



State of Wisconsin
Department of Health Services

Tony Evers, Governor
Kirsten Johnson, Secretary

June 3, 2024

Ms. Lindsay Hale
Acting Senate Chief Clerk
Wisconsin State Senate
PO Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707

Mr. Edward A. Blazel
Assembly Chief Clerk
Wisconsin State Assembly
17 West Main Street, Suite 401
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Ms. Hale and Mr. Blazel:

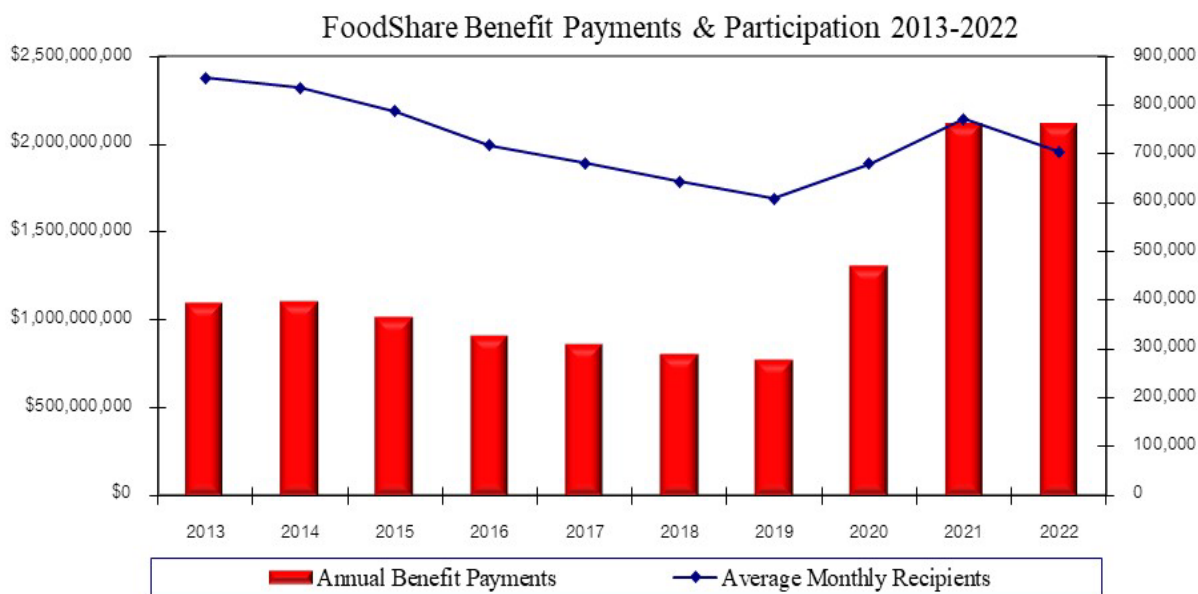
As required under Wis. Stat. § 49.76, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) provides this report on the participation of low-income households in DHS food programs during 2022. All programs are funded by USDA.

The USDA Economic Research Service Report states that, “Most U.S. households have consistent, dependable access to enough food for active, healthy living—they are food secure. However, some households experience food insecurity at times during the year, meaning their access to adequate food is limited by a lack of money and other resources. USDA’s food and nutrition assistance programs aim to increase food security by providing low-income households access to food for a healthful diet, as well as nutrition education.”

The Wisconsin’s USDA food and nutrition assistance programs aim to increase food security by providing low-income households access to healthy and nutritious foods. Access to healthy foods allows individual and families to make healthy food choices. The goal is to provide all residents across the state access to a nutritious diet to help ensure long-term health outcomes for everyone.

The FoodShare Program

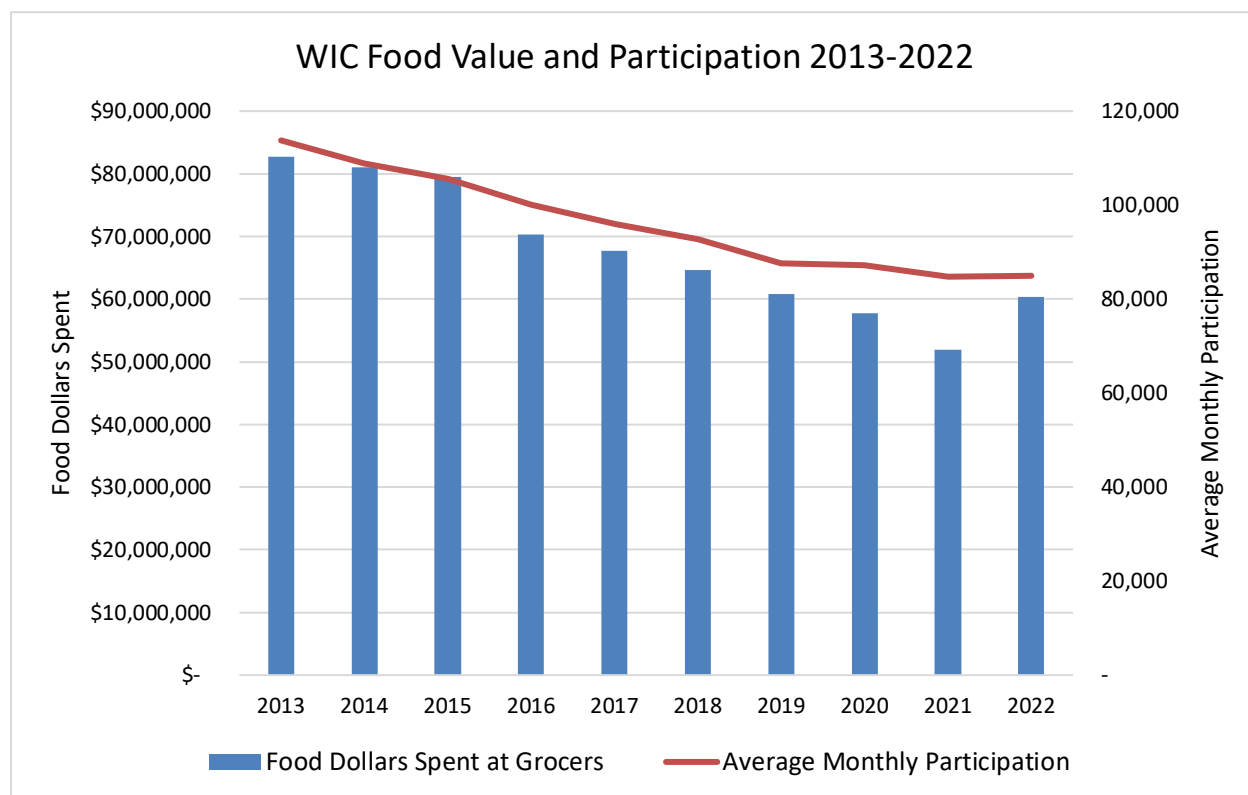
FoodShare is Wisconsin’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which provides monthly food allowances to qualified, low-income residents, and is the nation’s largest nutrition assistance program. In 2022, FoodShare provided benefits to a monthly average of 704,786 Wisconsin residents to purchase a total of \$2,122,557,479 in approved foods at grocery stores and farmers markets. 2022 participation was 8.6% lower than in 2021. In 2022, Wisconsin households received an **extra \$80 million a month** in SNAP emergency allotments, which ended in early 2023 when the national public health emergency declaration was concluded. In December 2022, FoodShare reported 55% of members were female; 33.8% of assistance groups included minors; 47.7% had an elderly, blind or disabled member; the average monthly allotment was \$296 per household; the average household size was 2 persons; and the average monthly income of assistance groups with at least one person working was \$487.



The Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC)

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a discretionary program. WIC serves low-income participants who are pregnant, postpartum, or breastfeeding as well as infants, and children up to 5 years of age, who have a nutritional need. Though the WIC program uses the term of “women” in its program name and data summaries, WIC serves low-income participants who are pregnant, postpartum, or breastfeeding regardless of gender identity, including women, transgender men, and nonbinary-gendered individuals. The data is inclusive of all people who were participating in the program while pregnant, breastfeeding, or postpartum.

WIC provides breastfeeding support, nutrition education, referrals to health care, social supports, public health services, and access to supplemental nutritious foods. In 2022, the WIC program served 131,203 participants including 35,113 women, 23,491 infants and 72,599 children. During 2022, monthly participation averaged 85,059 participants including 16,868 women, 18,461 infants, and 49,730 children who received WIC-approved foods. A total of \$60,290,383 was spent to purchase food at grocery stores. There was sufficient funding to serve all WIC applicants determined to be eligible.

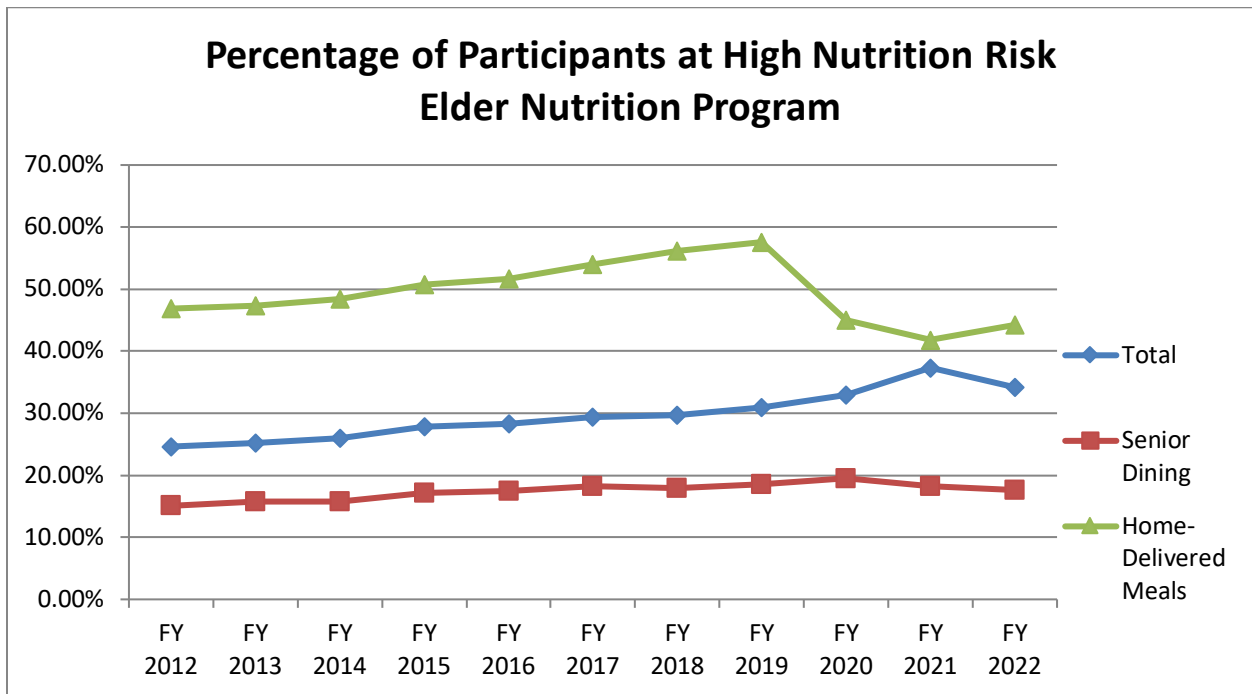
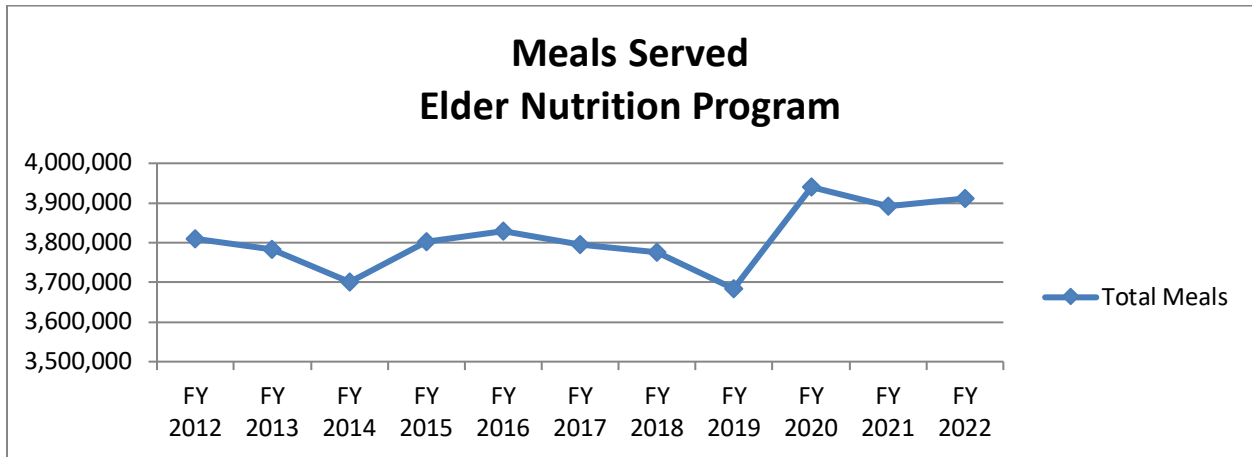


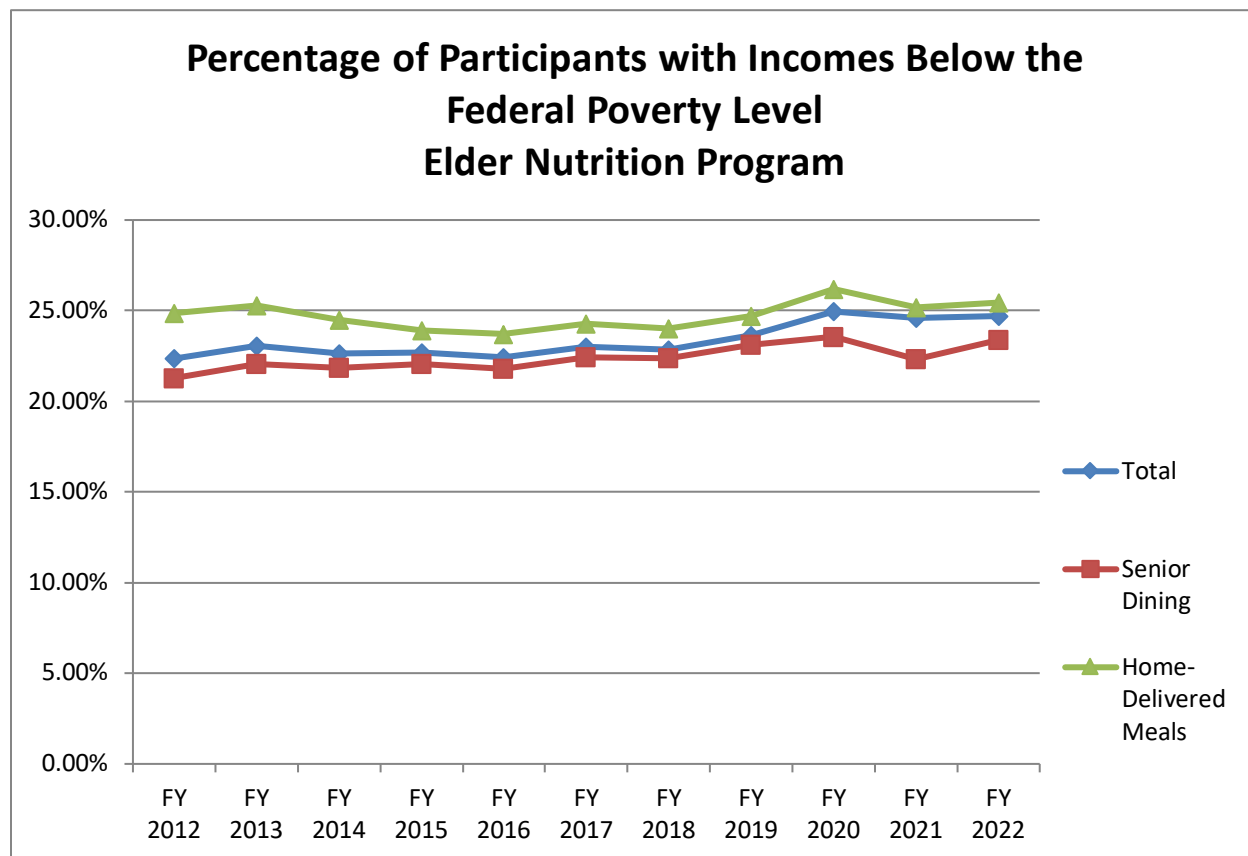
The Elderly Nutrition Program

The purpose of the Elder 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 helping to gain access to nutrition and other disease prevention and health promotion services. The nutrition program consists of two meal 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. Some nutrition programs in Wisconsin also provide carryout meal services because of programmatic shifts that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. Carryout meals can help fill gaps in services for older individuals for whom congregate meals or home-delivered meals may not be appropriate or for programs that lack resources to deliver meals to everyone who might be eligible for services.

Approximately 3.3 million carryout and home-delivered meals were served to 37,619 older adults. In CY 2022, Wisconsin’s nutrition programs served 573,374 congregate meals to 26,342 older adults. Approximately 18% of senior dining participants and 44% of home-delivered meal participants in Wisconsin are at high nutritional risk. Approximately 25% of meal participants live at or below the Federal Poverty Limit.

Beginning in October 2023, all nutrition programs will screen congregate and home-delivered meal participants for food insecurity annually using the [Hunger Vital Sign™](#) two-question food insecurity screening tool.





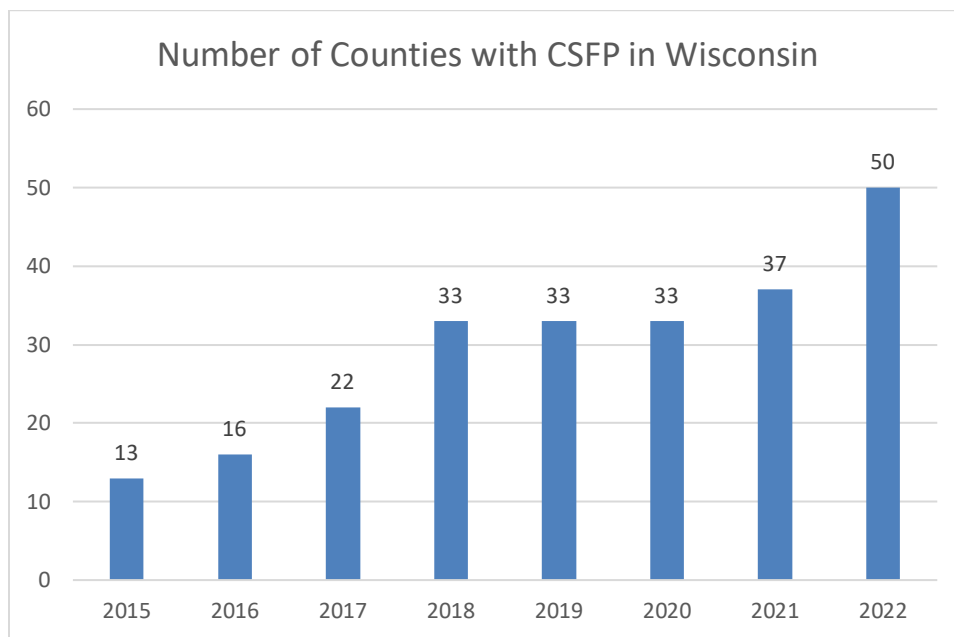
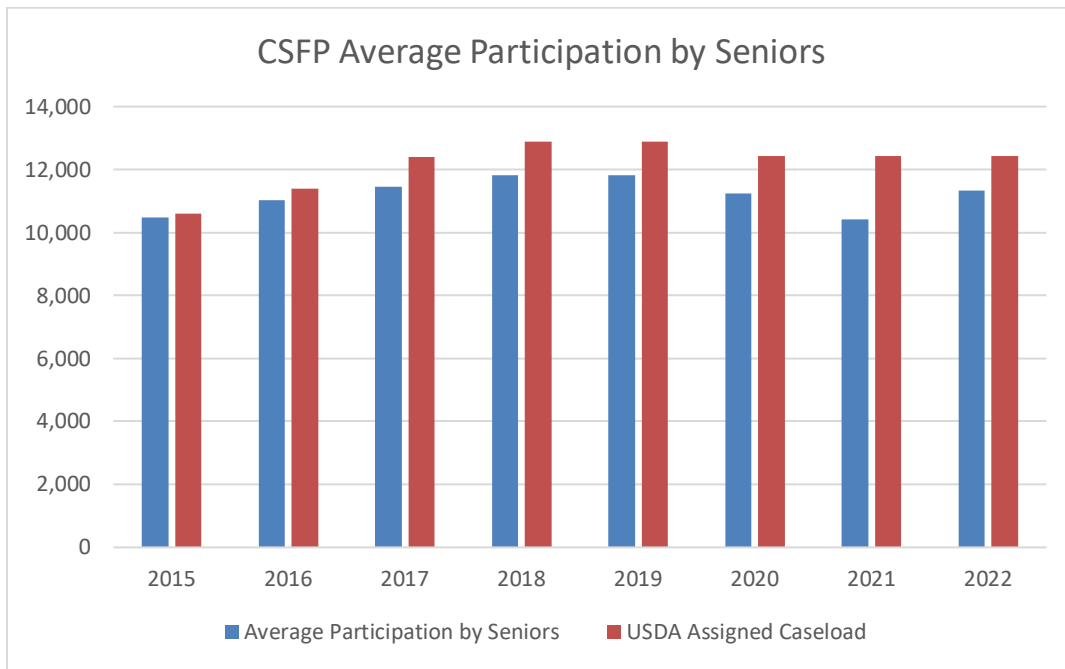
The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)

The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) works to improve the health of low-income persons at least 60 years of age by supplementing their diets with nutritious U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Foods. USDA distributes both food and administrative funds to participating states and Indian Tribal Organizations to operate CSFP. State agencies distribute CSFP food to public and nonprofit private local agencies. Local CSFP agencies determine the eligibility of applicants, distribute the foods, and provide nutrition education.

CSFP offers a monthly food package with a variety of nutritious foods, such as unsweetened or lightly sweetened canned fruits, low sodium or no salt added canned vegetables, low fat dairy products, whole grain cereals and pasta, and a variety of protein foods including lean meats, poultry, fish, and beans.

CSFP is administered at the Federal level by the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). State agencies are responsible for administering the program at the State level and may select local agencies to administer the program in local areas of the State.

In 2022, Wisconsin CSFP was carried out in 50 counties, providing monthly food packages to seniors within income at or below 130% federal poverty level. In 2022, an average of 11,326 seniors each month received food from one of the 226 distribution sites.



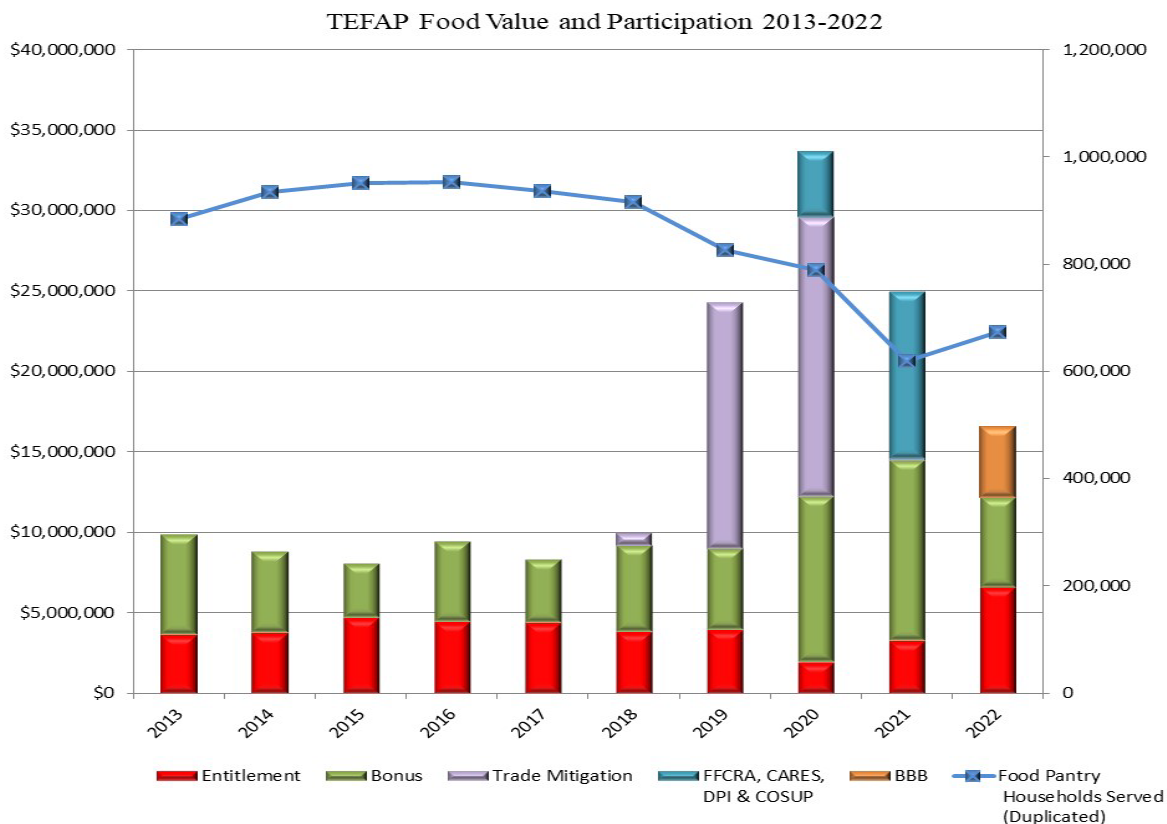
The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) provides USDA commodity foods to 338 participating food pantries, meal sites, and homeless shelters in Wisconsin for distribution to qualifying low-income households. Products include frozen and shelf-stable meats, fruits, vegetables, juices, grains, dairy, and cereals – and more recently fresh produce, shell eggs, and fresh fluid milk. TEFAP foods supplement outlets’ private sector inventories.

States purchase ‘Entitlement’ foods from a diverse menu with funds the USDA allocates in accordance with each state’s proportion of unemployed persons and persons living in

poverty. Because TEFAP is also a price-support program for farmers, the USDA purchases surplus products from growers for distribution to states as additional ‘Bonus’ foods. From 2018-2020 the USDA purchased ‘Trade Mitigation’ foods for TEFAP to offset farmers’ losses from the trade war. During Covid, the USDA provided supplemental foods from several sources including ‘Families First Coronavirus Response Act’ (FFCRA), ‘Coronavirus, Aid, Relief and Economic Security’ (CARES), and the ‘Covid Supplemental’ (COSUP). In 2022 as Covid receded the USDA provided foods authorized by ‘Build Back Better’ (BBB) to support states’ emergency food inventories.

In 2022, Wisconsin ordered 13.5 million pounds of TEFAP commodities worth \$16.5 million dollars for distribution to emergency food warehouses, food banks, and outlets. Approximately 95% went to 267 food pantries and mobile pantries who combined it with an additional 47 million pounds of locally donated, grown, and purchased foods for a total public/private distribution estimated at 60.5 million pounds. The remaining 5% of TEFAP commodities were distributed to 71 meal sites and shelters who combined it with local foods to provide 1,607,604 meals to food insecure individuals, 12% more than the previous year. TEFAP food pantries reported serving 672,715 food insecure households (duplicated), an 8.7% increase over 2021, reversing six years of declining utilization. This increase was likely due to families struggling with high rates of inflation affecting food, housing, and transportation costs, as well as the loss of substantial federal and state supplemental Covid resources. Food pantry utilization in 2022 remains 14% higher than before the 2007 recession.

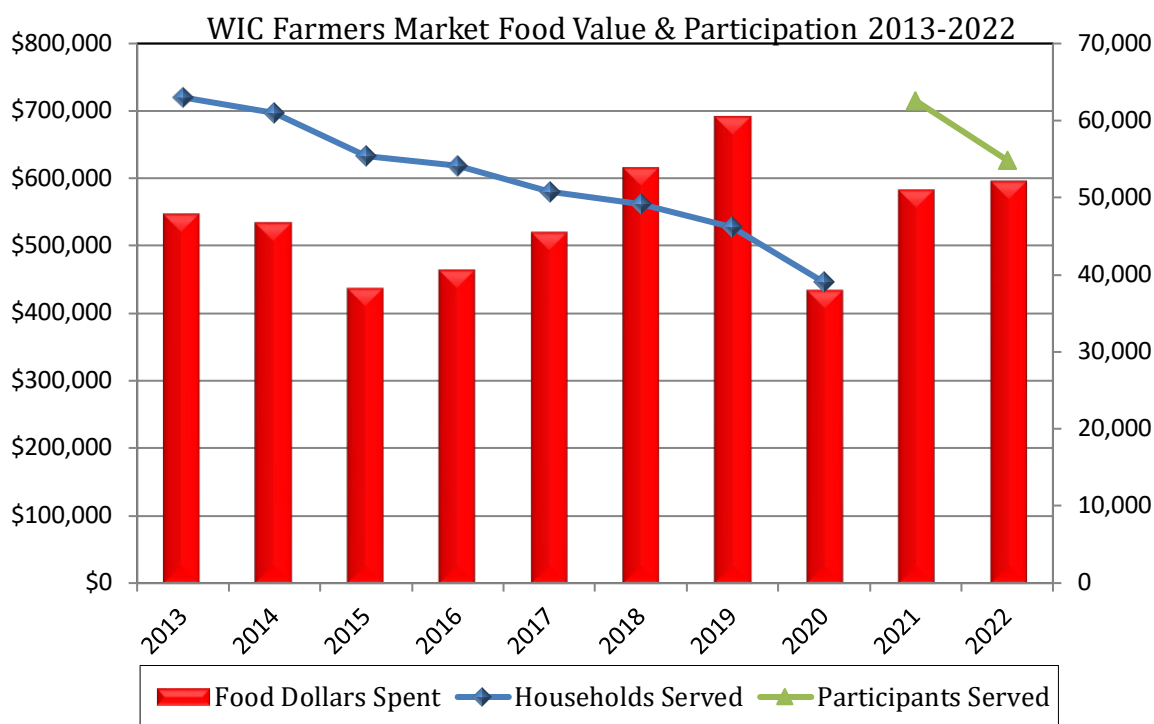


The Senior Farmer Market Nutrition Program

From June through October, the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program provides a \$25 benefit to low-income senior households 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 52 Wisconsin counties and in 2021 served 14,258 households with redemptions totaling \$255,880. The 2022 participant redemption was higher by \$11,130 compared to 2021, which exhibits the great need and interest in this program.

The WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program

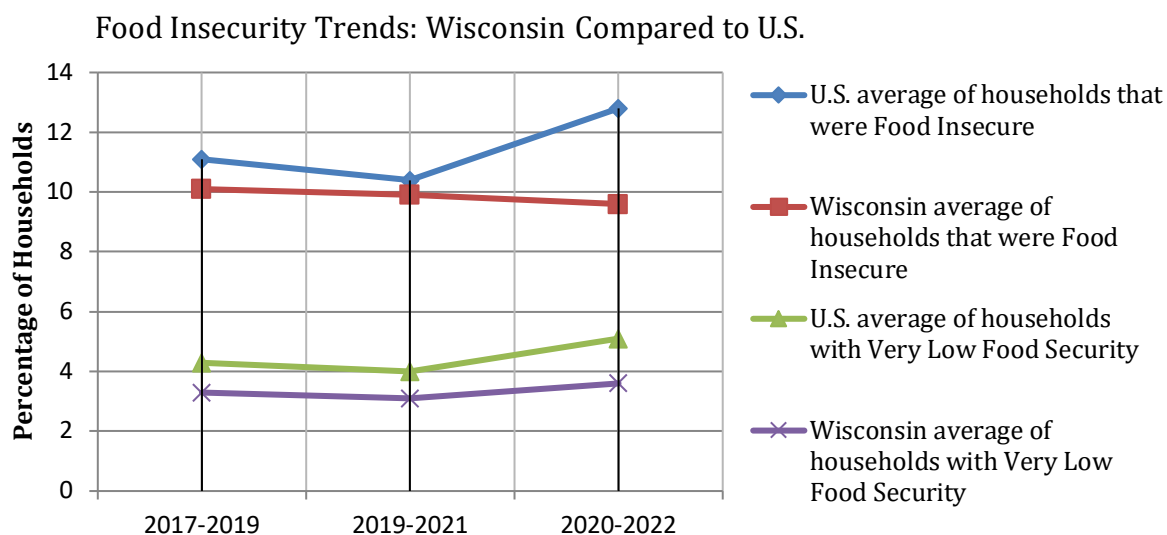
The WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program also is available from June through October and provides WIC participants a \$30 benefit to purchase fresh produce directly from farmers. Surveys indicate these purchases increase interest in year-round consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables. In 2022, 1,013 local farmers redeemed \$594,811 from 54,862 WIC individuals who spent their benefit at Wisconsin farmers markets and farm/roadside stands. The 2022 food dollars spent was higher than in 2021 and 2020, likely due to a transition in issuance from household to individual distribution allowing for multiple participants in a household to redeem benefits. However, the participation decreased possibly due to the public health emergency increasing other food security programs benefits.



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 available indicates Wisconsin’s food insecurity prevalence has declined slightly. From 2020 through 2022, Wisconsin’s average rate of food insecurity was 9.6%, compared to the higher national average of 12.8%. Wisconsin’s food insecurity rate has declined .5% from 2017-2019. Wisconsin’s average rate of households with “*very low food security*” in 2020-2022 was 3.7%, compared to the higher national average of 5.1%.



Food insecurity varies considerably by State. It is important to consider household information such as income, unemployment, and household structure. In addition, each State’s cost of housing, unemployment, wages, and State policies that affect access to nutrition assistance programs, unemployment insurance, and State Earned Income Tax Credit all need to be taken into consideration when reviewing this data.

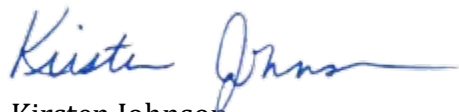
Where people live in Wisconsin impacts their food security. Food deserts are areas where it is difficult to buy affordable or good-quality fresh nutritious food. A common metric to identify food deserts is low-income low access areas (LILA). These areas are identified as having a substantial number of residents who are low income and who live more than 1 mile from a supermarket in urban areas, or more than 10 miles in rural areas. The most recent ERS data of State-Level Estimates of LILA populations shows that 10% of Wisconsin residents, over a half a million people, live in LILA census tracts. This is compared to 12.8% nationally. Living in a LILA, or food desert, can make it challenging to find fresh, nutritious, and affordable foods and can lead to poor nutrition and diet-related health issues. This

reduced access to healthy foods disproportionately affects low-income communities which can worsen health inequities for those Wisconsinites.

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 a single parent/guardian; households comprising of women and 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 2022 report indicate that although Wisconsin is below the National Averages for both food insecure and very low food security the State's Residents that are considered to not exhibit food security are at a rise. This report shows the great need for a continued commitment by DHS to fight hunger in Wisconsin.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Johnson
Secretary-Designee