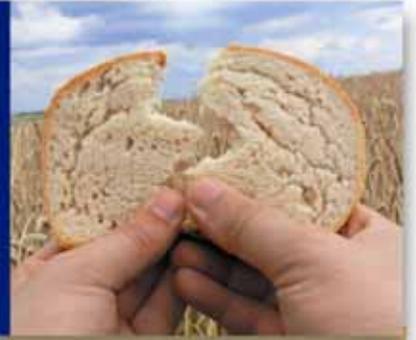


# Ending Hunger In Wisconsin



2008

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## Acknowledgements

*Ending Hunger in Wisconsin* was produced by the **Wisconsin Food Security Consortium**, with input from a broad array of stakeholders involved with food security initiatives around the state.

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## About the Wisconsin Food Security Consortium

In 2005, representatives from the University of Wisconsin- Extension Family Living Programs and the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services reconvened the **Wisconsin Food Security Consortium** in order to provide a coordinated statewide effort to address hunger. According to the mission:

*The Wisconsin Food Security Consortium, representing diverse sectors in the fight against hunger, is dedicated to the elimination of food insecurity in Wisconsin. The Consortium will serve as a networking forum to develop and promote effective solutions through education, collaboration, new partnerships and public policy that measurably reduce hunger.*

Consortium members work in food pantries and food banks; statewide agencies such as the Wisconsin Community Action Program Association; statewide food and nutrition programs such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and the FoodShare Program; nutrition education programs; the University of Wisconsin and UW-Extension; hunger education and awareness task forces; faith-based groups; and other organizations from around the state that are working to reduce hunger.

With guidance from its steering committee, the Consortium meets quarterly for an opportunity to:

- ❖ Learn about issues related to food security,
- ❖ Network with others across the state, and
- ❖ Collaborate on effective responses to hunger in Wisconsin.

In October of 2007, the Consortium hosted a statewide Hunger Summit in Stevens Point where Consortium members and others working against hunger were able to gather and share ideas about how to best meet Wisconsin's needs. Some of these conversations are reflected in this action plan. *Ending Hunger in Wisconsin* will be distributed and used to create further discussion and action aimed at reducing hunger, as well as to generate feedback at a series of Regional Hunger Forums to be held at several locations across the state in 2008.

For more information, visit: [www.EndHungerWI.org](http://www.EndHungerWI.org)

# Hunger & Food Insecurity in Wisconsin

## Overview

Poverty, food insecurity and hunger are major problems for hundreds of thousands of Wisconsin residents. Statewide, over half a million people live in households that are food insecure. This represents 8.9% of the households in our state, or almost 1 in every 10 households. Indications are that food insecurity is increasing in Wisconsin.

The children and adults in our communities who lack the assurance of sufficient food lack the most basic of all human needs. Recent rapid increases in the cost of food mean that low-income families are struggling even harder to keep food on the table. That hunger and food insecurity exist in the midst of prosperity and wealth presents a profound moral, political and social challenge for our state and our nation.

### What is food security?

*Food security* is the assured access to sufficient food for a healthy and active life for all household members at all times. Conversely, *food insecurity* is the lack of assured access to sufficient food for a healthy and active life. When households are food insecure, they worry about food running out without having money to buy more. Often, they cut back on the size of meals or skip meals due to lack of money.

### Why is food insecurity a problem?

Researchers have linked food insecurity to a variety of negative outcomes. Children in food-insecure households experience disrupted eating habits that may range from mild to severe, and both children and adults in food insecure households have greater risk of nutritional deficits. Beyond direct impacts on eating patterns and nutrition, food insecurity contributes to health problems including depression, adult obesity and worse overall health status. In children, food insecurity has been linked to negative behavioral and school-related outcomes.

### How common is food insecurity in Wisconsin?

During 2004-2006, 8.9% of households in Wisconsin were food insecure. Although Wisconsin fares better than the nation as a whole— the national food insecurity rate is 11.3%— Wisconsin's performance compared to other states has been declining. In fact, Wisconsin is one of only a few states in which food insecurity showed a significant increase in recent years.

Not surprisingly, food insecurity is strongly linked to poverty and low income. During 1996-2000, 31.3% of poor Wisconsin households were food insecure, compared to 15.3% of near-poor households and 4.6% of households above approximately twice the poverty line. There are also strong racial differences: African-Americans in Wisconsin have more than four times the risk of food insecurity as whites— 30% compared to 6.7%. Household composition is also important: food insecurity is twice as common among households with children (12%) as among childless households (6%); among households with children, single-mother households have a much higher risk (33%) than married couples (7%).

In 2007, over half of Wisconsin households that participated in the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) were food insecure.

### **Four legs of a table: A model for food security**

Food security— that is, ensuring all resident have enough food to put on the table— requires four primary components or legs:

1. A strong economic context that supports family economic security.
2. A strong retail food infrastructure that provides access to affordable and nutritious foods.
3. A strong federal food and nutrition safety net that ensures access to food assistance through publicly funded programs.
4. A strong emergency and charitable food safety net that ensures access to food assistance through community-based and nonprofit organizations.

Each of these legs plays an essential role in ensuring that all households in a community, regardless of their economic and personal circumstances, have sufficient food for an active, healthy life.

Although many who are involved in food security focus their efforts in only one or two areas, a comprehensive effort to strengthen food security in Wisconsin requires attention to each of the four legs.

#### **The first leg: Family economic security**

Food security is fundamentally linked to family economic security. We know from research that the risk of food insecurity is significantly lower when...

- ❖ Households have higher income.
- ❖ Local unemployment rates are lower and prevailing wages are higher.
- ❖ Median rent and the state tax burden on low-income households is lower.
- ❖ Households have access to public and/or private transportation.

#### **The second leg: Access to affordable & healthy food**

To ensure food security, families need dependable access to retail food outlets and other regular sources of healthy and affordable food. Families also need skills to purchase and prepare healthful foods. We know from research that...

- ❖ Prices are lower while food quality and variety are better in supermarkets and large grocery stores, compared to other food outlets such as small groceries and convenience stores.
- ❖ Availability of supermarkets varies greatly around the state.
- ❖ Living close to a supermarket or grocery store reduces the risk of food insecurity, and low-income areas tend to have fewer and lower quality retail food options.
- ❖ Nutrition education can improve food choices.

#### **The third leg: Federal nutrition programs**

Federal nutrition programs provide critical food resources to economically vulnerable families, and are an important line of defense against food insecurity. We know from research that...

- ❖ Households in states with higher food stamp use among eligible households have a lower risk of food insecurity. In 2005, an estimated 59% of eligible people received food stamps (FoodShare) in Wisconsin– compared to 65% nationally.
- ❖ Households in states with higher availability of and participation in summer food programs have lower risk of food insecurity. About half of Wisconsin counties did not have any summer food sites in 2007.
- ❖ Wisconsin ranks 46<sup>th</sup> nationwide in school breakfast program participation.

### **The fourth leg: Emergency food assistance**

Charitable, private sector food assistance programs provide a vital safety net for families faced with food insecurity and hunger. We know from research that...

- ❖ Food pantries serve as both an ‘emergency’ and an ongoing food source. A Wisconsin survey found that more than 60% of food pantry clients report 4 or more visits per year, and 27% report 10 or more visits per year.
- ❖ A survey of elementary school families in Wisconsin found that food insecure households are as likely to report food pantry use as food stamp receipt (approximately 35%).

### **How to use this action plan**

*Ending Hunger in Wisconsin* offers an extensive list of ideas to help eliminate food insecurity and hunger in Wisconsin– to ensure that all households are able to put food on the table. The plan lays out *goals* which are grounded in research on food security and aimed at strengthening one of the four table legs. Numbered beneath each goal, the plan suggests one or more broad *strategies* to achieve that goal. Finally, the plan lists specific *actions* that could be taken as a part of each strategy in order to achieve each goal.

The actions are not intended to be an all-inclusive list, but rather a place to begin. The actions all emerged from discussions with experts in various aspects of food security, and from a broad array of stakeholders who are involved with food security initiatives around the state. Some actions may show up in more than one place, as they may work towards strengthening more than one of the legs.

Groups may differ in their priorities or in their capacity to take different steps. Some actions are intended for organizations, some for communities, some for state policymakers, some for businesses, some for the faith community, and some for advocates and other citizens. The hope is that groups will use this action plan as a starting point for discussion and planning, or to build descriptive language around an action for community projects, grant proposals, local hunger prevention initiatives and more. Additionally, this document is meant as an educational tool and a way of introducing the components of hunger in Wisconsin to a variety of audiences.

*Ending Hunger in Wisconsin* is a ‘living document’– new actions can be added as needs and ideas arise.

## First Leg - Family Economic Security

Food security is fundamentally rooted in family economic security. When families struggle to make ends meet, acquiring sufficient food through conventional means can be difficult or impossible. A number of trends have emerged that put increasing strains on economic security, and therefore food security, in Wisconsin. Low-wage jobs, limited educational opportunities, the high cost of childcare, and the rising costs of housing, energy and healthcare all create substantial challenges for families struggling to make ends meet. A range of assistance programs— from tax credits to subsidized childcare to public health insurance to energy assistance— can help fill the gap. Unfortunately, funding constraints, lack of awareness, and logistical barriers often limit participation.

Research shows that low-income and high costs are both important predictors of food insecurity. Because of this, effective efforts to promote food security must include efforts to reduce poverty, increase family economic resources, and ensure that the cost of living does not limit other opportunities.

Specific goals to increase family economic security include increasing access to education and training, improving job opportunities, making housing and energy more affordable, and ensuring that people utilize available forms of economic assistance to help meet basic needs.

### **Goal: Increase access to education and training**

*Limited educational attainment increases the risk of food insecurity and hunger, by reducing people's ability to earn self-sufficiency wages. Improving access to education and training is an important way to increase economic security and thereby reduce the risk of food insecurity.*

#### **1. Improve the availability of education and training programs**

- a. Increase funding for institutes of higher education, including technical schools and two-year institutions.
- b. Improve the educational opportunities and resources available in prisons and jails.
- c. Increase availability of computer literacy training for people with low-income.
- d. Increase availability of online classes in higher education and general equivalency programs to reduce transportation and time barriers.
- e. Increase funding for continuing education and other programs that support nontraditional students.
- f. Improve adult basic education to help adults without education credentials to upgrade their skills and get better jobs.

#### **2. Remove barriers to participating in education and training for low-income workers**

- a. Create greater education and training opportunities as part of W2.
- b. Provide more funding for childcare and transportation expenses for low-income workers involved in education and training programs.
- c. Increase availability of financial aid for higher education.
- d. Allow part-time students to access financial aid for technical colleges.
- e. Implement policies to guarantee qualified students the opportunity to attend college.

## **Goal: Improve job opportunities**

*Quality jobs play an important role in ensuring food security. Food insecurity is less common in households with a worker than in households without a worker, and the risk of food insecurity is lower in states with higher prevailing wages compared to other states. By improving the quality of work available to Wisconsin residents, food insecurity should be reduced.*

### **3. Increase availability and accessibility of good jobs in the community**

- a. Support community development initiatives that bring jobs into struggling areas.
- b. Expand public transportation, ride-sharing, and other options for transportation to and from work.

### **4. Increase adequacy of wages and benefits**

- a. Raise the state minimum wage and index it to inflation.
- b. Pass local 'living wage' ordinances.
- c. Promote career ladders so that workers have opportunities to advance.
- d. Encourage and/or require employers to offer paid sick leave.
- e. Encourage and/or create incentives for employers to invest in their employees' education and training.

## **Goal: Improve access to affordable and appropriate childcare for working parents**

*As working parents struggle to make ends meet, childcare can become a major concern and an expensive addition to already tight budgets. Access to affordable and appropriate childcare is essential for working parents.*

### **5. Increase the availability of high quality, convenient childcare options for working parents**

- a. Encourage employers to offer onsite childcare to employees where feasible.
- b. Promote childcare cooperatives and other nontraditional childcare options.
- c. Explore strategies to increase childcare options in underserved areas.

### **6. Ensure that quality childcare is affordable for working parents**

- a. Ensure adequate continued funding for Wisconsin Shares.
- b. Develop outreach strategies to promote awareness of Wisconsin Shares for working parents.

## **Goal: Make housing and energy more affordable for families**

*Housing and energy costs account, on average, for the two largest family expenditures on a month-to-month basis. These expenses put considerable pressure on family budgets and they are major factors contributing to food insecurity. Research confirms that the greater the cost of housing in a community, the greater the risk of food insecurity.*

### **7. Increase the availability of affordable housing**

- a. Create a statewide housing trust fund, which would provide resources from a dedicated revenue source to create more affordable housing.

- b. Make it easier for local communities to implement local strategies and raise funds to expand affordable housing.

**8. Increase assistance available to families to pay for housing**

- a. Seek additional resources for subsidized housing to reduce waiting lists.
- b. Create a statewide housing trust fund, which would provide resources from a dedicated revenue source to provide rental vouchers, down payment assistance, and other financial support directly to low-income households.

**9. Reduce energy costs for families**

- a. Provide weatherization materials and assistance to individuals with poorly insulated homes.
- b. Offer energy audits to help families determine how to best improve the energy efficiency of their homes.
- c. Ensure adequate funding of state energy assistance programs.
- d. Apply research and demonstration projects on new, 'green' technologies to low-income housing, to seek increased energy efficiency at decreased cost.

**Goal: Ensure people take full advantage of available forms of non-food assistance**

*A variety of assistance programs and tax credits are available to help individuals and families make ends meet. However, awareness of and participation in available programs is low. When people receive available support in a variety of areas, it frees up critical resources that can be used to meet food-related needs. One way to simplify this process is to use the ACCESS website, an online resource that allows individuals quickly and easily to test their eligibility for benefits, apply for benefits, check on their benefit status and report changes for FoodShare, BadgerCare Plus and several other benefit programs.*

**10. Ensure that low and moderate income households receive available tax credits**

- a. Expand network of free tax assistance sites and encourage individuals and families to use them.
- b. Develop outreach strategies to increase awareness of tax credits such as the Earned Income Tax Credit and Homestead Credit.

**11. Ensure that the ACCESS website ([access.wisconsin.gov](http://access.wisconsin.gov)) seamlessly connects individuals and families to available benefits**

- a. Improve capacity of the ACCESS website to support online application for as many programs as possible.
- b. Provide computers and assistance to local organizations to help families utilize the ACCESS website.

**12. Increase participation of low and moderate income individuals and families in available public health insurance programs**

- a. Strengthen outreach to ensure families are aware of BadgerCare Plus and other programs.

## Second Leg - Access to Affordable & Healthy Food

In order to meet their most basic needs families need adequate income. They also require:

- ❖ Dependable and ready access to regular retail food outlets and other non-emergency food sources. Retail outlets include supermarkets, grocery stores, convenience stores, farmers markets and roadside stands. Alternate food sources include SHARE and other food-buying clubs, which can lower food costs through direct marketing and use of volunteers; Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms, where customers buy seasonal shares of a local farmer's produce harvest; and home or community gardens.
- ❖ The knowledge and skills necessary to select and prepare healthy, affordable food.

A central problem for many communities and neighborhoods is the lack of sufficient retail food outlets that sell healthy, affordable food. Researchers have described these areas as *food deserts*: geographic areas where consumers have relatively poor access to affordable and nutritious food. The stores within a food desert, if they exist at all, have higher prices and/or a limited variety and quality of foods. Food deserts are more common in rural areas and inner cities that lack retail options and in places where large distances or limited transportation may restrict access.

Nutrition education programs designed to help increase knowledge and access to food resources are found within a variety of federal food programs, and those education programs are discussed here and also in Leg 3 (Federal Nutrition Programs).

Recent rapid increases in the cost of food, stemming from a complex array of factors, are creating new challenges for more families.

Strategies to improve the access to food across the state include addressing the lack of affordable grocery outlets that offer healthy choices, promoting nontraditional methods of food buying, and increasing consumer skills related to food preparation, processing and safety.

### **Goal: Support access to healthy and affordable food at grocery stores located within reasonable distance of low-income consumers**

*By supporting retail grocery outlets in low-income communities, facilitating transportation, and promoting healthy inventories, some of the problems of food deserts can be alleviated.*

#### **13. Encourage and support locating retail grocery outlets within reasonable distance of low-income consumers**

- a. Identify existing food deserts in Wisconsin communities and develop local solutions, including alternatives to large supermarkets.
- b. Educate economic development committees and other policy makers about how events such as closing a grocery store affect access to healthy affordable food in low-income neighborhoods.
- c. Consider policy changes such as tax incentives or low interest or forgivable loans to sustain existing and encourage new grocery stores in underserved areas.

**14. Facilitate transportation to retail grocery outlets**

- a. Partner with cab companies and city busing services to provide free or reduced price rides to grocery stores.
- b. Support and expand public transportation, especially in areas with few or widely-scattered retail grocery outlets.

**15. Promote healthy inventories of food items at retail grocery outlets**

- a. Encourage small local stores to offer more diverse, healthy, affordable choices.
- b. Encourage grocers to provide culturally appropriate food.
- c. Encourage partnerships between large and small grocers to improve the availability of healthy food in smaller markets.

**Goal: Ensure access to farmers' markets, CSAs, food co-ops, food buying clubs, and home gardens**

*By providing access and improving the availability of farmers' markets, community gardens and home gardens, consumers may support sustainable farming practices and reduce environmental costs of transporting food long distances. Home gardens and community gardens can provide a low-cost supplementary source of healthy food. Food buying clubs such as SHARE and the market basket program are also important options.*

**16. Support establishment of farmers' markets and other direct marketing operations where farmers and providers sell food directly to consumers**

- a. Provide institutional assistance to form new farmers' markets.
- b. Increase the availability of mobile farmers' markets in communities that lack permanent farmers' markets.

**17. Improve participation of low-income families in CSAs and other direct marketing operations**

- a. Collaborate with groups promoting sustainable food systems to promote programs for low-income individuals, such as offering week-to-week buying for members of CSAs.
- b. Provide scholarships and subsidies so that low-income individuals can afford to participate in CSAs.
- c. Promote health insurance reimbursements for HMO members to purchase CSA shares to improve their diets.

**18. Encourage use of federal nutrition programs to support farmers' markets and other direct marketing operations**

- a. Increase funding for the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) and the Women Infants and Children (WIC) FMNP so that local agencies can serve more eligible people, expand to additional communities, and provide more generous vouchers.
- b. Improve the ability to use FoodShare at SHARE and farmers markets by providing funding to increase the availability of EBT machines at farmers' markets and other direct marketing sites.

**19. Increase land devoted to community gardens in areas that lack adequate home garden space, particularly for low-income individuals**

- a. Provide incentives, such as tax credits, to individuals and businesses that donate land permanently to community gardening ventures.
- b. Use community-owned land for the creation of gardens and other crops (for example, apple orchards).
- c. Increase the number of garden plots and urban agriculture projects available to those in low-income housing.
- d. Provide container gardens on rooftops and paved areas of apartment buildings, low-income housing, public buildings, community centers, houses of worship, schools, etc.

**20. Provide training and materials to improve gardening skills and capacity**

- a. Actively encourage more home gardens and container gardens by obtaining funding to provide free vegetable seed packages, seedlings, and gardening information to interested low-income households (such as food pantry clients) who have access to garden space.
- b. Create a mentoring program for those interested in starting a garden.
- c. Promote use of available teaching materials such as “Got Dirt???” to improve gardening skills.
- d. Increase student participation in the operation of their school gardens and greenhouses and promote student involvement as volunteers at local community gardens.
- e. Advocate for free seed additions to The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) deliveries.

**21. Distribute produce from gardens and farms**

- a. Connect local farmers with schools and communities to distribute their products.
- b. Distribute locally grown produce from community gardening programs and farms to clients of emergency food programs.

**Goal: Improve food buying, selection, preparation, processing and safety skills**

*In addition to being able to purchase or grow food, families need the knowledge and skills to select and safely store and prepare healthy food. These skills can be enhanced through partnerships with existing nutrition programs and through widespread and relevant educational programming.*

**22. Collaborate with food assistance programs to teach skills related to food selection, buying and preparation**

- a. Foster collaboration among providers of nutrition education to enhance quality and reach of programming.
- b. Educate WIC participants and other farmers’ market customers about how to prepare fresh fruits and vegetables, ideally using hands-on teaching to supplement distribution of recipes.
- c. Provide education on basic food budgeting for families.

**23. Utilize farmers’ markets, in-store demonstrations, schools, senior sites, food pantries and other pre-existing groups to teach skills**

- a. Provide opportunities for interested low-income individuals to learn how to cook raw, local, and seasonal produce.

- b. Provide free recipes and simple tips about how to prepare unfamiliar foods, to be distributed at pantries and grocery stores.
- c. Create demonstrations about cooking raw, local and seasonal produce for use in waiting rooms at WIC, food pantries, farmers' markets and other locations.
- d. Partner with local organizations to provide nutrition education for youth.

## Third Leg - Federal Nutrition Programs

When households lack sufficient income to meet basic needs, the federal nutrition programs provide essential food resources to protect and enhance food security. These programs include the Food Stamp Program (FoodShare in Wisconsin), Senior Meals, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the School Breakfast Program (SBP), Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), the Child and Adult Care Food Program as well as the federal nutrition education components (Food Stamp Nutrition Education and the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program, EFNEP) of the Wisconsin Nutrition Education Program (WNEP).

Two other federal programs, The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), are discussed in Leg 4 (Emergency Food Assistance) because they provide food through emergency channels.

The key to these programs' effectiveness is their capacity to provide households with significant amounts of supplemental food assistance through normal, non-emergency channels such as grocery stores, schools, camps, youth programs, community and senior centers, and day care providers.

Improving access to these resources is essential but is often complicated by stigma, or feelings of humiliation and shame; excess bureaucracy; federal restrictions on eligibility; limited benefits; low participation by eligible households in some programs in some areas; limited availability of programs in some communities and insufficient community-based outreach.

Methods to improve participation in federal nutrition programs include strengthening underutilized programs, reducing barriers to participation, and improving state and federal policy, procedures and funding.

### **Goal: Expand the use of underutilized federal nutrition programs through outreach and education**

*Tens of thousands of Wisconsin households are eligible for but not participating in federal nutrition programs. By increasing public awareness of hunger and federal food programs and by conducting outreach to underserved populations, more people will utilize these important nutrition resources.*

#### **24. Increase public awareness of hunger and the availability of federal nutrition programs**

- a. Increase public awareness about hunger and poverty by using tools like food stamp challenges, poverty simulations, presentations, and other UW-Extension resources.
- b. Educate community partners about the availability of the ACCESS web portal ([access.wisconsin.gov](http://access.wisconsin.gov)).
- c. Improve the general public's perception of federal nutrition programs by providing examples of community members who have benefited from nutrition programs to the local media.

#### **25. Increase participation in federal nutrition programs by underserved populations through outreach initiatives**

- a. Increase funding for community-based organizations to conduct outreach.

- b. Initiate targeted outreach to seniors and disabled populations to increase participation in FoodShare and Senior Meals.
- c. Initiate targeted outreach at emergency food programs and other community locations in order to increase participation among eligible persons in relevant federal food programs.
- d. Initiate outreach of rural populations to increase participation in FoodShare to levels comparable to those achieved in Milwaukee.
- e. Increase outreach for WNEP to improve awareness of available nutrition education services.

### **Goal: Reduce barriers to participation in federal programs**

*By establishing more community access points, reducing stigma, and emphasizing the importance of quality customer service by all providers, barriers to participation in federal nutrition programs will be reduced and more eligible people will participate.*

#### **26. Increase options for accessing federal food program applications**

- a. Engage more community-based partners to serve as access points where people can obtain application support, including help using the ACCESS website ([access.wisconsin.gov](http://access.wisconsin.gov)) and help submitting required documents.
- b. Provide funding for computers and internet connectivity to support online application at community-based organizations.
- c. Improve access for working families by providing services outside normal working hours.
- d. Improve access by homebound seniors and disabled people by conducting more home visits to assist with nutrition program applications.
- e. Increase use of telephone interviews from home to reduce barriers associated with face-to-face interviews at the local human services office.

#### **27. Improve customer service and the client experience at food program application sites**

- a. Provide more customer service training for community partners and caseworkers to ensure high customer satisfaction.
- b. Engage community organizations in discussions on strategies to improve customer service and caseworker ratios.
- c. Provide more opportunities for customers to provide feedback, such as routinely soliciting anonymous customer feedback on the quality of service.
- d. Provide incentives and recognition to county agencies with the best customer service.

#### **28. Improve local and state implementation of federal food programs**

- a. Increase the number of schools operating School Breakfast programs and improve student participation at existing programs.
- b. Increase the number of schools providing Universal School Breakfast Programs and in-classroom breakfast.
- c. Increase the number of Summer Food sponsors and participating children.
- d. Increase the number of communities operating senior nutrition programs.
- e. Ensure that schools allow adequate time for children to eat school meals.
- f. Provide state WIC supplement to increase breastfeeding support and enable staff to adequately communicate nutrition and health information.
- g. Maintain state funding for WIC and Senior FMNP.
- h. Ensure that the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, Division of Public Health maintains authority for the WIC and TEFAP Programs.

- i. Provide state funding for local community-based hunger prevention grants including outreach activities that enroll eligible people in federal food programs.
- j. Provide state supplement for the summer food service program to increase number of sponsors and communities served.

### **29. Reduce stigma associated with food program participation**

- a. Promote food programs as resources for good nutrition and health rather than as welfare programs. Emphasize that many working families qualify for these programs.
- b. Increase use of community application sites, which may be less stigmatizing and more comfortable for many customers.
- c. Use Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) in the WIC Program.

### **Goal: Improve state and federal policies, procedures and funding**

*Federal and state levels of government determine policy and funding for nutrition programs. In order to ensure sound public policy, elected officials need to hear the concerns and priorities of hunger advocates.*

### **30. Identify community priorities and concerns on federal food and nutrition program policy**

- a. Communicate priorities and concerns to federal policy makers for reauthorization of key federal nutrition programs:
  - ❖ Farm Bill priorities include but are not limited to:
    - i) Increasing the minimum Food Stamp benefit.
    - ii) Increasing the Food Stamp standard deduction and child care deduction.
    - iii) Removing the Food Stamp shelter cap for working families.
    - iv) Preserving the Food Stamp Categorical Eligibility.
    - v) Recalculating the Food Stamp Thrifty Food Plan to provide higher benefit levels.
    - vi) Ensuring that the federal government pays 50% of Food Stamp administrative costs.
    - vii) Providing increased funding for TEFAP Entitlement and Bonus food purchases and storage and transportation costs.
    - viii) Reauthorizing and expanding funding for SFMNP and CSFP.
    - ix) Maintaining support for EFNEP and Food Stamp Nutrition Education.
    - x) Reauthorizing and expanding the Community Food Security grants.
  - ❖ Child Nutrition Act priorities include but are not limited to:
    - i) Increasing the SBP meal reimbursement.
    - ii) Eliminating the reduced-price meal category for school meals and expanding eligibility for free meals to 185% of the federal poverty line.
    - iii) Lowering the area eligibility for Summer Food from 50% to 40% low-income.
    - iv) Improving the nutritional quality of school meals in order to reduce obesity.
    - v) Increasing WIC funding for breast-feeding support and the provision of health and nutrition information to clients.
    - vi) Ensuring that WIC funding continues to support the growth in participation and addresses food cost inflation.
    - vii) Expanding the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program.
    - viii) Expanding Child and Adult Care Food Program eligibility to better serve poor children in non-qualifying areas.
    - ix) Simplifying Child and Adult Care Food Program administrative requirements to encourage greater participation.

- ❖ Older Americans Act priorities include but are not limited to:
  - i) Request greater funding for meals so that the federal contribution is sufficient to pay 50% of the actual meal costs
  - ii) Allocate additional Elderly Nutrition Program resources to target unserved communities and communities with waiting lists.
- b. Monitor and communicate priorities and concerns during annual federal budget and appropriations cycle.

**31. Identify community priorities and concerns on state food and nutrition program policy**

- a. Communicate priorities and concerns about food and nutrition programs during biennial state budget processes.
- b. Ensure that the Wisconsin Food Security Consortium is engaged in state planning and implementation of federal nutrition policy options.

**32. Increase the effectiveness of the anti-hunger advocacy network**

- a. Use the Wisconsin Food Security Consortium network to reach out and engage hunger advocacy groups in support of federal and state policies.
- b. Engage individuals and community partners in a commitment to ending hunger.
- c. Use the Wisconsin Food Security Consortium website to provide updated information on status of federal and state nutrition policy issues.

## Fourth Leg - Emergency Food Assistance

*Emergency food assistance* refers broadly to the provision of food or meals to low-income people by charitable, private sector agencies outside of normal, routine food channels. Such agencies and programs serve as a nutritional safety net that helps prevent hunger for over 225,000 people each month.

Emergency food providers include *food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens* and *shelters*. Food banks are non-profit, community-based organizations that receive and distribute foods to charitable feeding sites at low or no-cost. Food banks collect food through food drives, corporate contributions, government commodity programs and outright purchases. In Wisconsin, ten food banks serve regional areas or individual counties. They rely on volunteers and paid staff to sort, store and distribute food.

Food pantries provide direct and immediate food assistance to low-income households at risk of hunger. Pantries often make referrals to link households to other resources, such as the federal nutrition programs addressed in Leg 3. Pantries often operate with minimal funds on a part-time basis and depend upon a volunteer workforce. Households typically receive a 3-5 day supply of shelf stable food once per month.

Many food insecure people are not eligible for key income support programs or are unaware of their eligibility. In other instances households decline to participate in federal programs because of stigma, low benefits, bureaucracy or other reasons. Since not all food insecure households can or do access government resources, emergency food providers are central to ensuring that communities have a nutritional safety net.

Ultimately, the long-term objective is to reduce demand for emergency food services with households meeting their food needs through higher wages and better access to nutrition and other assistance programs that enable them to obtain food through normal channels. In the meantime, the short-term objective is to make sure that we support and sustain the emergency food system.

By increasing overall food supplies, using pantries to support statewide outreach for federal nutrition programs, improving volunteer services, and ensuring that emergency food is a universal safety net, emergency food assistance in Wisconsin can achieve both the long and the short-term objectives.

### **Goal: Increase overall food supplies for emergency food providers**

*Increases in food and transportation costs, a declining economy, and a decline in overall food donations have had a dramatic impact upon the emergency food system. Unfortunately, decreased supply is coupled with increased demand. We know from data collected from pantries receiving federal commodities that the number of Wisconsin households receiving emergency food has increased by over 57% since 2001. This trend is evident both nationwide and closer to home: Minnesota also reports a 50% increase in food pantry visits during the same time period.*

### **33. Improve the ability of emergency programs to get sufficient food donations**

- a. Build upon the sources available for donations and share the knowledge among emergency providers.

- b. Increase the volume, variety and nutritional quality of donated foods for all providers.
- c. Create community and/or regional coalitions to connect and support food pantries.
- d. Promote and create a higher profile for the food network system; learn from experts how to use effective marketing and media strategies to increase attention and address needs.
- e. Increase food donations through urban and rural gleaning projects.
- f. Address the transportation challenges faced by food pantries in many areas which must travel considerable distances to a food bank.

**Goal: Develop statewide outreach processes for federal nutrition programs at food pantries**

*Many food insecure households are unaware of their eligibility for federal nutrition programs. In other instances households decline to participate in federal programs because of stigma, low benefits, bureaucracy or other reasons. Since not all food insecure households can or do access government resources, emergency food providers are central to providing information and referrals.*

**34. Develop referral processes and increase access to federal food programs for clients of food pantries**

- a. Increase the number of pantries with computers and internet access and improve referrals to other nutrition programs.
- b. Improve participation among those eligible for federal food programs and other government assistance, which could reduce pantry demand.
- c. Food banks can increase efforts to engage pantries in connecting households to federal nutrition programs.

**Goal: Improve training, retention and replacement of food pantry volunteers**

*Food pantries rely upon a workforce that is staffed primarily by volunteers and few paid staff. Volunteers often make decisions about hours of operation, food safety, food variety and availability, and customer service. Many pantries report high average age of volunteers and a lack of new, younger volunteers. There is concern about where the volunteer replacements will come from in the future and whether the volunteer workforce can be sustained.*

**35. Develop volunteer recruitment and training**

- a. Provide pantry volunteers with comprehensive training in areas such as cultural sensitivity, consumer respect, poverty awareness, and eligibility for nutrition programs and other resources.
- b. Promote pantry volunteer opportunities as experience for students in college and other academic institutions.
- c. Promote hunger awareness through the recruitment for volunteers in community service.
- d. Recognize the work of volunteers with certificates, awards, and in newsletters.

**Goal: Ensure that emergency food assistance is a safety net available to everyone**

*Although there are over 800 food pantries in Wisconsin, there are rural areas of the state where households do not have access to emergency food. Some food pantries are not open during enough*

*hours or days of the week, and some pantries do not provide adequate levels and/or nutritional quality of food.*

### **36. Increase access to food pantries**

- a. Increase the availability of pantries in underserved areas of the state.
- b. Explore alternate transportation options such as carpooling or public transportation credits that could help families reach pantries nearby.
- c. Create mobile pantries to accommodate the needs of rural households or those without access to transportation.
- d. Improve accessibility of pantries for people with disabilities.
- e. Provide flexible food pantry hours of operation to make the food available and accessible for clients with a variety of schedules and obligations.

### **Goal: Continue to improve the emergency food system**

*There are a substantial number of organized groups working to strengthen the emergency food system. However, there are further connections and collaborations that could facilitate statewide dialogue in the specific areas that address funding and food acquisition.*

### **37. Build upon and expand collaborations among emergency food system providers**

- a. Create a statewide association, network or coalition of Second Harvest, independent and TEFAP agencies to improve communication and coordination among food banks.
- b. Create a statewide association or coalition linking and serving all food pantries.
- c. Using Minnesota as an example, begin an annual campaign by faith-based and secular organizations to increase hunger awareness and raise local donations of food and funding for pantries.
- d. Use other states as an example to implement state funding for the support of food pantry operations, including equipment, food purchase, staff costs, facility operations, etc.

## Glossary

The terms, programs, and acronyms referenced in this action plan:

**ACCESS** (*access.wisconsin.gov*) An online portal for health and nutrition resources that allows Wisconsin residents to check for eligibility and apply for federal nutrition and other benefit programs, including FoodShare, BadgerCare Plus, Medicaid, and SeniorCare.

**BadgerCare Plus** A Wisconsin program that provides publicly funded health insurance to qualifying uninsured groups.

**Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)** A United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) program that provides subsidized food services for eligible children and functionally impaired adults in non-residential day care operations. Sponsors also receive USDA commodity food and nutrition education materials.

**Child Nutrition Act** A 1966 Federal law which established the School Breakfast Program and other programs to help meet the nutritional needs of children.

**Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)** A United States Department of Agriculture program which allocates commodity food to supplement the diets of older adults, low-income women and children up to age six.

**Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)** A partnership between local farmers and community members (shareholders) who often pay either a subscription or monthly fees in order to receive fresh produce regularly.

**Earned Income Tax Credit** A refundable tax benefit for low or moderate income households.

**Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT)** An electronic system that allows state governments to provide benefits, such as FoodShare, to authorized recipients via a plastic debit card.

**Elderly Nutrition Program (ENP)** Provides funding for two senior nutrition programs: congregate meals and home-delivered meals.

**Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP)** A United States Department of Agriculture nutrition education program.

**Farm Bill** A comprehensive federal bill that is reauthorized approximately every five years and dictates agricultural and food policy, including a number of nutrition programs, which fall under the umbrella of the USDA.

**Food deserts** Geographic areas with limited access to retail outlets that offer a variety of healthful and nutritious foods.

**FoodShare** Wisconsin's Food Stamp program. This program provides food assistance in the form of an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card to qualifying low-income households. The EBT card is used like a debit card to buy food at retail outlets.

**National School Lunch Program (NSLP)** A federal meal program operated in public schools, nonprofit private schools, and residential child care institutions. It provides free or reduced price nutritionally balanced meals to children who qualify based on their family's income.

**Older Americans Act** Authorizes Elderly Nutrition Program funds to state agencies that in turn provide grants to local aging agencies and Native American governments.

**School Breakfast Program (SBP)** A federal meal program operated in public and nonprofit private schools which provides free or reduced price meals to children who qualify based on their family's income.

**Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP)** Provides grants to provide low-income seniors with vouchers that can be redeemed for eligible food items at participating farmers' markets and CSAs.

**SHARE** A food buying club with no income requirements that provides access to high quality foods at savings up to 30-50% off grocery store prices.

**Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)** A federal meal program that provides reimbursements to schools, non-profits, camps, and other agencies that provide meals and snacks for children in low-income areas during the summer.

**The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)** A United States Department of Agriculture program that supplements the diets of low-income Americans by providing them with federal commodities at no cost. Wisconsin provides the food at coordinating agencies which in turn distribute the food at pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters that directly serve the public.

**Wisconsin Works (W2)** A statewide program that provides monthly cash payments to eligible parents who participate in certain work activities that are meant to prepare them for regular employment. Also provides services to assist limited income parents in finding and keeping jobs.

**Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)** A United States Department of Agriculture program that provides supplemental food, nutrition education, and access to health services for pregnant or postpartum women, infants, and children up to age five who meet income guidelines.

**Wisconsin Nutrition Education Program (WNEP)** A UW-Extension nutrition education program that helps limited resource families and individuals choose healthful diets, purchase and prepare healthful food and handle it safely, and become more food secure by spending their food dollars wisely. WNEP is made up of two federally-funded nutrition education programs—the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) and Food Stamp Nutrition Education (FSNE).