

# CUMBERLAND COUNTY FOOD ASSESSMENT



2022



## Dickinson

Department of Environmental Studies, Food Studies Certificate

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in Cumberland County

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# PEOPLE & FOOD ACCESS IN CUMBERLAND COUNTY

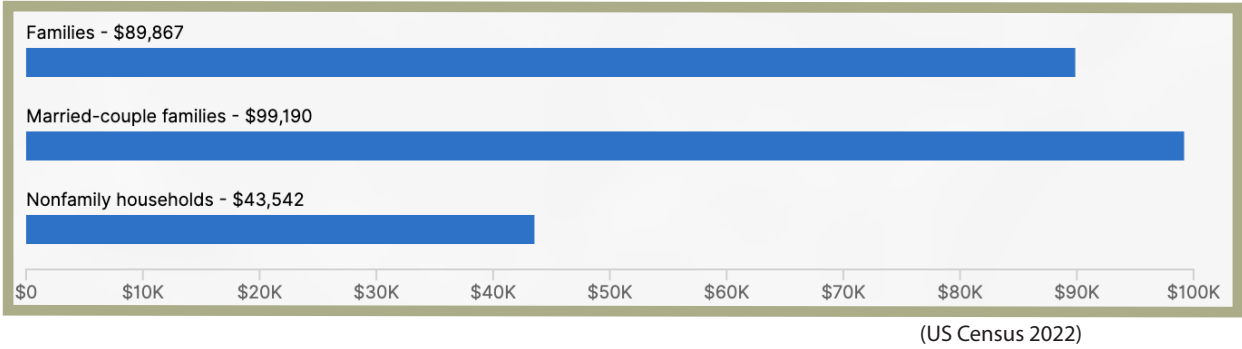
## Overview

A community food assessment involves the collection and dissemination of community data on demographics, food access and agricultural resources. Assessments may allow a community to understand and assess food system vulnerabilities and challenges. This 2022 assessment builds from the 2018 assessment researched and written by Dickinson College students to inform and enhance community food planning in Cumberland County. The 2022 version reflects collaboration between Dickinson College students and the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank staff, in conversation with the Cumberland County Food System Alliance and other community stakeholders. The effort seeks to promote community food access and sustainability of our shared food system.

You could be going through everything else in the world of complications, but if you have a meal, you know, that really makes a difference”

(PA Stakeholder, 11/09/22).

## Median Income for Cumberland County, 2022



### Food Access

refers to a community’s ability to provide affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food to its residents. In other words, how easy (or challenging) it is for individuals to acquire enough nourishing foods. When quality nutritious food is accessible to everyone at any given moment, this signifies food security (USDA 2022).

### Food Insecurity

means that meals are missed, low in quality and quantity, and/or require help from food assistance programs like SNAP benefits or food pantries (Fisher 2018: 13).



### Populations and People

Total Population

**259,469**



### Employment

Employment Rate

**61.2%**



### Business and Economy

Total Employer Establishments

**6,178**



#### Education

Bachelor's Degree or Higher

**38.8%**



#### Health

Without Health Care Coverage

**4.7%**



#### Race and Ethnicity

Hispanic or Latino (of any race)

**11,975**



#### Income and Poverty

Median Household Income

**\$82,691**



#### Housing

Total Housing Units

**109,125**



#### Families and Living Arrangements

Total Households

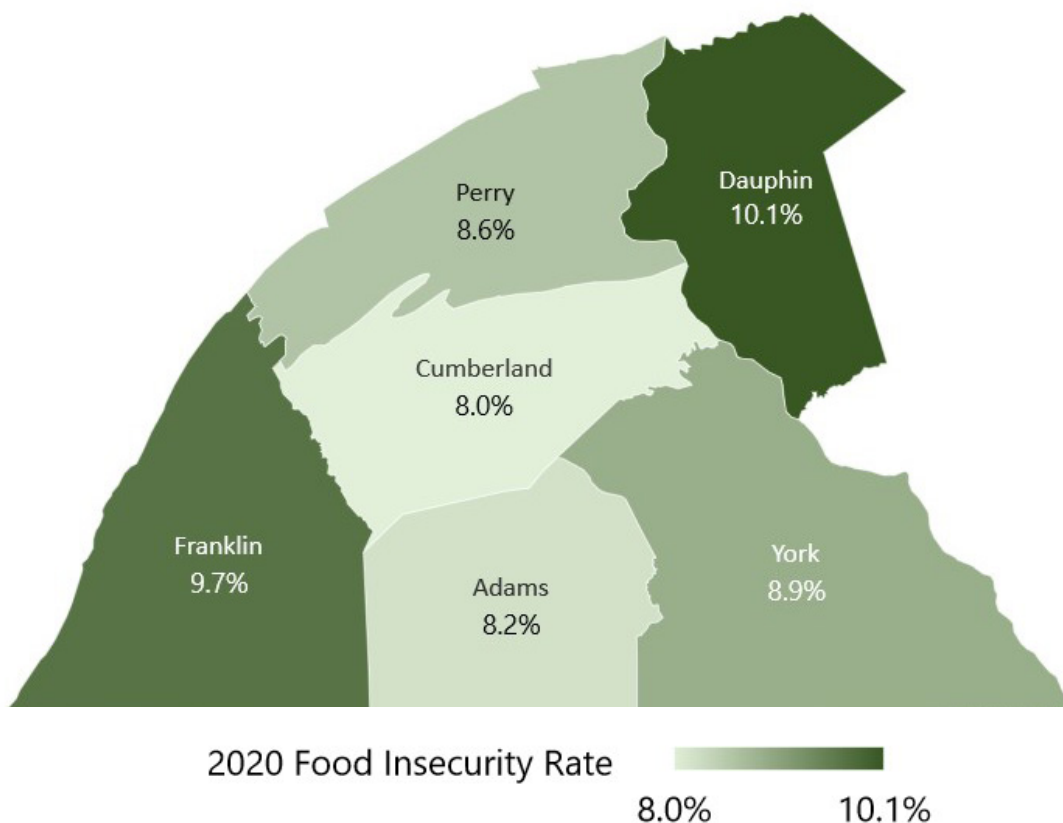
**104,768**

(American Community Survey 2021, Decennial Census 2020, Economic Surveys Business Patterns 2020, US Census 2022)

**Over 20,000 people in Cumberland County face food insecurity.** Although Cumberland County has the 4th lowest food insecurity rate in the state of Pennsylvania, challenges persist for vulnerable communities in the county (Gunderson et al., 2022).

The current food insecurity rate of 8% means that roughly one in 12 individuals in Cumberland County face food insecurity, a surprisingly high rate for one of the wealthiest counties in Pennsylvania. This signifies an unequal distribution of wealth leaving disadvantaged families more likely to be in poverty and food insecure (Gunderson et al. 2022).

## 2020 Food Insecurity Rates by County





The major disparity in food insecurity by age points to the importance of programs and food security initiatives targeting children and families with children, particularly given the long-term impacts of food insecurity and poverty on children throughout their lifetimes (Gundersen et al. 2022).

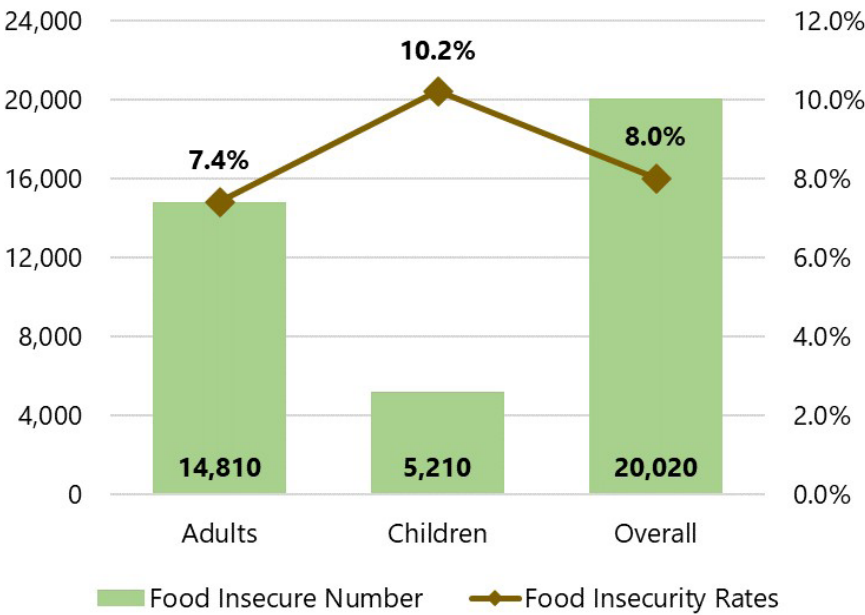
Children in Cumberland County are **38% more likely to be food insecure than adults.**

(Gundersen et al. 2022)

The overall food insecurity rate in Cumberland County also holds significant differences across race demographics. Food insecurity is 4 times higher among Hispanic individuals and 5 times higher among Black individuals compared to white individuals in Cumberland County. A staggering 1 in 4 Black individuals in Cumberland County are food insecure compared to 1 in 5 Hispanic individuals and just 1 in 20 white individuals (Gundersen et al. 2022).

In 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government responded with a massive economic stimulus, including increased unemployment compensation benefits, increased SNAP benefits, and one-time stimulus checks that had a major impact on household income and poverty. This stimulus was only temporary for the pandemic and most of the aids have since been lifted. Recent evidence indicates a rise in food insecurity in 2022 after the end of the government stimulus programs (Waxman et. al 2022).

## 2020 Food Insecurity by Age Group in Cumberland County



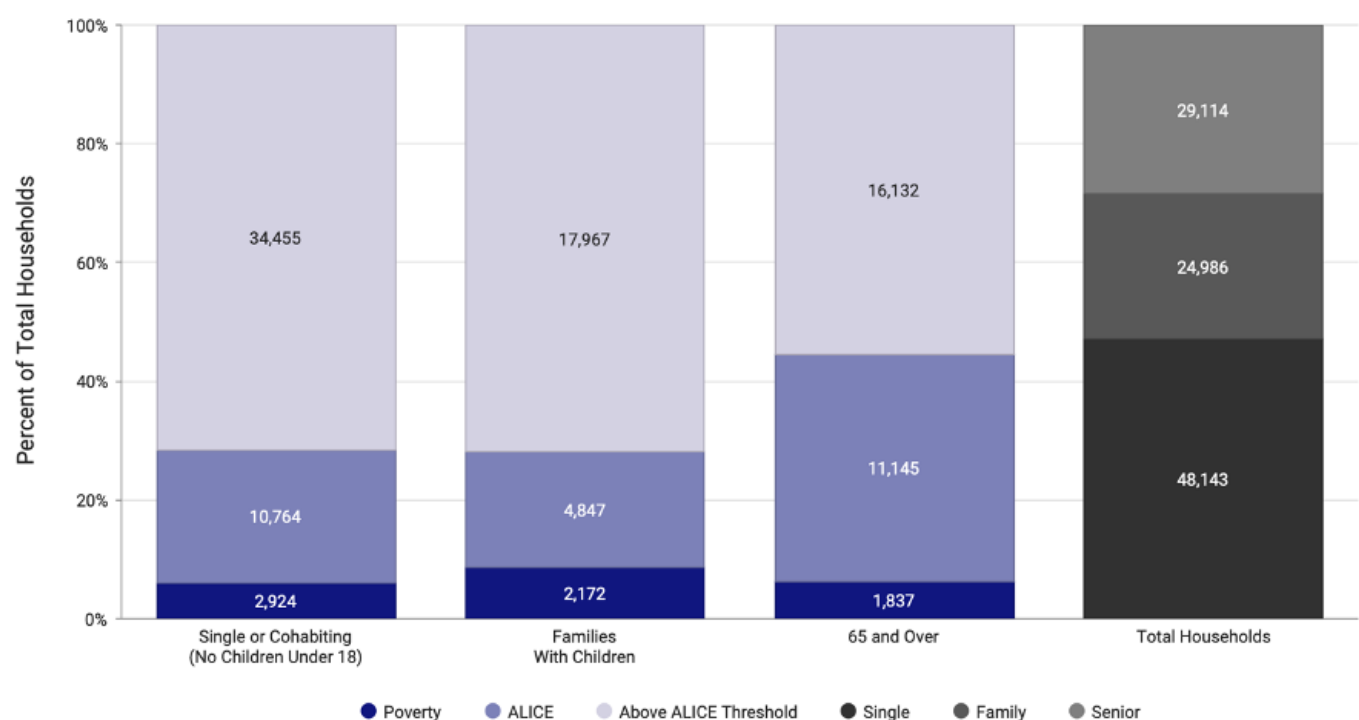
(Gundersen et al. 2022)



We are not eligible for any income-based resources. However, we utilize Project SHARE farmstand and the Project SHARE summer feeding program. We have a son who is severely medically fragile who spends 1/4 of his year in hospitals. **Even though, on paper, we make “enough”. All of our bills are so very far behind due to living in hospitals out of state with him”**

(Project SHARE farmstand survey respondent)

# Vulnerable Populations in Cumberland County



(ALICE Threshold, 2007-2018; American Community Survey, 2007-2018)

## Vulnerable Populations in Cumberland County

- **19.1%:** People 65 years and over
  - **28%:** Single parent households, as a percentage of households with children
  - **7.9%:** Veterans
- (US Census 2022, FRED 2022)



Imagine the systemic changes we can make to promote health and financial well-being, and reduce stigma and inequities, when we collectively work together”

(Martin 2021: xiii).

## Veterans

**7.9%** +/- 0.9%

Veterans in Cumberland County, Pennsylvania

**6.2%** +/- 0.1%

Veterans in Pennsylvania

## Asset Limited, Income Constrained and Employed (ALICE)

Families and individuals who are Asset Limited, Income Constrained and Employed (ALICE) and are unable to afford the basics of housing, childcare, transportation, food, and healthcare. Community members that fall under this umbrella earn more than the Federal Poverty Line (FPL) and many of them earn above levels needed to qualify for government assistance but do not make enough to consistently afford essentials. The ALICE Household Survival Budget calculates the budget needed for a household to afford to live and work. There is also an ALICE Household Stability Budget, which includes a budget for 10% savings (United for Alice 2022).



## Methods

Students used three main research methods from August to November 2022 to inform the assessment. Highlights from the surveys, interviews, and data analysis feature throughout the report. The Dickinson College Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved these research methods. Students completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative on research ethics and compliance.

### Surveys

- Students and Central Pennsylvania Food Bank (CPFEB) facilitated a Feeding America survey with food pantry guests in-person in Cumberland County.
- The group completed 365 surveys at 7 pantries in-person.
- Guests had the option to complete the survey on their phone, on a provided iPad, or to have a student or staff member administer the survey.
- For their participation, guests received a \$10 gift card at a supermarket retailer of their choice.
- The CPFEB will be conducting a follow-up charitable food-system report in 2023, including a more detailed analysis of survey results.


### Quantitative Data

- Students and the CPFEB collected and analyzed a range of quantitative data.

### Qualitative Interviews

- Students completed 11 qualitative interviews with a range of community stakeholders to gain insights into food and people issues in the county.
- Students crafted research objectives, developed interview questions, transcribed the interviews, and analyzed them for trends.

**Please take our survey!**



The Central Pennsylvania Food Bank invites you to take a completely anonymous survey that will help us learn how to better serve our community!

Scan the QR code to the left with your phone by opening your camera, holding it over the QR code, and following the link to the survey.

**Central Pennsylvania Food Bank**  
No One Should Be Hungry

The survey will take about 10 minutes, and you will receive a \$10 e-gift card for participating.

For more information or for any questions or issues, please contact [neighborsurveys@centralpafoodbank.org](mailto:neighborsurveys@centralpafoodbank.org)

## Research Methods: Reflections on Challenges

The following could impact the results of the survey:

- Survey administration varied, dependent on guest preference (some took the survey themselves, while others asked for the survey to be administered to them). Surveys administered by others may result in underestimation of severe coping mechanisms on food security questions and other sensitive questions.
- There was some confusion about the technical definitions used in the survey.
- Some questions had multiple options to pick between and this caused uncertainty in some cases.
- There may have been social confirmation bias in responses, as some guests asked if students were Government representatives.
- Respondents may have felt they couldn't critique the food pantry, as they were getting the food at that time. It was emphasized that surveys were anonymous and would not impact any services. Surveys were also most often distributed after a client received food.



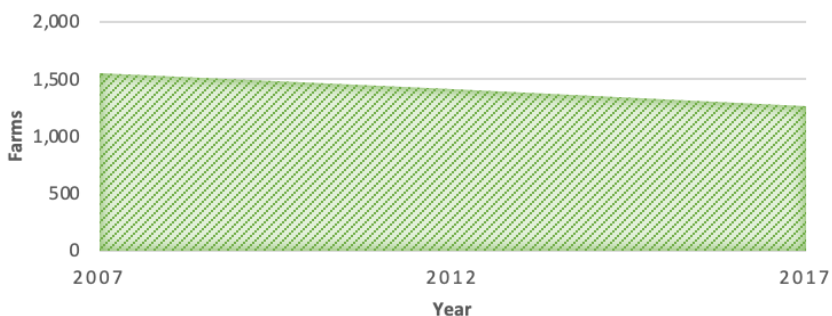
# FARMING

## Overview

This section presents the current state of farming and the associated economy in Cumberland County. Agriculture is the county's primary land use with 170,000 acres (48%) of farmland. Out of the commonwealth's 67 counties, Cumberland is the seventh most lucrative (USDA 2017). COVID-19 and extreme weather events associated with climate change present unique challenges for the county's farms.

- **1,260** farms throughout Cumberland (representing 11% decreased in 2012)
- **169,654** acres of land occupied by farms
- **135 acres:** average farm size (representing a 23% increase since 2012)
- Since 2012: **50% increase** in net cash farm income to \$53,660 (USDA 2017)

NUMBER OF FARMS IN  
CUMBERLAND COUNTY FROM  
2007 TO 2017



(US Census of Agriculture 2012, Census of Agriculture 2017)

**1 in 6 jobs**  
in Cumberland  
County is in  
agriculture or a  
related business

(USDA 2017)

Since 2012, the number of farms has been decreasing steadily as older generations of farmers retire, younger generations are less inclined to move into farming, and farmland is consolidated into single, major operations (11/16/22 Interview, Keith Jones, Jones Harvesting).



“

We really need to be thinking, you know, 25 years from now, who feeds us? ... The next generation of farmers really doesn't exist”

(11/15/22 Interview, Heidi Whitmer, Founder and Executive Director, LEAF Project).



Most farms in the county are either major industrial farms or small family farms. Startup farms struggle to sustain themselves after initial one-time grants end and long-term government grants have higher requirements for eligibility. When older farmers retire, there is not an equal replenishing of the workforce in younger farmers due to various reasons including lack of hands-on farming experience and pressures from college debt (11/15/22 Interview, Heidi Whitmer).

## Perserved Farmland

Pennsylvania is the nation's leader in farmland preservation, a program that permanently preserves land for agricultural production (Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture 2022).

**21,786.49 acres** of Preserved farmland

**Cumberland County 2030 Goal:** Preserve 30,000 acres in the county

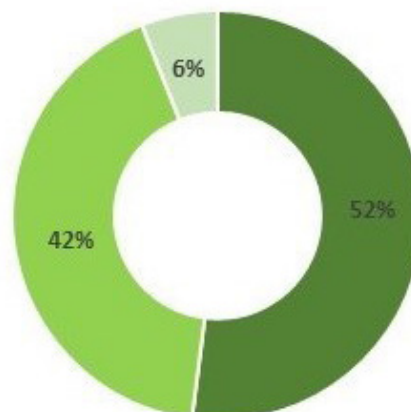
“

While it's challenging to balance conservation and development, (the program) works with local municipalities to encourage land use plans and ordinances that preserve and protect agriculture”

(Stephanie Williams, Senior Planning Manager, Cumberland County Planning Department 2022)

## Cumberland County Land Use

Farmland accounts for nearly half of the total land in Cumberland county, but the ratio of preserved to non-preserved farmland is extremely low, meaning the usage of most of that land has the potential to be changed from agricultural use to urban or industrial land (Census of Agriculture 2021).



■ Non-Farmland ■ Non-Preserved Farmland ■ Preserved Farmland

# COVID-19 and Farming

- COVID-19 has caused significant disruption to farming operations. Agricultural production occurs in isolated rural areas. The product is then transported to processing centers and retail.
- In 2017, only 10% of farmers delivered directly to customers (US Census 2017). In 2020 they were forced to adapt and cut out middleman retailers, relying on door-to-door sales to support themselves (2022 Interview with K. Jones). Many small farmers, especially those growing produce, switched to an online model to sell and deliver their foods directly to buyers through subscriptions. (Shortle, 2020, Mondal et. al 2022).
- Because food must be moved from more isolated rural areas to various markets, supply chains must be maintained. In addition to the disruptions to the supply chain during the pandemic, widespread crop disease meant that food could not be moved, thus causing an increase in food waste (Bellany and Corkey, 2020).

## Percent of farms that:

Have internet access **61**

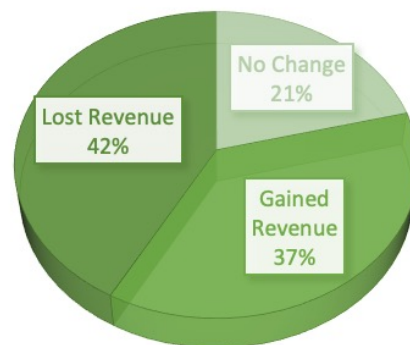
Farm organically **2**

Sell directly to consumers **10**

Hire farm labor **24**

Are family farms **96**

## FINANCIAL IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON FARMERS CUMBERLAND COUNTY



COVID-19 affected farmers unpredictably, but those able to market their products online were more likely to succeed (Shortle et al 2020).

“ We supply a lot of restaurants and clubs ... we have a retail store, and we deliver door to door. And on the beef side of things, it was very interesting. Our sales went way up door-to-door. Restaurants and clubs went down, but sales door-to-door did very well. So, if you looked at the trend, we had an uptrend through COVID-19.”

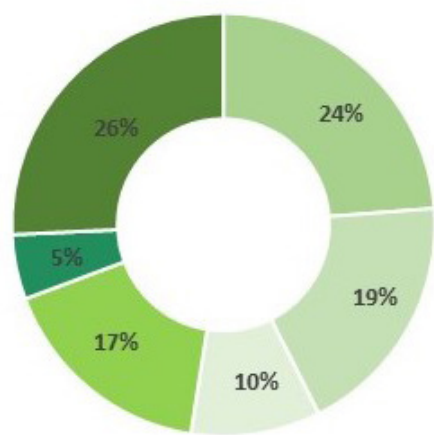
(2022 Interview with Keith Jones)



# Agricultural Economic Pressures

The products produced by farms are highly vulnerable in their production and as such farms are dependent on market demand and economic protections.

Cumberland County Top Crop Land Usage

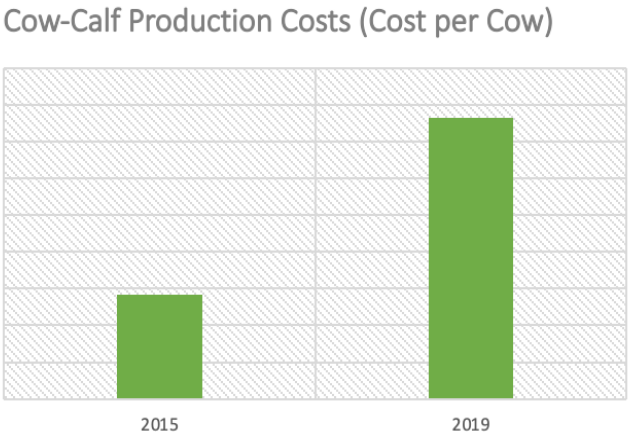
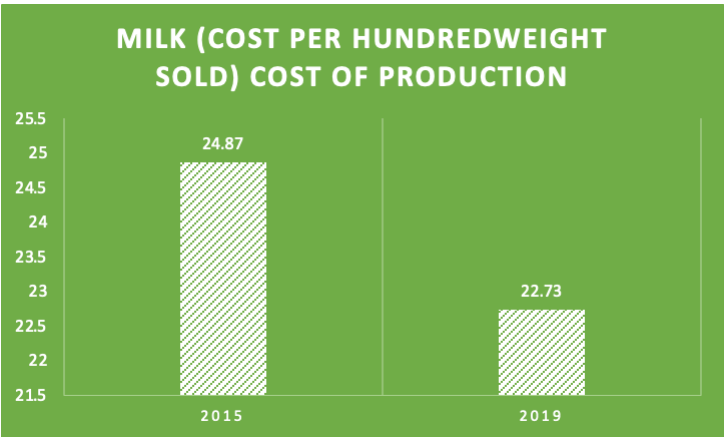
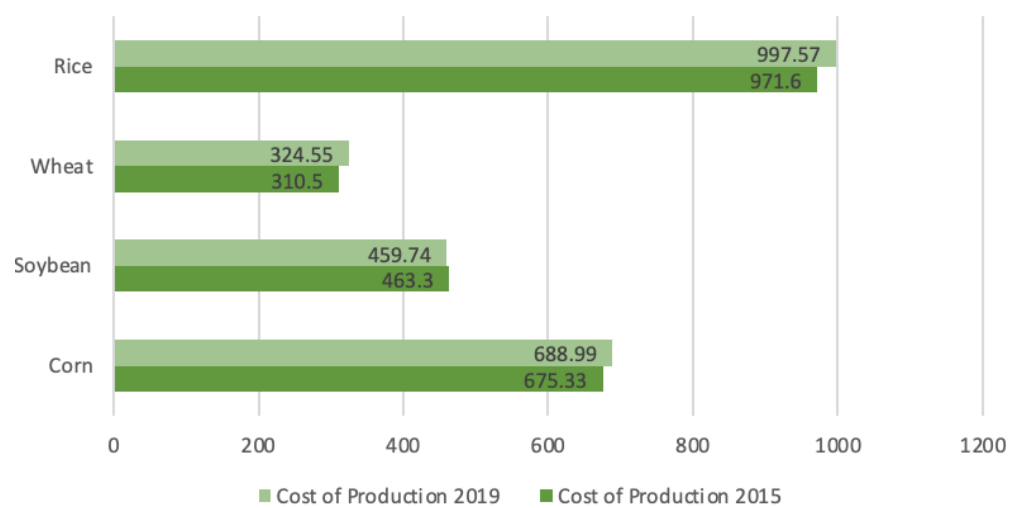


Most crops grown in the county are row crops, processed crops or animal feed, so farmers are primarily growing for the market over their own consumption and use (County Profile 2017). This means most of what is grown in the county cannot directly support the food needs of the farmer and the county.

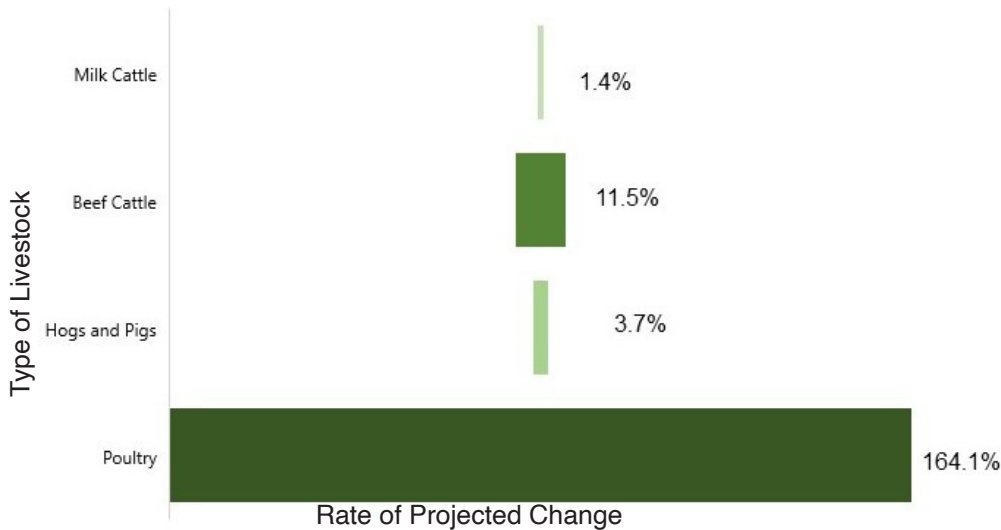
(USDA 2020)  
(County Profile, 2018)

The cost to maintain crops and rear livestock can be a risky investment for a farmer. The costs of raising a pig to slaughtering age can be prohibitive towards the investment, even if the returns would be greater than on a cow. Farmers with less overall capital rely on lower-cost crops and livestock, reducing their farm’s diversity and increasing their risk of crop failure or demand drop.

Field Crops (Cost per Planted Acre) Cost of Production



Projected Change in Livestock Inventories between 2012 and 2020



Poultry production, already the dominant livestock in the county, is projected to almost double by 2050 (Shortle et. al 2020). This heavy skew leaves farmers' harvests vulnerable to diseases like Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, an ongoing pandemic in 2022 that has devastating effects on agricultural bird populations (Avian Influenza 2022).

(Shortle et. al 2020)

## LEAF Project PA

"There's a lot of ethical diligence in the way we go about our impact in the region... ultimately it boils down to: is this for the good of the food system?" (11/15/22 Interview, Heidi Whitmer).

LEAF Project PA is an internship and educational project focused on involving youth in the food system. Founded by Heidi Whitmer, giving young people experience with farming and offering them a first step into the farming industry.

- Potentially training an upcoming generation of farmers
- Focus on specialty crops (fruits, vegetables, etc.) over processed crops
- Building relationships between all parties in the food system

Projects like LEAF look to build the future of the farming industry and promote economically sustainable practices to benefit Pennsylvania's agriculture and people.





# Climate Change, Extreme Weather, and Farming

“ Extreme weather events are by far the largest threat, and not knowing how to plan for the extreme weather event. That, to me, is the worst... It’s an ever-changing weather pattern it seems, and that to me is my biggest fear. You never know what to plant and how to plant” (11/16/22 Keith Jones).

- Climate change will have a detrimental effect on farming by making harvests less predictable, with negative effects on the farmer’s financial stability (Althoff et al. 2021).
- Crops require specific moisture levels for successfully harvesting and storage. Sudden and extreme weather patterns add risk to the harvesting process, which must be completed within a particular timeframe for each crop (Harthoorn and Walters 2022).
- If the temperature changes drastically, not only will heat sensitive crops be affected but the growing season of the crops may be offset due to late, warm winters and early summers (EPA 2022).
- In addition, there will be more precipitation during winter and spring and less during fall seasons, with more “extreme” precipitation all around (Althoff et al. 2021). Crops rely on consistent and even water exposure, suffering from lack of or over exposure to water (Harthoorn and Walters 2022).
- Crop insurance may protect farmers from loss of revenue due to lost crops (11/21/22 Personal Correspondence, D. S. Dellinger, Supervisory District Conservationist).

**Climate change protections must be put in place now before it begins to cause significant damage to our food system.**

## Supporting Farms

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the financial instability of farming.

Federal, state, and local government financial support, incentives, and resources could support the county’s farms.

- Existing policies of crop insurance and protection could be incrementally amended in order to address changing pressures.
- Incentives towards crops attuned to resisting climate affects should be implemented to help farms prepare for the future.

The low and unstable revenue provided by farming disincentivizes new entrants into the industry, prompting farmers to sell their land to other farms and merge into larger industrial conglomerates.

- Grants could sustain farms, particularly in their initial startup and first years of operation.
- Programs like the LEAF Project make the farming industry accessible to new and younger entrants.



## Overview

\$650 billion dollars are spent annually at grocery stores across the United States (Ruhlman 2017). Supermarkets and other retailers that accept food benefits are essential community resources. This section highlights the connection between poverty and access to food retailers, including those that accept SNAP benefits, in Cumberland County. There is a wide variety in prices at different supermarkets within the county and some people are unable to access more affordable options. This is because a lack of public and individual transportation may force some citizens to only visit the supermarkets that are close to them.



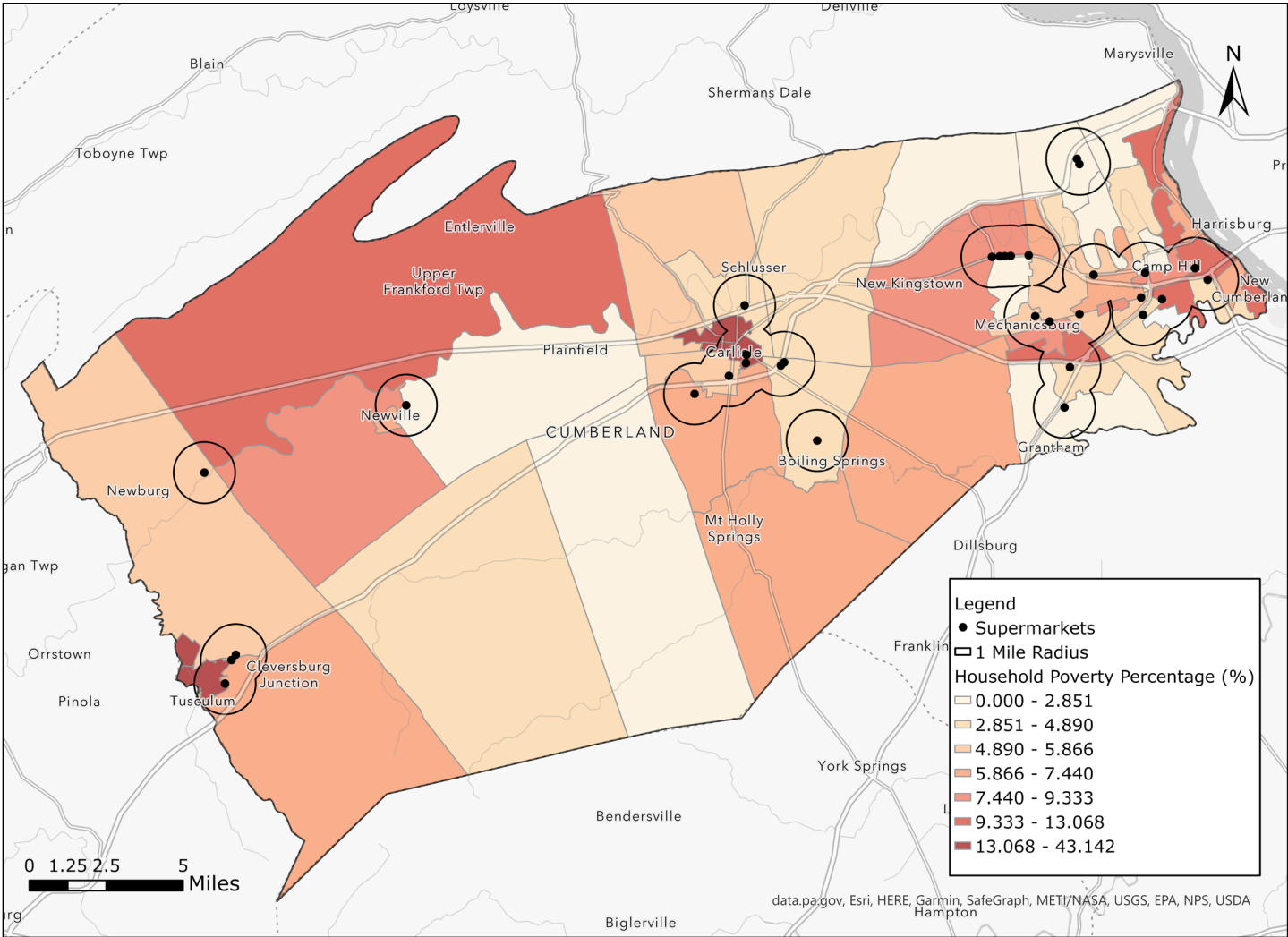
## Supermarkets and COVID-19

Supermarkets were greatly impacted by the pandemic as a result of unprecedented disruption in both supply and demand.

- The U.S Census Bureau report shows that the demand for food at grocery stores had declined, but in March 2020 that the sales were 13% higher than same period last year.
- The numbers of different major food prices changed significantly, for example ground beef rose about 4.4% and bread prices increased about 2.3%.
- Then food prices started to decline for many different categories in July 2020, but the rate of their decrease was not as fast as their rate of their increase for pork in 2020 (-1.4%) from August to September. Then it rose about 0.9% from September to October. Fluctuating prices were near impossible for consumers to forecast during the pandemic. The USDA Economic Research Service predicted retail food prices would increase 1 to 2 percent in 2021.



# Poverty and Supermarkets within One Mile in Cumberland County



Data Source: ESRI ACS (American Community Survey), PASDA (Pennsylvania Spatial Data Access)

There are stark differences in the number of supermarkets in the eastern and western parts of Cumberland County. Regions like Mechanicsburg and Camp Hill in the east have multiple grocery options within a close proximity. There is another cluster of grocery stores in the Carlisle area near the middle of Cumberland County, but farther west than that, the stores drastically decrease with only a few locations in Southampton and Shippensburg. These more rural areas also have less variety in their grocery store options because they have so few locations to choose from. This emphasizes the disparities in food access in rural and low-income areas as opposed to urban areas.





# Efforts to Bring a Supermarket to the North Carlisle Food Desert



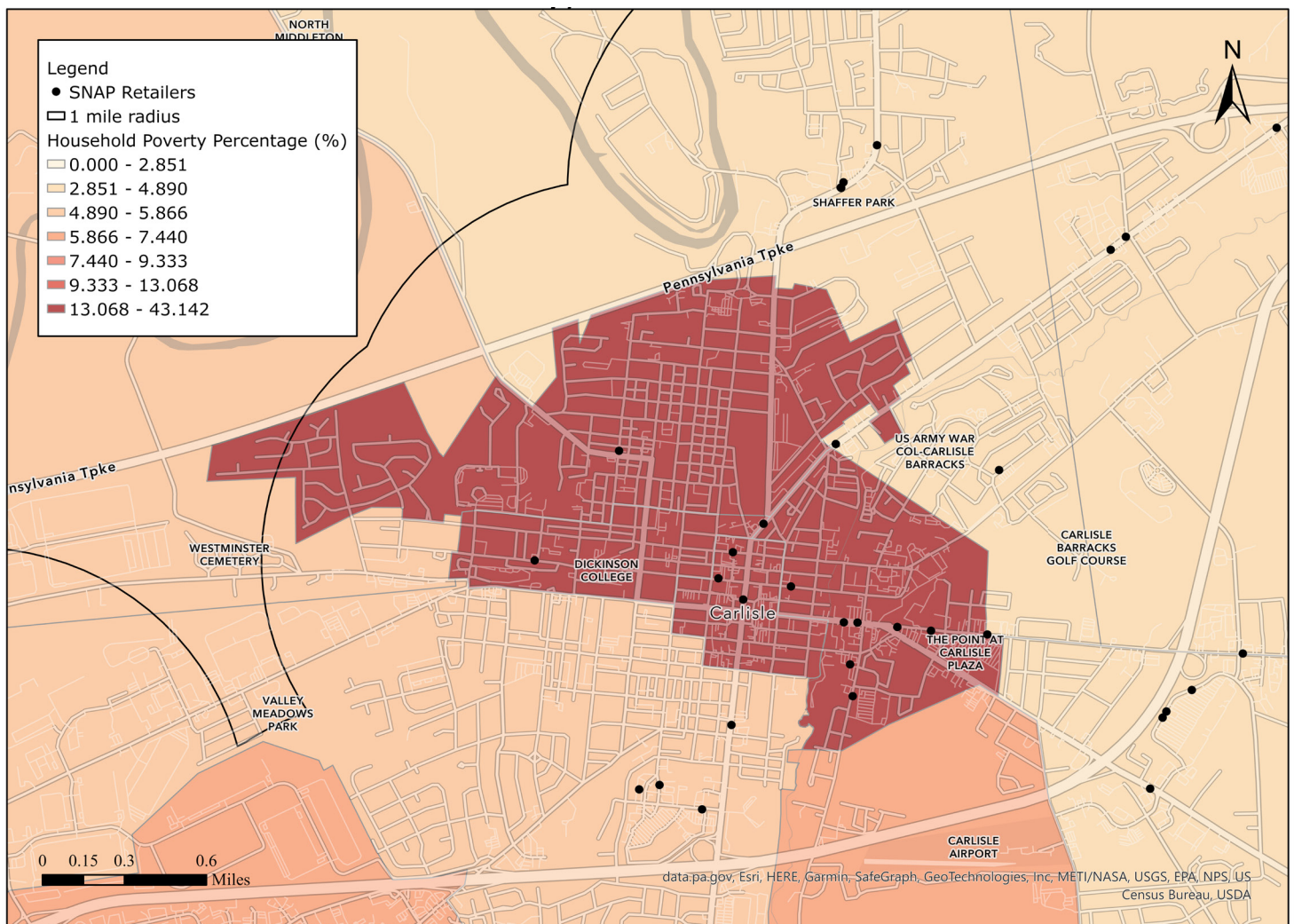
People make jokes about the shopping carts that are left all over... well, why are they there? How do you get your groceries? You drive in a car... the reason why there are abandoned shopping carts is a sign of a disparity that [residents] have"

(11/01/22 Interview, Brenda Landis, Deputy Mayor of the Borough of Carlisle).

- **Food deserts** are low-income census tracts with a substantial number of residents (at least 33%) living more than one mile from a supermarket or grocery outlet (Ver Ploeg et al. 2011).
- The northwest corner of Carlisle is a mixed-income neighborhood in a food desert.
- Recently, stakeholders have advocated for a food retailer to establish in North Carlisle, particularly an affordable grocery store.
- The Partnership for Better Health offered a \$10,000 grant to assist in bringing a grocery store to the area, but no businesses were interested.



## SNAP Retailers and Poverty in Carlisle



Data Source: ESRI ACS (American Community Survey), PASDA (Pennsylvania Spatial Data Access)



# Food Prices at Five Supermarkets in Carlisle

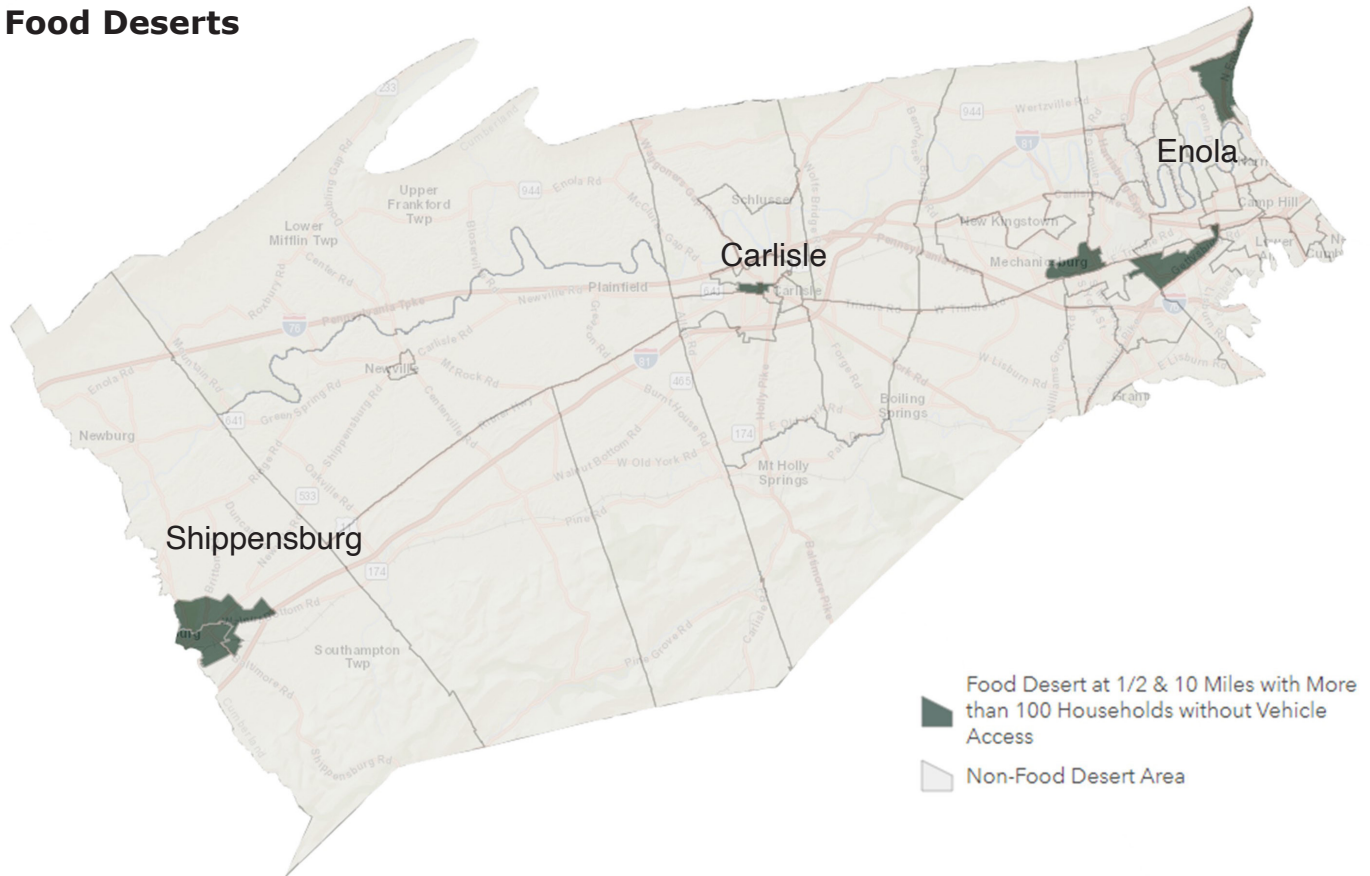


Data collected on food prices from five major supermarkets in the Carlisle area reveals major price differences. The supermarket Aldi has the most affordable food options. However, as shown in the figure above, Aldi only has two locations in Cumberland County. Giant and Weis, which have the highest overall prices, have over double the number of stores that Aldi has. For many people who do not have easy access to transportation to supermarkets, the closest options are more often the more expensive stores with more locations. This is not viable for those who do not have the financial means to spend more on food. This further exacerbates food insecurity in these rural areas.



# Low Income and Low Access to Food in Cumberland County

## Food Deserts



(CPFB analysis of USDA Data)

## Vehicle Availability and Supermarket Access

**Shippensburg:** This area has a relatively high number of households (100 of 1145 total households) (8.7%) without vehicles that are more than one-half mile from a supermarket.

**Carlisle:** This area has a relatively high number of households (215 of 782 total households) (27.5%) without vehicles that are more than one-half mile from a supermarket.

**Enola:** This tract has a relatively high number of households (125 of 2340 total households) (5.4%) without vehicles that are more than one-half mile from a supermarket. (USDA 2022)

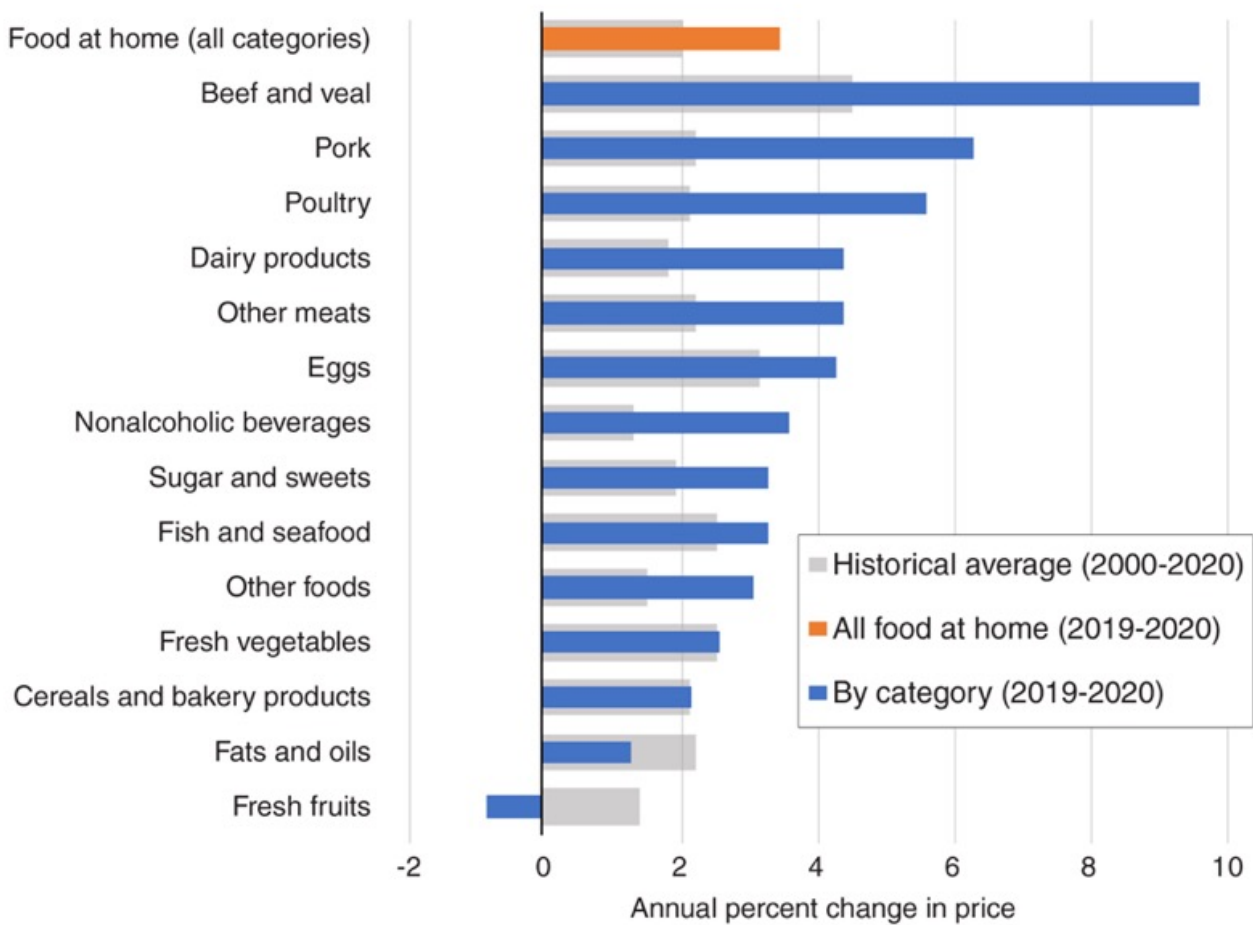


# Food at Home

## Price Percentages for Food in 2020

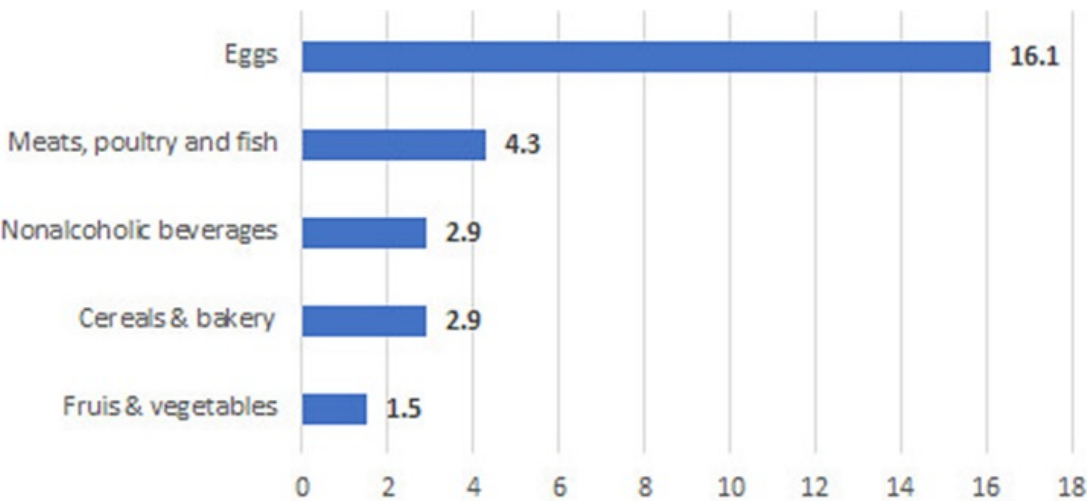
The graphs below demonstrate the ever-changing prices of all food groups during the pandemic

**Food-at-home prices increased in all major food categories, except fresh fruits, in 2020**



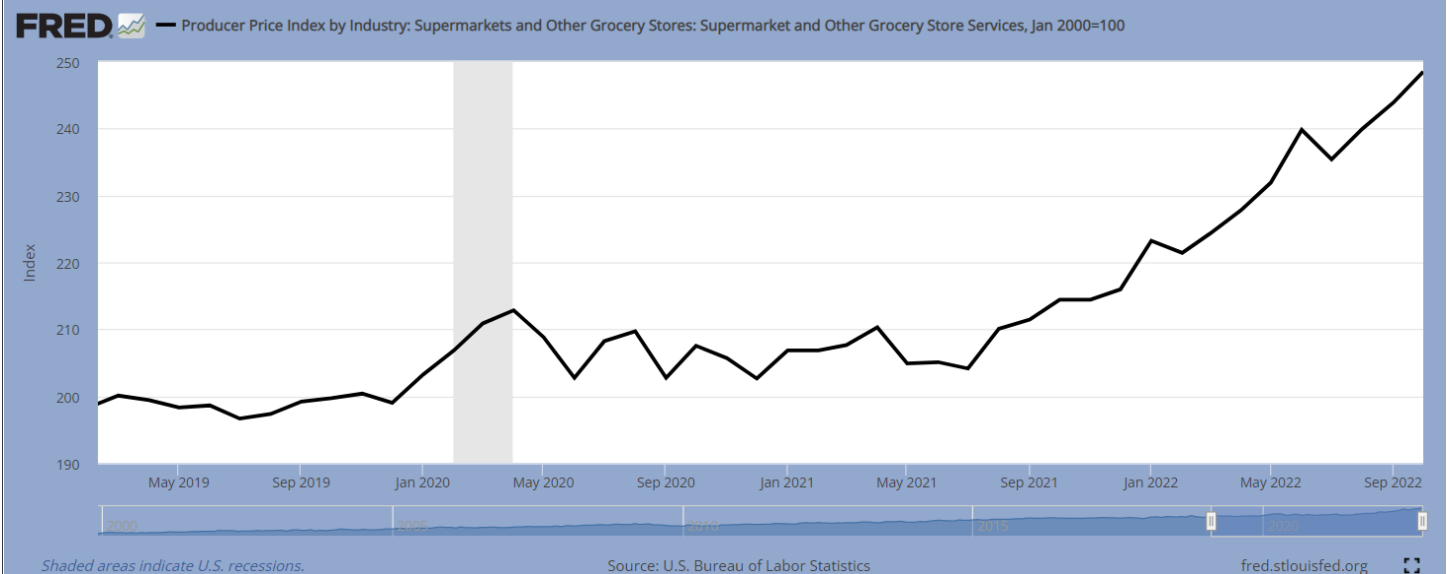
Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index data.

**Change in Retail Price Index for Major Food Groups in April**





# Inflation: Producer Price Index from March 2019- October 2022



Producer Price Index: Measures the average change over time in the selling prices received by domestic producers for their output. March 2019: 200.1 - March 2020: 210.9 March 2021: 210.3- October 2022: 248.5







## FOOD ACCESS

“ Consumer choices about food spending and diet are likely to be influenced by the accessibility and affordability of food retailers—travel time to shopping, availability of healthy foods, and food prices. Some people and places, especially those with low income, may face greater barriers in accessing healthy and affordable food retailers, which may negatively affect diet and food security” (USDA 2020).

## Overview

When options regarding the quantity and quality of food are limited, the well-being and productivity of individuals are limited (Holder 2019). This section examines barriers to food access and analyzes food security rates in Cumberland County. The section highlights how:

- **Varied access:** Food access in Cumberland County varies at the individual and community level due to social, economic, and geographic factors.
- **Inaccessibility:** Food pantries and food banks aim to serve those experiencing food insecurity; however, inaccessibility remains a significant challenge experienced by guests.

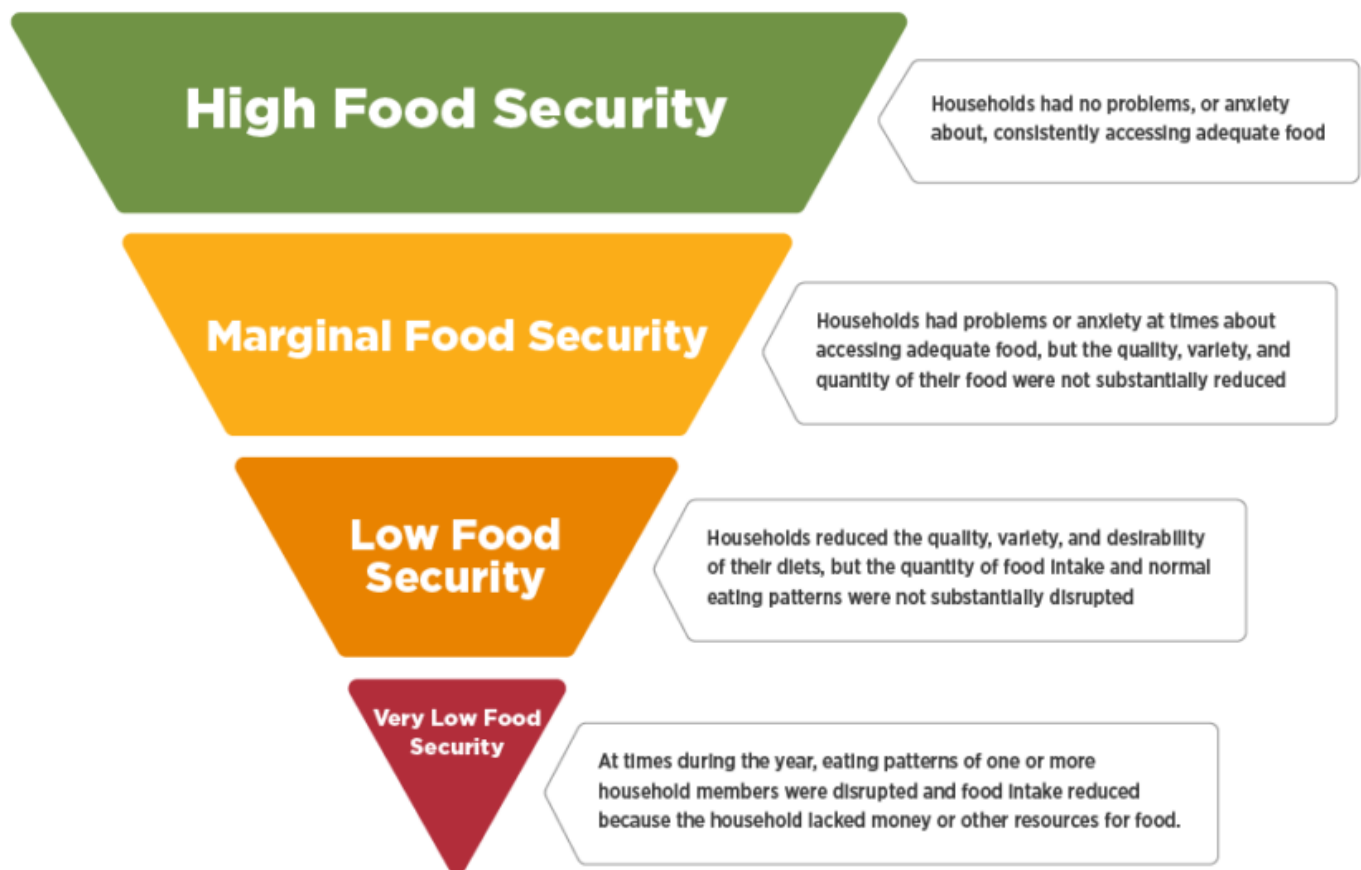
In 2020, **8.0%** of the county population faced barriers in accessing reliable sources of nourishing food.

**20,020** Cumberland County residents were food insecure.

## Food Insecurity Among Food Pantry Guests

- The 2022 survey found that 44% of all food pantry guests were very low food secure.
- In 2019, 7,780 (3.1%) Cumberland County residents experienced very low food security, encountering multiple disruptions to eating patterns and a reduction in the quality and quantity of food intake (Gundersen et al. 2021).
- These disruptions are caused by many factors including low access to affordable and healthy food options, lack of available transportation, and/or financial restrictions.

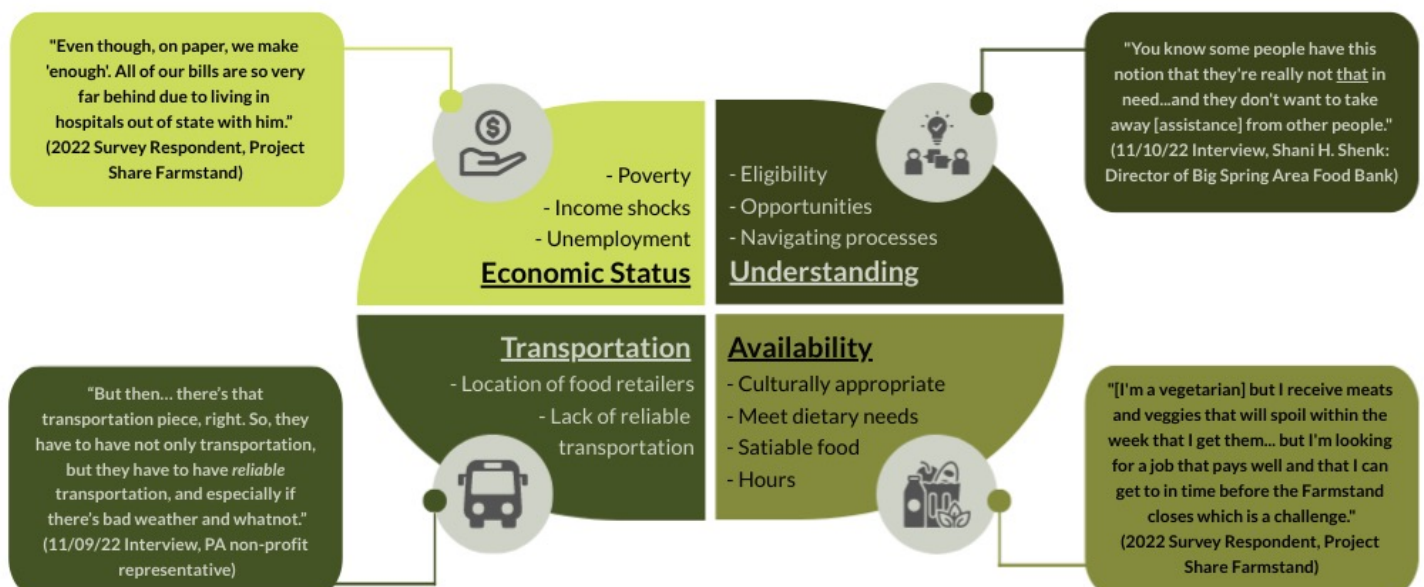
# Levels of Food Insecurity



This infographic illustrates the levels of food insecurity and describes the household experience (Feeding America 2021).

## Food Access Barriers

Many factors affect food accessibility within Cumberland County. These barriers can be socio-economic (e.g., unemployment/low-wages, medical expenses, lack of transportation), cultural (e.g., lack of dietary appropriate food such as halal and kosher options), or geographic (e.g., lack of an affordable, local grocery store).





# Food Access and Health

- Low-income and communities of color are most likely to lack access to affordable, healthier foods (USDA 2022)
- In an effort to meet nutritional needs, food insecure individuals may opt for less expensive and more convenient food options such as fast food and microwaveable meals, which are often higher in calories and carbs (Shani H. Sherk, Big Spring Area Food Bank Director, 11/10/2022)
- These options offer poor nutritional value that can elevate one's risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers (CDC, 2022)



Some supermarkets in the U.S. choose to situate themselves in profitable areas where consumer patterns are consistent and high in volume. This practice often overlooks urban and rural lower-income communities, limiting their overall access to quality foods which has serious effects on community health (Martin 2021: 24). Lower-income communities are often limited to smaller stores, like corner shops and gas stations, which emphasize convenience as they often do not have the capacity “or equipment needed to offer fresh produce on a daily basis” (Prevention Institute 2022). As a result, food options tend to be limited to long shelf-life items that offer poor nutritional quality.

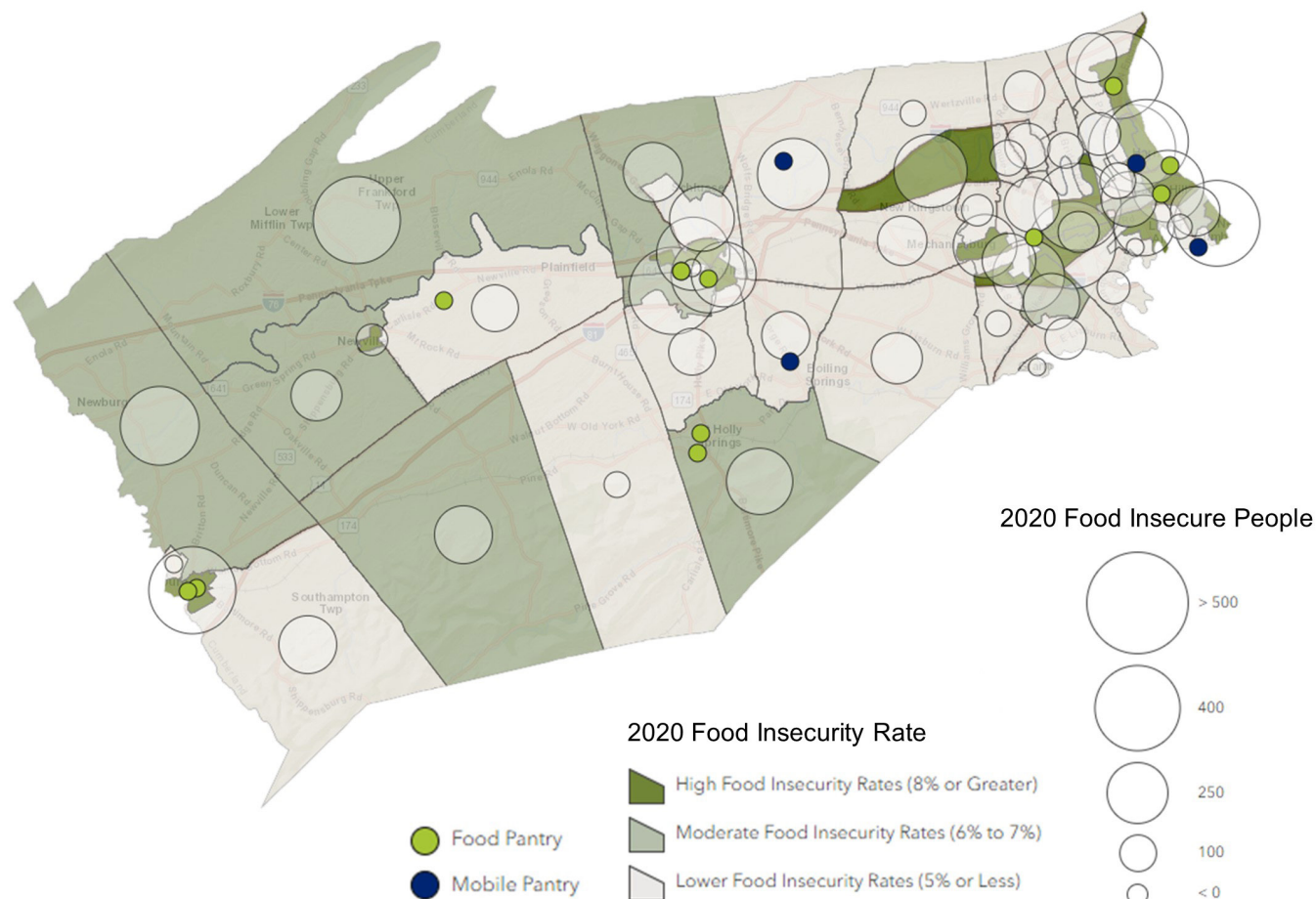
## Types of Food Distributed in Cumberland County

- Food pantries tend to provide more food than other program types because they are intended to serve a whole household for several days or a week, rather than youth or senior feeding programs that can typically only distribute set amounts due to programmatic constraints
- Cumberland County’s largest product type distributed is produce, with over 1.2 million pounds distributed in 2022.
  - » This can be partially attributed to a strong produce donation system established in Cumberland County by programs like New Hope Ministries and Project SHARE, but also by Central Pennsylvania Food Bank’s subsidizing of produce
- The least distributed products include those that are low nutritional value and are frequently highly processed and/or contain large amounts of sugar, sodium, and carbohydrates, indicating that there is broadly an emphasis on healthy products in the Cumberland County charitable food network.



# County Food Insecurity Trends

## Cumberland County Food Insecurity Rates and Numbers



### Cumberland County Food Pantries:

Carlisle: Project SHARE, Project SHARE farmstand, The Salvation Army

Enola and Mechanicsburg: New Hope Ministries

Mount Holly Springs: United Methodist Church of Mt. Holly Springs, Mt. Holly Springs COG

Shippensburg: Oasis of Love Church, Shippensburg Produce and Outreach

Wormleysburg: M28 Ministry Emergency Food Pantry

\*Only food pantries that are open to all clients, regardless of age, are plotted on the above map. Surveys were conducted at a subset of these pantries.

### Cumberland County Mobile Food Pantries:

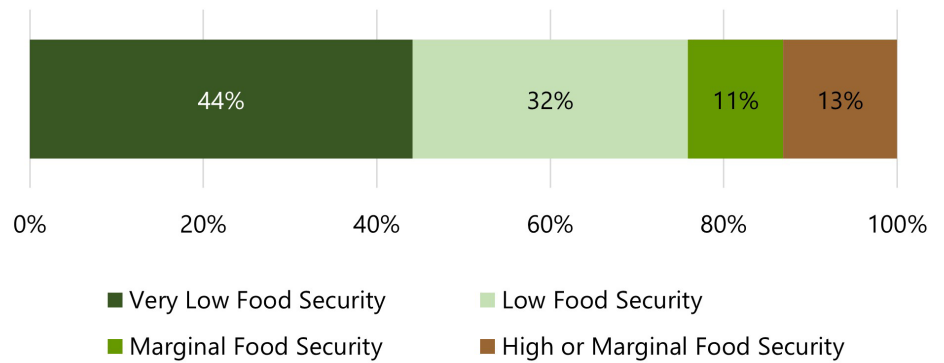
Operated by New Hope Ministries in the following locations: Boiling Springs, Camp Hill, Carlisle, and New Cumberland

There are disparities in food access in Cumberland County. This map shows that high food insecurity rates across Cumberland County are largely concentrated in the eastern portion of the county, along the West Shore and around Shiremanstown. There are also significant pockets of high food insecurity in Carlisle, Newville, and Shippensburg, with moderate food insecurity rates concentrated in the western parts of the county and Mount Holly Springs.

At food pantries in Cumberland County, individuals were surveyed about their estimated food security levels. Among the respondents, 44 percent of individuals said that they have very low food security, meaning they often go hungry or skip meals because there is not enough money for food. The presence of 24 percent of individuals with marginal or high food security that still utilize these food pantries is a reminder that access

to these services help keep people from experiencing more severe forms of food insecurity. Even people with typically high levels of food security still have instances where they need help to get their needs met, especially in circumstances like the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Food Insecurity Categories at Pantries across Cumberland County



## Food Pantry Access Challenges

People in rural areas across the county have more difficulty getting connected to resources and more barriers come into play in these outlying areas of the county. (PA Stakeholder, 11/09/22).

This table examines various components of charitable food access by ZIP Code in Cumberland County, including evening hours, weekend hours, and client choice options. The table demonstrates that some ZIP Codes have significantly easier access than others. One component not included in the table is frequency of allowable visits. People in some ZIP Codes have access to food pantry distributions once per week while people in other ZIP Codes can only visit once per month.

ZIP Code 17241, which includes Newville, has the least access to charitable food, with their only non-emergency food option being open once-per-month in the daytime. This means that people in this ZIP Code who are unable to come to the pantry during that time are unable to access other food pantries.

ZIP Code	Post Office Name	Number of Food Insecure Individuals	Evening Hours?	Weekend Hours?	Client Choice Option	Drive-Thru Option
17007	Boiling Springs	260	Yes - 5:30 PM	Yes	Yes	Yes
17011	Camp Hill	2,740	Yes - 8:30 PM	Yes	Yes	No
17013	Carlisle	3,890	Yes - 5:30 PM	Yes	Yes	Yes
17015	Carlisle	1,200	Yes - 5:30 PM	Yes	Yes	Yes
17025	Enola	1,410	Yes - Varies	Yes	Yes	No
17043	Lemoyne	420	Yes - 8:30 PM	Yes	Yes	No
17050	Mechanicsburg	2,400	Yes - 8:30 PM	Yes	Yes	No
17055	Mechanicsburg	2,910	Yes - 8:30 PM	Yes	Yes	No
17065	Mt. Holly Springs	300	Yes - 5:30 PM	Yes	Yes	Yes
17070	New Cumberland	1,490	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
17093	Summerdale	90	Yes - Varies	Yes	Yes	No
17240	Newburg	290	Yes - 6:00 PM	Yes	No	Yes
17241	Newville	1,050	No	No	Yes	No
17257	Shippensburg	3,140	Yes - 6:00 PM	Yes	No	Yes
17266	Walnut Bottom	40	No	No	Yes	No
17324	Gardners	290	Yes - 5:30 PM	Yes	Yes	Yes



# Service Territory Limitations

- One way to combat the amount of very low food security rates seen across the pantry system in Cumberland County would be to ease service territory requirements. Service Territories are the area from which guests must live to receive regular food assistance from a given food pantry.
- Easing service territory restrictions would increase choice and allow people to access food more easily when they need it throughout a month, regardless of where they live. It is important to note that people’s lives take them across the county. They may prefer to access pantries in another part of the county or pantries that are the most convenient for them.
- State rules do not prevent large and overlapping service territories (PA Dept. of Agriculture, 2018), so food pantries could expand their service territories to increase choice from guests across the county.

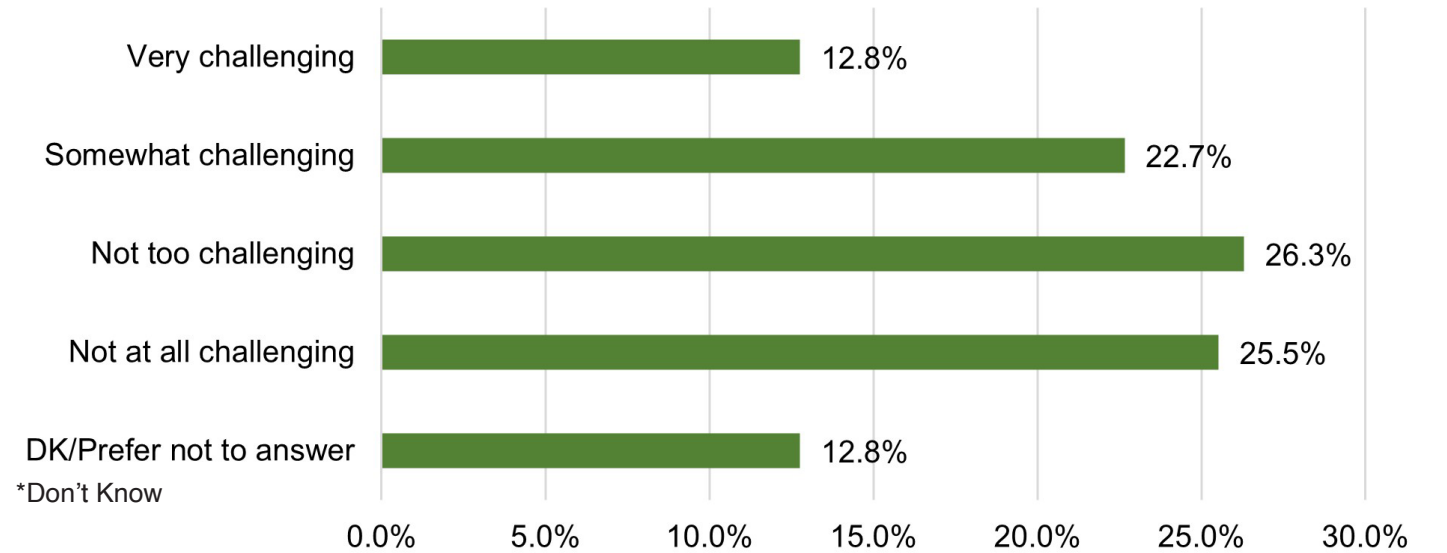
**Service Territory:**  
The geographic area from which guests must live in order to receive regular food assistance from a given food pantry.

“ COVID-19’s really thrown everyone for a big loop, I think that we’re all readjusting to life in one way shape or another... I think that barriers have become really difficult, housing being a huge piece of that” (PA Stakeholder, 11/09/22).

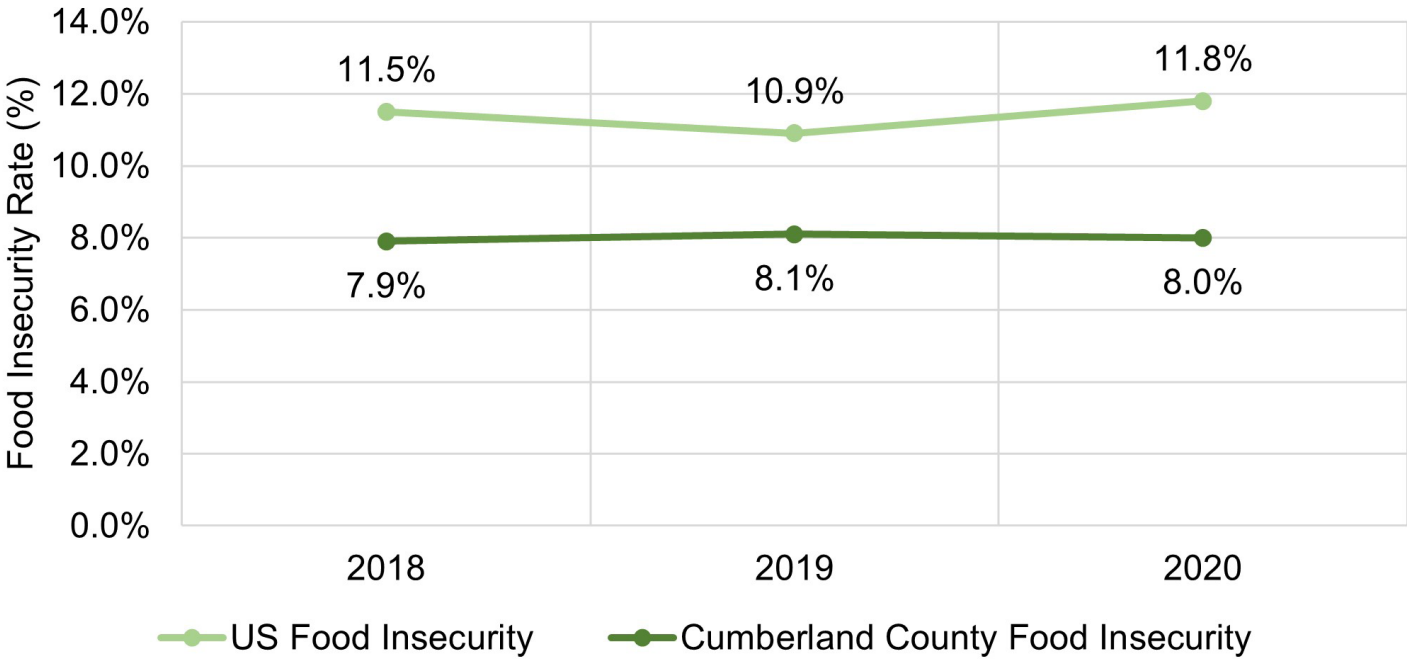
The relative difficulty in accessing food pantries is also shown in the survey data. A total of 36 percent of respondents said that it is at least somewhat challenging to access a food pantry at the days and times needed, including 13 percent of people who said it is very challenging. Pantries with evening access have the lowest percent of people reporting it is very challenging to access a food pantry, signifying it as an effective measure to ensure better food access.



## How challenging is it to find a food pantry that is open during the times and days you need it?



# Food Insecurity Rates for the U.S. and Cumberland County, PA, 2018-2020



This line graph captures the food insecurity rate trends for Cumberland County, PA, and the United States from 2017 to 2020 (Feeding America 2022)



“As a food pantry we are not addressing the root cause [of food insecurity] we are a symptom.”

(Shani H. Shenk, Big Spring Area Food Bank Director, 11/10/2022)



# Food Shortages and COVID-19

“Considering the loss of income and childcare, as well as increasing inaccessibility of food throughout the pandemic, ‘food insecurity rates are expected to skyrocket’ (Kinsley et al. 2020).

## Impact:

- Loss of labor from COVID-19 illness, mandatory lockdown periods, having to care for family members (Antipova 2021)
- Many stores selling food and essential goods were unable to stay open or had to reduce hours during lockdowns, becoming less accessible (Antipova 2021)
- Schools shutting down and moving towards remote learning (Dunn et al. 2020)

## Most-impacted populations:

- People who lost their job or part of their income from reduced hours (Antipova, 2021)
- School-age children who rely on school lunches for nutrition and were unable to attend school during lockdown periods (Dunn et al. 2020)

## Implications:

- Wide-spread food shortages from loss of labor and people panic buying essential goods (e.g., toilet paper, masks, sanitizer, pasta, water, rice, and frozen/prepared meals) (Kinsley et al. 2020)
- SNAP Emergency Allotments and other remaining COVID-19 flexibilities will expire at the end of the federal public health emergency.

## Solutions:

- Ensuring that children relying on free/reduced school lunches are provided with meals while not in in-person classes
- Recognizing food security needs for people above poverty level

## Conclusion

Food feeds and fuels the Cumberland County community. Ensuring that the production, distribution, and consumption of food is sustainable and equitable is fundamental to redressing food access disparities for all. The crucial work of volunteers, donors, food banks, and pantries across the county help mitigate food insecurity, however, it is not a long-term solution for ending hunger. This endeavor requires community-based solutions to the root causes of hunger such as poverty and unemployment.







## Overview

State and federal food benefit programs have a high potential to provide immediate relief for individuals experiencing income and food insecurity. Food benefits come in a variety of formats including vouchers, coupons, and electronic benefit transfer cards, allowing people to access supplemental food. The availability of emergency funds creates a safety net and resilient community networks for those who need additional aid.

There is a gap between those eligible for benefits and those who enroll. Benefit programs can require a long application process or ask enrollees to continuously renew their benefits, making enrollment more complicated especially for those who may have limited transportation and less time off work. The language and questions used in the enrollment process can further impede one's ability to provide accurate information. This section will illuminate how food benefit programs operate and address community needs on local and state levels.



## Main Food Benefits Challenges

- **Decrease in funds:** Emergency benefits and the extra monthly funds provided by the federal government during the COVID-19 pandemic will be phased out, with SNAP benefits projected to return to pre-pandemic levels at the end of the federal public health emergency. The end of the federal public health emergency is currently set for January 2023, but is likely to be renewed.
- **Income eligibility changes:** The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is no longer free to all students like it was during the pandemic.
- **Service gap:** In Cumberland County, there is a gap between those eligible for benefits and those who enroll in the programs.

# SNAP

The SNAP program is a monthly food purchasing assistance program serving over 40 million low-income Americans each year. To potentially qualify for SNAP benefits, individual or family gross incomes must be at or below 200% of the federal poverty line (PA DHS 2022). For those applying to SNAP in Pennsylvania, the combined income of the household can total up to 200% of the federal poverty line (PA DHS 2022).



## SNAP Usage and Eligibility in Cumberland County

### Rise of individuals enrolled in SNAP in Cumberland County

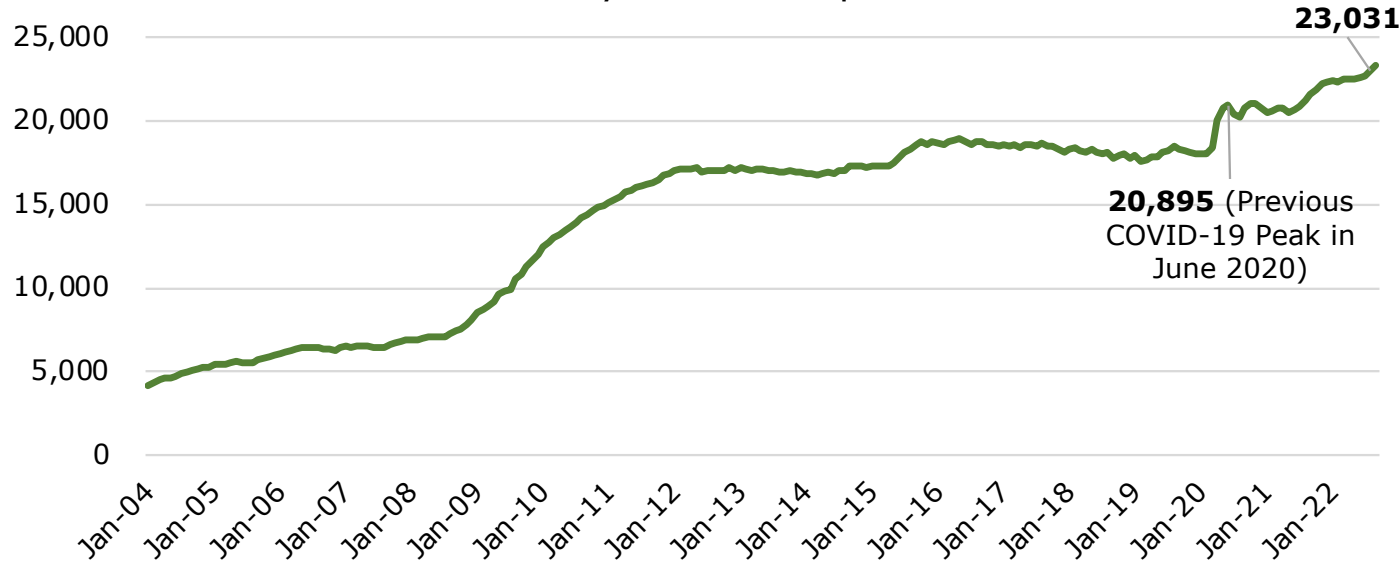
- 18,017: February 2020
- 20,895: June 2020
- 23,271: September 2022 (CPFB 2022)

In September 2022, of the 262,919 residents of Cumberland County:

- 19.3%: were at 200% or below the poverty line and potentially qualified for SNAP benefits
- 23,271 people used SNAP, representing 8.9% of the total population

(ACS 2021, PA Department of Human Services year)

Cumberland County SNAP Participation Over Time






# Expiring COVID-19 Benefits

SNAP Emergency Allotments (EAs) are projected to end at the end of the federal public health emergency, currently set for January 11, 2023, unless renewed again by the Biden administration (CPFEB 2022). As a result, the average monthly benefits per person across central Pennsylvania is projected to fall by \$101, from \$242 to \$141. This is an average drop of 42% (CPFEB 2022).

### During Stay At Home Order



**What is Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)?** SNAP is a federal program that helps millions of low-income Americans put food on the table.

**What are supplement SNAP benefits?** Additional benefits to SNAP households to bring them up to their maximum monthly allotment for a household their size.

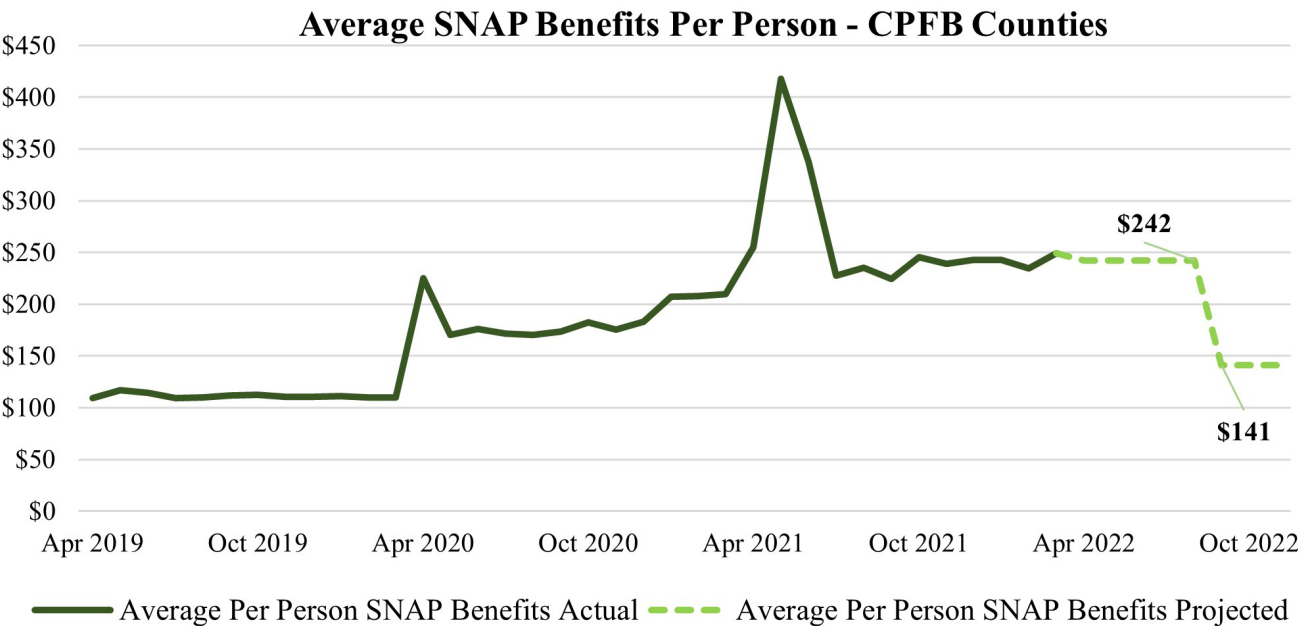
**Is anyone eligible for SNAP?** No. All applicants - even those who had hours cut because of COVID-19 - must meet strict federal SNAP eligibility guidelines including income.

**What if I can't get enough work hours for SNAP requirements because of COVID-19?** During the crisis, there are no time limits for work hours starting on April 1st.

In an interview with Bob Weed, CEO of Project SHARE, a food pantry in Carlisle, PA, Weed went over the changes he foresees taking place after COVID-19 enhanced benefits expire:

“With legislation that has been passed along the way, many of our clients are receiving what are called enhanced SNAP benefits. So, a family of four who was getting \$120 a month in SNAP benefits is getting \$850 in SNAP benefits so there are a lot less reliant on us than they have been in the past. That’s all going to come to an end, right at some point in time, heaven knows when. But when that does, you know those families will come back to rely on Project Share to help supplement some of their food needs”

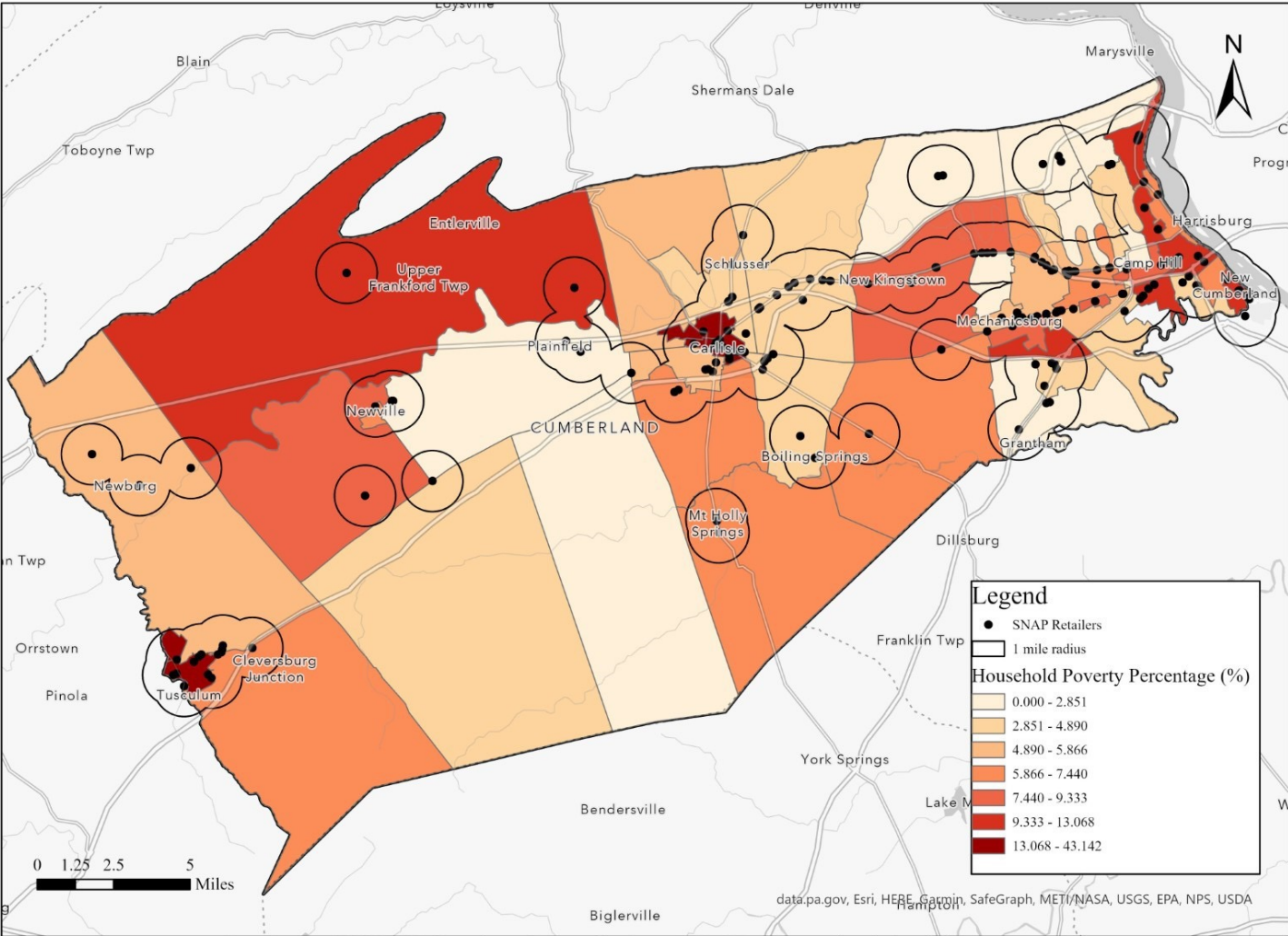
(10/17/22 Interview, Bob Weed).



(CPFEB 2022b)

\* This analysis was conducted by the CPFEB in May 2022. The public health emergency that SNAP emergency allotments depend are authorized under has been extended until at least January 2023 so average benefits have not yet dropped.

# Retailers Accepting SNAP and Poverty Concentration in Cumberland County



Data Source: ESRI ACS (American Community Survey), PASDA (Pennsylvania Spatial Data Access)

## Disparity in SNAP Site Accessibility

The above graph displays the location of each site accepting SNAP EBT as a form of payment. Each dot represents a retailer, and the one-mile radius around it, show to portray its reach in population. As well, it is important to note the shading, as a darker red represents a higher percentage of resident poverty. This graph does not differentiate between convenience and grocery stores, but it is nonetheless clear the areas of Cumberland County without access to a nearby SNAP retailer.





# WIC

## Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

The US Department of Agriculture established WIC to provide healthcare, funding, and nutrition to low income pregnant, breastfeeding, postpartum women, and food insecure children under the age of 5. Women can start the program as soon as they find out they are pregnant, up until their child's 5th birthday. Also, under the age of 5, children of single fathers, adopted parents, or being raised by their grandparents (or another guardian) can receive benefits. The WIC program provides a variety of foods including dairy products, canned goods, whole grains, and proteins, in addition to more helpful services. If someone is eligible for SNAP, they should be eligible for WIC (185% poverty line).

In Cumberland County, there are WIC offices in Camp Hill and Carlisle. These offices work to meet the needs of their clients by providing transportation, processing applications, and connecting them with not only people who are experiencing similar insecurity (10/28/2022 Interview, Julia Kint: Family Health Council of Central PA/SNAP/WIC outreach coordinator).



### WIC Monthly Participation

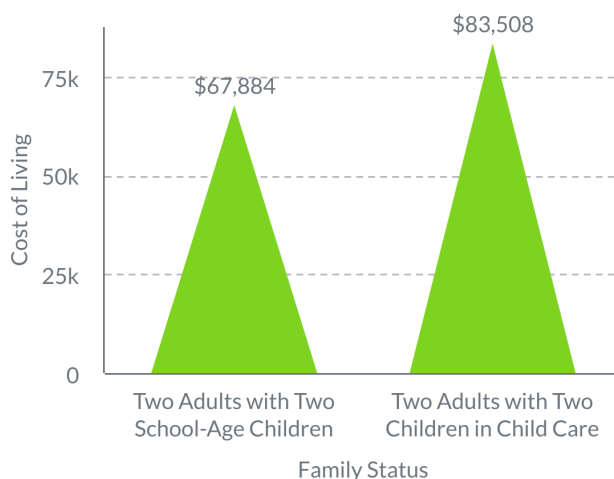
- Carlisle: 1,280 people
- Camp Hill: 1,300

(Kint 2022)

Total Number of Food  
Insecure Children: **5,210**

(Gunderson et al, 2022)

### Cost of Living per Family Structure



■ \$

(United Way 2018)

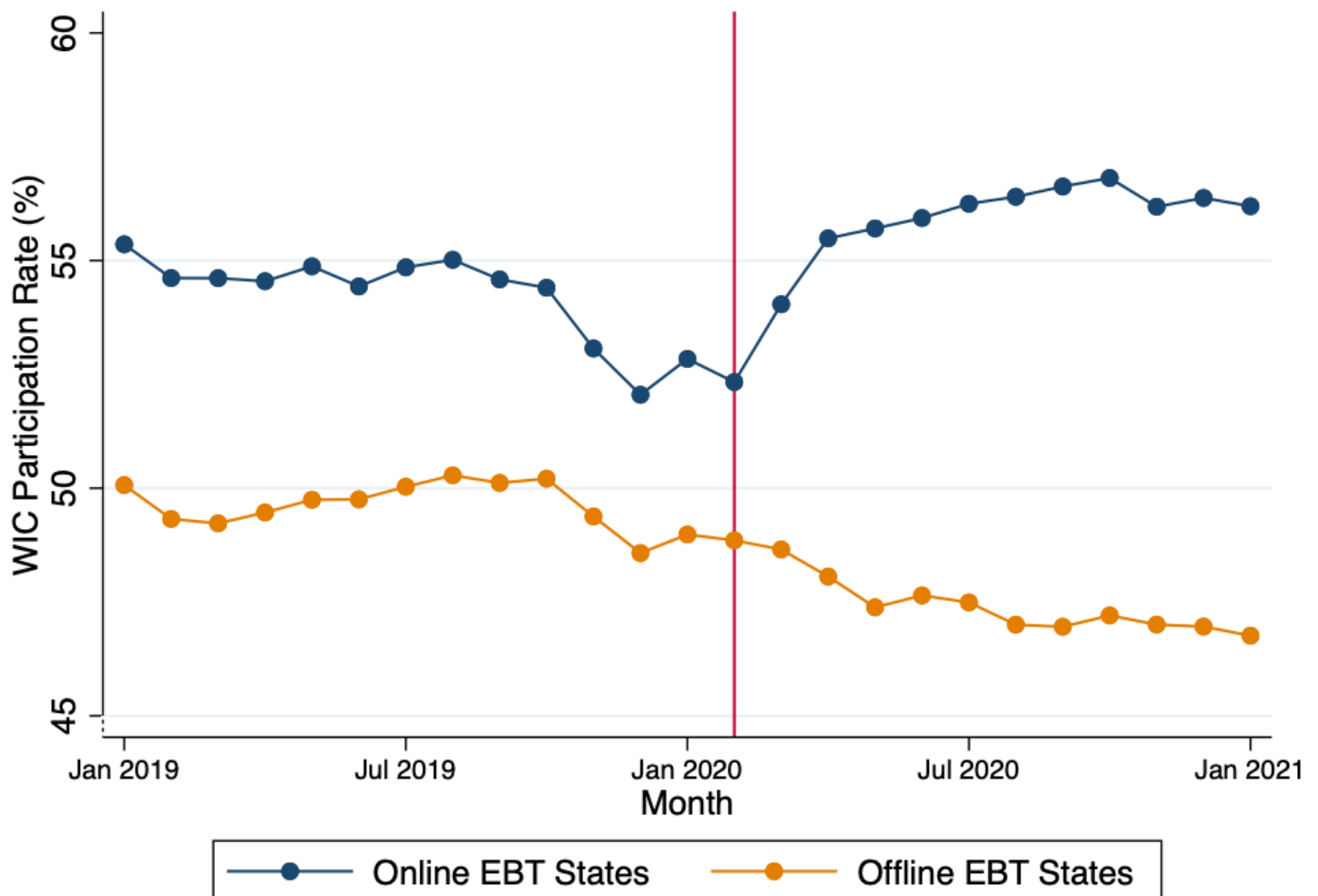
In Cumberland Country, children are the most likely age group to be food insecure. WIC locations within Cumberland County have similar participation rates, compared to the large number of overall participants within the county. Also, the cost of living within Cumberland County (depending on the ages of children) is already high, ultimately representing how WIC benefits can alleviate some of the financial stress on families.

## WIC Benefit Distribution

Individuals who receive WIC benefits also receive electronic benefits transfer (EBT) cards which hold the funds residents can use in stores. In 41 of the 50 states across the US, online EBT cards are available that renew funds automatically (online) every month, however Pennsylvania uses offline EBT cards, which means recipients need to visit a WIC office in person every few months to receive their benefits. This process is cumbersome and outdated, and for Cumberland County, it is on the list of adjustments to make soon to make the process of receiving benefits easier on and more accommodating to residents.

Over the pandemic, WIC participants received waivers for physical documentation of income, allowing for verbal confirmation of income, however by early 2023 the waivers will expire, requiring recipients to begin providing physical, paper documentation once again. Also, appointments were able to be taken virtually, however they are now being steered back to in person appointments. Transportation, babysitting, and time availability are only some of the barriers for residents to receive their benefits. (Kint 2022)

**WIC participation rates in Online and Offline EBT states  
from January 2019 to January 2021**



The above figure shows how WIC participation is drastically higher in states that use online EBT cards than states that use offline EBT cards. At the red line, signifying the COVID-19 pandemic, on-line EBT states had sharp increase in WIC participation, as benefits were needed more and easy to access despite the pandemic, while offline EBT states had a decrease as WIC benefits were harder to access during the pandemic (CHOP 2021).



# WIC in Cumberland County

An interview with Julia Kint, Family Health Council of Central PA/ SNAP/WIC outreach coordinator.

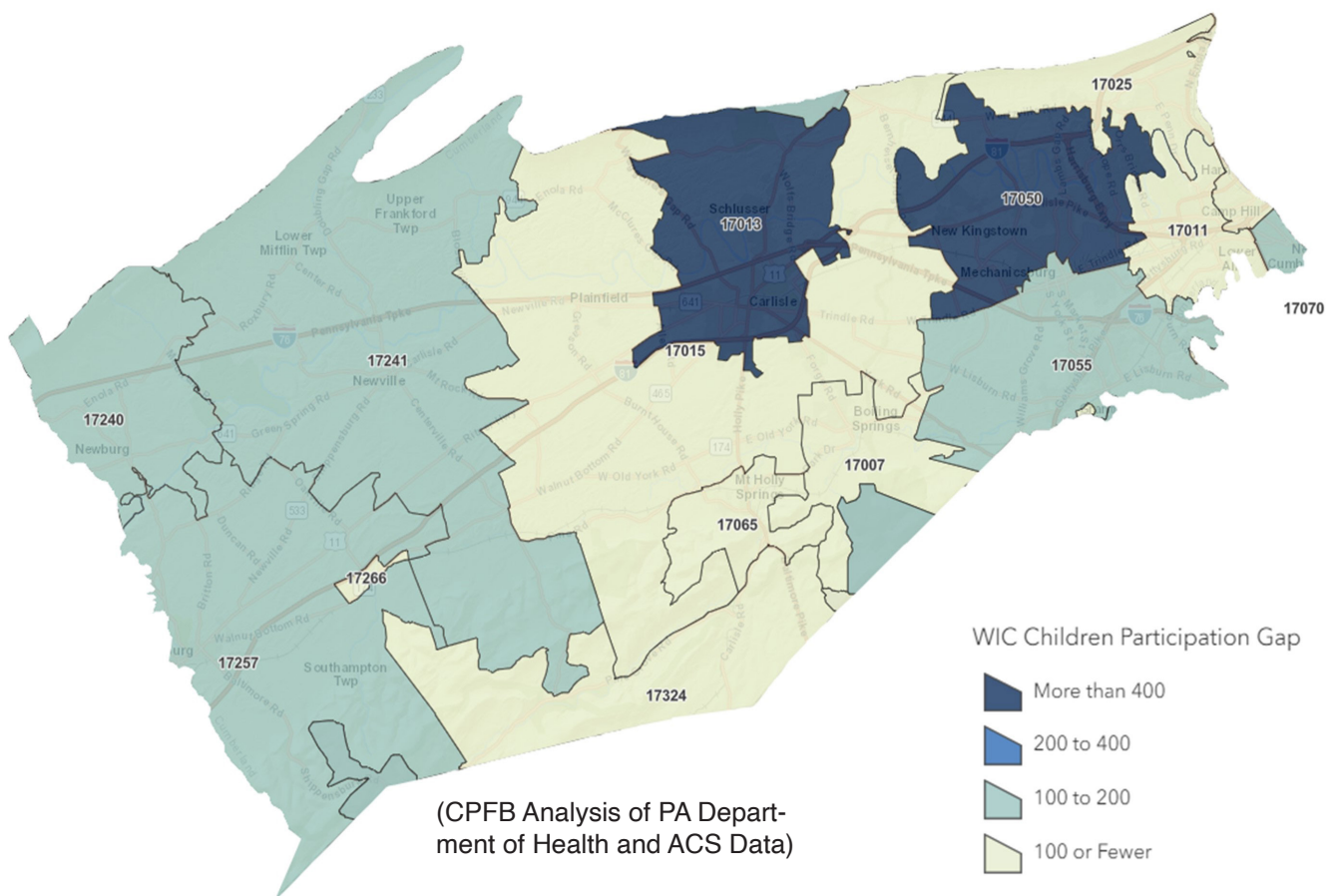
**Question:** What is unique about WIC needs in Cumberland County compared to the rest of the state?

**Answer:** In Cumberland County, our WIC program has two offices (Camp Hill and Carlisle), and one pop-up clinic, which none of the other PA counties have. This helps with outreach, participation, and distribution. It is one of the biggest counties to serve, and one of the most diverse as well.

**Question:** How does Cumberland County try to meet the WIC needs of its residents?

**Answer:** We try to do a lot of pop-up clinics and are in the middle of getting a mobile unit, kind of like an RV clinic. So, it's going to be just like that, we can drive around and give WIC appointments. Also, we are involved in a lot of organizations and community partners which give us the ability to do referrals for anything. So, if anyone needs housing, we can refer them to a case worker within the housing topic. Literally anything, reproductive health, food clothing, school supplies. Any kind of community benefit, anything that we might need we can refer them to. We can also try to find community partners who have the things we may need. With grants we can sometimes get diapers, tampons, menstrual and reproductive health materials, all through donations and mini grants. We do a lot within Cumberland County.

## WIC Children Participation Gaps



The map above shows WIC participation gaps across Cumberland County as determined in a CPFBI analysis of Pennsylvania Department of Health and ACS data (CPFBI, 2022c). Two ZIP Codes have WIC participation gaps of over 400 children, including 17013 in Carlisle and 17050 in Mechanicsburg.

# NSLP

## NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM

Established under the National School Lunch Act, the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is a federal assistance meal program for public and non-profit schools and residential child-care institutions. Families that receive any type of local or federally funded support from programs such as SNAP and WIC or that earn less than 185% FPL are eligible for free or reduced lunch. The program provides low-cost or free lunches which must meet state requirements for nutritional and patterning values. Following the guidelines above, this includes “a whole or enriched grain, fruit, vegetable, meat/meat alternative and milk.” (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2022) The portions vary depending on the specific year of the student and accommodations are made for dietary needs (US Department of Education, n.d.).

### COVID-19 and Child Nutrition Programs

The way children receive school meal benefits has changed several times in the last two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related federal waivers being put into effect as well as their expiration. This is attributed to the switch to the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) during peak pandemic, which was part of a waiver implemented by USDA to address accessibility issues caused by school closures and supply chain circulation. SSO is restricted to school districts, which allows admin to exercise their power over the transition to this program. Out of the 11 school districts in Cumberland County, 10 participated in SSO as part of COVID-19 relief as of 2022. As of June 2022, the school districts of Cumberland Valley, followed by Mechanicsburg and Big Springs, had the highest SSO meal rates. However, as of school year 2022-2023, waivers have expired, and all school districts have returned to NSLP as the primary meal plan.

**Summer Food Service Program (SFSP):** While most school districts in Cumberland County used the Seamless Summer Option as their primary meal plan during the COVID-19 pandemic, schools that did not transitioned to the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). This program allows schools as well as community stakeholders and non-profit organizations to manage and fund meals for school aged children during the summer months” (USDA 2019)

In addition to the NSLP being the primary meal plan, current governor, Tom Wolf unveiled a \$21.5 million dollar plan earlier this year to provide free breakfast to 1.7 million students across the state. The program began on October 1, 2022 and will continue through the rest of the school year. The implementation of this program signifies a major change in how child food insecurity and food access are being addressed as it has no income or eligibility requirements regarding a child and their family” (Murphy 2022). However free breakfast will expire at the end of the year without further government action.

### Comparing School Food Programs

Program	SFSP Summer Food Service Program	NSLP/SBP National School Lunch Program & School Breakfast Program	SSO Seamless Summer Option
Times of Operation	May-Sept. & Oct.-Apr. during school closures, and vacations of 15+ days	When school/summer school is in session	May-Sept. & Oct.-Apr. during school closures, and vacations of 10+ days
Locations	Schools, camps, churches, libraries, migrant and community centres	Schools and child care institutions	Schools, camps, churches, libraries, migrant and community centres
Cost	All meals are free	Free or reduced depending on their families income eligibility <i>*Breakfast is free</i>	All meals are free
Type of Meal	Serves breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks	Serves breakfast, lunch, and snacks	Serves breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks <small>(USDA Administrative Guide for Sponsors, January 2016)</small>

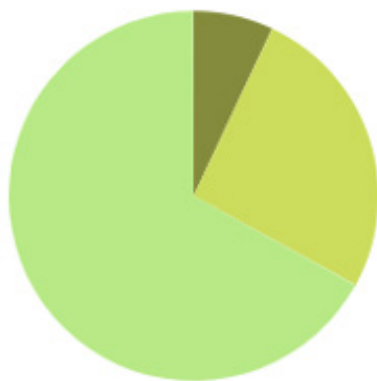


# ALICE

## ASSET LIMITED, INCOME CONSTRAINED, AND EMPLOYED

According to the 2022 Poverty Income guidelines, 200% of the Federal Poverty Line (FPL) for a household of four is \$55,550 a year. This is the highest a family of four can earn and potentially be eligible for SNAP. However, the household survival budget in Cumberland County for a family of four with two kids in daycare is \$83,508. This discrepancy has critical implications. If they make \$55,600, they are not eligible to receive SNAP benefits or additional forms of assistance and income from the government. This is the ALICE population. The eligibility requirements vary for every food program and can cause individuals to feel stagnate as they cannot access resources in their community to address their needs.

Households by Income in Cumberland County, 2018



Poverty (7%) ALICE (26%)  
Above ALICE Threshold (67%)  
American Community Survey, 2007-2018

Food Insecure Children by Household, 2020



Poverty (16.83%) ALICE (26.73%)  
Above ALICE Threshold (56.44%)  
ALICE Threshold, 2019; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, PUMS, 2019

### 2018 Point-in-Time Data

Population  
251,423

# of Households  
102,243

Median Household Income  
\$71,802

ALICE Households  
26.00%

Household in Poverty  
7.00%

### Household of Four Income Eligibility

185% of the Federal Poverty Line:  
\$51,338

### 2020 Point-in-Time Data

Population  
255,857

# of Households  
101,176

Median Household Income  
\$71,979

ALICE Households  
TBF

Household in Poverty  
7.05%

### Income Eligibility Thresholds by Program

SNAP: \$55,704

WIC: \$51,338

Social Security Income: \$40,368

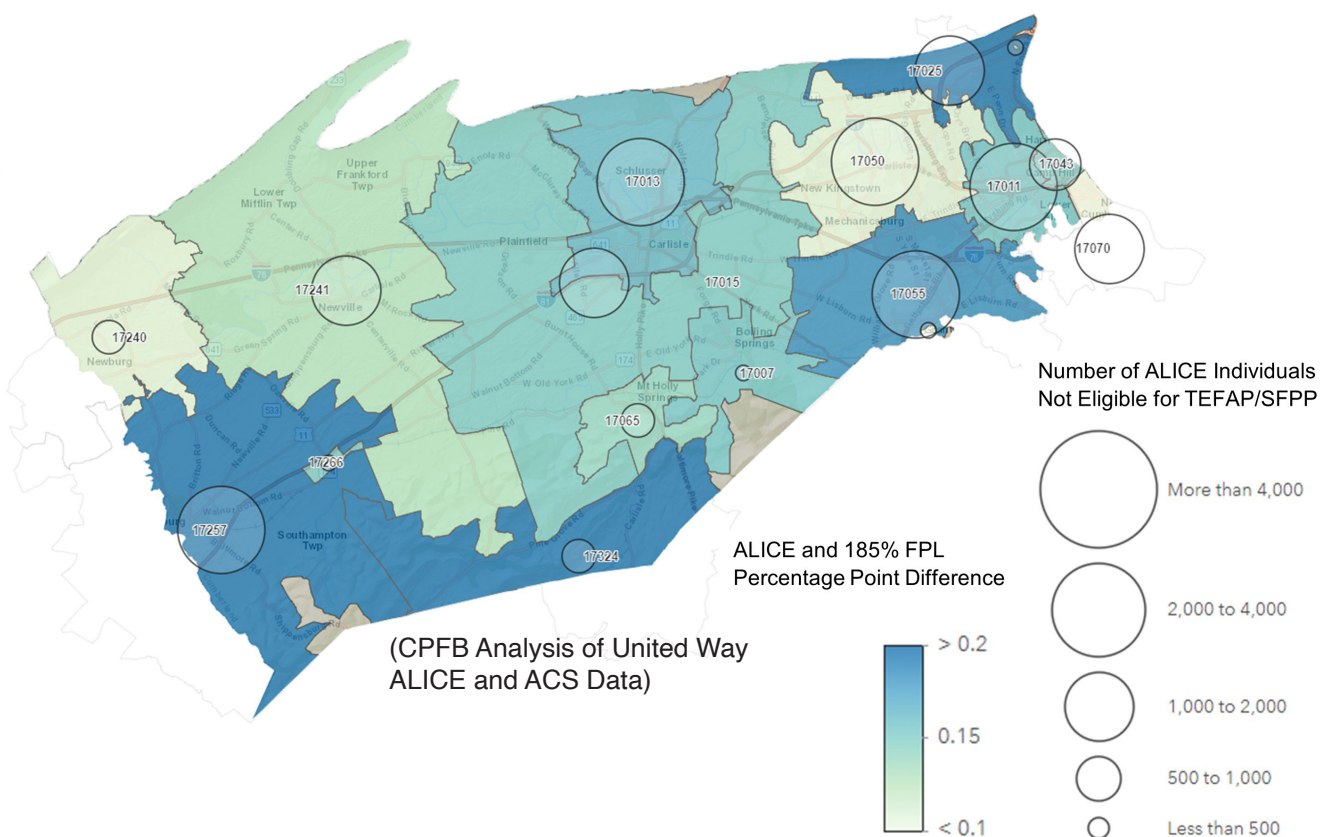
“ At the same time, it’s that population who’s above that threshold but not quite to a level where you need earning power to you know make ends meet fully; The ALICE population, who were seeing, who found Project Share and found it to be a beneficial resource”

(10/17/22 Interview, Bob Weed).

ALICE households are living paycheck-to-paycheck and may be in occasional need of charitable food assistance if they are unable to make ends meet. To isolate the areas of Cumberland County where there may be a significant need for food assistance among populations that do not qualify for TEFAP or SFPP (their incomes are not below 185% FPL), the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank utilized ZIP Code level data from the United Way of Pennsylvania’s ALICE study to determine the difference between the ALICE population and the population under 185% FPL.



## Cumberland County ALICE and TEFAP/SFPP Eligibility Analysis



This map highlights that the towns with the largest percent of individuals considered ALICE who don’t qualify for charitable food assistance programs live in Gardners (24% of the population), Shippensburg (20% of the population), Enola (20% of the population), Mechanicsburg (19% of the population), or Carlisle (17% of the population). These individuals are unable to receive TEFAP/ SFPP-funded charitable food assistance or SNAP as their income level is above the eligibility limits (CPFB, 2022a).



# CSFP

## Commodity Supplemental Food Program

The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) “works to improve the health of low-income persons at least 60 years of age while being at or below 130% of the US poverty level by supplementing their diets” with nutritious, appropriate food” (USDA 2022).

- Food and administrative funds are distributed to give beneficiaries components of a balanced, healthy diet.
- The goal of this program is to assist older adults in maintaining their independence and health as they battle food insecurity.

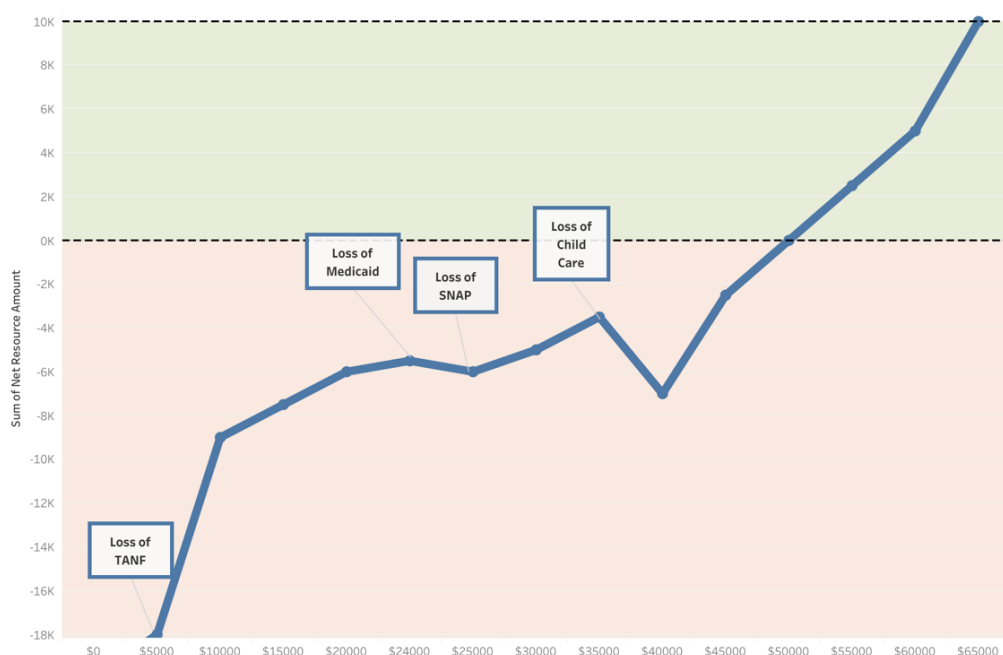
## Benefits Cliff

The benefits cliff is a phenomenon when a recipient of a benefit program experiences an increase in income but overall loses spending power due to rising above the program’s income cutoff. Due to confusion regarding eligibility and allowed duration of program participation, there can be the danger of becoming financially ineligible for the programs and “falling off” of the benefits cliff (PA DHS 2022).

“ Well, the benefits cliff was in effect before enhanced SNAP benefits started and will be, is in effect today. The way our social services system is set up, it’s a disincentive to upward mobility, economic mobility. I have literally sat with individuals who are in tears because they’ve gotten a \$0.25 or \$0.50 an hour raise at work. Because they’re losing 400 to \$600 a month in spending power because all those benefits get ripped out from underneath them.”

(10/17/22 Interview, Bob Weed).

## Benefits Cliff Representation: Household with 1 Adult and 1 Child



This household can achieve a living wage once they earn \$49,000 per year in gross income

- Value of benefits \$1,529
  - After tax income \$41,895
- Without benefits, this household is not able to achieve a living wage until they earn about \$51,000 per year in gross income (\$43,312 in after tax income) (PA DHS 2020).

# COVID-19 and Food Assistance



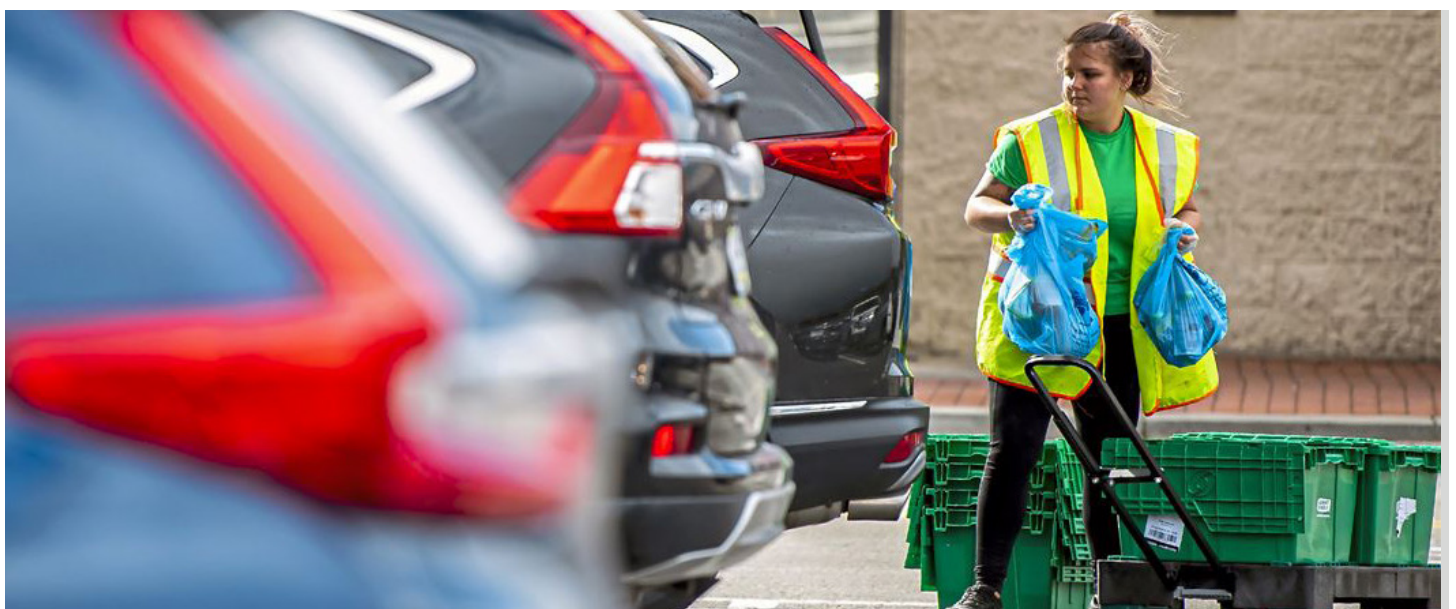
In May 2020, the USDA estimated 570,739 households using emergency SNAP benefits; by January 2022, that number increased to 996,009. The amount of money allotted for the SNAP program increased to accommodate the rising number of households experiencing food insecurity.

## Benefits impacted by COVID:

- ALICE individuals and those falling below 185% of the FLP (In-state and nationally).
- Individuals who already receive governmental benefits (i.e. SNAP).
- Closed schools mean the USDA operated under the SSO program as a policy adjustment - no longer active.
- WIC has not been as accommodating to COVID needs, as it still requires residents to renew their benefits in person.

## Solutions and why it matters:

- Online purchasing options continue to be available to individuals qualifying for food benefits – ensure they continue to have autonomy of choice and accessible options for receiving the food
- President Biden's \$880 million dollar investment plan delivered expanded access to more fruits and vegetables for WIC participants







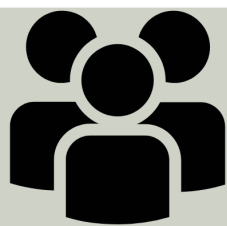
# The Changing Role of the Charitable Food System

## Introduction

The original purpose of food banks was to provide temporary relief from hunger (Fisher 2017). The model encouraged short-term solutions for a foundational set of socioeconomic conditions (Sethi 2020). Over the years, organizations have deviated from methods that exclusively address hunger to methods that also include ways to combat the root causes of food insecurity. Consequently, food banks and pantries are now permanent societal fixture (Martin 2021). This section aims to examine how food banks and pantries can address the root causes of food insecurity while still meeting the nutritional needs of guests. This will be done by analyzing changing demographics and community needs, studying community feedback on organizational models, and coalescing ideas on how to expand services and programs. Food pantries have a unique opportunity to become advocates for their guests by getting involved with policy work to begin to address the root causes of food insecurity and poverty.

## Impacts and Implications of COVID-19 on Food Pantries

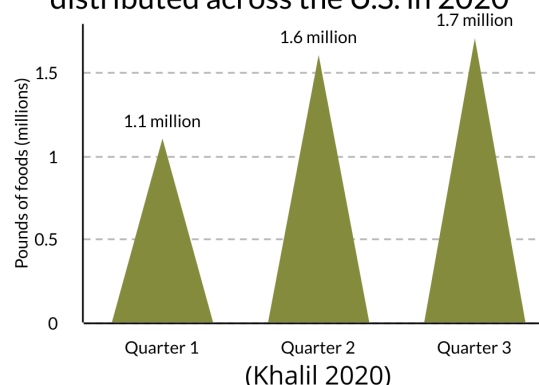
The presence of COVID-19 created a situation in which demand for food assistance and other social safety nets was highly increased. The food bank and pantry system were faced with finding innovative ways to shift quickly and effectively to emergency relief food distribution such as drive-throughs and premade boxes.



**60 Million**

People turned to food assistance programs and organizations during the pandemic in 2020 (Feeding America 2020)

Amount of food Feeding America distributed across the U.S. in 2020



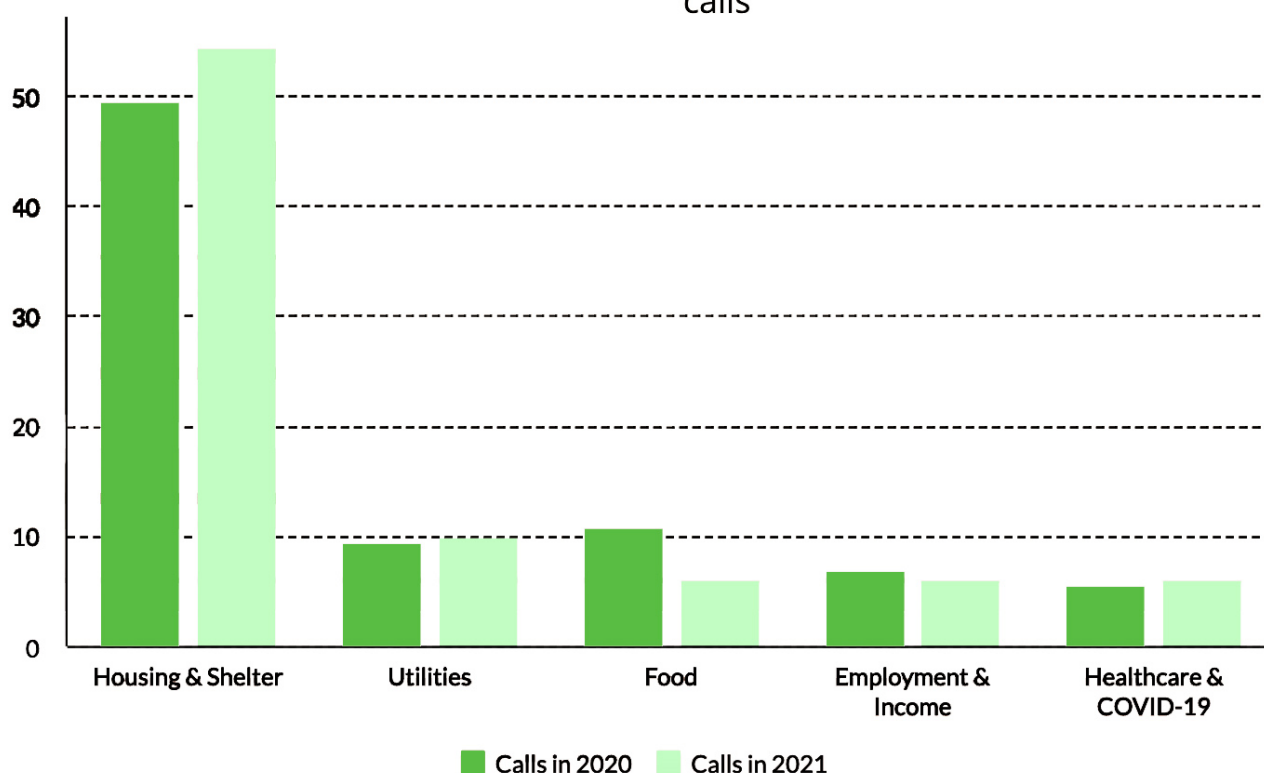
"The silver lining [was that] Covid-19 pandemic gave food pantries the opportunity to renovate, because of empty buildings, and transition to different methods of distribution, by getting feedback, to better support the community. This can be seen in Project Share's transition to offering multiple distribution methods and the introduction of their choice-shopping program" (Bob Weed 10/13/2022).



## 211 Calls in Cumberland County

- 211 Calls are a public resource that give confidential free public access to crisis counseling on several issues including housing services, food access, and healthcare among others (United Way n.d.)
- 211 calls refer people to other programs and resources. The stable number of calls over two years suggests that low-income individuals are experiencing further hardship in other areas and there is a growing population of individuals experiencing economic hardship
- This resource is underutilized because many people don't know it exists. There are opportunities for stakeholders to widely publicize the 211 information and make it more acces-

In Cumberland County, there was a total of 3,755 calls to 211 United Way in 2020 and 3,604 in 2021. Below the graph shows the breakdown in the subject of those calls



“ Food isn't an isolated problem. So, when people come to us and they are homeless, I know that can talk to Shippensburg cares shelter. There are other agencies within Cumberland County that will provide support. We can provide them with that information.”

(Karen Deshong 11/09/2022).

Client choice pantries are a best practice because, like a grocery store, people get to choose the foods they want. This increases the likelihood that people will receive the foods they want and reduces waste. However, drive-throughs can also serve an important function, as they can potentially be less stigmatizing for people who are potentially concerned about being seen at a food pantry and they can be quick, depending on the model. If both options are available, and clients choose a drive-through, that is a form of choice.

# 2022 Food Pantry Survey Respondent Demographics

This data is based on

**365**

surveys from 8 sites

Of surveyed guests,

**12.1%**

Identify with a culture outside the US

Apart from the US,

**Puerto Rico**

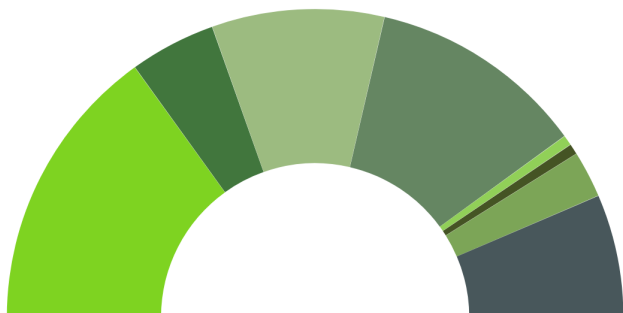
is the most common culture of origin

Of surveyed guests,

**5.5%**

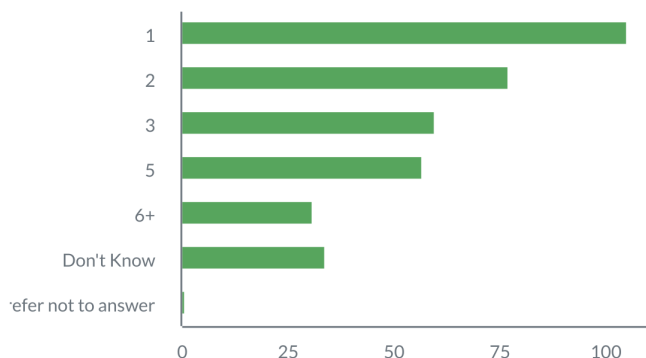
Identify as Hispanic or Latino

## Sources of Income



- Working Full-Time (30.14%)
- Working Part-Time (9.04%)
- Disability (18.08%)
- Social Security (22.74%)
- Contract or gig Work (1.1%)
- Unemployment (1.1%)
- Prefer not to answer (4.93%)
- None of these (12.88%)

## Reported Household Size



## Highest Level of Education Completed Among Food Pantry Guests



No High School Diploma **12%**



High School Graduate **47%**



Attended College **27%**



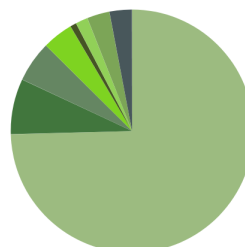
College Graduate **13%**



## Gender Identity

- Male (26.92%)
- Female (71.98%)
- Trans Woman (0.27%)
- Some other way (0.82%)

## Racial Identity



- White (74.59%)
- Black (7.38%)
- Hispanic (5.46%)
- Asian (4.1%)
- Indigenous American (0.82%)
- Middle Eastern/North Africa (1.64%)
- Some Other (3.01%)
- Prefer not to answer (3.01%)

Arabic and Spanish are the most spoken languages after English



## Age of Guests



- 19-29 (7.95%)
- 30-44 (27.67%)
- 45-59 (30.41%)
- 60-74 (27.67%)
- 75+ (6.3%)

Of surveyed guests

**5.8%**

were evicted in the past year

In the coming year

**18.2%**

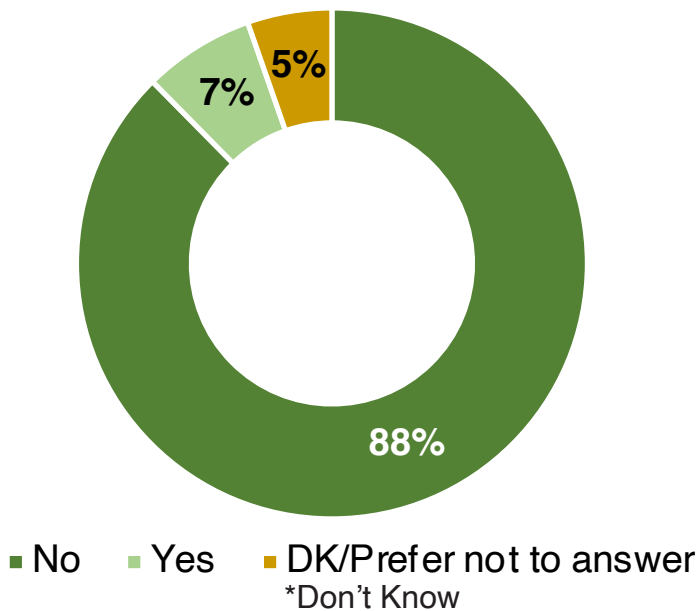
fear they will be evicted

**9%**

report not having stable or consistent housing

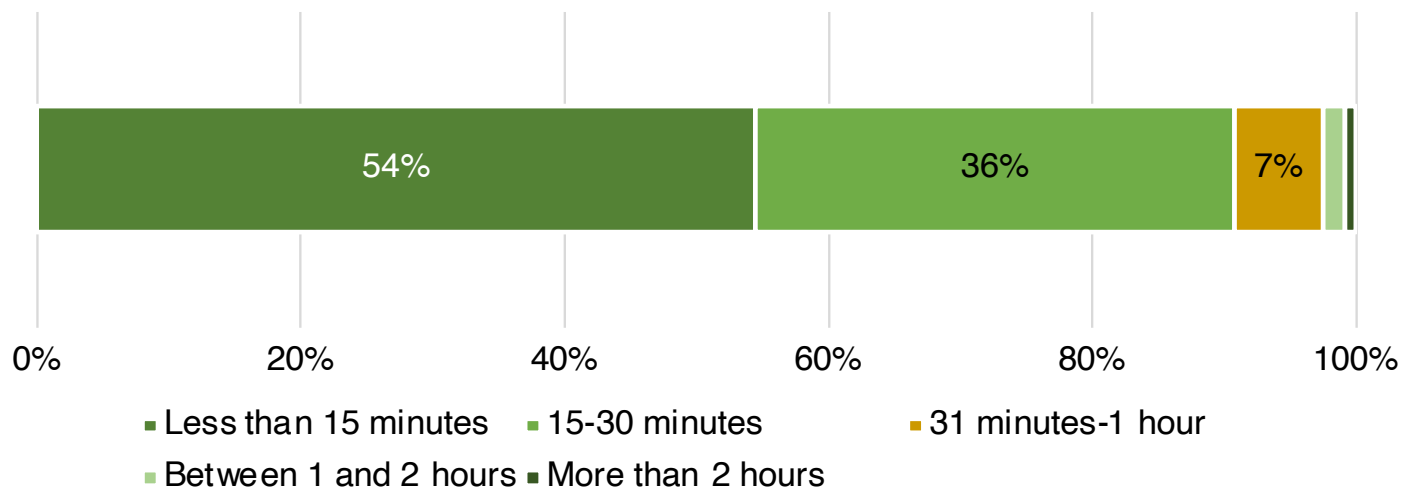
## Client experience

Have you ever felt judged because of your personal circumstances or other reasons?



- Nearly 90% of guests reported not feeling judged by staff or volunteers. This is likely biased upwards somewhat since the surveys took place on-site, however, the open-ended comments were also overwhelmingly positive.
- 7% of all guests reported feeling judged by staff or volunteers.
- 5% did not know or preferred not to answer this question.

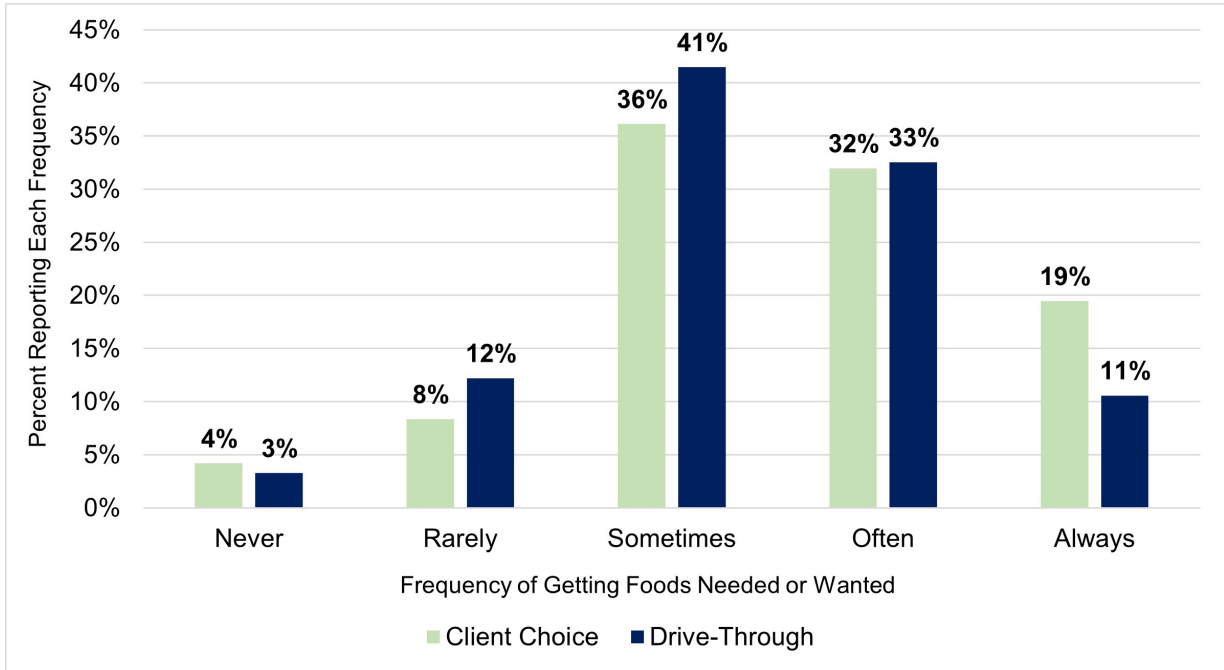
## How Long Does it Take to Get to the Food Pantry?



- Over half of all guests could get to a food pantry within 15 minutes.
- 90% of guests reported being able to get to a food pantry within 30 minutes.
- Guests who reported it taking more than one hour had to walk and/or get rides with friends or family.



# Reported Frequency of Getting Foods Needed or Wanted by Distribution Type



Most guests report sometimes or often getting the types of foods they need or want, with roughly one-third of guests saying often, and over 36% of guests saying they sometimes get the foods they need or want.

Reported frequency of receiving desired foods varies by distribution model. Guests from client choice food pantries are nearly twice as likely to get foods that they always need or want compared to drive-through pantries. Of the respondents saying they rarely or never get the types of foods they need or want, A total of 15% of guests from drive-throughs say they rarely or never receive the foods they want compared to 12% from client choice pantries.

“ I like being able to choose items so we get only what we can eat and use”

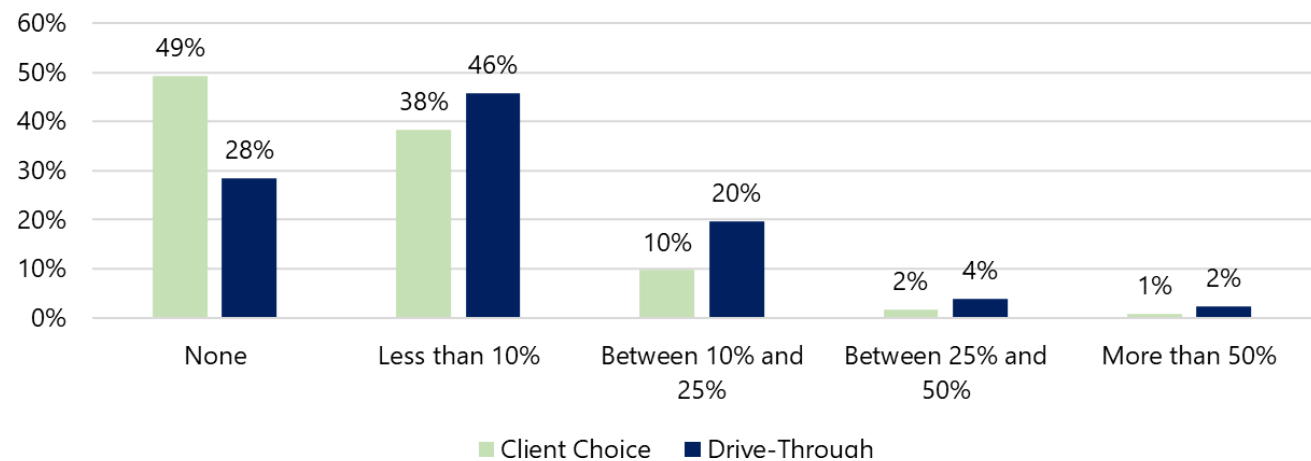
(Project Share Client Choice Survey Respondent)

Client Preferred Food Distribution Type	First Choice	Vote Percentage
Client Choice Locations	Client Choice	85.7%
Drive-through Locations	Drive-Through Pre-Pack	54.2%

Guests were asked for their preferred food distribution model. The table shows the top choice among responses per distribution type and the percentage at which guests selected it.

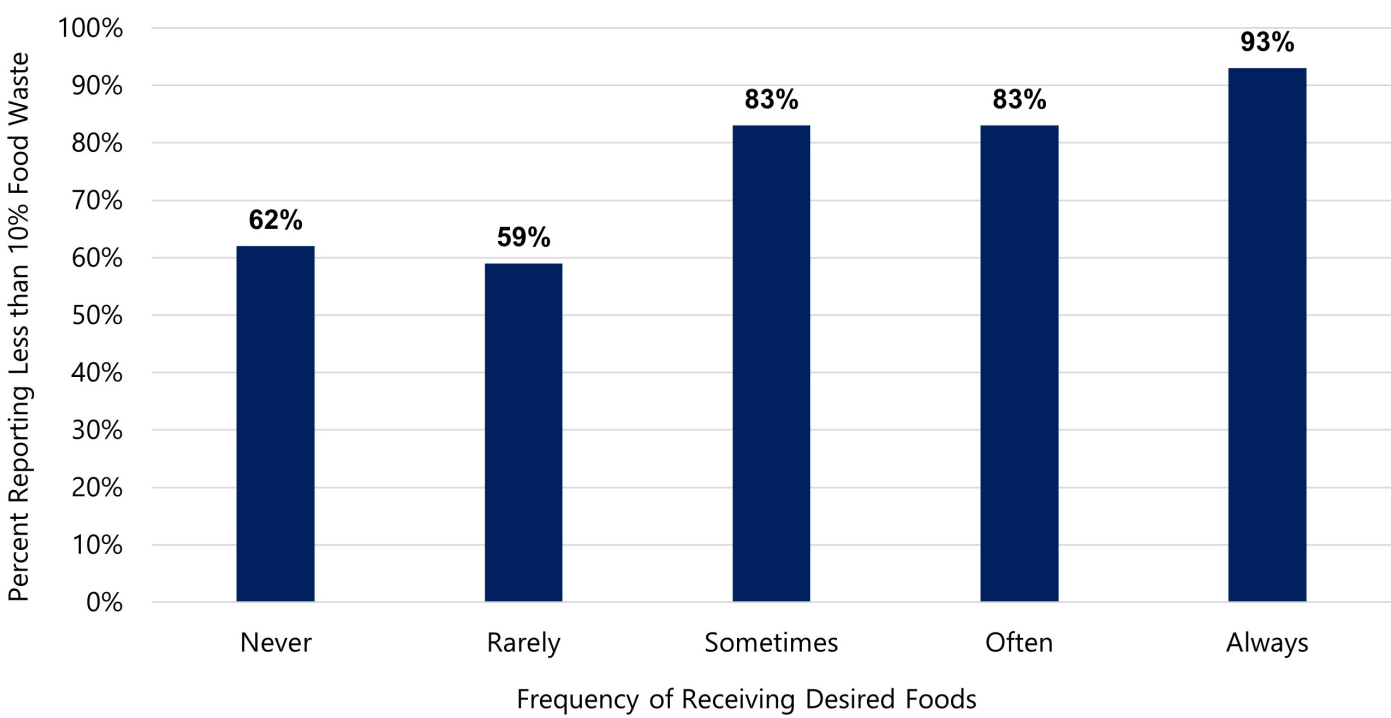
- Selected first choices for distribution models align with each pantry’s food distribution model, but at much varying rates.
- Respondents from choice shopping style pantries responded in favor at consistently high rates (85.7%) compared to respondents at drive-through pantries who preferred their pantry styles by moderate margins (54.2%).
- It is important to note that at drive through locations, an additional 14% of clients preferred drive-throughs with some choice, so there is a preference for the convenience of drive-throughs.

# Reported Food Waste by Distribution Model



- Over 82% of all respondents reported having zero or less than 10% of food wasted (including 87% from client choice pantries and 74% from drive-throughs). Waste includes goods from food pantries that were spoiled, given away, or needed to be thrown away.
- Guests from client choice pantries overwhelmingly report no food waste at 49% of all respondents, compared to just 28% of drive-through guests.
- 26% of drive-through guests reported more than 10% of food waste compared to just 13% of client choice pantry guests.

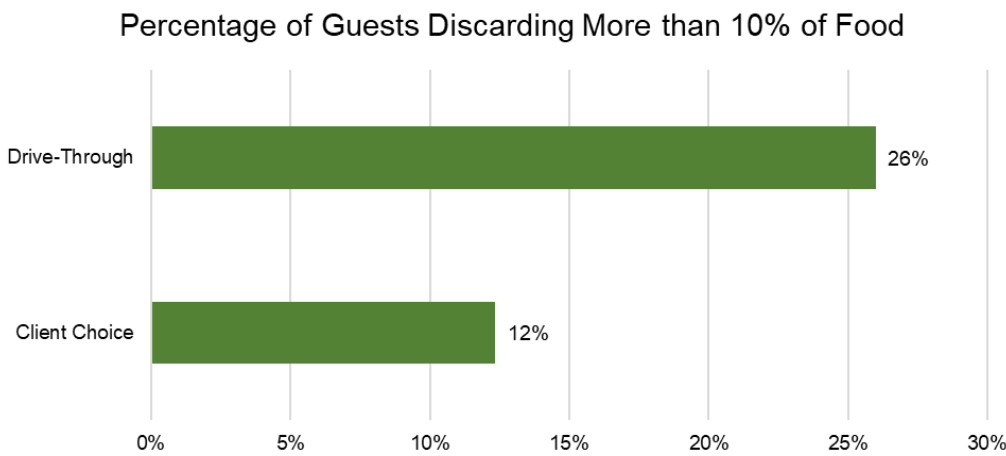
# Percent Reporting Less than 10% Food Waste by Frequency of Receiving Desired Foods



- Of the guests who always receive the food they need or want, 93% report having less than 10% food waste. This indicates the importance of providing food people want.
- Similarly, 83% of respondents who sometimes or often get the foods they need or want report having less than 10% food waste.
- Respondents rarely or never receiving the foods they need or want are just 59% and 62% likely to report having less than 10% food waste.

# Distribution Models and Food Waste

This section examines the generation of food waste within Cumberland County with a particular focus on food pantry distribution models and food waste generation. \$161.6 billion in food was wasted in 2010 by the United States (Buzby et al. 2014). Food waste accounts for as much as 22% of material placed in landfills.



**9.6 million pounds  
of commercial food  
waste produced in  
Cumberland County in  
2020**

(Cumberland County  
Recycling & Waste 2022:  
8-9)

Choice shopping proves to have less food waste compared with pre-pack drive-through distribution models. When guests are empowered with individual choice, they can make the most appropriate consumption choices that meet their dietary needs and wants. In turn, food can be consumed and not discarded.

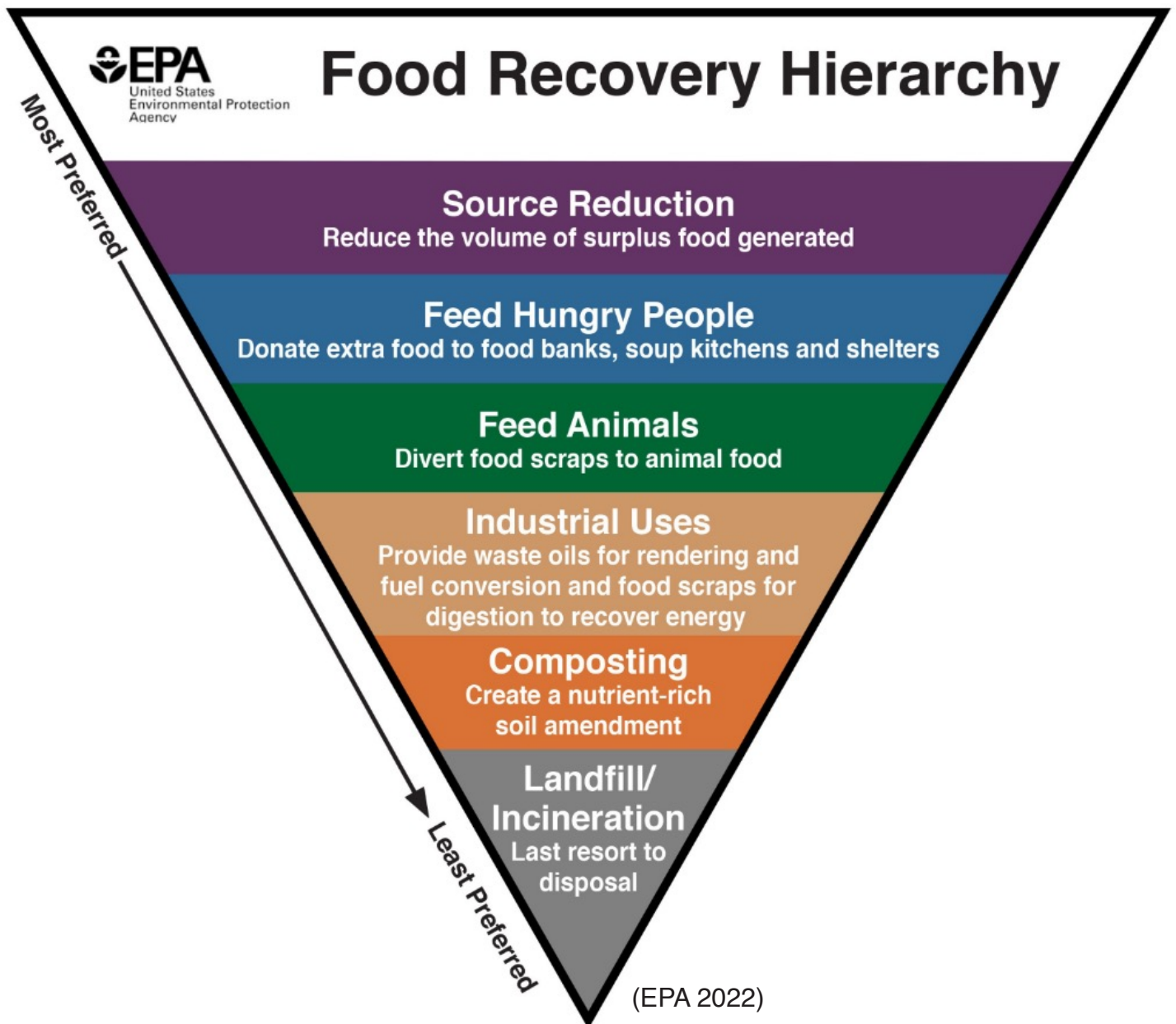
Many survey respondents commented on the quality of produce and bread. While these products are in high demand, they are also among the most difficult to source, store, and sort for quality. Due to these factors, guests have provided feedback advocating for further food quality vigilance as they occasionally receive expired or low quality produce and bread products.

- In the survey, respondents at the drive-through pantries predominantly preferred this model.
- The drive-through model represents a form of guest choice, with some opting for this model over an indoor model.
- Drive-throughs are potentially less stigmatizing and more anonymous for people who feel uncomfortable going into a food pantry.





# Food Waste Solutions



Food banks represent a potential alternative to landfills and a method of reducing hunger. Other forms of food waste recollection include composting plant-based scraps or donating waste to organizations with a food digester to produce oils or natural gases. “As more programs [to reduce food waste] develop, more food waste can be diverted which is likely to reduce trucking fees. Reduced costs will encourage greater participation” (Cumberland County 2022: 21).



# Expanding Access

“ Food pantries consist of individuals and groups who share the same general philosophy: helping people in need”

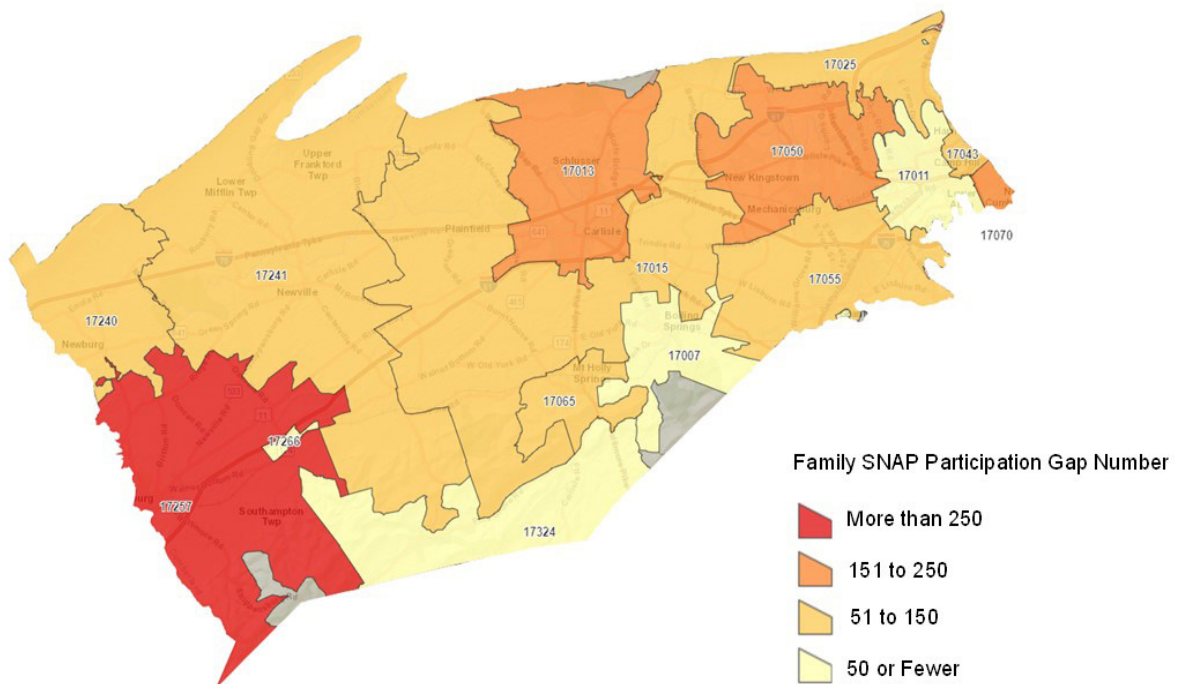
(Second Harvest 2021).

Food banks and pantries have become permanent fixtures because of the structural inequity that drives hunger. Food banks are often better trusted than government programs because of their community involvement. While their primary concern is to address the immediate needs and hunger of communities, food pantries have a unique opportunity to be a resource for information and access. It is vital that they serve as an entry point, gathering place, or gateway to other vital services and organizations in the community.

## SNAP Enrollment Outreach

Despite large populations of guests being SNAP eligible, enrollment rates among guests at food pantries are low, at 49% of all surveyed guests in Cumberland County. When conducting surveys, multiple guests were not only unenrolled, but were unaware SNAP even existed and that it could be a resource for them.

### Cumberland County SNAP Participation Gap Analysis



The CPFEB conducted a ZIP Code-level analysis of SNAP participation utilizing ACS and Pennsylvania Department of Human Services data (CPFEB, 2020-updated 2022).

The ZIP Codes with the highest SNAP participation gaps include 17257 in Shippensburg, 17013 in Carlisle, 17050 in Mechanicsburg, and 17070 in New Cumberland. These four ZIP Codes make up 84% of the total family SNAP participation gap in Cumberland County and have just 44% of the population. Importantly, the CPFEB analysis utilized family data, so the estimates are not skewed by the presence of college students.

From the results of the client survey, every pantry had a SNAP participation rate of less than 60%, representing a major opportunity for pantries to conduct outreach and assist with people getting connected to SNAP resources at the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank and with the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services.





# Partnering with Other Organizations

What services a pantry can provide is highly dependent on scale, available resources, and community need. Not every pantry can have the same services or present them in the same way.

- “I look at food as a cash equivalent. I don’t have unlimited cash but in most cases I feel like I’ve got unlimited food supply” (Saunders 10/31/22).
- “If all you do is focus your economic resources, your material resources on plugging up budget gaps and you never put resources into developing solutions, I think you’re hurting people and creating a dependency situation instead of actually strengthening their ability to become self-sufficient” (Saunders 10/31/22).
- When these additional needs cannot be met in-house and resources for economic or educational help cannot be provided, it is vital that food pantries act as gateways and form partnerships with other organizations. For example, Project SHARE invites services, including Sadler Health, to set up resource tables at the food distributions. Shippensburg Produce and Outreach is housed in a building with a range of other service organizations and shares a network with the Shippensburg care shelter.



Our job is to make sure there’s enough capacity that when somebody’s ready to take that step, that there’s a seat available for them”

(Saunders 10/31)



# Charitable Food Organizations, Hunger, and Policy

- Hunger is symptomatic, it is not—in most cases, I don't think it's a primary issue" (Saunders 10/31), but rather food insecurity is created by systems of poverty.
- Policy can be a salve to these underlying systemic issues, but "who's making the agenda for this advocacy? Is it coming from a national council who is pushing it down and saying, 'Call your legislator and tell them to this way on this issue'? Or is it coming from the people who are experiencing food insecurity... are we giving people who are experiencing the problems of hunger and poverty a voice in their own recovery" (Saunders 10/31/22)?
- Whose interest is being kept in mind when writing legislature and "what does it cost to deliver food assistance benefits to a family versus what does it cost to help that family find education and job training and experience employment? Where are we putting our resources? It seems like we're putting our resources into cycles that perpetuate poverty rather than alleviate poverty" (Saunders 10/31/22).



// Yes, so... we evaluate their situation, what they need...where they're lacking,...as far as resources,...a lot of the times here, specifically in Shippensburg, we partner up with SPO [Shippensburg Produce & Outreach]. So... any individual that's coming in here, you know that's where I'm getting them sent to" (PA Stakeholder, 11/09/22).

"I would say that we have a very diverse group of individuals that come in and all of their needs, ... some of them come with one thing in mind, and then as you talk with them, ...more unravels from there" (PA Stakeholder, 11/09/22).

I have individuals that come to me and... they're homeless, but they didn't realize that they could qualify for food stamps" (PA Stakeholder, 11/09/22).

"The food bank is definitely a place where... you're going to hit the population that would be best served by those people... I think every food bank, on top of handing out food, should definitely be able to be a place to provide other resources" (11/10/22 Interview, Shani H. Shenk)





# CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

## Overview

The 2022 Cumberland County Food Assessment details enduring and new vulnerabilities in the region related to food access. While 8% of county residents are food insecure (20,020 people), there are significant disparities across race, age, and place (Gunderson et al. 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic presented major challenges, but also provided opportunities to restructure food systems to meet the needs of the community. The county continues to make progress working towards solutions beyond a box of food, but more work needs to be done to address structural inequalities, leverage state and federal resources, and reimagine food territories. This section summarizes key findings from the assessment and proposes opportunities for change.



## Expanding Food Retail Alternatives

**Many areas of Cumberland County do not have supermarkets within easily accessible distance.**

- This is exacerbated by the lack of public transportation options in the county and the number of households with no personal vehicle.
- There is a lower number of the more affordable grocery options such as Aldi or grocery outlets like BBs.

✓ **There needs to be more locations of affordable food retail options spread out across Cumberland County so that they are more accessible for people who lack consistent transportation.**

## Resources Beyond Food

The charitable food system in Cumberland County is robust, with many strong partners across the county. Survey feedback reflects largely positive interactions and experiences at food pantries.

- Food pantries across Cumberland County innovatively use mobile food pantries. They have a mix of drive-through and client choice options, and some programs are open to anyone, regardless of income.
- Several pantries also offer additional social and economic support, and job training support.
- **Most respondents had positive feedback on the charitable food distributions and locations.** A limited number of respondents noted negative interactions with volunteers.

✓ **Continue to train volunteers in organizational culture and the respectful treatment of guests.**

## Distribution Type and Food Waste

Client choice models proved to be more likely to meet client food needs and to generate less reported food waste than pre-packaged models

- 1 in 5 respondents reported always getting foods they want and need with client choice whereas 1 in 10 report this with drive-through
- People who went to client choice pantries were nearly twice as likely to report no food waste.

✓ **Client choice pantries continue to be a best practice, by allowing guests to choose the foods they prefer and generating less waste.**

## COVID-19 Flexibility

Food pantries drastically changed methods of food distribution to meet the changing needs in order to minimize COVID-19 exposure throughout the pandemic.

- Pre-packed food boxes distributed in a drive through model was a primary method for food distribution utilized by food pantries.
- Project SHARE adapted by switching to a drive-through model during COVID-19. Post-pandemic, they have implemented a client choice pantry, which is now open once per week rather than one week per month.

✓ **Offering multiple choices for people allows them to choose which type of distribution they prefer, whether that be a drive-through model, client choice, or a combination.**

“ I would say that our community is a very generous community and COVID-19 has definitely ramped up giving for individuals, for churches, [and] civic organizations.”

(11/10/22 Interview, Shani H. Shenk)



# Focus on Vulnerable Communities

**At food pantries across Cumberland County, 44% of respondents reported having very low food security (11 times the national average).**

- Children are 38% more likely to be food insecure than adults – the child food insecurity rate is 10.2%, compared to 7.4% for adults (Gunderson et al. 2022).
- Food insecurity rates are 4 to 5 times higher for Black and Hispanic individuals than white individuals in Cumberland County. Food insecurity vary by race and ethnicity: Black (26%), Hispanic (20%), and white populations (5%) (Gunderson et al. 2022).
- High food insecurity is concentrated in the densely populated eastern portion, particularly along the West Shore and around Shiremanstown. High food insecurity tracts are also present in the northern portions of Mechanicsburg and Carlisle, and in Shippensburg and Newville.

✓ **Programs could focus on reaching the needs of the most vulnerable food-insecure populations, including children.**

The USDA (2022) defines **very low food security** as “food insecure to the extent that eating patterns were disrupted (skipped meals) and food intake reduced because the household could not afford **enough food**.”

“ That we have such pervasive food insecurity is not because we don’t have enough food. We lack justice and equity within our food system, we lack the courage or patience to tackle the root causes of poverty, and we lack the political will to ensure living wages and a strong social safety net. We can do better”

(Martin 2021: 4).

## Reimagine Food Territories

**Access to charitable food varies across Cumberland County due to varying service models and service territory segmentation.**

- People have differing frequency of food pantry access based on their ZIP Codes (some can go to a full food pantry once per week, others once per month), while others have client choice or drive-through models exclusively.
- Certain parts of Cumberland County have limited access to charitable food, with one major ZIP Code having just one two-hour availability per month.
- Some areas have access to distributions without income requirements, while other areas only have access to income-restricted charitable food.
- 36% of surveyed respondents said it was at least “somewhat challenging” to access food. Since surveys were conducted on-site, this is a lower-bound estimate.
- TEFAP rules do not preclude large and overlapping service territories.

✓ **Food pantries could ease Service Territory requirements in the county. This would increase choice and allow people to access food more easily when they need it, regardless of where they live.**

**Service Territory** restrictions mean that Cumberland County is divided into several parts, with charitable food options restricted for individuals based on where they live.

# Leverage Federal and State Resources

**There are significant opportunities for Cumberland County and the charitable food system to better leverage SNAP and other federal resources.**

- Additional emergency benefits, funds, and waivers put in place from the COVID-19 pandemic will expire by 2023, lowering the benefits provided to a pre-pandemic level.
- Cumberland County ranks in the bottom half (40th overall) in the state in SNAP participation.
- Just over half of surveyed pantry respondents participated in SNAP.
- The ZIP Codes with the highest SNAP participation gaps include 17257 in Shippensburg, 17013 in Carlisle, 17050 in Mechanicsburg, and 17070 in New Cumberland.

✓ **There is an opportunity for the charitable food system in Cumberland County to conduct additional SNAP outreach.**

## Child Focused Programs

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, school districts were able to utilize multiple types of feeding programs and sponsorship for meals.
- As of September 30, 2022, waivers allowing for flexible school meal service models as a response to COVID-19 have ended. Therefore, in the 2022-2023 school year, school districts have returned to the traditional National School Lunch Program meal format, and lunches are no longer free to all students
- School breakfast and lunch participation, particularly at county high schools, are extremely low compared to state participation rates.

✓ **Schools should take advantage of Governor Wolf's Universal Free Breakfast Program in the 2022-23 school year.**

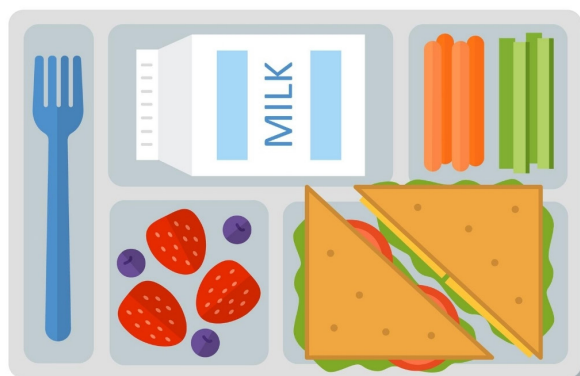
✓ **Schools should establish breakfast and after-the-bell alternative models to help mitigate child food insecurity.**

“ Thank you so much for helping us with good food and vegetables”

(Survey Respondent,  
New Hope Ministries West Shore)

“ This place is very helpful”

(Survey respondent, Project SHARE)



# Acknowledgments

Students in Dr. Heather Bedi's fall 2022 Environmental Research Methods and Civic Engagement course at Dickinson College conducted the surveys, interviews, and data analysis featured in this report. Dr. Bedi developed the community-based research Environmental Studies and Food Studies certificate course in response to discussions with food advocates regarding the need for an assessment of the current status of food access and poverty in the county.

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