



Michigan Community Action
2173 Commons Pwky
Okemos, MI 48864

p: 517.321.7500
f: 517.321.7504

michigancommunityaction.org
February 2016

ISSUE BRIEF: Food and Nutrition

Food Access: There is an urgent need for greater access to healthy, locally grown food for residents, specifically, low-income residents. The Fair Food Network released a report in June 2013 ([Fair Food Network](#)) on the economic impacts of localizing Michigan's food system. The report indicates that a 20 percent shift to local food purchasing leads to 42,519 new food related jobs generating a \$2.9 billion economic benefit annually.

According to a 2014 study by Feeding America, 16 percent of Michigan's population is considered food insecure; that is, they cannot reliably obtain enough food to feed themselves and their families. Nearly 24 percent of Michigan children, or 1 in 4, live in poverty and regularly face food insecurity.

The Gallup organization, as part of the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index, reveals that Americans in every community and every state struggle to put food on the table. The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) refers to this struggle as food hardship. According to the Index, the food hardship has been slowly and trending down since the last recession; however, the longer view shows that an appalling one in six households is reporting food hardship – just as was true before the recession. The nation has an unacceptable long-term food hardship problem, which at 18.5 percent, Michigan rates 14 out of the 20 states with the worst food hardship rates in 2014.

Low income Michigan residents confront barriers in accessing reliable food sources. Many urban neighborhoods are "food deserts" and have access only to convenience-type foods that are high in calories and low in nutritional value. Rural and suburban low income residents might face other challenges, such as transportation to a grocery store or knowledge about making good food choices. Whatever the barrier, a diet lacking in proper nutrition can lead to more health problems, including stunted growth, diabetes, and ironically, obesity. In fact, Michigan's rates for diabetes and obesity are among the highest in the country.

Those affected by hunger are not necessarily the stereotypical destitute or homeless. Many households that need food assistance are the "working poor"—they have jobs but don't earn enough to make ends meet, leading to difficult decisions when choosing between food and other necessities such as child care, medications and housing. Some assume that with so many food assistance programs, no one can be going hungry. However, technology barriers, transportation barriers and confusion about eligibility can hinder participation in food assistance programs.

Community Action Agencies' Role

Community Action Agencies in Michigan feed thousands of people every year through a wide variety of hunger-related programs and services. With help from their CAA, clients can be healthier and more productive at school or work, and more likely to reach their full potential.

CAAs' direct assistance and referral programs include the following:*

- The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Commodities Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)
- Women, Infants and Children (WIC)
- Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)
- Project FRESH (access through farmers markets)
- State Emergency Relief Food Assistance Program
- Meals on Wheels (Senior Nutrition)
- Congregate Meals
- Local Food Pantries

* Programs differ by agency. Contact your local CAA to find specific aging programs offered.

CAAs in Michigan also support localizing food systems and community revitalization in the following ways:

- Building upon Michigan's agriculture industry by exposing the general public and agriculture businesses to volunteering, buying, and selling product and services with low-income residents historically excluded.
- Assisting local communities with adopting the goals of the Good Food Charter, released in 2010 by The Michigan Food Policy Council. The Charter reflects the economic impact of localizing Michigan's food system;
- Expanding community garden networks;
- Collaborating with local partners to increase access to fresh locally grown produce;
- Expanding outreach to low-income households with Bridge Cards to purchase fresh produce at farmers markets;
- Train and provide business coaching and technical assistance to low-income residents' participating in growing, buying, and selling food. Track short and long-term progress of self-sufficiency, including income, food, housing, and education progress.
- Supports Farm to School planning for Head Start Programs.
- Collaborating with regional food systems partners and provides dietary and medical staff to assess health and nutrition of low-income residents.
- Organizing or supporting local "No Kid Hungry" groups, hunger councils, and community health workgroups
- Placemaking strategizing that includes food initiatives such as organizing Farm to Plate events, building hoop houses, and promoting urban farming.

Funding

Funding for food services comes from the US Department of Agriculture and US Department of Health and Human Services. In Michigan, program resources are provided by the Michigan Departments of Education and Health and Human Services. Many programs are also funded locally by public and private charities and foundations.