National Report Prepared for Feeding America

January 2010

Chapter 2: Introduction
(Excerpted from Hunger in America 2010)
www.feedingamerica.org

Mathematica Reference No.: 06251-600
2. INTRODUCTION

Many individuals and families across the United States confront a diverse and extensive range of barriers in their procurement of adequate food such as financial constraints associated with income and job loss, the high cost of a nutritious diet, and limited access to large stores with more variety and lower prices.\(^1\) These challenges are reflected in recent government data which indicate that of all households in the United States, at least 14.6% (17.1 million households) were food insecure at some point during 2008.\(^2\) Moreover, 5.7% (6.7 million households) had, at some point during the year, very low food security characterized by disruptions in eating patterns and reductions in food intake of one or more household members, from inability to afford enough food. These disruptions are even more common in households with children under 18 (6.6% of such households, or 2.6 million, have very low food security). In acknowledging the extent of food insecurity, policymakers, in accordance with Healthy People 2010, have set the public health goal of reducing the rate of food insecurity to 6% by the year 2010.\(^3\) This task has proved difficult, as the number of food-insecure Americans remains stubbornly high. Indeed, the existence of so many people without secure access to adequate nutritious food represents a serious national concern.


While a sizable portion of low-income households and individuals adopt cost-saving practices, such as buying products when they are on sale and buying products in bulk, many find it necessary to rely on an extensive network of public and private emergency food providers to maintain an adequate food supply. In particular, throughout the United States, food pantries, emergency kitchens, and homeless shelters play a critical role in meeting the nutritional needs of America’s low-income population. By providing food for home preparation (pantries) and prepared food that can be eaten at the agencies (kitchens and shelters), these organizations help meet the needs of people and households that otherwise, in many instances, would lack sufficient food.

FA, formerly America’s Second Harvest, plays a critical role in helping these organizations accomplish their mission. A network comprising about 80% of all food banks in the United States, FA supports the emergency food system by obtaining food from various sources, such as major food companies, and by providing technical assistance and other services to the food banks and food rescue organizations. In addition to its role in directly negotiating food donations and in providing, through its affiliates, substantial amounts of food in bulk to emergency food providers, FA increases awareness of the problems and ramifications of food insecurity and hunger and developing public and private initiatives to respond to it.

Over the years, FA has periodically studied the workings of its network and the characteristics of the clients the network serves, both to assess the severity of the nutrition-related problems of the poor in America and to identify ways of making its operations more effective. This report, which presents the results of the fifth comprehensive study sponsored by FA, provides detailed information about the programs and agencies that operate under FA network members and the clients the programs serve, and it provides an important basis for
developing public and private responses to food insecurity and hunger at both the national and the local levels.

This chapter provides important background for the findings. Subsequent sections are as follows:

- A highlight of the objectives of the study
- An overview of the FA network
- An identification of the groups of organizations involved in conducting the study
- A description of the layout of the report

### 2.1 Objectives

The Hunger in America 2010 study comprises a national survey of FA emergency food providers and their clients. The study had the following primary objectives:

- To provide annual and weekly estimates at the national and local levels of the number of distinct, unduplicated clients who use the FA network and to provide a comprehensive description of the nature of hunger and food insecurity among them.
- To describe the national demographic characteristics, income levels, SNAP benefit utilization, food security status, and service needs of persons and households served by the FA network, and to examine the ability of local agencies to meet the food security needs of their clients.
- To present national and local profiles of the characteristics of the agencies and programs that constitute the FA network in describing the charitable response to hunger throughout the nation.
- To compare national data between the 2006 and 2010 FA research studies to identify trends in emergency food assistance demands, federal food assistance program use, and the compositions of the network’s agencies and the clients they serve.

The Hunger in America 2010 study was designed to provide a comprehensive profile of the extent and nature of hunger and food insecurity as experienced by people who access FA’s
national network of charitable feeding agencies. Information was collected on clients’ sociodemographic characteristics, including income and employment, benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (formerly the Food Stamp Program) and other federal or private programs, frequency of visits to emergency feeding sites, and satisfaction with local access to emergency food assistance. Information obtained from provider agencies included size of programs, services provided, sources of food, and adequacy of food supplies.

2.2 OVERVIEW OF THE FEEDING AMERICA NETWORK

The FA network’s 205 certified members are regularly monitored by FA staff and food industry professionals to ensure compliance with acceptable food handling, storage, and distribution standards and practices. FA network members distribute food and grocery products to charitable organizations in their specified service areas, as shown in Chart 2.2.1.

Within this system, a number of different types of charitable organizations and programs provide food, directly or indirectly, to needy clients. However, there is no uniform use of terms identifying the essential nature of the organizations. Hunger relief organizations are usually grassroots responses to local needs. As such, they frequently differ throughout the country and use different terminology. For clarity, and for consistency with the terminology used in the 2006 study, the terms used in this report are defined as follows:

**Food Bank.** A food bank is a charitable organization that solicits, receives, inventories, stores, and distributes donated food and grocery products to charitable agencies that directly serve needy clients. These agencies include churches and qualifying nonprofit [Internal Revenue Code 501(c) (3)] charitable organizations.

**Partner Distribution Organization (PDO).** PDOs, smaller food banks or larger agencies allied with affiliated food banks, are private, nonprofit, charitable organizations
providing important community services. Although some are agencies, all PDOs distribute part of their food to other charities for direct distribution to clients.

**Food Rescue Organization (FRO).** FROs are nonprofit organizations that obtain mainly prepared and perishable food products from groceries, farmers, warehouses and distributors, as well as from food service organizations, such as restaurants, hospitals, caterers, and cafeterias, and distribute to agencies that serve clients.

**Agencies and Food Programs.** FA network members distribute food to qualifying charitable agencies, most of which provide food directly to needy clients through programs. Some agencies operate single-type and single-site food programs, while others operate at multiple sites and sometimes operate several types of food programs.

For this research, there are two general categories of food programs that FA network members serve: emergency and nonemergency.
CHART 2.2.1
SOURCES OF FOOD AND CHANNELS OF FOOD DISTRIBUTION FOR FOOD BANKS

- **Feeding America**
  - National Donors & National Food Drives

- **205 Network Members**
  - Food Banks and Food Rescue Organizations

- **National Food Sources**
  - National Donors
  - Purchased Food Programs
  - Produce Programs
  - Food Salvage & Reclamation
  - Prepared Food Programs
  - Local Food Drives
  - Local Farmers
  - Local Retailers, Grocers, & Manufacturers
  - USDA Commodities

- **Partner Distribution Organizations (PDOs)**

- **Emergency Food Programs**
  - (Primary Purpose to Provide Food to People in a Hunger Crisis)
    - Emergency Pantries
    - Emergency Kitchens
    - Emergency Shelters

- **Non-Emergency Food Programs**
  - (Primary Purpose Other than to Provide Food in a Hunger Crisis)
    - Youth Programs
    - Drug & Alcohol Rehab Programs
    - Senior Programs
    - Other Programs

---

*a* Non-Emergency food programs were not sampled for client data collection.
Emergency food programs include food pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters. Their clients typically need short-term or emergency assistance.

- **Emergency Food Pantries** distribute nonprepared foods and other grocery products to needy clients, who then prepare and use these items where they live. Some food pantries also distribute fresh and frozen food and nutritious prepared food. Food is distributed on a short-term or emergency basis until clients are able to meet their own needs. An agency that picks up boxed food from the food bank to distribute to its clients was included as a food pantry. The study excluded from this category any agency that does not directly distribute food to clients or distributes bulk food only on a basis other than emergency need (such as U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA] commodities to all people over age 60). On the other hand, a food bank distributing food directly to clients, including clients referred from another agency, qualified as a food pantry.

- **Emergency Soup Kitchens** provide prepared meals served at the kitchen to needy clients who do not reside on the premises. In some instances, kitchens also provide lighter meals or snacks, such as fresh fruit, vegetables, yogurt and other dairy products, and prepared food such as sandwiches, for clients to take with them when the kitchen is closed. This category includes “Kids Cafe” providers.

- **Emergency Shelters** provide shelter and serve one or more meals a day on a short-term basis to low-income clients in need. Providing shelter may be the primary or secondary purpose of the service. Examples include homeless shelters, shelters with substance abuse programs, and transitional shelters such as those for battered women. The study did not categorize as shelters residential programs that provide services to the same clients for an extended time period. Other excluded programs are mental health/retardation group homes and juvenile probation group homes.

Nonemergency organizations refer to any programs that have a primary purpose other than emergency food distribution but also distribute food. Examples include day care programs, senior congregate-feeding programs, and summer camps.
2.3 GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY

The study was conceived and coordinated by the national offices of FA. Data were collected by 185 FA network members or consortia around the country.\(^4\) FA’s research contractor, Mathematica Policy Research provided technical advice throughout the study and implemented the sampling and data analysis activities.

As part of the study review process, oversight and advice were provided by a Technical Advisory Group convened by FA. This group consisted of:

- John Cook, Associate Professor at Boston Medical Center Department of Pediatrics (Chair)
- Beth Osborne Daponte of the United Nations Development Programme’s Human Development Report Office (on leave from Yale University)
- Jim Ohls, independent consultant for Feeding America
- Rob Santos, Senior Institute Methodologist at the Urban Institute

As part of the study review process, an additional team of reviewers participated in the review of the national draft report:

- Steve Carlson, Office of Research and Analysis Food and Nutrition Service at the USDA
- Stacy Dean, Director, Food Assistance Policy Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
- Craig Gundersen, Associate Professor at the Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics at the University of Illinois
- Walter Lamia, doctoral candidate at the Colorado State University School of Education

Also, the Member’s Advisory Committee (MAC), consisting of selected members of the FA national network, provided valuable input during the research process:

- Marian Guinn, CEO of God’s Pantry Food Bank (Committee Chair)

\(^4\) About 10 percent of food banks in the FA network did not participate in the study.
· Jeff Dronkers, Chief Programs & Policy Officer of the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank
· Karen Joyner, Chief Financial Officer of the Food Bank of Southeastern Virginia
· Lori Kapu, Chief Programs Officer of Care and Share Food Bank
· Erin Rockhill, Director of Agency Relations & Program Development of the Second Harvest Food Bank of East Central Indiana
· Carol Tienken, Chief Operating Officer of the Greater Boston Food Bank
· Kristen Yandora, Controller of Forgotten Harvest
· JC Dwyer, State Policy Coordinator of the Texas Food Bank Network

2.4 OVERVIEW OF THE REST OF REPORT

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the methodologies used in the study and shows the proportion of agencies that participated among all eligible agencies in the FA National Network. Chapter 4 estimates the numbers of clients served by the FA National Network. Chapters 5 through 9 present detailed findings from the client survey, including information about characteristics of FA clients, their levels of need, and their experiences with the program. Chapters 10 through 14 present findings from the agency survey, including data on characteristics and program operations of FA agencies. Chapter 15 focuses on changes in diverse sets of outcomes and characteristics of both clients and agencies between 2005 and 2009 due to the high degree of comparability in survey methodologies relative to prior Hunger in America studies.