic future. With nearly 600,000 students enrolled in Ohio's network of colleges and universities, many face food insecurity, which undermines their ability to succeed academically and professionally. Ohio's food insecurity rate, at 11.5%, exceeds the national average, while the state ranks 7th in the nation for student loan debt.<sup>12</sup> By investing in initiatives like Hunger-Free Campus legislation, which incentivizes colleges to address student food insecurity through programs like on-campus food pantries and SNAP outreach, Ohio can create a more supportive environment for students.

Investing in "Food as Medicine" initiatives can significantly enhance public health outcomes in Ohio by addressing food insecurity as a critical social determinant of health. Ohio has already seen the benefits of such programs, like the collaboration between the Mid-Ohio Food Collective and OhioHealth, SE Ohio Foodbank + Kitchen and Ohio Association of Health Plans, Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank and Cleveland Clinic, to name a few. By integrating food and nutrition security interventions into our health care system, Ohio can reduce long-term health care costs, improve quality of life for vulnerable populations, and support broader public health goals.<sup>13</sup>

As Ohio's population ages, the number of older adults experiencing food insecurity continues to rise. Many of these seniors live on fixed incomes, making it difficult to meet their nutritional needs. Currently, over 70,000 households in Ohio with members aged 60 and older are receiving the minimum SNAP benefit of just \$23 per month. This amount falls far short of covering the cost of adequate nutrition, leaving many older Ohioans struggling to access healthy food. With the increasing need for support, the state must take action to enhance food security for seniors, ensuring they have access to the nutrition they need to live healthy, independent lives. By investing in increased benefits and expanding support programs, Ohio can better meet the needs of its aging population.



# AVOIDING FUMBLES: WHAT MAKES EFFECTIVE LEGISLATION?

## The two simple litmus tests for any legislation impacting hungry Ohioans

When considering any proposals that would affect programs and policies that serve food insecure Ohio families, we encourage you to ask:

	<b>Will this proposal improve the food security of Ohioans?</b>	<b>Will this proposal use taxpayer dollars responsibly?</b>
<b>Proposal to “increase fraud prevention and oversight” of SNAP by means such as increased frequency of eligibility verifications</b>	No, it would put additional barriers in place for vulnerable people	No, it would increase administrative costs exponentially, and likely lead to additional quality control errors by caseworkers
<b>Proposal to require photo identification when shopping with SNAP benefits</b>	No, it would erroneously remove program participants from SNAP using tactics that have been proven unsuccessful in other states	No, it would increase administrative costs exponentially, in addition to placing an added burden on private grocers and retailers
<b>Proposals to undermine SNAP, such as by eliminating categorical eligibility, mandating child support cooperation, or restricting choice</b>	No, it would restrict access to basic federal food assistance through punitive and harmful restrictions	No, it would forfeit federal funds owed to Ohio taxpayers and the State of Ohio and increase administrative costs
<b>Proposal to upgrade SNAP EBT cards to chip-enabled technology to prevent benefit theft</b>	Yes, benefit theft has weakened trust and effectiveness of the nation’s largest and most important line of defense against hunger	Yes, stolen benefits are stolen taxpayer dollars. SNAP skimming continues to pressure both public and private industries including retailers, local governments, legal aid attorneys, and the charitable food network
<b>Proposal to enact Healthy School Meals for All</b>	Yes, research continues to demonstrate the effectiveness of ensuring all children have the nutrition they need to develop and thrive	Yes, child food insecurity and poor child health can have significant costs to life-long health, education and the economy
<b>Proposal to bring the WIC program online</b>	Yes, WIC enrollment in Ohio has suffered because of its offline system	Yes, data demonstrates WIC's success in reducing poor Maternal and Child Health (MCH) outcomes

Ohio Revised Code requires that members of the Ohio Association of Foodbanks network serve all Ohioans with incomes up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level. In 2024, more than 3.4 million Ohioans lived in households with incomes at or below that threshold.<sup>14</sup> Any proposal that takes SNAP benefits or other income-supporting benefits out of the pockets of low-income Ohioans places more strain on our statewide hunger relief network.

# STRATEGY FOR SUCCESS: OUR STATE BUDGET REQUEST

The Ohio Association of Foodbanks is requesting \$36.98 million annual in the 2026-2027 biennium (\$73.96 million total) to strengthen hunger relief efforts, support Ohio agriculture, and help Ohioans meet their basic needs by:



***Procuring fruits, vegetables, dairy, protein, and other center of the plate foods through the Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program***

Funds to procure 58 million pounds of nutritious foods at an average of \$0.63 per pound. These staple items are critical to families receiving their daily nutritional needs.



***Sorting and distributing nutritious foods across Ohio while strengthening local capacity for handling perishable foods***

Funds to sort and distribute locally grown, nutritious food across Ohio, advancing the agricultural sector, reducing food waste, and supporting Ohio farmers and the state's economy.

## OPPORTUNITY FOR SPECIAL PLAY



The Ohio Association of Foodbanks urges the State of Ohio to prioritize additional investments that promote food security by addressing social determinants of health. In addition to increasing and adequately funding SNAP benefits for older adults, supporting Food as Medicine initiatives, and addressing college student hunger (as mentioned on page 12), we advocate for expanded access to nourishing food for vulnerable populations, such as through free school meals and tax credits that support families and workers.

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