



State of Wisconsin
Department of Health Services

Tony Evers, Governor
Karen E. Timberlake, Secretary

March 9, 2021

Michael Queensland
Senate Chief Clerk
Room B20 Southeast, State Capitol
Madison, WI 53702

Kay Inabnet
Assistant Assembly Chief Clerk
17 West Main, Room 401
Madison, WI 52703

Dear Mr. Queensland and Ms. Inabnet:

I am pleased to submit to the Legislature the 2019 Hunger Report as required under Wis. Stat. § 49.76. The Department of Health Services (DHS) provides this report on the on the participation of low-income households in DHS food programs during 2019. Submission of this report was delayed due to our ongoing COVID-19 pandemic response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Karen E. Timberlake".

Karen E. Timberlake
Interim Secretary

Enclosure



2019 Hunger Report

The FoodShare Program

FoodShare is a federal program providing monthly food allowances to qualified, low-income residents based on household size. In 2019, FoodShare provided benefits to a monthly average of 609,359 Wisconsin residents to purchase an annual total of \$773,798,613 in approved foods. April 2019 began the fifth year of the mandatory FoodShare Employment and Training (FSET) Program for “able-bodied” adults ages 18 to 49 with no minor children in the home. These participants were required to obtain 80 hours per month of either employment or training or a combination (unless exempt). FSET members who did not or were unable to comply with requirements are limited to three months of FoodShare benefits in a 36-month period. In the fourth year, 59,619 FoodShare members were referred to FSET; 18,614 were enrolled; 7,056 FSET participants gained new employment. Since April 2015, when mandatory FSET was first implemented, through June 2019, 35,790 FSET participants gained employment.

The Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a discretionary program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) with limited funding allocated by Congress. WIC serves low-income women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, as well as new mothers, infants, and children up to 5 years of age, who have a nutritional need. WIC provides breastfeeding support, nutrition education, referrals to health and nutrition services, and supplemental nutritious foods.

During Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2019, there was an average monthly participation of 87,666 women, infants, and children who received WIC-approved foods. A total of \$60,747,747 in retail food value was used by the participants to purchase food at grocery stores. There was sufficient funding to serve all WIC applicants determined to be eligible in 2019.

The Elderly Nutrition Program

The purpose of the Elderly Nutrition Program is to reduce hunger and food insecurity, to promote socialization of older individuals, and to promote the health and well-being of older individuals by assisting such individuals to gain access to nutrition and other disease prevention and health promotion services. The program is funded by a combination of federal and state funds, local public and private funds and participant contributions, and has substantial operating support from volunteers. The nutrition program consists of two programs, each with specific purposes. The congregate (senior dining) program provides meals in a community environment that promotes socialization and healthy aging. Home-delivered meals, also known as Meals on Wheels, provide meals and daily social contact to those who are determined to be homebound and, therefore, unable to prepare daily meals or attend a senior dining center. Approximately 19% of senior dining participants and 58% of home-delivered meal participants in Wisconsin are at high nutritional risk.

In FFY 2019, 1.4 million senior dining meals were provided to 46,324 older adults through this program in approximately 485 dining centers statewide. In FFY 2019, 2.3 million home-delivered meals were provided to 21,415 older adults through this program in Wisconsin.

The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)

In 29 counties, DHS provides monthly food packages to seniors with incomes at or below 130% of FPL through the USDA Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP). In 2019, an average of 11,813 seniors each month received food from one of 171 distribution sites. The total value of food distributed in 2019 was \$3,438,387, approximately \$24.26 per person per distribution.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

The Emergency Food Assistance Program provides USDA commodity foods to 345 participating food pantries, soup kitchens, and homeless shelters (outlets) in Wisconsin for distribution to qualifying low-income households. TEFAP is intended to supplement outlets' private sector food inventories. States purchase "Entitlement" food from a diverse menu of products—including meat, fruits, vegetables, grains and cereals—using Entitlement funds the USDA allocates in accordance with each state's proportion of persons living in poverty or unemployed. Because TEFAP is also a price-support program for farmers, the USDA purchases surplus products from growers to provide as additional "Bonus" food. In December 2018, the USDA also began purchasing "Trade Mitigation" food to offset farmers' losses from reduced sales of U.S. agriculture products caused by the trade wars.

In FY 2019, 271 food pantries and mobile pantries in the TEFAP network distributed food to 826,393 households (duplicated), 40% higher than before the recession. During the same period, 71 meal sites and shelters provided 1,633,770 meals. Wisconsin warehouses, food banks, and outlets received 26.08 million pounds of TEFAP commodities worth \$24.22 million dollars for distribution to all outlet types. In addition, TEFAP food pantries reported distributing 37.28 million pounds of privately donated, grown and purchased foods.

Senior Farmer Market Nutrition Program

The Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program provides a \$25 annual benefit to needy seniors, enabling them to purchase locally grown fruits, vegetables, and herbs from farmers markets and roadside stands. Seniors must have incomes at or below 185% of the federal poverty level (FPL), and be at least age 60 (Native Americans may participate at age 55). The program operates in 50 Wisconsin counties and in 2019, it served 13,834 households with redemptions totaling \$271,545. Last year, local farmers received \$961,615 in additional income through their participation in Senior and WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Programs.

WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program

From June through October, the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) provides WIC participants the opportunity to purchase fresh produce directly from farmers. Surveys indicate these purchases increase interest in year-round consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables. In 2019, 1,183 local farmers redeemed \$690,070 from 46,233 WIC households who spent their benefit at Wisconsin farmers markets and farm/roadside stands. The amount farmers redeemed is 12% more than the previous year.

Food Insecurity Trends in Wisconsin Compared to the U.S.

An important source of national food security data is the Economic Research Service (ERS) of the USDA, which surveys households about difficulties meeting basic food needs. Households are classified as “*food insecure*” if they reported three or more food-insecure conditions. A subset of “*food insecure*” households reports having “*very low food security*.” This means that, at times during the year, members reduced their food intake and disrupted their normal eating patterns because they lacked resources for food.

The most current ERS data indicates Wisconsin has the eighth lowest food insecurity prevalent rate in the nation. From 2016 through 2018, Wisconsin’s average rate of food insecurity was 9%, compared to the higher national average of 11.7%. Wisconsin’s food insecurity rate has declined 2.3% from 2013-15. Wisconsin’s average rate of households with “*very low food security*” in 2016-2018 was 3.4%, compared to the higher national average of 4.6%.

Both nationally and in Wisconsin, food insecurity is highest among households with incomes near or below the poverty level; households with children that are headed by single women or single men; households comprising women or men living alone; and households headed by individuals who are Black, Hispanic, or Native American.

In conclusion, the effort and challenges represented by the data in this 2019 report indicate the need for a continued commitment by DHS to fight hunger in Wisconsin.