



FOOD SUPPORTS

Conversations with Neighbors

In 2021, research was conducted to understand who received food and support from our region's network of hunger-relief organizations.

Farmers, food producers, and grocery stores provide food in large quantities to Second Harvest Heartland, the Midwest's largest food bank. We then store the food and distribute it to nearly 1,000 food shelves and meal program partners throughout a 59-county service area in Minnesota and western Wisconsin. Once a partner receives food from us, they distribute it directly to neighbors in their communities. **This collaboration is referred to as the hunger-relief network. Read on for how the network supported neighbors in 2021.**



In 2021, the region's hunger-relief network supported more than 813,000 people.

That's 1 in 6 of our neighbors.



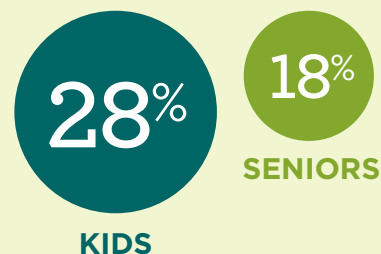
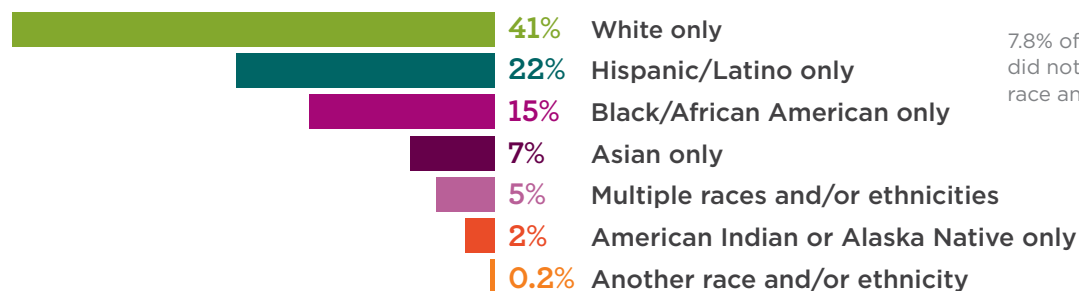
**DIVE DEEPER INTO OUR
RESEARCH FINDINGS...**

The need for food support exists in every part of our service area, in every community, across all demographics.

By region, 44% of individuals visiting food shelves lived in the suburbs, 34% in Minneapolis or St. Paul, 12% in micropolitans—like St. Cloud or Mankato—and 10% lived in rural communities.

Household sized varied from 1 to 12 people. Most people rented (46%) but many owned their homes (38%). Almost two thirds of people had at least four people in their households (61%). Five-person households were most common (19%).

By race and ethnicity, individuals identified as:



By age, 28% were kids 18 and younger and 18% were seniors over 60.

The need for food support is both new, brought on by the pandemic and economic disruptions, and persistent, a resource regularly used to help make ends meet.



of individuals were new to seeking food support since the COVID-19 pandemic.

A greater proportion of new visitors came from outside Minneapolis and St. Paul. People shared that the cost-of-living compelled them to seek food help, to offset increasing housing, food and insurance costs.

51% of individuals supported last year had received food help before the COVID-19 pandemic. Many described their use of food supports as simply a way of life.



“With the prices and everything going up like gas. I can’t believe our utility bills right now. And it’s COVID and everybody’s behind the 8-ball trying to catch up.”



For many households, their incomes simply weren’t enough to cover the grocery bills.

63%

of people lived in households where someone worked for pay, including half with full-time workers. But more than half (53%) earned a **household income less than \$35K per year.**

20% of people had a social security or pension, and 19% had income from Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

53%



of individuals were currently benefiting from at least one federal nutrition program,

like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance

Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), but still needed to supplement that support with grocery and meal help.



“Right now, I’m on disability and have been out. It helps to supplement. Especially on Fridays when they have extra produce. Being able to help just supplement with groceries. And being on a limited income. **It’s that increase in groceries. Everything has been enormous. Especially with the seniors, which is me, it’s that little bit you can’t get help with. It offsets food.**”



The hunger-relief network is working. And neighbors are feeling that support.

“We always make it month-to-month. If we were not to have this extra help, it’d be a lot more difficult paying for the food. It’s nice to have a wide variety of food (i.e., veggies, meat, fruit, dairy, bread).”

“The staff there is very, very helpful and they are encouraging, you know, they talk to you nicely, they don’t treat you like as if you were a beggar so that makes a difference...they treat people as if they are all human, not like beggars.”

“I’ll forego something, whether it’s not eating, to pay the bill. Those things will come first because usually I can get help. There’s not usually a time when you have absolutely zero in the house. And when that happens, the food shelf is there Monday, Wednesday and Friday.”

“I had that stigma in me really holding me back, but what happened is when I started going there, the way they treated me, it was just like I was going to the grocery store...that breaks the barrier to be honest.”

As supportive and essential as the current hunger-relief network is, too many households still face barriers to food and nutrition security.



32%

Nearly a third of individuals who reached out for support last year **reported needing more free meals or groceries than they received.**



27%

More than a quarter of individuals did not drive themselves to the location where they sought assistance, **in many cases they walked or relied on public transportation or family or friends for a ride.**



24%

Accessing ingredients that meet dietary, health and religious needs was the most common meal-making challenge faced.



18%

Physical or situational (crises and trauma, kitchen access) circumstances made meal preparation a challenge for many.

This research shows that hunger is growing and so too must our hunger-fighting response.

1 in 6 of our neighbors turned to the hunger-relief network in 2021. We need to come together to ensure food shelves and food banks are supported as they work to respond to these hungry times.

We know that we can't end hunger through food distributions alone. We need our local, state and federal governments to play their part in preventing the need for food support in the first place.

We each need to play our part:



Reach out to the network if you could use help keeping your fridge full.



Donate your money or your time if you're able, to your local food shelf or to our food bank.



Contact your elected officials and ask what they are doing to combat food insecurity.

The complete Food Supports report can be found at
2harvest.org/clientreport

This research project was conducted by ACET, Inc., for Second Harvest Heartland. Data was collected from October 2021 through February 2022. The report was compiled in March 2022 and revised in May 2022.

METHODOLOGY

For this project, we relied on three sources of information:

1. A 15-question survey that we administered verbally and in-person to people receiving support at randomly selected food shelves and hunger-relief program partners within the network;
2. 30-minute one-on-one conversations with 20 people who received support to gather in-depth qualitative data; and

3. Counts of people supported by food shelves and hunger-relief program partners within the network (reported regularly by program partners to Second Harvest Heartland).

We conducted 889 in-person surveys across 55 sites between October 28 and December 14, 2021. Surveys were available in English, Spanish, Somali, and Hmong. Survey findings in this report are based on the counts of people supported (counts provided by food shelves and hunger-relief program partners within the network) and survey responses. All survey data is weighted to produce unbiased estimates.