

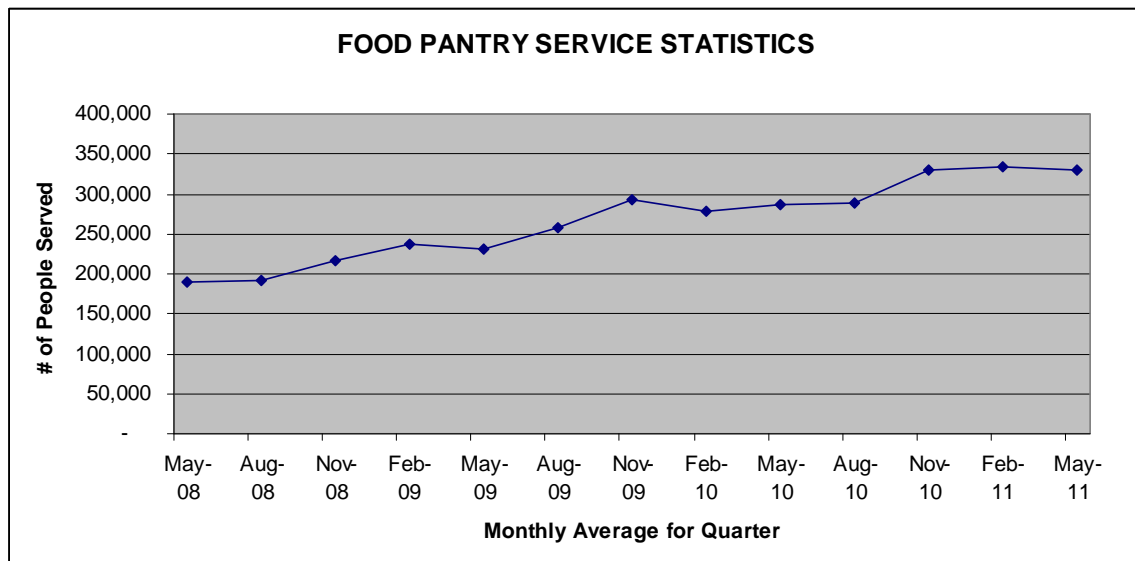


Los Angeles Regional Food Bank Policy Brief

Local Charitable Food Programs Reach Record Level of Service

The accumulated effects of the sluggish local economy and continued rounds of government cutbacks have put significant pressure on local charitable food programs in Los Angeles County to keep pace with the demand for food assistance. Even though the 600 food pantries served by the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank now reach a record 330,000 people monthly, an increase of 73 percent from three years ago, some food pantries have closed their doors and others are running out of food in the face of the growing demand. Other charitable food programs served by the Food Bank have also struggled as the demand for food assistance outstrips food supplies.

Food banks and charitable food programs rely on several sources for support: donated food from the food industry and from the public through food drives, financial contributions, volunteers, in-kind support, and food and funds from various government programs. For the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank, food acquisition and distribution has increased by 70 percent during the past three years. The Food Bank currently distributes 1.25 million pounds of food weekly, the equivalent of nearly 1 million meals, to agencies and through Food Bank programs. This increase has fueled the growth in food pantry service from 190,000 people served monthly in 2008 to 330,000 people served monthly currently.



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While the Food Bank has recruited new food pantries to begin operating during the past three years, there are indications that food pantries and other agencies are struggling to survive or sustain current levels of service. In a few cases, food pantries have closed down their operation with the most recent announcement being made by the St. Peter Claver Food Pantry of Los Angeles which will close next week. Cutbacks in government funding have impacted other agencies such as the Union Rescue Mission's announcement to cut back shelter services.¹ With more budget cuts proposed at the federal, State and local level, these cuts have a dual impact of leading to an increased demand for food assistance by residents while reducing resources to meet this demand.

Los Angeles County continues to experience one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation. Interviews of recipients at food pantries indicate that many adults, who previously did not require food assistance, now require help due to a lack of employment. Out of a total labor force of nearly 4.9 million people in Los Angeles County, 583,800 people were unemployed in May 2011 (11.9 percent seasonally adjusted unemployment rate) compared to 263,200 people (5.6 percent) when the recession began in late 2007.² This increase of more than 300,000 workers now unemployed has led to many of these former wage earners to seek food assistance. In addition, interviews of food recipients indicate that many adults are still working but are working fewer hours per week, which has placed considerable pressure on their household budgets.

The Importance of the CalFresh Program

Given that the Food Bank has a finite amount of food to distribute and many food pantries and other agencies are

Food Pantries, which distribute grocery bags of food to families and individuals seeking food assistance, are the best barometer of charitable food assistance trends for two reasons: 1) food pantries are able to increase or decrease service quickly to respond to demand; and 2) people who live in apartments or homes are more likely to seek assistance from a food pantry than any other type of charitable agency.

The Los Angeles Regional Food Bank serves 600 food pantries located in different geographic areas of Los Angeles County. These food pantries, which rely on the Foodbank for a significant percentage of their food, distribute to recipients based on a set schedule depending on the food pantry's facility, operations and programs.

¹ Los Angeles Times, <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-shelter-cuts-20110625.0,2763990.story> , June 25, 2011.

² State of California Employment Development Department Monthly Labor Force Data for Counties, [http://www.calmis.ca.gov/file/lfmonth/la\\$pd.pdf](http://www.calmis.ca.gov/file/lfmonth/la$pd.pdf) and <http://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/cgi/dataanalysis/areaselection.asp?tablename=labforce> accessed July 6, 2011

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reaching capacity, the service provided by the CalFresh Program, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, is a critical aspect of food assistance. The number of Los Angeles County residents receiving CalFresh benefits has increased markedly since the beginning of the recession. According to May 2011 data, more than 1 million Los Angeles County residents received CalFresh benefits, a 56 percent increase from December 2007 when the recession began.³ For the month of May 2011, \$156 million of CalFresh benefits were received by Los Angeles County residents.⁴ Due to the economic “multiplier” effect of these benefits, the \$156 million is calculated to have had a \$287 million impact on the local economy on a monthly basis.⁵ However, the State of California has one of the lowest participation rates in the nation, so there continues to be a significant opportunity to reach more residents through the CalFresh Program.

Outlook for the Rest of 2011

The Food Bank’s focus on increasing the acquisition of fresh fruits and vegetables and other nutritious foods coupled with increased volume of United States Department of Agriculture commodities has led to significant volume growth over the past three years. The increased amount of food distributed to agencies served by the Food Bank, as well as growth in the Food Bank’s senior and children’s programs, has been well-timed given local needs. However, with each passing week, there are signs that agencies are struggling to sustain this high level of service. In addition, this current record level of service is beginning to flatten even though the demand for food assistance continues to grow due to local economic factors and government cutbacks. It is critical that both community support and help provided by government programs continue and stretch to help the charitable food network sustain current efforts.

*Policy Brief is a publication of the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank:
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³ California Department of Social Services Food Stamp Report, <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/research/res/pdf/DFA256/2011/DFA256May11.pdf> and <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/research/res/pdf/DFA256/2007/DFA256Dec07.pdf> accessed July 6, 2011.

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ The Food Stamp Program has a \$1.84 multiplier effect estimate. Hanson, K. and Golan, E., Effects of Changes in Food Stamp Expenditures Across the U.S. Economy. Food Assistance and Nutrition Research, Report Number 26-6. Economic Research Service. United States Department of Agriculture. August 2002.