

Los Angeles Regional Foodbank Policy Brief

FOOD PANTRY DEMAND INCREASES BY 41%

Millions of Americans, including many residents of Los Angeles County, experience hunger on a regular or sporadic basis. The United States Department of Agriculture recently released *Household Food Security in the United States 2007* which estimated that 36.2 million Americans lived in households experiencing low food security in 2007.¹ In September 2007, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health released a report that estimated that 471,000 Los Angeles County households experienced low food security in 2005.²

Due to many food pantries reporting to the Los Angeles Regional Foodbank significant increases in the demand for food assistance this summer, Foodbank staff decided to compile a snapshot of food pantry service throughout Los Angeles County. In late October and early November 2008, the Foodbank’s Agency Relations staff conducted a phone survey of medium to large-size food pantries located in all eight of Los Angeles County’s Service Planning Areas. The food pantries were randomly selected within each of the eight geographic regions (i.e. Service Planning Areas) of Los Angeles County. Service statistics were compared to written reports submitted by the food pantries to verify the accuracy of the data collected. The eighteen food pantries surveyed cumulatively provided 22,729 households comprising 72,092 people with grocery bags of food during September 2008. This total represents a significant amount of food pantry service provided by food pantries served by the Foodbank. Compared to September 2007, the food pantries surveyed cumulatively served 6,593 more households (+41 percent) representing an increase of 21,694 individuals served (+43 percent).

What is a food pantry?
 Food pantries distribute packaged, refrigerated and frozen foods for offsite use. Most people receiving groceries from food pantries live in some type of housing and prepare the foods that they receive in their home.

Survey of LA County food pantries from all 8 Service Planning Areas	Households Served 2008	Individuals Served 2008	Households Served 2007	Individuals Served 2007	Percent Change Households	Percent Change Individuals
Total Service for September	22,729	72,092	16,136	50,398	41%	43%

Food pantries surveyed: Santa Clarita Food Pantry, SOVA Community Food Pantry – Van Nuys, North Hollywood Interfaith Food Pantry, Grace Resource Center, Loveship Food Pantry, Shekinah Worship Center, Our Saviour Center, Foothill Unity Center, St. John Vianney Church Food Pantry, Mexican American Opportunity Foundation, St. Athanasius & St. Paul Church Food Pantry, SOVA Community Food Pantry – West LA, Bethel AME Food Pantry, Christ Centered Ministries, Hawaiian Gardens Food Bank, Interfaith Food Center, Harbor Community Church Food Pantry and St. Margaret’s Center.

¹ Economic Research Service/USDA, *Household Food Security in the United States 2007*; November 2008.
² Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, *Food Insecurity Increasing in Los Angeles County*, LA Health; September 2007.

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While data exist for each geographic region of Los Angeles County, the sample size in each geographic region was not large enough to draw any conclusions whether the increased demand for food assistance varied significantly by region. The survey results reflect that the demand for food assistance has increased in every geographic region of Los Angeles County; and thus, this spike in the demand for food assistance is being felt by food pantries throughout Los Angeles County.

In the telephone responses from food pantry representatives, nearly all report serving people who have not previously sought assistance from their food pantry. One pantry estimated that 16% of all recipients served during September were new clients.

What is a low food security? An updated definition developed by the USDA, households that have limited access to adequate food due to a lack of money or other resources are categorized as experiencing “low food security.”

During the past two years and especially during 2008, a number of factors have put significant economic pressure on residents of Los Angeles County. Food prices have increased nationally by 4.8 percent in 2007 and by 7.2 percent during the first nine months of 2008.³ For many low-income residents of Los Angeles County who already are coping with higher than average rents, the increase in food prices has reduced the amount of food purchased by the household.

The county’s unemployment rate has increased significantly from 257,600 individuals in September 2007 (5.2 percent unemployment rate) to 386,400 in September 2008 (7.8 percent rate).⁴ Many workers who are already struggling to pay for all of their expenses find that a job loss puts them in a position of requiring additional assistance from government or charitable programs.

To help meet the increased demand for food assistance, the Foodbank has increased distribution during the past six weeks by 33 percent compared to a year ago. However, this increase falls short of the increased demand reported by food pantries. The Foodbank is relying on financial and food donors to help bridge this gap during the upcoming weeks given that the increased demand is projected to continue. The Foodbank also encourages recipients to seek help from public assistance programs such as the Food Stamp Program, now named the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) due to the implementation of the new federal Farm Bill.

*Policy Brief is a publication of the Los Angeles Regional Foodbank:
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³ Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Consumer Price Index Summary*, Economic News Release; October 2008.

⁴ California Employment Development Department, *Historical Data for Unemployment Rate and Labor Force (Not Seasonally Adjusted) in Los Angeles County*; November, 2008.