



2024 ANNUAL REPORT ENDING HUNGER IN MAINE

FEBRUARY 2025





INTRODUCTION

About the Ending Hunger in Maine Initiative

The mission of the Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) is to foster collaboration across state government to help solve Maine’s most important long-term challenges utilizing data-driven, innovative policy solutions. Now home to the Ending Hunger in Maine initiative, GOPIF serves as a convener, bringing stakeholders together across and beyond state government to create a Maine free from hunger with Maine’s Roadmap to End Hunger as its guide. This work is facilitated by GOPIF’s Senior Anti-Hunger Policy Advisor, including:

- Facilitating coordination of key policy initiatives and recommendations outlined in Maine’s Roadmap to End Hunger by 2030.
- Spearheading collaboration and coordination of anti-hunger and anti-poverty strategies and policies across state agencies and with external stakeholders.
- Convening the statewide EH2030 Advisory Committee charged with guiding the implementation of Maine’s Roadmap.
- Tracking data to inform anti-hunger strategies, measuring progress, and monitoring the impact of key anti-hunger policies and programs.

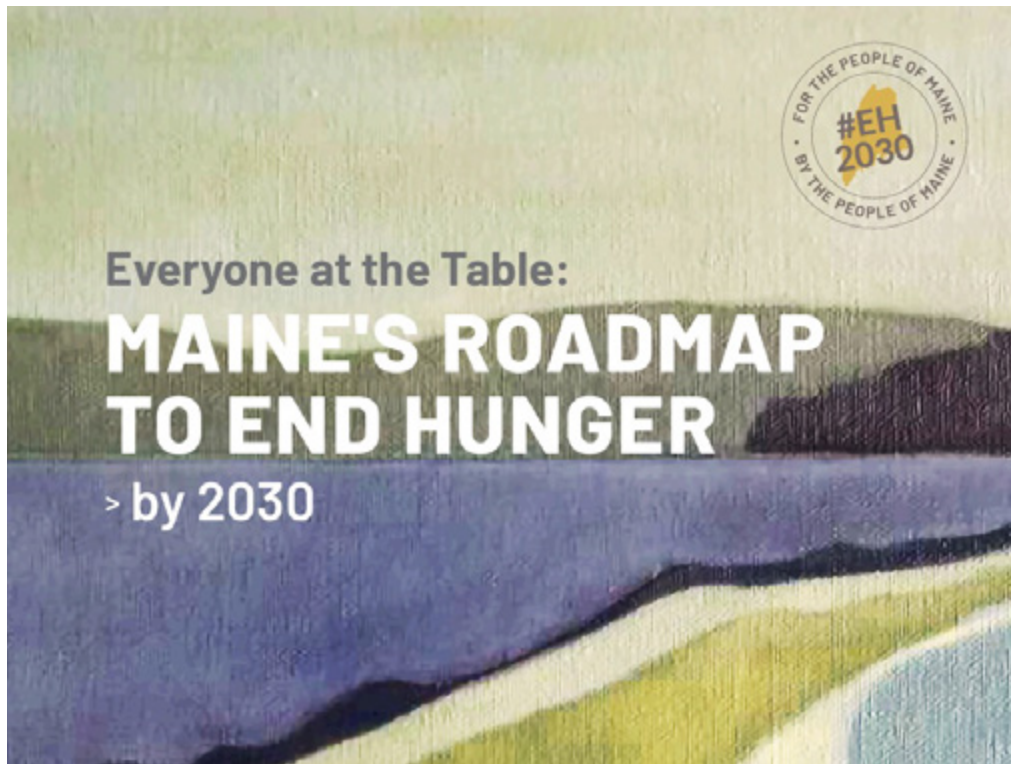
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Background

Maine's Roadmap to End Hunger by 2030 was born out of the 129th Maine State Legislature. Citing the significant social and economic threats that household food insecurity poses to Maine today and to Maine's future, the state made a historic commitment with the passage of LD 1159 Resolve to End Hunger in Maine by 2030. Authored by then-Rep. Craig Hickman and signed by Governor Mills, this bi-partisan legislation directed the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry (DACF) to coordinate a cross-sector effort to develop a strategic plan to achieve this bold goal.

Over two-hundred Mainers were engaged across a two-year, multi-phase process to inform the final product, beginning with the development of the Interim Report, delivered to Maine's 129th Legislature in 2020, followed by the Impacted Community Recommendations & Review on the Interim Report on Ending Hunger in Maine by 2030,

submitted to DACF in 2021. The result is Everyone at the Table: Maine's Roadmap to End Hunger 2030, a plan finalized in January 2022, which is rooted in evidence-based solutions to hunger, the unique nature of the problem in Maine, the priorities of Maine people, and the lived expertise of Mainers impacted by poverty and hunger.

In 2022, with the passage of LD 174 An Act to Implement Maine's Roadmap to End Hunger by 2030, Maine's 130th State Legislature directed the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) to provide staffing services to the commissioner of DACF, to coordinate implementation of Maine's Roadmap. Guidance on implementation is provided by an advisory committee, established by the DACF commissioner, composed of members with lived expertise and content expertise relevant to the goals and strategies included in the plan.

INITIATIVE UPDATES

The Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) serves as a key coordinator, working collaboratively with other State agencies and stakeholders to address critical long-term issues facing the State of Maine. We support planning and implementation by providing research, data, and innovative policy solutions. The Ending Hunger in Maine initiative is one of GOPIF’s current areas of focus and leadership.

The Ending Hunger in Maine (EHM) initiative supports coordination across state government and with nonprofits, community-based organizations, and impacted communities to create a Maine free from hunger with Maine’s Roadmap to End Hunger (Maine’s Roadmap) as its guide. This work is led by a Senior Anti-Hunger Policy Advisor at GOPIF, with guidance provided by an advisory committee, established by the DACF commissioner¹ in June 2023.

As outlined in the report introduction, the EHM initiative resulted from several years of strategic planning and public engagement. Now permanently housed within state government at GOPIF, the 2024

activities of the initiative focused on supporting an effective transition from planning to implementing key recommendations outlined in Maine’s Roadmap.

2024 activities were aimed at three primary goals:

1. Identify implementation priorities for 2025-26 from the recommendations in Maine’s Roadmap, given the comprehensive nature of the plan.
2. Develop a structure to efficiently and effectively coordinate action on these priorities across the multi-sector network of Ending Hunger in Maine partners.
3. Build a baseline of data on the state of food insecurity and its drivers in Maine to provide a common resource and guidepost for Ending Hunger in Maine partners.

The achievement of these goals is outlined below, illustrating the growing collaborative capacity of the Ending Hunger in Maine initiative and its network of partners.



The Ending Hunger in Maine Community Cookbook, compiled and printed with support from the Elmina B. Sewall Foundation, shares a collection of the recipes and stories that working group members shared in response to the Community Plate prompt: *Share a story about a food that reminds you of a specific person or place in your life, or is meaningful in some way.*

¹ As directed by LD 174 An Act to Implement Maine’s Roadmap to End Hunger by 2030, Maine’s 130th State Legislature.

Working Groups Identify Implementation Priorities for 2025–26

Maine’s Roadmap suggests a two-pronged approach to ending hunger: improve our response to hunger and food insecurity today and go upstream to prevent food insecurity tomorrow, with strategies aimed at the root cause of the problem. As a result, the recommendations are wide-ranging and comprehensive, from food assistance to poverty-reduction and housing stability. In 2024, a working group process was developed with the goal of identifying areas of focus for coordinating implementation of the plan in the short-term, while maintaining the plan’s core theory of change.

Five working groups were formed, based on the five goals of Maine’s Roadmap, with the task of identifying priorities for aligned action across our diverse network of Ending Hunger partners in 2025-2026: Capacity Building, Food Access, Economic Security, Narrative Change, and an Equity Subcommittee.

This effort culminated in the first Ending Hunger in Maine Convening on October 30, 2024. At the event, working group members shared their recommendations, weighed in on further prioritization, shared a meal that was almost 100% locally sourced and shared stories that underscored food as our common denominator through an activity hosted by Community Plate.





Priority Areas for Aligned Action in 2025–2026

The initiating 2019 legislation, Resolve to End Hunger in Maine by 2030², stated that the human, social and economic costs of hunger and food insecurity in Maine were enormous, far-reaching, and unacceptable. Maine’s Roadmap, which resulted from that 2019 directive, is built on the fundamental understanding that ending hunger requires coordination and collaboration across government, nonprofit, and the private sector, with leadership and engagement from impacted communities and stakeholders closest to the issue.

As a result, the priority areas identified by the 2024 working group process are not recommendations from one sector to another. Instead, they represent shared goals for aligned action across sectors, leveraging the unique strengths of individual partners in the Ending Hunger in Maine network and the impact that can only come from collaboration. The success of these collective efforts will bear fruit that benefits everyone in Maine.

2 https://legislature.maine.gov/legis/bills/bills_129th/billtexts/HP084801.asp

Ending Hunger in Maine Priority Areas for 2025–26

Shared Overarching Goal: Reduce the prevalence and severity of food insecurity in Maine.

Priority Areas for Aligned Action:

1. Maximize Federal Nutrition Programs & Improve Access to Public Benefit Programs through Cross-Sector Collaboration, Administrative Streamlining, and Outreach & Application Assistance

- Streamline administration and improve access to public benefit programs to make it easier to apply for, maintain, and use public benefits.
- Include people accessing the public benefits system or impacted by poverty in efforts to identify barriers and solutions to benefits access to ensure programs gain from the expertise of lived experience and meet community needs.
- Expand outreach & application assistance to populations that face barriers to federal nutrition programs & public benefit programs.
- Expand access & build capacity of out-of-school time Child Nutrition programs (SUN Meals & SUN Meals To-Go and the Child and Adult Care Food Program, CACFP), WIC, and Older Americans Act Nutrition programs.

2. Expand Access and Impact of Food Assistance Programs

- Improve access for disproportionately impacted communities who are underserved by charitable and public food assistance programs.
 - Build, expand, and strengthen relationships with individuals, organizations and community groups that are embedded in impacted communities. Emphasize relationships that will improve access.
 - Develop better data sharing models to measure the extent to which programs are meeting the needs of all populations.
- Integrate complementary services and supports with food assistance programs (e.g. connections to public assistance programs) and co-locate food access points at locations providing other community and public services.
- Continue to invest financially in charitable and community-based food assistance programs to bolster capacity to provide high value, barrier-free, and culturally responsive access to food and ensure the system can meet the need.

3. Leverage Local Food & Nutrition Incentive and Intervention Programs that Increase Low-Income Purchasing Power, Increase Agency and Choice, and/or Increase Access to Nutritious, Local, or Culturally Important Foods.

- Maximize programs, policies, and funding streams which increase low-income purchasing power, agency and choice, and/or access to nutritious, local, or culturally important foods. For example, these may include local food for food assistance programs (e.g., Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program), nutrition incentive programs (e.g., Maine Harvest Bucks), farm to institution/school, and Food is Medicine initiatives.

- Support efforts to develop a Maine Food Plan (as recommended in the Maine Climate Plan update) and coordinate alignment with Maine’s Roadmap to End Hunger by 2030.
 - Emphasize investment in socially disadvantaged producers.
 - Emphasize the intersection of increasing low-income food access and strengthening Maine’s local food system.

4. Invest in the Leadership & Inclusion of Impacted People in Ending Hunger in Maine Efforts

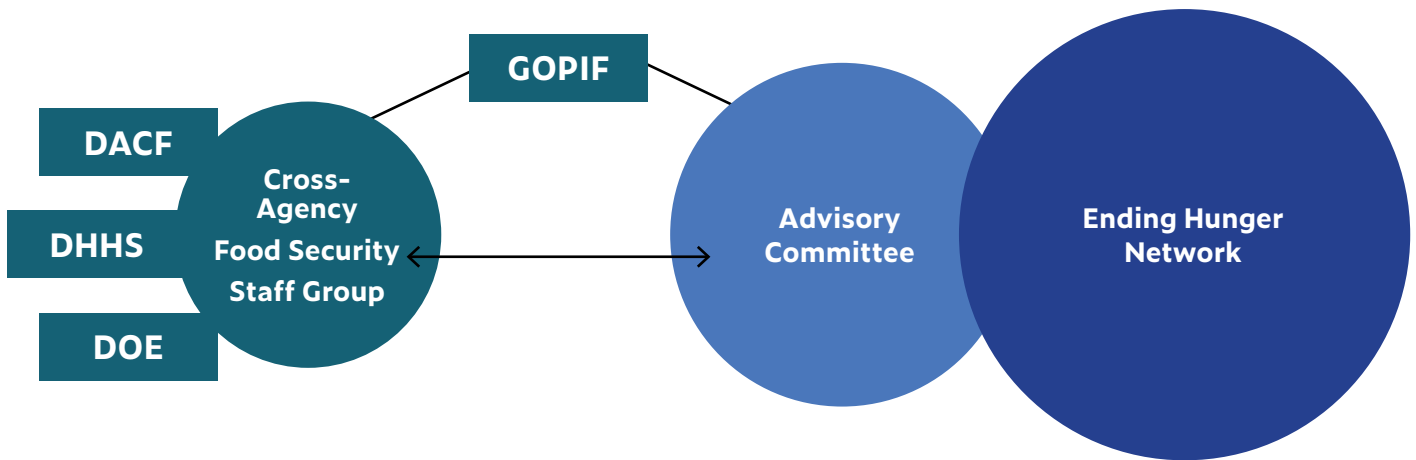
- Ending Hunger in Maine Initiative:
 - Ensure that funding is available to compensate people with lived experience for their participation and expertise on the Ending Hunger in Maine Advisory Committee.
 - Partner with community-based organizations that provide leadership and advocacy training and support to people with low-income and lived experience of food insecurity and poverty, to support the engagement on the EHM Advisory Committee.
 - Provide support with fundraising, coordination of efforts, and highlight the impact and importance of existing on-the-ground, community-based efforts to empower and invest in the leadership and inclusion of impacted people.
- Benefits Access [see 1B]: To be implemented, in part, through the Ending Hunger in Maine Advisory Committee’s engagement with the State Cross-Agency Staff Group.
- Narrative Change [see 5A]
- Food Assistance [see 2A]

5. Develop Shared Ending Hunger Narrative Change Messaging

- Develop Core Narrative Change Messaging and Tools About the Causes and Solutions to Hunger in Maine That Can Be Utilized and Adapted by Different Groups. Build on the work of Davey Strategies for Ending Hunger Maine, narrative efforts of partner organizations, and the key elements developed by the Narrative Change Work Group, including:
 - Strength-based, unifying narrative.
 - Emphasizing hunger as a systemic issue, not one caused by individual failings.
 - Center voices of people with lived experience in developing Ending Hunger in Maine narratives.

6. Support Efforts of Others to Reduce Transportation Barriers & Housing Instability, Emphasizing the Relationship with Food Insecurity.

- Support Efforts to Reduce Transportation Barriers to Food, Resources, Jobs, and Opportunity.
- Support Efforts to Reduce Housing Instability.
- Connect to Narrative Change Messaging: Emphasize the interconnection of transportation access, housing stability, and food security.



Building Capacity for Cross-Sector Coordination and Tracking Progress

Goal A of Maine’s Roadmap to End Hunger is about building the infrastructure and capacity needed to coordinate implementation of the plan, within and outside of state government. The plan emphasizes the unique role that GOPIF can play as a lead convener by staffing the initiative, facilitating coordination and aligning action across sectors, and developing data systems for tracking progress, measuring disparities, and supporting continuous learning and improvement.

Towards these ends, GOPIF has laid the groundwork in 2024 for the Ending Hunger in Maine initiative to:

- Launch a Cross-Agency Food Security Staff Group in January 2025
- Strengthen the Role of the Ending Hunger in Maine Advisory Committee
- Support the Ending Hunger in Maine Network
- Host an annual Ending Hunger in Maine Summit
- Develop a Data Dashboard to be launched in early 2025

Evolving the Structure of Ending Hunger in Maine Initiative

CROSS-AGENCY STAFF WORK GROUP

Two key objectives in Maine’s Roadmap are to maximize federal nutrition programs and to streamline access to public benefit programs. These elements were identified as the top priority for aligned action in 2025-26. This new cross-agency staff group will support this priority by bringing together staff from the Maine Departments of Education (DOE), Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF), and Health and Human Services (DHHS), who administer key food security programs, many of which are USDA Food and Nutrition Service programs. For example, the National School Lunch Program and Summer Meals (DOE), The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) at DACF, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) at DHHS.

This staff group aims at improving coordination across state-administered federal nutrition programs to:

- Maximize federal nutrition programs and improve access to public benefits to reduce food insecurity in Maine. (Priority 1)
- Make the most of federal funding and local food funding opportunities (Priority 3).

- Support and collaborate with food assistance programs and community-based organizations interested in being involved in federal nutrition program outreach and application assistance. (Priority 2)
- Engage lived expertise to identify barriers and solutions to benefits access. (Priority 4)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Cross-Agency Staff Group will provide updates to and seek input from the Ending Hunger in Maine Advisory Committee which will be streamlined from over 40 members to a more manageable 20-member group. Membership will focus on those that are closest to the issue: food assistance providers, federal nutrition program advocates, organizations representing groups most impacted by food insecurity, and community members with lived experience of food insecurity and poverty. The goal is to create a more effective feedback loop between the on-the-ground efforts and the state’s efforts to end hunger and to create more concrete opportunities for the advisory committee to guide the EHM initiative. The advisory committee will serve as a bridge, providing input to the State Cross Agency Staff Group and then engaging and empowering a broader network of stakeholders through the Ending Hunger Network.

ENDING HUNGER NETWORK

The Ending Hunger in Maine Network brings together Maine’s vast community of partners who contribute to the statewide initiative. The Network will provide a forum to:

- Exchange information, resources, and learnings.
- Align action and mobilize support of Ending Hunger in Maine priorities.
- Coordinate shared messaging about the causes and solutions to hunger. (Priority 5)
- Support the efforts of others to reduce transportation barriers and housing instability, emphasizing the relationship with food insecurity. (Priority 6)

Building on the success of the first statewide in-person event this year, the Ending Hunger in Maine initiative will continue hosting an annual summit to promote and strengthen collaboration across public, private, and community efforts to reduce food insecurity in Maine.

Developing a Dashboard for Data on Food Insecurity and Its Drivers in Maine

The section of the report that follows includes an overview of data compiled by the Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) on the state of food insecurity and its drivers in Maine. The purpose of this data is to increase public understanding of the nature of the problem and to inform our state’s efforts to reduce the prevalence and severity of food insecurity. This information will form the basis of an Ending Hunger in Maine Data Dashboard to be hosted and maintained on the GOPIF website, to serve as a common source of data for the initiative and its broad network of partners contributing to Ending Hunger in Maine.



THE STATE OF FOOD INSECURITY AND ITS DRIVERS IN MAINE

Introduction

One in eight people (13.1%) in Maine live in households that struggle to afford enough food to eat³. Among children in Maine, one in five, or 18.7%, live in food insecure households – the highest rate of child food insecurity in New England. Food insecurity rates vary widely across Maine counties, as seen in Figure 1. The highest county-level rate of child food insecurity in Maine – and in New England – is 25.9% in Washington County⁴.

As defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), “food insecurity means that households were, at times, unable to acquire adequate food for one or more household members because they had insufficient money and other resources for food⁵.” Because food insecurity is caused by a lack of sufficient resources, it is a symptom of a household’s broader struggle to make ends meet. That struggle results in making sacrifices on food, which is a more flexible expense compared to other basic need expenses with non-negotiable fixed costs like housing. As the oft cited saying goes, *the rent eats first*⁶.

The USDA measures household food insecurity annually using data collected in the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FSS), with state-level rates reported as three-year averages due to the survey sample size. The latest report found that 10.9% of households in Maine were food insecure in 2021–2023, with 40% of those food insecure households (4.4% of Maine households overall) experiencing very low food insecurity, the most severe form of food deprivation⁷.

Households are classified as food insecure, with low food security or very low food security, based on the number of conditions described in the survey questions that they report experiencing at some point over the past 12 months. Examples of experiences measured by the survey questions include:

- Worrying that food would run out before there was enough money to buy more.
- Not being able to afford to eat balanced meals.
- Cutting the size of meals or skipping meals because there was not enough money for food.
- Being hungry, but not eating because there was not enough money for food.
- Relying on low-cost food to feed children because money to buy food was running out.
- The children were not eating enough because there wasn’t enough money for food.

The USDA has been reporting on the prevalence and severity of food insecurity in U.S. households since 1995 to inform the operation of Federal food and nutrition assistance programs, as well as private food assistance programs and other government initiatives aimed at reducing food insecurity. This section of the Ending Hunger in Maine Annual Report provides an overview of the state of household food insecurity in Maine to increase public understanding of the nature of the problem and to inform our state’s efforts to reduce the prevalence and severity of food insecurity.

3 Feeding America. Map the Meal Gap. Food Insecurity among the Overall Population in Maine. <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2022/overall/maine>.

4 Feeding America. Map the Meal Gap. <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2022/child/maine>.

5 *Household Food Security in the United States in 2023*, USDA, Economic Research Service.

6 Desmond, M. (2017). *Evicted*. Penguin Books.

7 USDA, 2024. Note: the USDA measure is at the household level, while the Feeding America *Map the Meal Gap* measure is at the individual level.

Figure 1

Overall Individual & Child Food Insecurity Rates by County



County	County	Child Food Insecurity
ANDROSCOGGIN	14	23
AROOSTOOK	16	24
CUMBERLAND	11	14
FRANKLIN	14	21
HANCOCK	13	19
KENNEBEC	14	21
KNOX	12	18
LINCOLN	12	19
OXFORD	15	22
PENOBSCOT	14	20
PISCATAQUIS	16	24
SAGADHOC	12	17
SOMERSET	16	24
WALDO	14	20
WASHINGTON	17	26
YORK	12	17

Causes and Consequences of Food Insecurity

Though it is measured at the household level, food insecurity is best understood, not as an individual or household-level problem, but as a societal problem reflecting structural barriers to economic security and opportunity.

Household food insecurity is a complex problem, influenced by many intersectional factors. These include:

- Economic factors, like recession and inflation, cost-of-living, and wages
- Federal and State policy (e.g., policy changes impacting Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program eligibility and benefit amounts).
- Household circumstances, for example, the income shock of a job loss, or the unique financial challenges facing single-parent households.
- Socioeconomic disadvantage resulting from historic, structural, and interpersonal racism and discrimination.

Due to the causes and the serious and wide-ranging consequences of the problem, household food insecurity is a key indicator of the health and economic well-being of Maine people and communities. It is also a key indicator of disparities given the dramatic variance across populations in Maine.

Food insecurity is associated with several serious negative health outcomes, including heightened risk of chronic disease, such as hypertension, coronary heart disease, cancer, obesity, and diet-sensitive chronic diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure⁸. Food insecurity is also associated with higher use of emergency room visits and inpatient admissions,

and higher healthcare costs, even after accounting for other socioeconomic factors⁹.

Lacking consistent access to a fundamental basic need like food for an individual and their loved ones takes a significant toll on mental well-being, in addition to the physical health impacts. Food insecurity is considered a psychosocial stressor, which leads to increased levels of anxiety, depression, shame, and stress¹⁰. As food insecurity becomes more severe, depression becomes more severe.

For children, food insecurity has devastating impacts on physical and mental health, academic achievement, behavioral problems, and future economic prosperity. Food insecurity in children is associated with delayed development, increased risk of chronic illness and mental health issues like anxiety and depression, among many other serious consequences with long-term impacts for individuals, families, and communities¹¹.

Child food security is also strongly impacted by family dynamics and maternal well-being, suggesting the importance of whole-family approaches to addressing child food insecurity. A study by Children's HealthWatch, for instance, found that experiences of discrimination among mothers and caregivers were strongly associated with household and child food insecurity. In this study, those who experienced interpersonal discrimination were 1.5 to 2 times as likely to experience food insecurity. Increased caregiver experience with discrimination was associated with increased magnitude of child food insecurity¹².

For households with children, research has found that across the U.S., families reporting Adverse Childhood

8 Feeding America. Impact of Hunger. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/impact-of-hunger>

9 Berkowitz SA, Seligman HK, Meigs JB, Basu S. Food insecurity, healthcare utilization, and high cost: a longitudinal cohort study. *Am J Manag Care*. 2018 Sep;24(9):399-404. PMID: 30222918; PMCID: PMC6426124.

10 Ejiohuo O, Onyeka H, Unegbu KC, Chikezie OG, Odeyemi OA, Lawal A, Odeyemi OA. Nourishing the Mind: How Food Security Influences Mental Wellbeing. *Nutrients*. 2024 Feb 9;16(4):501. doi: 10.3390/nu16040501. PMID: 38398825; PMCID: PMC10893396.

11 Feeding America. Impact of Hunger. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/impact-of-hunger>

12 Children's HealthWatch, August 2018. From disparities to discrimination: getting at the roots of food insecurity in America.

Experiences (ACEs), such as domestic violence, neighborhood violence, and family substance abuse, were much more likely to experience household food insecurity. Just one out of every 25 children in food-secure homes were exposed to three or more ACEs. In food-insecure homes that rose to one in every four children.¹³ This research suggests that solutions for food insecurity should include trauma-informed approaches which address exposure to violence and discrimination in addition to the economic insecurity that prevents households from affording adequate food.

The following sections of the report provide an overview of trends in the drivers of food insecurity and communities disproportionately impacted by food insecurity in Maine.

Trends in Food Insecurity in Maine

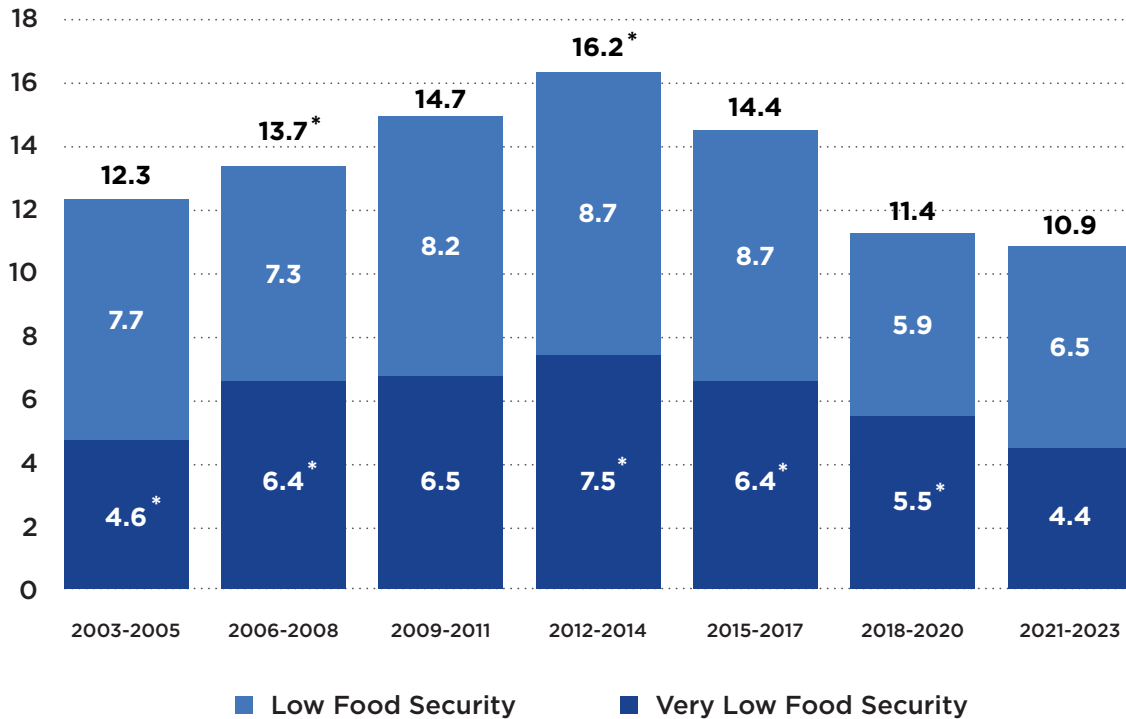
Over the Past 10-20 Years in Maine Household and Child Food Security Has Improved Overall

Looking back at trends in Maine’s household food insecurity rates over the past 20 years there is some good news. Three-year averages between 2003 and 2023 have improved overall, fluctuating from a high of 16.2% (2012–2014) to a low of 10.9% (2021–23), (Figure 2). The prevalence of the most severe condition of very low food security has been higher in Maine than the national average for five of the seven, 3-year averages reported across this 20-year period. However, the rate of very low food security has consistently trended down between 2012–14 and 2021–23.

Figure 2

Household Food Insecurity in Maine 2003-2005 to 2021-23, 3-year averages

*Rate is higher than national average; statistically significant difference.

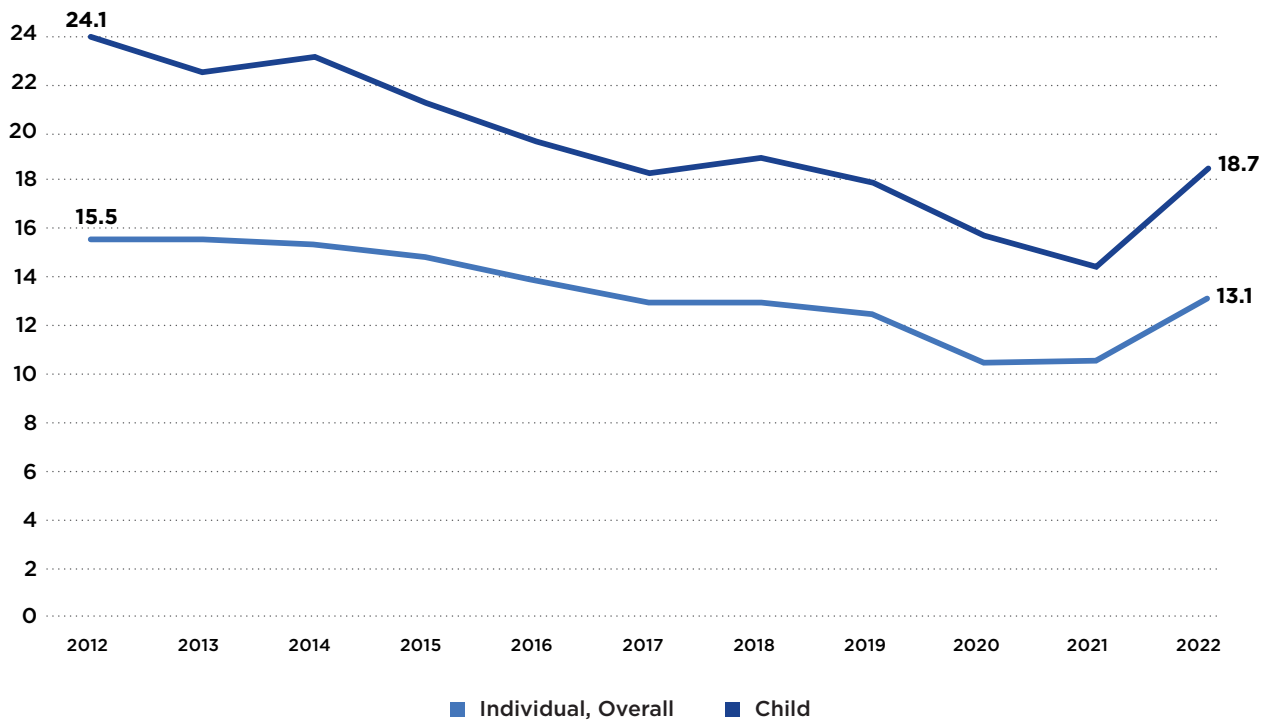


Source: USDA Economic Research Service, Household Food Security in the U.S., Annual Reports

13 Children’s HealthWatch. (2019). Adverse Childhood Experiences and Household Food Insecurity: Findings from the 2016 National Survey of Children’s Health.

Figure 3

Individual Food Insecurity Rate, Overall & Child, Maine, 2012-2022



Source: Feeding America, Mind the Meal Gap Report, 2012-2022

The percentage of children living in food insecure households in Maine has also improved overall over the past ten years, as reported by Feeding America’s annual Map the Meal Gap individual-level food insecurity estimates between 2012 and 2022 (Figure 3)¹⁴. The rate of children living in food insecure households decreased by 22% between 2012 and 2022. The food insecurity rate for all individuals, overall, during that same period, decreased by 15.5% (2.5 percentage points).

Pre-Pandemic to Today Food Insecurity Has Worsened in Maine

Looking at food insecurity pre-pandemic (2019) to today, the broader overall trend of improvement has reversed, and food insecurity in Maine is on the rise.

While child food insecurity was on a consistent downward trend, reduced by nearly 10 percentage points between 2012 (24.1%) and 2021 (14.6%), the rate increased dramatically (+28%) in just one year, between 2021 and 2022, to a rate higher than it was pre-pandemic in 2019. This is also the case for the overall individual food insecurity rate (Figure 4), which shows a lower rate in 2020 and 2021 than in 2019, followed by a 2022 rate that is higher than 2019.

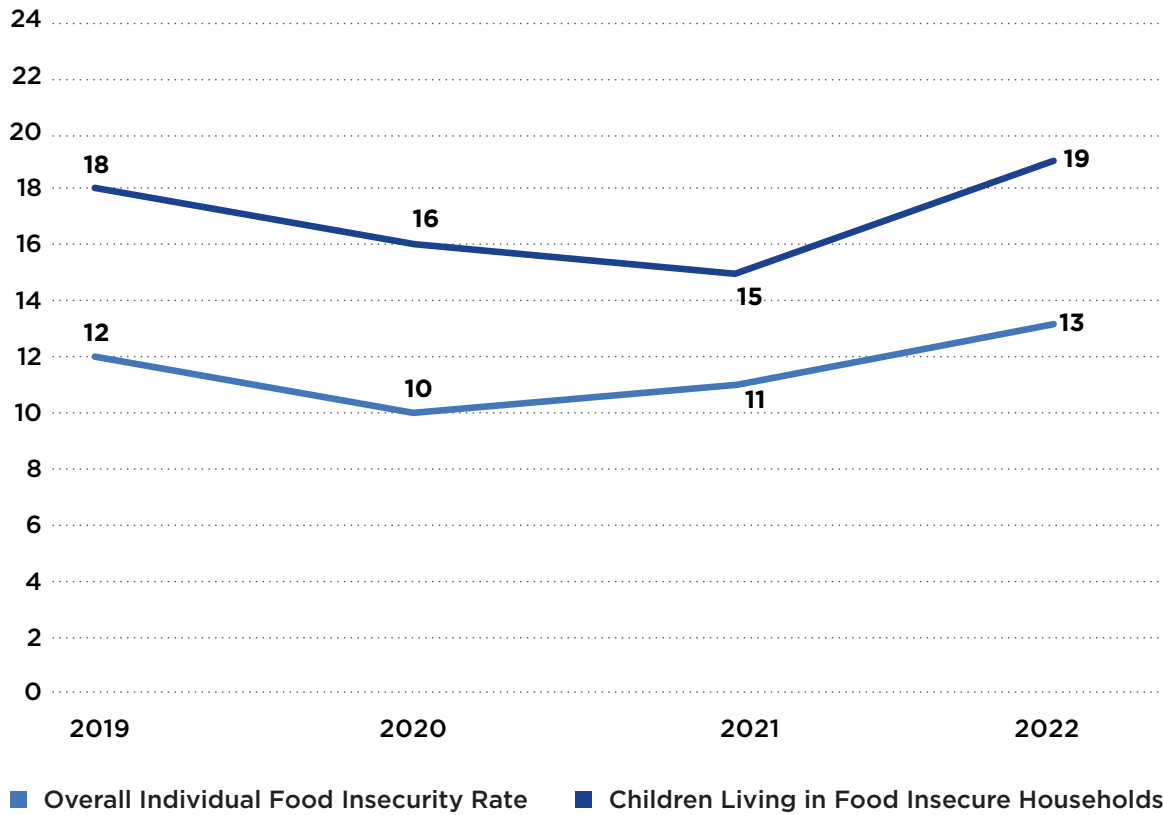
Looking at more recent data, food insufficiency, a point-in-time measure of food insecurity, increased by 47.1% in Maine when comparing August-September 2021 rates to August-September 2024 rates¹⁵ (Figure 5). Food insufficiency, measured in the monthly Census Household Pulse Survey (HPS), is defined

¹⁴ Note: Child food insecurity rates are not reported at the state level by the USDA. Feeding America estimates these rates at the state, county, and congressional district level in their annual Map the Meal Gap (MMG) report, based on the USDA report microdata. MMG estimates are for individuals, not at the household level, as measured by USDA. See more in their Methodology Report.

¹⁵ Hunger Free America. 2024 National Hunger Survey Report. https://hfa-website.cdn.prismic.io/hfa-website/Z0ZCZZbqstJ97zAf_2024NationalHungerReport.pdf.

Figure 4

Individual Food Insecurity Rate, Overall & Child, Maine, 2019-2022



Source: Feeding America, Mind the Meal Gap Report, 2012-2022

Figure 5

Maine Households Without Enough to Eat, Sometimes or Often

Food Insufficiency Rate, Census Household Pulse Survey

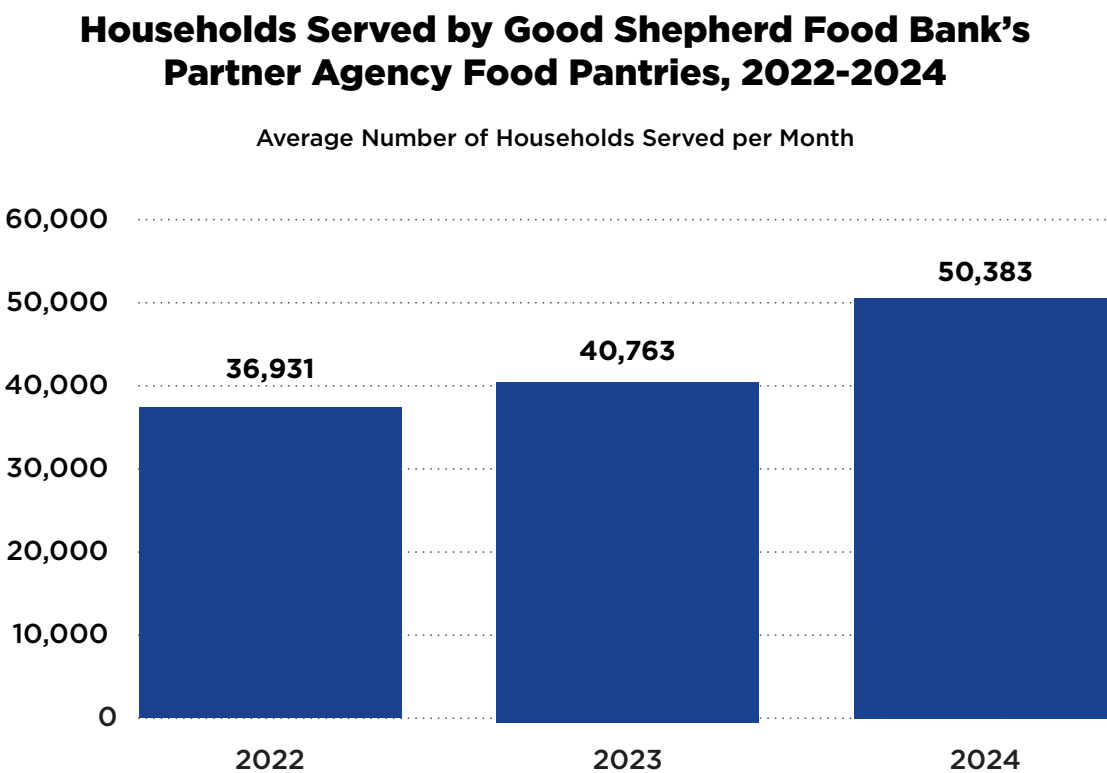


Source: Hunger Free America, National Hunger Survey Report 2024

as when a household did not have enough to eat, sometimes or often, in the last 7 days. Food insufficiency is not directly comparable to the USDA food insecurity measure¹⁶, but does provide more recent data than other sources¹⁷.

The number of households served by food pantries in Good Shepherd Food Bank’s partner agency network also illustrate a trend of increasing food hardship in Maine over the last few years. The monthly average number of households served by the network increased by 36% between 2022 and 2024, increasing most dramatically between 2023 and 2024 (Figure 6).

Figure 6



Data comes from a sample of around 300 food pantries across Maine who report a monthly estimate of unique households served. The May 2024 count relies on an average of April and June numbers for three of the 16 counties due to reporting challenges.

Source: Good Shepherd Food Bank

¹⁶ The Census Household Pulse Survey was launched in 2020 to provide a real-time measure of the impact of the pandemic on U.S. households. The HPS food sufficiency measure is not directly comparable to the USDA household food insecurity measure due to different methodologies, response rates, and different time periods covered (past week versus past twelve months experience with food access).

¹⁷ Currently, the most recent state-level food security data available otherwise is the 2021-2023 average for households from the USDA and the 2022 individual-level estimates from Feeding America.



Local Food Pantry Feels the Impact of the End of SNAP Emergency Allotments

In the words of Kelly Sirimoglu, Executive Director of the Piscataquis Regional Food Center, from an interview conducted in December 2024:

“On February 14th, 2023 – on purpose, we picked Valentine’s Day – we opened the doors of our marketplace [Dover-Foxcroft Area Food Center]. It’s a choice marketplace. Everyone has an appointment. We design everything with the intent of treating everyone with compassion, respect and dignity. When we opened our doors, we had 200 registered shoppers in our database. We end this year with 800.

It was the timing. We opened the doors in February of 2023 and weeks later, all of that [expanded] pandemic SNAP benefit went away. The growth was also because we created an amazing shopping experience in a region where there is nothing else like us. So, we’ve been serving people from Somerset, Penobscot, Piscataquis, and Waldo County. There are people that drive over an hour to get here. Now it has become unsustainable to do that, so next year we will establish a Piscataquis-only service. That was a really hard call to make.

Our biggest growth area is children. We have a lot of large families, and a lot of ALICE* families, in this area. When we started out, it was primarily older people, and we’ve watched the demographic shift. We had to go get one of those diaper changing stations and we go through more formula and baby food and diapers now than we ever did when we were smaller. Just because of everything going on, food prices went up and SNAP benefits went down. So, we were really riding the wave of all of this change.

I would love to see SNAP back to a benefit that helps people actually afford food. I believe that during the pandemic, it lifted so many people out of poverty and it really kept a lot of families from going to the food pantries. And I love that it just puts the money right back in the local economy because they’re spending it locally. And if my magic wand can’t impact government and the farm bill, what I really think would work in this region, because we are also very transportation poor ... I think mobile pantries are the answer. Because the biggest challenge our shoppers face is getting to us. We talk to them every day. Often, it’s one car taking four households. People come together. And if that car breaks down, four families don’t eat. And those cars break down all the time.”

Read more about PRFC in 2024 Highlights from the Ending Hunger in Maine Network.

*ALICE: Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed; a phrase coined by United Way to define households that earn above the Federal Poverty Level but cannot afford the basic cost of living in their county.

Trends in the Drivers of Food Insecurity

Expiration of Pandemic-Era Expansions to Safety Net Increased Food Insecurity and Poverty

The post-pandemic increases in household food insecurity seen in Maine mirror national trends, widely understood to be the result of the combined effects of inflation and the expiration of pandemic-era public safety net program expansions like the expanded Child Tax Credit (ECTC), expired in 2022, and increased benefits known as emergency allotments in the nation's largest anti-hunger program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which expired in March 2023.

The ECTC, issued July 2021 to December 2021, was associated with a dramatic decline in food insecurity among households with children¹⁸. That same year, the U.S. poverty rate went down to a record low of 8%, falling by 14.5 million between 2019 and 2021 and then increasing by 14.5 million people in 2022, when the ECTC was no longer available. A similar trend was seen in child poverty rates¹⁹.

In February 2023, the SNAP emergency allotments (temporary benefit increases of between \$95 and \$250 a month per household) expired in Maine, along with 34 other states. A new study by researchers at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, found that the emergency allotment expiration resulted in an 8.4% increase in food insufficiency²⁰. The report findings also suggested that the 2021 update to the Thrifty Food Plan, which permanently expanded SNAP benefits, did not keep pace with inflation.



One in Eight People Participate in SNAP in Maine

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, is a federal nutrition program administered in Maine by the Office of Family Independence (OFI). SNAP, America's largest anti-hunger program, provides food benefits to low-income families to supplement their grocery budget so they can afford the nutritious food essential to health and well-being. In 2023 the average monthly participation in SNAP in Maine, was 179,208 individuals, or 12.8% of that state's population. On average, SNAP lifted 36,000 people above the poverty line in Maine per year, between 2014 and 2018. *Read more about Maine's SNAP Employment & Training program and SNAP Education in the 2024 Highlights section.*

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities,
SNAP Fact Sheet Maine

[LEARN MORE](#)

18 Martinchek, K., Gupta, P., Karpman, M., Gonzalez, D. March 2023. As Inflation Squeezed Family Budgets, Food Insecurity Increased between 2021 and 2022. Urban Institute.

19 Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. June 10, 2024. *Expiration of Pandemic Relief Led to Record Increases in Poverty and Child Poverty in 2022.*

20 "Food Insufficiency Increased After The Expiration Of COVID-19 Emergency Allotments For SNAP Benefits In 2023," Whitney Wells, Kaitlyn E. Jackson, Cindy W. Leung, Rita Hamad, Health Affairs, October 7, 2024, DOI: 10.1377/hlthaff.2023.01566

Rising Food Costs and Inflation Hit the Lowest Income Households Hardest

Food costs have been on the rise at historic rates since 2020, putting strain on household budgets and leading to increased risk of food insecurity. The largest spike in food prices (10.4% increase) was seen between December 2021 and December 2022, marking a 40-year high for inflation. Rising food costs have an outsized impact on low-income households, who spend almost a third of their household budget on food, compared to just 8% for households in the highest income quintile, according to the USDA. A 2022 study from the Urban Institute found that respondents that reported a higher rate of grocery cost increase were twice as likely to be food insecure and reported coping mechanisms that included withdrawing money from savings (43.3%) and taking on credit card debt (36.3%), suggesting increased risk of financial instability in the future²¹.

Meanwhile, new data from the American Community Survey, shows that the lowest income households are also hardest hit by inflation overall. While the median household income in Maine increased by 5% between 2019 and 2023, for Mainers in the bottom income quintile, incomes dropped 1% during that same period. The rate of Mainers living in deep poverty also increased slightly between 2019 and 2023, from 4% to 4.8%, suggesting that despite a strong labor market and increased median income, inflation is outpacing households with low incomes²².

Additional Measures Suggest High Cost-of-Living Impacts Food Insecurity in Maine

Data on the incomes of food insecure households in Maine demonstrates that Mainers tend to experience food insecurity at higher income levels than the national average, suggesting a higher cost-of-living. Annually, Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap (MMG) Report estimates the share of people who are food insecure, but whose incomes are too high to qualify for SNAP²³.



In 2022, FA estimates that 52% of food insecure individuals in Maine live in households with income above 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL), the state's SNAP income threshold (Figure 7). Eligibility thresholds for SNAP vary across U.S. states. Nationally, 36% of food insecure individuals have incomes above a lower threshold of 185% FPL, 16% between 130%-185% FPL, and 48% below 130% FPL (Figure 8).

The MMG Report also includes data on average meal costs, based on the amount food insecure individuals report spending on food in the Current Population Survey. In 2022, the national average cost per meal was \$3.99, which is 1.6 times as high as the average individual cost of the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP), which serves as the basis for calculating the maximum SNAP benefit

²¹ Martinchek, K., et al. March 2023. Urban Institute.

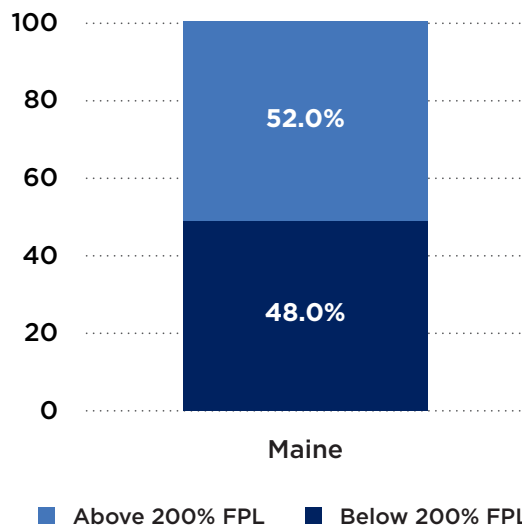
²² Maine Center for Economic Policy. Blog Post. <https://www.mecp.org/blog/census-data-shows-most-mainers-ahead-compared-to-pre-pandemic-but-poorest-still-struggling/>.

²³ Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap Report, <https://map.feedingamerica.org/>.

Figure 7

Maine Food Insecure Population by Income 2022

200% of the Federal Poverty Level is the income eligibility threshold for SNAP (Food Stamp Program)

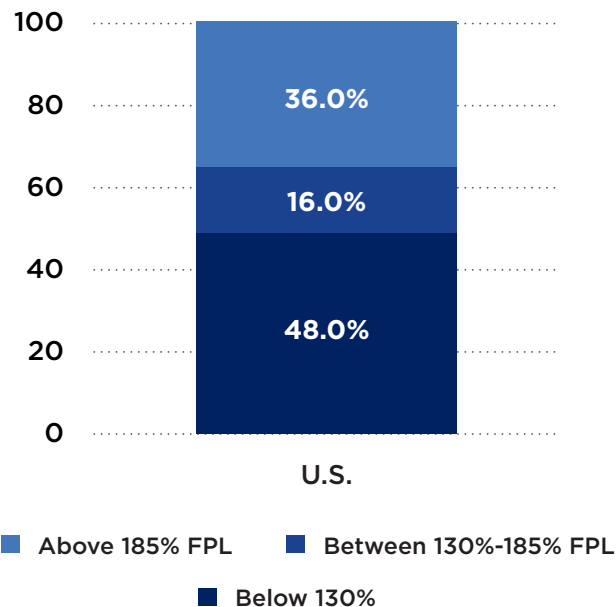


Source: Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap Report

Figure 8

U.S. Food Insecure Population by Income 2022

SNAP income eligibility varies across U.S. states, ranging from 130%-200% FPL (income as a share of Federal Poverty Level).



Source: Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap Report

allotments by the USDA. The average cost per meal in Maine in 2022 was higher than the national average at \$4.19. Average meal cost varied widely across Maine counties, ranging from \$4.01 (Somerset) to \$4.89 (Sagadahoc), which is nearly twice as high as the TFP meal cost. These numbers demonstrate the challenging fact that food prices, and as a result, SNAP buying power, varies based on where you live, potentially compounding affordability issues for low-income households.

In addition to the cost of food, the cost of other basic needs, like housing, transportation, healthcare, and child-care also impact a household’s ability to afford enough food. Homeownership in Maine has become increasingly unaffordable and out-of-reach for most Mainers. Households now need to make over \$100,000 a year to afford the median home price. In 2022, nearly half of renters (47.2%)²⁴ were cost burdened, paying over 30% of household income in rent. Home prices and rents continued to increase in 2023, exceeding wage increases, likely further exacerbating housing cost burden for Mainers²⁵.

A 2024 energy burden study, meanwhile, found that home energy burden (the percent of household income spent on home energy) for low-income households in Maine is 14%, nearly three-times higher than the statewide average, and far above the affordability target of 6 percent²⁶.

24 Census, American Community Survey

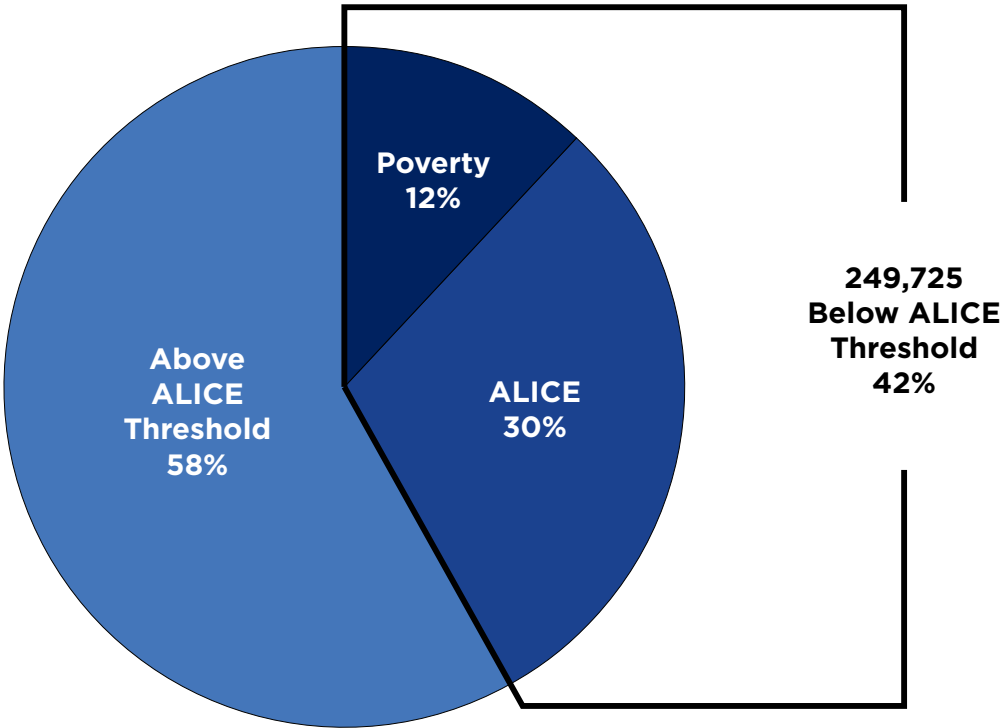
25 State of Maine Housing Production Needs Study. October 2023. Maine Housing, GOPIF, MDECD.

26 Maine Energy Burden Study. October 7, 2024. <https://www.maine.gov/meopa/sites/maine.gov.meopa/files/inline-files/2024-10-07%20VEIC%20ERAC.pdf>.

Providing a measure for overall cost-of-living by county, a study of financial hardship by the United Ways of Maine, finds that a large share of households that have income above the poverty level in Maine still struggle to afford basic needs—a group the report refers to as ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed). The ALICE in Maine report finds that in 2022, 30% (172,502) of households in Maine were ALICE, just above the national rate of 29%. When combined with households in poverty (12%), a total of 249,725 households — 42% — are living below the ALICE Threshold²⁷ (Figure 9). Between 2021 and 2022, the number of households in poverty decreased by 1%, but the number of ALICE households increased by 4%; another indicator of increased cost-of-living. The report also finds racial disparities in ALICE, with 49% of Black households struggling to make ends meet with income above the poverty level, compared with the state average of 30%, suggesting the persisting impacts of historic and structural racism²⁸ and discrimination.

Figure 9

Total Households in Maine = 594,358



²⁷ United for ALICE Research Center Maine, <https://www.unitedforalice.org/state-overview/maine>.

²⁸ Structural racism: “the totality of ways, in which societies foster racial discrimination, via mutually reinforcing inequitable systems (e.g. housing, employment, earnings, benefits, credit, media, health care, criminal justice, etc.)” Bailey ZD, Krieger N, Agenor M, Graves J, Linos N, Bassett MT. 2016. Lancet.

Disparities in Household Food Insecurity

Food insecurity rates vary dramatically for different racial and ethnic populations as a result of historic and structural racism that has caused social and economic disadvantage for communities of color, increasing the risk of food insecurity²⁹. This data, however, can be difficult to find at the state-level, especially for Maine due to its small population, and because of the small sample size of the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FSS) data³⁰.

In 2024, the Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future commissioned the Maine Office of the State Economist (OSE) to assess food insecurity rates in Maine by race and ethnicity in addition to other relevant characteristics including disability status and household composition, using the CPS-FSS microdata used for the USDA’s annual report. The analysis found rates of food insecurity two to three times as high as the state average among single-parent households, households where the reference person reported having a disability, and among Black and Hispanic/Latinx households.

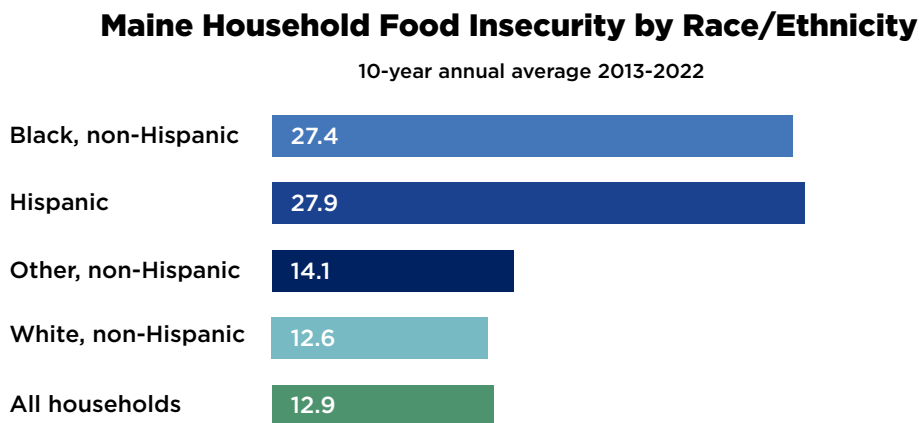
This analysis was done by weighting and pooling data from the 10-year period between 2013 and 2022 to improve the accuracy of estimates and address the small sample size in Maine³¹. The race and ethnicity statistics are reported in broad categories (White, non-Hispanic; Black, non-Hispanic; Hispanic; and other, non-Hispanic), because even after pooling data over a 10-year period, there were insufficient observations for additional groups.

Food Insecurity Twice as High for Black and Hispanic/Latinx Households in Maine

The analysis found that Black and Hispanic/Latinx households in Maine experience food insecurity at very high rates, 28.7% and 27.9%, respectively (Figure 10). These rates are over twice as high as White, non-Hispanic/Latinx households (12.7%) and households overall in Maine (13.0%) across this same time span.

National research finds that racial disparities persist even after accounting for other factors that are tied directly to socioeconomic outcomes like income

Figure 10



29 Feeding America, *Map the Meal Gap 2024* Executive Summary

30 The USDA annual household food insecurity report does not disaggregate rates by race and ethnicity at the state level. Feeding America’s annual Map the Meal Gap study provides food insecurity estimates for Black, Latino, and White individuals, but does not do so for Maine due to insufficient sample size.

31 Additional details are available by request in a methodology brief provided to GOPIF by the Maine Office of the State Economist.

Figure 11

Food security status of U.S. households by race and ethnicity of household reference person, 2016-21

	Food Insecure Percent	Very Low FI Percent
All households	11	4
American Indian/Alaskan Native	23	11
Asian	5	2
Black	21	9
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	16	5
Hispanic	17	5
White	8	3
Multiracial, American Indian-White	22	11
Multiracial, Black-White	18	8
Multiracial, All Other Combinations	18	8

Source: Household food insecurity across race and ethnicity in the United States, 2016–21. USDA ERS, 2024. • Created with Datawrapper

and education, suggesting that racism continues to impact political, cultural, and socioeconomic systems today³². Research also suggests that discrimination plays a significant role, finding correlation between increased experiences of discrimination and increased food insecurity³³.

The broad race and ethnicity groupings found in Figure 10 align with those used in the USDA’s annual Household Food Security report. Recognizing the insufficiency of these categories, in 2024, the USDA released a report that pooled six years of data (2016-2021) from the Current Population Survey to provide national household-level food insecurity estimates for a wider array of racial and ethnic identities, such as American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, multiracial, and others.³⁴ While this data is not specific to Maine, it provides important information about significant variances among specific populations otherwise obscured by broader categories.

Food Insecurity Status for U.S. Households by Race & Ethnicity Highest for Native Communities

These findings, displayed in Figure 11 above, show American Indian/Alaskan Native households experience the highest rate of food insecurity (23%) among subgroups, followed very closely by multiracial, American Indian-White households (22%), and Black households (21%).

Food insecurity and poverty are high among Native communities today, resulting from a long history of harmful Federal policies, which disrupted Native food systems, land tenure, and cultures³⁵. Additionally, according to a 2018 report by First Nations Development Institute, some Native communities tend to pay higher prices for food than the average U.S. consumer: for example, a gallon of milk costs nearly 40% more for reservation residents and 85% more for a loaf of bread³⁶.

32 Feeding America, *Map the Meal Gap 2024* Executive Summary

33 Children’s HealthWatch, August 2018. From disparities to discrimination: getting at the roots of food insecurity in America.

34 Hales, L. J. and Alisha Coleman-Jensen (2024). Household food insecurity across race and ethnicity in the United States, 2016–21 (Report No. EIB-269). U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.

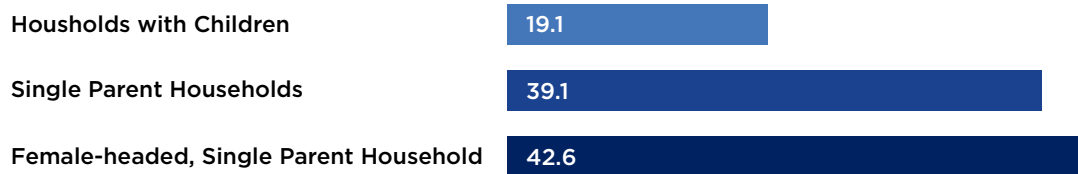
35 Maillacheruvu, S.U., (Oct. 4, 2022). The Historical Determinants of Food Insecurity in Native Communities. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

36 Maillacheruvu, S.U., (2022). Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

Figure 12

Food Insecurity by Household Composition in Maine

10-year annual average 2013-2022



Source: Maine Office of the State Economist analysis of Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (FSS), 2013-2022 data via IPUMS.

Nearly Half of Single-Parent, Female-Headed Households in Maine are Food Insecure

Single-parent households, especially those that were female-headed, experience the highest rates of household food insecurity in Maine among all population subgroups included in the CPS-FSS microdata analysis conducted by the Maine Office of State Economists (OSE). An astounding 42.6% of female-headed single-parent households in Maine are food insecure (Figure 12).

Single mothers are at a particularly high risk for experiencing food insecurity due to a complex combination of factors including the financial challenges of making ends meet with a single income while juggling caregiving responsibilities; gender inequalities such as lower income due to gender discrimination in pay and benefits; and higher risk of gender-based violence³⁷, which research has found to be associated with increased very low food security³⁸. These factors are compounded by racial inequality for women of color.

Food Insecurity is Twice as High for Households with a Disability in Maine

The OSE analysis of Maine’s household food insecurity data also found very high rates of food insecurity – 26.1%, twice as high as the state average – among

households where the survey respondent reported having a disability. This reflects national data which finds that disabled adults experience higher rates of food insecurity, likely due to limited employment opportunities or disability that prevents work, along with higher healthcare-related expenses that reduce the money available for food³⁹. For those with a disability that affects their ability to work, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), provides critical cash assistance. However, the maximum benefit for SSI is below the poverty level (75% FPL), leaving many participants without enough resources to meet basic needs⁴⁰.

Disability is more prevalent in Maine (16%) than the national average (13%), with far higher rates in four Maine counties: Piscataquis (26%), Washington (23%), Aroostook (22%), and Somerset (20%). These are also the counties with the highest rates of household food insecurity in Maine⁴¹. As outlined in a 2023 report by Disability Rights Maine, health disparities for people with disabilities are widespread, along with social inequalities linked to disparities in both health and food security, including higher rates of poverty, more transportation barriers, and higher rates of housing insecurity⁴².

37 Move for Hunger. Why Women are Facing Hunger at a Disproportionate Rate. <https://moveforhunger.org/>

38 Conroy AA, Cohen MH, Frongillo EA, Tsai AC, Wilson TE, Wentz EL, et al. (2019) Food insecurity and violence in a prospective cohort of women at risk for or living with HIV in the U.S. PLoS ONE 14(3): e0213365. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0213365>

39 Healthy People 2030. Food Insecurity. Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. <https://odphp.health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health/literature-summaries/food-insecurity>

40 Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. May 4, 2022. Policymakers Should Expand and Simplify Supplemental Security Income.

41 Feeding America. Map the Meal Gap. *Food Insecurity among the Overall Population in Maine*. <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2022/overall/maine>.

42 Disability Rights Maine. (2023). Equitable Access to Health Care for Mainers with Disabilities.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE ENDING HUNGER IN MAINE NETWORK

Included in this section is just a sample of the positive impacts being made by the Ending Hunger in Maine network of partners, led by State of Maine agencies and nonprofit organizations. The content in this section was provided by state agencies and partner organizations.



Alberto A. Gonzalez, Jr., Senior Advisor for External Engagement at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service joins students for lunch at Lewiston's Connors Elementary School

State Agencies and Community Partners Maximize Federal Nutrition Programs & Local Food Purchasing Programs

MAINE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Free School Meals for Students Helps Eliminate Stigma and Increase Participation in School Meals

Content from Maine Department of Education:

On October 16, 2024, the Maine Department of Education (DOE) gathered with other child nutrition leaders at Connors Elementary School in Lewiston to celebrate National School Lunch Week (Oct. 14-18, 2024). Special guest Alberto A. Gonzalez, Jr., Senior Advisor for External Engagement at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service, attended, as did USDA Northeast Regional Office officials and others. During the event, attendees visited classrooms and the school garden. They also partook in a delicious lunch, served by the Connors Elementary School nutrition team.

Recently, Maine became the second state in the country (of just 8 in total) to offer meals at no charge to public school students, as part of the state's Ending Hunger in Maine by 2030 initiative. That effort has helped to eliminate stigma and increase participation in meal programs statewide. When compared to the 2019 school year, before the School Meals for All policy was implemented, participation in meal programs statewide increased by 25% (34% breakfast; 20% lunch).

The Maine DOE is proud of other programs with similar goals that it oversees through the USDA. To learn more about Child Nutrition programs in Maine, visit the Maine Department of Education website.



Maine's Child Nutrition Programs Receive National Recognition and Expand Capacity of Local Food to Schools

FARM AND SEA TO SCHOOL

In 2022-2023, 119 Maine's School Administrative Units (SAUs) spent funds purchasing local foods in all sixteen (16) counties. SAUs used funds from the State Local Foods Fund and the Federal Local Foods for Schools Program totaling \$968,162.95. This program also promotes our Annual Cook-Off, where Child Nutrition Professionals compete while promoting local foods in schools.

REGIONAL LOCAL FOODS COORDINATORS

With the State Agency Farm to School Formula Grant from the United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (USDA FNS), Maine DOE Child Nutrition has started a program to place year-long, part-time regional coordinators in each of the nine (9) Superintendent Regions across the state. These coordinators will help bridge the gap from school to farmer, or farmer to school. During school year 2024-2025 the Maine DOE Child Nutrition team will place four (4) regional coordinators in the state and will add five (5) more regional coordinators during the 2025-2026 school year. The goal is to expand and strengthen the long-term impact of our Farm and Sea to School program in schools.

HEALTHY MEAL INCENTIVES FOR SCHOOLS

Maine's child nutrition programs are receiving national recognition. To date twelve (12) SAUs have received national recognition for their innovation and taking school meals to the next level, with twelve (12) SAUs accepting grant awards to improve nutritional quality and modernize their operations. Awards and recognition are provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Action for Healthy Kids as part of USDA's Healthy Meals Incentives Initiative. Statewide grant awards total: \$ 1,349,480.00

MAINE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Content provided by Maine Department of Health and Human Services:

SUN Bucks: Maine's Summer Nutrition Program for Kids

When school is out for summer, millions of kids lose access to school breakfast and lunch programs, putting them at higher risk of hunger and making it harder to get nutritional meals. In response to this concern, the USDA added a suite of programs providing children with food and nutrition support in the summertime. This suite of "SUN" programs includes rebranding Hot Lunch Summer as SUN Meals, and establishing SUN Meals To Go and SUN Bucks. Maine's Office for Family Independence (OFI) began administering the SUN Bucks program in 2024. SUN Bucks provides Grocery electronic benefit transfer (EBT) program dollars for families with eligible school-aged children. The funds can be used to buy groceries everywhere that Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits are accepted.

Most children who qualify for free or reduced-price school meals through a school meal application or receive SNAP, are automatically enrolled; however, there are some parents who need to apply for their children. EBT cards must be activated within 45 days of receipt, with unused benefits removed from the card 122 days after issuance.

To coordinate the launch of SUN Bucks program, the Office for Family Independence actively collaborated with the Maine Department of Education, DHHS's

Office of Child and Family Services, Passamaquoddy Nation Indian Township, the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future, Full Plates Full Potentials, Good Shepherd Food Bank, Maine Equal Justice, and other community partners. These Offices, groups, and organizations have been integral to the successful launch of SUN Bucks; from identifying SUN Bucks eligible children to promotional outreach work.

In its first year, over 102,000 Maine children were issued Sun Bucks payments of \$40 per month for food for June, July and August (\$120 total). Over \$12 million dollars was issued to help families meet their summer nutrition needs. Of the benefits issued, 71% of funds were utilized by families.

For 2025, there will be continued collaboration across offices to reach as many eligible children as possible. We also hope to improve the participation rate by double digits with an enhanced outreach effort to encourage families to utilize their SUN Bucks issuance, a SUN Bucks phone app, and a targeted data cleanup effort.

For more information about SUN Bucks, check out the below resources:

- https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ofi/programs-services/food-supplement/sun_bucks
- <https://www.maine.gov/doe/schools/nutrition/SUNBucks>



Maine SNAP Employment and Training Program (SNAP E&T) Delivers Services to Record-Breaking Number of Participants in 2024

Maine SNAP E&T delivered services to a record breaking 299 participants last year through three contractors and in partnership with Maine DOL Competitive Skills Scholarship Program. Maine SNAP E&T providers include Goodwill NNE (Job Connection), Sunrise County Economic Council (Family Futures Downeast and Start Up Downeast), and Strengthen Lewiston/Auburn (SLA). These agencies provide job search training, tuition supports, case management, and participant supports to remove barriers (reimbursement training expenses like travel, child care, books, tools and equipment). Services are voluntary and free to participants.

To be eligible, participants must be enrolled in SNAP and not be receiving TANF benefits. Some SNAP E&T participants receive short-term assistance with finding jobs while others enroll in post-secondary educational programs at Maine's community colleges and universities. More than half of Maine's E&T participants are enrolled in educational programming for credentials and degrees.

SNAP E&T has impressive results: For those completing programming, 61.5% were working six months after completion of E&T, and 58.3% were working one year post completion. SNAP E&T offers more than a job! For those who get a job through SNAP

More Than a Job.

Build a better future with SNAP E&T.

SNAP Employment and Training programs offer more than a job. Find programs that can connect you to training, personal support, and help with things like books, uniforms, and childcare.

Learn more about your State's program at fns.usda.gov/snap-et

USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

FNS-1081-03 - December 2023 - USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

Image provided by Maine SNAP E&T



Photo provided by Maine SNAP-Ed

E&T, Job Retention supports are available for up to one year for assistance with child care and transportation costs and job coaching.

Maine SNAP-Ed Reaches Almost 20,000 People in 2024

Maine SNAP-Ed is a Maine nutrition education program that Maine Department of Health and Human Services contracts with University of New England and 17 sub-recipient agencies to deliver. Maine SNAP-Ed is available statewide in all public health districts. Last year Maine SNAP-Ed's 40 nutrition educators taught 7,460 classes and reached 19,814 unique participants! Maine SNAP-Ed programming on nutrition education and preparing low-cost healthy meals was delivered in 162 K-12 schools, 97 child care and preschool sites, 49 public housing sites, and 21 community and recreation centers. Maine SNAP-Ed's message of "Healthy Eating on a Budget"

is also highlighted on the Maine SNAP-Ed website. Evaluation shows the program has good results; 9-18-year-olds reported eating more fruits and vegetables and adults reported increased confidence in buying and cooking nutritious foods on a budget.

Maine Office of Aging and Disability Services (OADS): SNAP Outreach to Older Adults Shows Results

In August 2023, OADS partnered with the Office of Family Independence, the area agencies on aging (AAAs), Good Shepherd Food Bank, and many others to develop and distribute SNAP education and outreach materials for older adults. This outreach effort was conducted during the unwinding of public health emergency (PHE) flexibilities for many federally funded programs, including SNAP. The number of calls regarding SNAP received by the Aging and Disability Resource Centers

Many Eligible Older Adults in Maine are Missing Out on SNAP Benefits

A 2024 report commissioned by the federal Administration for Community Living, found that in Maine less than one-third (28.7%) of eligible older adults, age 65 and older, participated in SNAP. According to the report, an estimated 56,409 Mainers aged 65 and older are eligible, but not participating.

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(operated by the AAAs) double in August 2023 (80 calls). In January 2024, another distribution of outreach was made by the AAAs and calls increased by 60% (64 calls) compared to the monthly average number of calls (40 per month). Between May 2023, the end of the PHE, and March 2024, there was a 5% increase in 60+ households enrolled in SNAP in Maine.

Maine Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program: 2024 Highlights

In 2024, Maine WIC served 28,153 Maine residents. Notably, this year, the Maine WIC program:

- Hired five Community Health Workers that helped immigrant parents participating in WIC navigate shopping for WIC-eligible foods, addressing language barriers. Community Health Workers have increased redemption by 50% in participating clinics.
- Had the highest redeeming season ever during the 2024 WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) season, with \$245,000 spent with local producers at Maine farmers markets.

- Changed to Spirit Web, a web-based Management Information Systems (MIS) that determines participant eligibility and benefit issuance. The new system is more portable and easier to access at remote locations.
- Started serving participants that had been served by the Indian Township WIC program, enabling access to eWIC (an electronic card for WIC benefits).





2024



Do good things and feed the babies Maine.gov/WIC

WIC served **28,153** Maine residents, 55% of eligible people



WIC Shopping Options



194 WIC approved stores

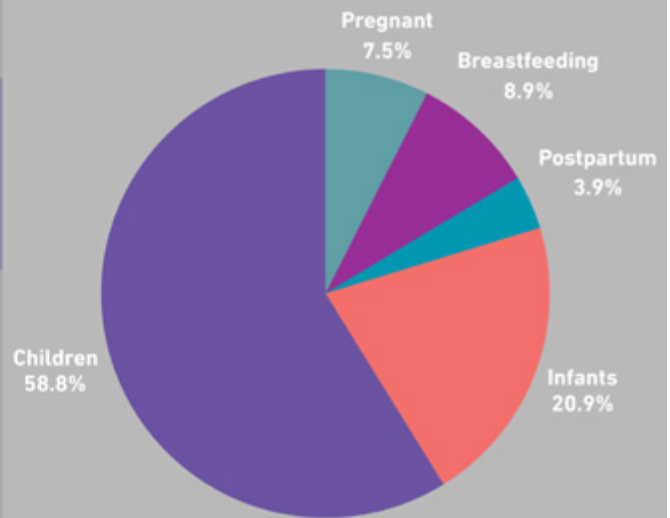
95 WIC Certified Farmers



18,125 average number of Maine residents served each month



8 Local Agencies
18 Main Sites
47 Satellite Sites
16 Counties



24,630 Referrals made from WIC to other services.



\$261K purchased fruits and vegetables with Maine farmers



Lactation Education and Support



92% of WIC parents initiate breastfeeding or chestfeeding

52% of WIC parents breastfed/chestfed for the first three months

44% breastfed/chestfed for over 6 months.

Maine WIC Staff

- 53** Nutrition Counselors
- 22** Certified Lactation Counselors
- 11** Breastfeeding Peer Counselors
- 10** Registered Dietitians
- 5** International Board Certified Lactation Consultants
- 5** Community Health Workers

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

Content from Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

Local Food Purchase Assistance Program Brings \$2.6 million in Federal Funding to Maine for More Fresh, Locally Grown Food to Food Assistance Programs

The Maine Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) Program is strengthening local agriculture and helping to tackle food insecurity statewide. With \$2.6 million in federal funding since June 2022, the program sources fresh, locally grown foods from small and mid-sized farmers, distributing them to food banks, pantries, and community programs across Maine. By supporting farmers and ensuring nutritious, locally sourced food reaches those in need, LFPA achieves its dual mission: sustaining agricultural businesses and improving food access. Part of a USDA-funded national initiative, the program is managed by the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry.

Ending Hunger Corps VISTA Program Builds Capacity to End Hunger in Maine

2024 Accomplishments by the Numbers: Maine Ending Hunger Corps VISTA Program

In 2024 Maine Ending Corps VISTA Members:

- Supported 425 organizations with capacity-building services
- Enhanced efficiency, effectiveness, and/or program reach for 921 organizations
- Recruited and managed 242 community volunteers
- Served 48,367 individuals
- Sourced and/or provided 91,257 pounds of food

Governor Mills Recognizes Contributions of Maine's Ending Hunger Corps VISTA Members

In August 2024 at the State Capitol, Governor Mills recognized the contributions of the AmeriCorps VISTA members of Maine Ending Hunger Corps. These incredible members, who come from across the U.S. and worldwide, are making a powerful impact on our efforts to combat hunger in Maine.



Muhidin Libah of Liberation Farms, in Wales, Maine; farm participating in the LFPA program

Ending Hunger Corps is a program sponsored by Maine’s Department of Agriculture, Conservation, Forestry (DACF), with the goal of building capacity to fulfill Maine’s historic commitment to creating a hunger-free state by 2030.

Governor Mills presented each of Maine’s Ending Hunger Corps VISTA members with a challenge coin, a symbol historically awarded in military and service organizations, to recognize contributions and exemplary dedication. Governor Janet Mills and Margaret Garvey, Acting Director AmeriCorps VISTA, and Kim Lengert, Ending Hunger Corps Program Manager, are pictured with the VISTAs.



Jayna Mallon, VISTA member.



Governor Janet Mills with the Ending Hunger Corps VISTA members.

EHC VISTA Member Spotlight: Establishing a Statewide Campus Food Security Network

Meghan Moore, an Ending Hunger Corps VISTA serving with Mid Coast Hunger Prevention Program and Southern Maine Community College, has quickly become an expert in college SNAP benefits.

Meghan's mission is to take a broader look at the challenges facing community college students and identify the obstacles they encounter in enrolling for SNAP benefits. With this big-picture approach, she's been able to increase statewide efforts for student SNAP eligibility through the establishment of the Campus Food Security Network, where Maine higher education institutions share best practices and resources to end hunger on college campuses. Meghan's work toward increasing SNAP awareness and empowering students to utilize the benefits available to them improves student retention rates and overall educational experiences within Maine's community colleges.



In her own words, Meghan shared her passion for this work:

“With the Campus Food Security Network, I’ve been able to facilitate important conversations between 14 different Maine higher education campuses, community stakeholders, and state organizations with the hope to expand the eligibility criteria for students. I’ve also been able to forge mutually beneficial partnerships with nationwide organizations like the Student Basic Needs Coalition. Through our work together, SMCC joins a nationwide pilot program of student Peer Navigators interns who are learning about the SNAP enrollment process on their community college campus. Programs like this internship create a more unified, localized food system where students feel more connected to their campus communities and their peers. Student Navigators also get paid for their work helping connect their fellow students to resources.”

“Community colleges are not always offered the same opportunities and programs as four-year institutions, so I was thrilled to be able to bring such a wonderful program to SMCC! I think there’s this idea in people’s heads that college students are supposed to be struggling and skipping meals, but just because that’s the way things have been doesn’t mean that’s how they should be. College students are supporting families, working in addition to their studies. SNAP is such an important social benefits program, it’s an easy way to immediately boost people’s quality of life and it’s important for students to know that this resource is available to them.”

Meghan's efforts are helping build a stronger, more supportive environment for Maine's community college students, one that recognizes the importance of food security in educational success.

College Students Twice as Likely to be Food Insecure

A new report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) finds that an estimated 23 percent of college students (3.8 million) experienced food insecurity in 2020, according to data from the Department of Education's National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS). Key takeaways from the report include:

- Most food-insecure students (2.2 million) had very low food insecurity, meaning they were often skipping meals or eating less due to financial constraints.
- Food insecurity was more prevalent among students with the following characteristics: had a disability, were 24 years old or older, single parent, or were financially independent from their parents.
- Only 33 percent of students identified as potentially eligible for SNAP reported that their households received SNAP benefits.

U.S. Government Accountability Office. June 2024. Estimated Eligibility and Receipt among Food Insecure College Students.

[LEARN MORE](#)

Full Plates Full Potential: Removing Barriers to Child Food Security

Content provided by Full Plates Full Potential:

Maine has the highest rate of childhood food insecurity in New England. For 1 in 5 kids – and nearly 1 in 4 for rural counties like Washington and Piscataquis— food insecurity is nothing short of a public health crisis. But programs like School Meals for All have proven significant in removing obstacles and barriers that once prevented many kids from accessing nutritious foods during the school day. Today, over 105,000 Maine students eat lunch at school every day, and more than 64,000 start their mornings with breakfast.

But the work isn't finished. While School Meals for All removed many barriers during the school day, many others still exist for accessing food during out-of-school time. For every 100 kids who rely on school lunch during the academic year, only 27 are reached by summer meal programs, and just four are accessing afterschool snacks or supper.

Nonprofit organizations, like Maine's Full Plates Full Potential, are working to bolster these essential out-of-school time programs through grantmaking and investments. In 2024, the nonprofit awarded 44 grants totaling over \$342,000 to specifically support

afterschool meal and summer meal programs. Full Plates also secured \$8.5 million in USDA Healthy Meals Incentive funding for 9 Maine projects as part of the USDA's School Food System Transformation Challenge Sub-Grant initiative, with the goal of helping schools overcome barriers to purchasing Maine-based foods and local ingredients.

Maine has shown what's possible when we prioritize feeding every child. Together, we've delivered measurable successes through innovative policies and programs, but the work is far from finished. Thousands of children still face barriers to consistent, nutritious meals, and too many communities remain underserved.



By continuing to invest in practical policies and solutions, we can remove the remaining obstacles to ensure every child in Maine has the nourishment they need to thrive. Ending childhood food insecurity is within our reach, and Maine has the power to set a strong example as we chart a path forward for the rest of the nation.

Food Assistance Programs in Maine Expand and Innovate

Good Shepherd Food Bank Invests in Local Partner Agency Network

Content provided by Good Shepherd Food Bank:

Since 2019, Good Shepherd Food Bank has invested over \$3.6 million (including \$885,000 from the TEFAP Reach & Resiliency funds we partnered with the Maine Dept. of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to administer in 2023 and 2024) in network partners through Capacity Building Grants. Early return-on-investment analysis of the Capacity Building Grant program has shown the following:

- 49% of partners have received Capacity Building Grants since the launch of the program and 51% of partners have not yet received Capacity Building Grants.
- Partners that did receive Capacity Building Grants grew by an average of 564% from 2019 to 2024, compared to an average growth of 134% for those that did not receive Capacity Building Grants during the same period.

- Partners that received Capacity Building Grants distributed 8.7 million additional lbs. in 2024 than in 2019, compared to 2.9 million additional meals for agencies that did not receive Capacity Building Grants during the same period.
- Partners that received Capacity Building Grants grew an average of 10,000 more lbs. from 2023 to 2024 than those that had not.

In August 2024, we relaunched the Capacity Building Grant Program as the Nourish and Flourish Grant Program, emphasizing a strategic shift towards funding priorities that improve the experience of visiting a free food market.

We launched our Community Redistribution Fund, which invests directly in communities of color to address the disproportionate impact of food insecurity and increase access to culturally relevant foods, in 2020. Since then, we have invested nearly \$2 million in over 50 BIPOC led and focused food security initiatives in Maine.



\$8.5 Million USDA Healthy Meals Incentive Funded Projects

- Auburn Public Schools: School-based Food Hub
- Five Pillars Butchery: Halal Meal Production Lab
- Maine Coast Fishermen's Association: Fishermen Feeding K-12 Mainers
- Maine Food Convergence: Local Food Switchboard
- Peak Season: Streamlining Access to Maine Grown K-12 Products
- RSU 54/MSAD 54: Somerset County Farm to School Initiative
- The Good Crust: Good Grains on the Go
- Maine Health/Let's Go 5210: Culinary Skills for School Meals Training
- Healthy Communities of the Capital Area: Maine Farm and Sea to School Institute



Emily Flinkstrom, Executive Director of Fair Tide (left) and Megan Shapiro-Ross, Executive Director of Footprints (right) in front of the existing building at 22 Shapleigh Road Kittery, Maine

Mainspring: A Model for Co-Locating Social Services and Food Assistance

Content and photos provided by Good Shepherd Food Bank and Footprints Food Pantry:

Footprints Food Pantry was established in 1992 and has resided in the same small space, but are outgrowing the location. Although the area has served them well for the past 30 years, they started to dream big and search for a new space for their food distribution and a place to collaborate with local organizations aligning with their mission.

“The charitable food system has been serving individuals food in the same manner for years. The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) was designed for that – *emergency* food assistance. Yet, this has become an outdated model that has huge value to our society and has fed many, but is not a long-term solution to ending hunger,” stated Executive Director Megan Shapiro Ross. “Footprints is embarking on a new, collaborative project to address a long-term solution to end hunger but also to eradicate poverty.

We don’t believe they can be done separately, and we look forward to empowering individuals to actively participate in gaining independence.”

Footprints Food Pantry has been collaborating with Fair Tide, an affordable housing nonprofit, in designing Mainspring, a resource hub that will offer wrap-around services – including housing a collection of social service agencies that will offer individuals a coordinated entry process and a one-stop shop for assistance. The new hub will expand the current offerings of the food pantry and include services from partner organizations that will be on site, including York County Community Action’s Community Outreach Program and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program, in addition to General Assistance, fuel and utility assistance, medical services, Pine Tree Legal Assistance, MaineHealth, LGBTQ+ programming, Southern Maine Agency on Aging, and many others.

Footprints Food Pantry applied for and was awarded a Capacity Building Grant from Good Shepherd Food Bank, which helped them launch the capital



campaign that will make this dream a reality. “I’m so excited! This is a start to helping people build the capacity to build their own lives,” said Megan.

Mainspring has since received \$1 million in federal funding from a Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development appropriations bill with support from Sen. Susan Collins, Sen. Angus King, and Rep. Chellie Pingree. A grand opening celebration is slated for February 2025.

Preble Street Launches New Food Security Hub to Meet Growing Need

Photo and content provided by Preble Street:

Hunger in Maine has grown substantially since the beginning of the pandemic. In a brief period of time, Preble Street needed to dramatically increase the number of hot meals served and the amount of grocery meals and boxes provided. Because of this drastic increase in demand for food, Preble Street launched its new Food Security Hub, a sustainable, comprehensive, and collaborative approach dedicated to ending hunger in Maine.

The new Preble Street Food Security Hub operates out of a 30,000 square foot mixed-use office building in South Portland, Maine. Construction is underway

that will allow Preble Street to evolve in future years to meet the growing need for food and scale efforts in collaboration with partners to end hunger in Maine.

Once fully realized, the Food Security Hub will be able to:

- Serve the needs of community members by producing and distributing at least 1 million hot nutritious meals each year, integrating culturally appropriate foods, collaborating with local farms to increase our sustainability efforts and support local agriculture, and working with community partners on implementing solutions to tackle the root causes of hunger. We anticipate that these efforts will decrease food insecurity in our community, create effective community partnerships, and bolster local agriculture and environmental sustainability.
- Promote long-term sustainable solutions to improve food security and achieve food justice while supporting local agriculture. Based on current estimates, 75% of the products preserved at the Food Security Hub will be Maine-grown. The processing lab will preserve approximately 180,000 pounds of product within the first 18 months and steadily increase to support the community’s needs. Fully realized, the Food Security Hub will be able to process up to

5,000 pounds of local produce every day, up from the current 5,000 pounds each week.

- Allow for increased food access and increased community capacity through dedicated collaborative space and initiatives.
- Expand the production and distribution of local nutritious, delicious food and contract with other nonprofits needing food for vulnerable populations such as the elderly, children, and people of color.
- Improve the nutrition and overall sustainability of Preble Street meals. Utilizing blanchers, blast freezers, and dehydrators, the Food Security Hub will mitigate waste and increase access to nutritious fruits and vegetables year-round.

Support for the Preble Street Food Security Hub includes:

- Public grants (ARPA & USDA NIFA): over \$5 million, including \$2 million from the State of Maine
- FY23 Congressional Appropriation: \$1 million
- John T. Gorman Foundation: \$1 million
- Good Shepherd Food Bank: \$500,000
- Hannaford Charitable Foundation: \$250,000
- Elmina B. Sewall Foundation: \$90,000
- Susan and Fritz Onion: \$75,000
- The Kresge Foundation: \$36,000
- Additional private & anonymous donors: over \$2 million





Nutrition Incentive and Intervention Programs Grow in Maine

Maine Harvest Bucks Grows by 30% in 2024, Benefitting SNAP Participants and Local Farms

Content provided by the Maine Federation of Farmers Markets:

Maine Harvest Bucks are known as “nutrition incentives”, which increase the spending power of shoppers when they use their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits on local food at participating locations, which include farmers’ markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares, and farm stands across Maine. The Maine Harvest Bucks program matches SNAP funds, dollar-for-dollar, providing Bonus Bucks that can be spent on fruits and vegetables. The program has contributed over \$750,000 in sales at 82 farmers’ markets, CSAs, and farm stands across the state. Over the past year, the program has grown by 30%, thanks in large part to state funding support through the Fund

to Address Food Insecurity and Provide Nutrition Incentives⁴³.

Farm Fresh Rewards Incentive Redemption Increased by Nearly 40% in 2024

Content provided by Good Shepherd Food Bank:

Effective May 2022, Good Shepherd Food Bank assumed oversight of **Maine’s Farm Fresh Rewards Program** from our partners at Maine Farmland Trust. The Farm Fresh Rewards Program supports Maine SNAP/EBT shoppers in accessing fresh, nutritious foods while optimizing their budgets with a 50% discount on qualifying fruits and vegetables at select retailers. By making these essential items more affordable, Farm Fresh Rewards tackles Maine’s food insecurity,



⁴³ Public Law 2023, chapter 412 appropriated \$600,000 in one-time funds for each of the 2023-24 and 2024-25 fiscal years to capitalize the Fund To Address Food Insecurity and Provide Nutrition Incentives and match contributions from public and private sources.

empowering SNAP/EBT shoppers to stretch their food dollars for healthier choices. In 2023, Good Shepherd Food Bank changed the program model from a voucher redemption system to a point of purchase discount.

Although “Total SNAP Sales” among our Farm Fresh Rewards partner stores have dropped by 25% this year (due to the post-pandemic era reduction in SNAP benefits) the “Incentives Redeemed” (discount on fruit and vegetables given at purchase) have increased by nearly 40%. This speaks to the success of our shared outreach campaign with store partners, the improved efficacy of a point-of-sale discount vs the former voucher redemption system, and the elimination of local food restrictions, which historically had caused large dips in program participation outside of Maine’s short growing season.



Workgroup Promotes Food is Medicine Strategies in Maine

Content provided by MaineHealth:

The statewide Food is Medicine (FIM) Workgroup, led by MaineHealth, grew out of the Ending Hunger in Maine initiative in 2023. Food is Medicine is a rapidly growing area that integrates food-based nutritional interventions into healthcare to treat or prevent disease and advance health equity. Food is Medicine strategies can include prescribing medically tailored meals, groceries, or produce to support chronic disease management and optimal well-being, based on the presence of a specific health condition as well as social needs. The FIM Workgroup is comprised of representatives from Maine health systems including Northern Light and MaineHealth, government agencies such as MaineCare, WIC and the Department of Agriculture, non-profit community organizations like Good Shepherd Food Bank, Preble Street, and many more. Together, committed stakeholders conducted an environmental scan of Food is Medicine efforts across Maine, developed an asset map in collaboration with the Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future, and provided recommendations to MaineCare for their Section 1115 waiver renewal application around Food is Medicine strategies. The FIM Workgroup is excited to expand opportunities to reimburse for important interventions that will support the health of Maine community members.

Promising Pilots

Life Happens, But Hunger Shouldn't: Piscataquis County Food Providers Pilot Anti-Stigma Campaign

In the words of Kelly Sirimoglu, Executive Director of the Piscataquis Regional Food Center, from an interview conducted in December 2024:

“We were awarded a grant [from Good Shepherd Food Bank] to deal with stigma. We did a really interesting project to see if we could change the way people talked about hunger and food insecurity ... just reframing how people view other people who need assistance. Part of the grant also covered some of our expenses in creating the Piscataquis Food Access Alliance, because we didn't have a food guild in Piscataquis. We work with the main group of guilds [Maine Network of Community Food Councils]. We started with inserting language through our own food guild, public facing pages, and we advertised at the Centre Theater here in Dover Foxcroft. They do a reel before each movie. And then I did paid advertising on Facebook. I've never had advertising with as high of engagement as I did with this campaign. I couldn't believe it! It really hit a nerve with people, and it just worked.”

“I took an AI generated image - I did two, one with older adults, one with the young family - and I had a series of things on the left-hand side that said what you think you know. And on the right about what you don't know. I put the actual stories in that I

got from our [pantry shopper] survey ... has an autistic child at home or would love to work but can't because they're a full-time caregiver and all these things to help people realize their own prejudice. And for some reason, it really resonated, got shared a lot.”

What do you want the public to know about food insecurity?

“I can sum it up quickly. Life happens and hunger shouldn't. One car accident away from not being able to go to work and to pay all your bills. You hear these stories all the time from people that never thought they'd be walking in the door to a food pantry. And yet here they are.”

MORE THAN YOU KNOW

There are many reasons people need help from food pantries and food banks. Let's put an end to stigma and judgement and make a difference in our community.

WHAT YOU MAY THINK	WHAT YOU DIDN'T KNOW
They don't know how to manage their money	They were working multiple jobs before the accident. Then came the medical, car repair and insurance bills.
They don't want to work	They would like to work, but they have a severely autistic child at home who requires constant care.
They spend their money on cigarettes, drugs, and junk food.	After paying the bills, there is not enough left over to buy groceries. The food pantry helps fill in the gaps.

Quality Housing Coalition's Guaranteed Income Pilot for Single Mothers Addresses the Benefits Cliff and Improves Food Security

Quality Housing Coalition:

Project HOME Trust is a program of Quality Housing Coalition that provides Direct Cash Assistance to single mothers and their children. The program addresses the challenges of the “*Benefits Cliff*”—the precarious situation where a small increase in earnings leads to a disproportionate loss of social assistance. By providing unconditional cash support, the program empowers mothers navigating inadequate wages and high childcare costs, offering a vital safety net as they work toward financial independence. Project Home Trust has piloted two models of Direct Cash Assistance to 67 single moms and their children in York, Androscoggin and Cumberland counties, coupled with housing and health navigation. The first model is a monthly recurring payment of \$1,000 per month for one year. After year one, the first cohort of moms reported being stably housed, healthier

and better able to pay for household expenses. The program is currently in the second year of this model with 20 moms and 38 children receiving \$1,000/month for one year. The other program model provides a lump sum payment of \$3,600 to 27 single moms and their children. The moms who have received these payments reported that they used the money to pay for transportation, childcare and food.



“The first effect the payments had was on my household’s food security. I am required to pack my daughter’s lunches for daycare and provide 4-5 snacks, five days a week. Rather than deprive her of fresh fruits, vegetables, and other snacks with a higher nutritional value, I was going without those items to stay in our food stamps budget, which also meant that sometimes I was going without breakfast or lunch. A portion of each payment this year was spent on having enough nutritious and fresh food. This eventually had a positive impact on my own health and supported really prioritizing my physical health after discovering how high my risk is for chronic illness, especially cardiovascular disease.”

—Participant quote, Project Home Trust Final Impact Assessment, Stepwise Data Research

[LEARN MORE](#)

Maine Senior FarmShare Expands Access through Farmers Market Pilot

Content provided by Maine DACF and Maine Federation of Farmers Markets

The Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) receives a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to fund the Maine Senior FarmShare Program (MSFP). This program provides eligible low-income older adults the opportunity to receive a share (worth \$50) of first-quality, fresh, local produce at no cost directly from local Maine farmers during the growing season. In 2024, DACF and the Maine Federation of Farmers Markets (MFFM) teamed up to bring the Senior FarmShare Program to 10 farmers markets through a pilot initiative.

In the words of MFFM director, Jimmy DeBiasis: “This farmers’ market model represents a shift from the program’s traditional operation in Maine. It removes the burden of tracking individual participants’ credits from the farmers and transfers it to the market’s information booth, which is typically staffed by paid personnel. Instead of a credit that we track via a logbook, we give each participant \$50 in a voucher currency to buy their MSFP-eligible products. Additionally, this approach allows participants to use their FarmShare dollars on any eligible food at the market, rather than being limited to the offerings of a single farmer. This year, we surpassed \$55,000 in Maine Senior FarmShare spending at farmers’ markets! The program also integrates seamlessly with other food access initiatives at farmers’ markets, like the Maine Harvest Bucks program. Many older adults qualify for both, which helps maximize the benefits and reinforce the positive outcomes of each program.”



17,707 Mainers 60 years old and above participated in the Maine Senior FarmShare program in 2024, a slight increase from the prior year.



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www.maine.gov/future/hunger