



The Iowa Policy Project

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A Secure Nutrition Network

Public, Private Efforts Fight Food Insecurity in Iowa

By Andrew Cannon

At some point during a year, about 15 percent of American households and 12 percent of Iowa households will be tested on whether they can place enough food on the table to keep their family active and healthy.¹ “Will this be enough for my family? Will it last the week? Should I skip lunch so there is enough for my kids for breakfast?” Fully one-third of those who cannot always meet this challenge of food security face such very low food security that they need to frequently skip meals or to be unable to satisfy themselves — on a regular basis.²

This widespread need for assistance obtaining food requires a public and private response. Some public programs — which some have placed on the budget chopping block — are well-known, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP (formerly known as Food Stamps), and free and reduced-price school lunch. In the private sphere, a network of food banks, food pantries and kitchens help people who suffer from food insecurity.

Though these public and private efforts operate independently, there is considerable overlap and interaction. SNAP benefits, for instance, may not fully meet the needs of a family, which may supplement that assistance with foods obtained through a food pantry. Similarly, food banks and food pantries receive quality food supplies and sometimes funding through both federal and state programs.

Budget-cut fever in Washington has put key nutrition programs at risk. The Budget Control Act, passed in August 2011, demands agreement on reductions in federal programs or many, including nutrition supports, would face automatic deep cuts.

Apart from deficit reduction negotiations, other nutrition assistance program battles loom. Food safety-net programs are primarily financed in about five-year increments through what is frequently referred to as the Farm Bill. The most recent Farm Bill, the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008,³ provides funding through the current federal fiscal year. The current political dynamics in Washington will likely challenge efforts to maintain adequate funding for these programs, let alone to expand them.

While the private network of food banks and food pantries is robust, these charities lack the resources and capacity to fully cover the needs of food-insecure Americans in the event of cuts to federal nutrition programs. In the midst of growing numbers of food-insecure Americans, increased reliance on emergency feeding organizations (EFOs), swelling federal food assistance enrollment and potential cuts to those federal programs, it is important that policymakers and the public have a clear understanding of how these private and public programs work, receive funding and interact.

This report examines federal and private nutrition assistance programs, as well as recent state experiments in nutrition assistance.

Hunger and Food Security in the United States and Iowa

While hunger and near-hunger are concepts easy enough to understand, measuring their extent among American citizens and residents has proven difficult for researchers.

In the mid-'90s, USDA researchers devised a method to measure the extent of hunger and the effectiveness of food and nutrition safety net programs in combating it.⁴ "Food security" is having "[a]ccess by all people at all times to enough food for active, healthy life."⁵

Food security is measured through an annual survey, the Current Population Survey, administered by the U.S. Census Bureau. Households are asked to respond to a series of 10 statements and questions (households with children under age 18 are asked an additional eight questions) regarding their access to food. For example, households are asked whether they cut the size of or skipped meals because of a lack of money for food, or felt hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food.⁶

Households reporting more than two food-insecure conditions are classified as food insecure. The food-insecure group is further classified into subgroups: households with low food security are those that reported reduced quality, variety or desirability of diet, with little or no reduction in food intake; households with very low food security reported at least six out of 10 food-insecure conditions, including reduced food intake.⁷ Further, households with children were designated having very low food security if they reported at least eight out of 18 food-insecure conditions.

Table 1 displays the food insecurity (both low food security and very low food security) for Iowa and the United States, overall. While Iowa's overall food-insecurity level is lower than the U.S. rate, more than 340,000 Iowans experienced food insecurity in that period.⁸ Lee and Appanoose counties had the highest rate of food-insecure households in Iowa in 2009, with 16.4 and 16.3 percent, respectively.⁹ Data from 2009 suggest that food insecurity in Iowa has risen to 12.8 percent, affecting over 382,500 Iowans.¹⁰

Table 1. About 1 In 8 Iowans Experienced Food Insecurity, 2008-10

	Rate of Food Insecurity (%)	Total Food Insecure
Iowa	12.1	340,000
U.S.	14.5	48,800,000

Note: Iowa data averaged over three years (2008-2010); U.S. data for 2010

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture and author's calculations.

By USDA measurements, one-fifth of households with children were food insecure in 2009. In about half of those households, only adults experienced food insecurity; in the other half of that 21 percent, however, both adults and children experienced low or very low food security.¹¹ Again, Iowa typically has lower rates of food insecurity than the nation average; still, over 16 percent of Iowa children were food insecure over 2006-08.¹²

The Recession and Food Security

Food insecurity increased significantly as a result of the recession. Table 2 shows the increase in food insecurity rates across the country from 2007 — just before the onset of the recession¹³ — through 2010. The recession caused a dramatic increase in food insecurity across all categories, but particularly in households with children, households identifying as Hispanic, and households below the federal poverty level (\$22,350 for a family of four in 2011).¹⁴

Thanks largely to expanded SNAP benefits through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), food insecurity rates remained virtually unchanged in 2009,¹⁵ even as the national unemployment rate doubled from 5.0 percent in January 2008, reaching 10.1 percent in October 2009.¹⁶

Table 2. Recession Increased Food Insecurity Across Categories

Household type	2007	2008	2009
All households	11.1	14.6	14.7
Households w/ children under 18	15.8	21	21.3
Households w/ children under 6	17.1	22.3	22.9
Female head, no spouse	30.2	37.2	36.6
Elderly	7.3	8.1	7.5
White, non-Hispanic	7.9	10.7	11
Black, non-Hispanic	22.2	25.7	24.9
Hispanic	20.1	26.9	26.9
Below 100 percent FPL	37.7	42.2	43
Under 185 percent FPL	34.2	39	39.7

Note: Federal Poverty Level (FPL) is \$22,350 for a family of four in 2011.

Source: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture

Poverty and Food Insecurity

Hunger and food insecurity are closely linked with poverty. A 2010 study found that nearly three quarters of households served by the Feeding America network of emergency feeding organizations (EFOs) — food banks, food pantries, soup or emergency kitchens, shelters — had incomes below the federal poverty line (\$22,350 for a family of four in 2011).¹⁷ Iowa does not deviate from the national norm: Household income for 78 percent of Iowa EFO clients fell below the federal poverty line (FPL); average annual income among Iowa’s EFO clientele was even lower than the national average: \$9,240.¹⁸

But hunger and food insecurity are not just limited to the very poor. Nationally, 20 percent of households with income above the poverty line experienced food insecurity in 2009.¹⁹ Just over 7 percent of those with income over 185 percent FPL (\$41,348 for a family of four; the eligibility cutoff point for several federal food assistance programs) reported food insecurity in 2010.²⁰ Food insecurity seems to afflict a greater share of low- to moderate-income families in Iowa than nationally; over 9 percent of Iowa EFO clients in 2008 had incomes above 185 FPL, compared to just 7 percent nationally.²¹

Despite the low levels of income among the food-insecure and EFO clients, a significant share come from households with at least one working adult. Nationally, about 38 percent of food pantry clients came from such a household.²² That ratio was even higher in Iowa: 47.5 percent of Iowa’s food pantry clients came from household in which at least one adult was employed.²³ This finding dovetails with previous Iowa Policy Project findings: that wages in Iowa are stagnating, making it increasingly difficult for Iowa families to make ends meet.²⁴

Beyond poverty and tight budgets, geographic access to food is a key factor in determining food security. In 2009, USDA began using existing Census data to measure the prevalence of “food deserts” — low-income Census tracts in which a substantial number or share of residents have low access to a supermarket or large grocery store.²⁵ USDA further defines the criteria, stating that “low access to a healthy food retail outlet is defined as more than 1 mile from a supermarket or large grocery store in urban areas and as more than 10 miles ... in rural areas.”²⁶ Nearly 105,000 Iowans are estimated to live in a food desert, 79 percent of whom live in urban areas.²⁷ For the 22,000 Iowans in rural food deserts, the problem can be even more acute, as grocery stores and supermarkets may be many miles away, while local resources, like convenience stores, stock less nutritious food and are generally more expensive.²⁸

The Private and Nonprofit Food Distribution Network

Throughout the United States, thousands of private, faith-based and nonprofit organizations work to alleviate food insecurity. In Iowa, over 1,160 local and regional emergency feeding organizations (EFOs) distribute food to those in need.²⁹

Food banks — regional warehousing and distribution centers — store privately and publicly donated foods, and distribute those foods to local partner agencies. The privately donated food may come through donations by individuals or a small group, such as a church or school group, or corporate donations from food producers, distributors and retailers. The privately donated food is distributed alongside commodities purchased and distributed by the USDA through the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). “Commodities” are typically basic resources that may or may not serve as inputs for other products. Agricultural commodities include corn, soybeans, meat and poultry products, and others.

These local partner agencies may be food pantries, which distribute unprepared food or emergency kitchens, which provide individuals with prepared food to eat on-site. Additionally, many larger EFOs — regional food banks and pantries in larger cities — also provide a host of other services, including financial counseling and assistance, employment counseling, and enrollment in other public programs designed to help low-income households, such as the Low-Income Heat Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and SNAP. This is particularly true of EFOs that are also Community Action Agencies — generally private nonprofit organizations that receive some federal and state funds to implement public programs designed to alleviate poverty.

EFOs are typically private, nonprofit organizations that are supported through individual and corporate donations and private grants. Many EFOs — particularly pantries and emergency kitchens — are completely run by volunteers. Nationally, about two-thirds of pantries and kitchens are faith-based organizations.³⁰

EFOs supplement federal food assistance received by individuals, they do not replace it. Clients of both federal food assistance programs and community food assistance programs typically come from households with low food security. Of households that had received emergency food from a pantry or kitchen, about three-quarters reported food insecurity.³¹ It is thus unsurprising that a nearly one-third of SNAP recipients also obtain food from a pantry at some point during the year.³² There is less overlap with the other two largest food programs (free or reduced-price school lunch and WIC), but in both cases about 1 in 5 households relied on a pantry at some point during the year.³³

Why is there so much overlap between privately provided food and federal benefits? First, federal food benefit levels — whether in SNAP or WIC — are far from extravagant. For FFY10, SNAP benefits averaged \$4.46 per person per day.³⁴ In addition to being limited to certain products, WIC benefits are even more meager, averaging \$1.38 per person per day for FFY10.³⁵

Further, a dollar buys considerably more unhealthy food than it does nutritious food. A price-per-gram comparison of foods by energy density (kilocalories per gram) reveals that less nutritious foods are far cheaper than more nutritious foods. More nutritious foods are also much more sensitive to inflation. A 2007 study found that fruits and vegetables cost on average \$18.16 per 1,000 kcal compared to just \$1.76 per 1,000 kcal for foods like crackers, chocolate bars, cookies, mayonnaise and potato chips.³⁶

Additionally, 13.5 million Americans live far enough from a supermarket or large grocery store to be considered living in a food desert. While many residents of these areas may have access to a smaller food store or convenience stores, prices in such food stores are, on average, 10 percent higher than supermarket prices.³⁷

Because nutritious foods are more expensive and due to the absence of accessible supermarkets for many Americans, some SNAP recipients supplement their food supply with food obtained at EFOs. Anecdotal reports from EFO staff suggest that healthy foods — TEFAP commodities and “rescued” salads and other perishable items — are the most in-demand items at EFOs.³⁸

EFOs work with federal food assistance programs to provide a frontline against hunger and food insecurity in the United States.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Of all food and nutrition assistance programs, the best-known is recognized by its old name, Food Stamps. Now called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, this program helps low-income families and individuals obtain unprepared food. Table 3 displays average monthly SNAP beneficiaries and average monthly benefit per individual for Federal Fiscal Year 2010 for both Iowa and the United States. For the first 11 months of FFY11 (through August), national participation averaged over 44.5 million.³⁹ State-level estimates for FFY11 are not yet available.

Though states administer the program, the federal government covers the entire cost of the benefits, splitting administrative costs with states.

SNAP benefits are limited to individuals and families whose household earnings fall below 160 percent of the federal poverty level, or FPL (\$35,760 for a family of four in 2011).⁴⁰ Beneficiaries receive an electronic benefits card, which functions like a debit or credit card, except it can only be used for unprepared foods in certain authorized stores. Benefits average about \$133.80 per person per month, or \$4.46 per person per day. Benefit levels decrease as earnings inch toward the 160 percent FPL threshold. Benefit levels are set by a formula, devised by the USDA.*

SNAP is an entitlement program, meaning that Congress does not determine the level of funding for the program in a given year. Rather, funding is determined by need, as indicated by program enrollment. This allows the program to respond quickly and help those in need following natural and economic disasters. Recent proposals to transform SNAP to a block-grant program would hamper its ability to respond to both economic and natural disasters.⁴¹

Few public support programs are as responsive to economic downturns as SNAP. During recessions, household income shrinks — either as a result of job loss or a reduction in pay or hours. Rather than limiting participation by quotas or limiting funding, any individual who meets eligibility requirements may enroll in SNAP. Enrollment in the program tracks closely with changes in the economy: Enrollment has increased during each recession for the past 40 years and increased as the unemployment rate has increased.⁴²

Table 3. SNAP Participation, FFY10

	Average Monthly Participation	Average Monthly Benefit Per Person
Iowa	340,304	\$128.84
Total U.S.	40,301,878	\$133.79

Source: Food and Nutrition Services, United States Department of Agriculture

* The formula assumes that households will use 30 percent of their income on food; SNAP benefits make up the difference between 30 percent of the family’s food budget and the USDA Thrifty Food Plan — the lowest cost of four food budgets created by USDA to illustrate the approximate weekly or monthly cost of adequate food to provide a nutritious diet. Food cost estimates come from the Consumer Price Index (CPI), a national, monthly survey of the cost of a basket of consumer goods. The Thrifty Food Plan for a family of four (two parents, two children) costs \$533.40 per month. See: Official USDA Food Plans: Cost of Food at Home at Four Levels, U.S. Average, June 2011. <<http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/Publications/FoodPlans/2011/CostofFoodJun2011.pdf>>.

The most recent recession was no exception. Nationally, enrollment in SNAP has grown about 69 percent since the recession began in December 2007.⁴³ In Iowa, enrollment growth has not been as rapid as the national increase, but still increased nearly 43 percent from 2007 to 2010.⁴⁴

SNAP's success in countering food insecurity has been the subject of continuing research.⁴⁵ Studies of program effectiveness are confounded by the reality that many households receiving SNAP benefits still report food insecurity, likely a result of the most needy households enrolling in the program.

One innovative study looked at food security in households over the course of two years. Households were surveyed in four consecutive months the first year, and surveyed again the following year in the same months. Using this method, researchers found that, among households that subsequently participated in SNAP, household food security began deteriorating seven or eight months before the household began receiving SNAP benefits.⁴⁶ Enrollment in SNAP reduced the prevalence of very low food security by 40 percent.⁴⁷ Another study — also using multiyear data — concluded that SNAP reduced the likelihood of low food security by 31 percent and of very low food security by 20 percent.⁴⁸

Despite the program's long-standing success in alleviating food insecurity, estimates suggest that SNAP remains underutilized by eligible populations. In FFY09 — the last year for which such estimates are available — fewer than three-quarters of eligible individuals participated in SNAP.⁴⁹ Among certain segments of the population, participation rates are even lower. Only about 35 percent of eligible seniors, for example, participate in the program.⁵⁰

In addition to alleviating food insecurity and providing nutrition, SNAP is strongly linked to the broader economy. The distribution of SNAP benefits generates demand for food products that, absent SNAP, would be significantly lower.[†] This means higher income, higher production and higher employment in many sectors of the economy: agriculture, food processing, manufacturing, transportation, retail and others.⁵¹

In addition to creating demand for food products, SNAP generates around \$1.75 in the broader economy for every dollar spent.⁵² SNAP benefits are quickly injected into the economy as beneficiaries shop for groceries. Demand for food products expands but SNAP benefits also free up dollars within a household budget, meaning that SNAP recipients can spend more money on other needs, such as fuel, housing costs, child care, clothing, and other essentials. During an economic downturn, this makes SNAP a doubly valuable program, as it aids those in need and provides a boost to the economy.

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children

Established in 1972, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) is a highly targeted program serving pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding women, and infants and children up to age 5.⁵³ To qualify, household earnings must be at or below 185 percent FPL (\$41,348 for a family of four in 2011).⁵⁴ Participants in SNAP, Medicaid, or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) automatically qualify for WIC.

Like SNAP, WIC beneficiaries receive an electronic benefits card that is reloaded each month. Unlike SNAP, WIC benefits are limited to certain foods (milk, cheese, eggs, canned fish, vitamin C-rich juices, fruits and vegetables, whole-wheat breads, soy-based beverages, tofu, baby food, and infant cereal.)⁵⁵

[†] A 2002 study showed that a \$5 billion reduction in SNAP would mean a net decrease in food spending of \$1.3 billion. See: Kenneth Hanson, Elise Golan, Stephen Vogel, and Jennifer Olmsted, "Tracing the Impacts of Food Assistance Programs on Agriculture and Consumers: A Computable General Equilibrium Model," Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Report No. 18, ERS, USDA, April 2002. <<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/fanrr18/fanrr18.pdf>>.

In addition to providing targeted populations with foods, WIC is designed to provide nutrition education, including lessons on healthy diets and behaviors. States are required to offer two nutritional education sessions every six months; enrollee attendance is not mandatory. State WIC offices also provide participating women with referrals to health providers and other assistance programs, such as Medicaid.⁵⁶

WIC is entirely funded by the federal government, though, like SNAP, administration of the program is overseen by the states. However, WIC is a block-grant program, meaning that states are allocated a set amount of money for WIC on an annual basis. This means that states may at times be forced to turn qualifying women and children away from the program.

Nationwide, in the first eight months of FFY11, WIC served an average of 6.8 million infants and children per month; in Iowa, an average of 54,827 infants and children per month were served (16,073 women; 16,664 infants; 38,163 children).⁵⁷

WIC enrollees may also participate in the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), which provides participants with a coupon, worth up to \$30 a year, to purchase locally grown fruits and vegetables directly from farmers, at a farmers' market, or at a roadside stand. Farmers and vendors then submit redeemed coupons to the state agency that administers the program for reimbursement. In FFY11, nearly \$20 million was appropriated for FMNP.⁵⁸ States cover 30 percent of the administrative costs of the WIC FMNP program, while the federal government covers the remaining 70 percent of administrative costs and foots the entire food cost bill.

Despite the wide range of services WIC provides, it, too, remains underutilized. Official participation estimates for 2007 suggest that just 56 percent of eligible individuals were enrolled in the program. Participation rates were highest among breastfeeding and postpartum women (78 percent) and infants (81 percent).⁵⁹

The Emergency Food Assistance Program

Thousands of private food distribution organizations receive some level of federal support through the Emergency Food Assistance Program, or TEFAP. More than 60 different food commodities — including canned fruits and vegetables, juice, pasta, peanut butter, meat, poultry and fish — are available to households that meet the income guidelines set by each state.⁶⁰

TEFAP serves a dual purpose — it supplies high quality food products to the neediest Americans while strengthening agricultural markets. Through TEFAP, the federal government purchases commodities from farmers, fishers and other food producers, distributing those commodities to state agencies. In addition to the mandatory food purchases, TEFAP may make “bonus” purchases at the discretion of the Secretary of Agriculture to stabilize market prices.⁶¹ The amount of food distributed is determined by the number of jobless people and individuals living below the federal poverty level in an area.⁶² In Iowa, food is distributed to one of eight regional food banks serving all 99 counties.⁶³ They, in turn, distribute the food items to local food banks and food pantries, which distribute the food to individuals qualifying for assistance. To participate in TEFAP, household income must be less than 185 percent of the federal poverty level (about \$41,348 for a family of four).⁶⁴

In FFY10, over \$565 million worth of food was distributed to the states by TEFAP. Iowa received over \$4 million worth of food through TEFAP in FFY10.⁶⁵ Local private agencies pay a nominal fee for storage and distribution costs.

Food charities such as food banks, pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, and others, rely extensively on TEFAP to stock their shelves. Among food banks with less-diversified resources, TEFAP may supply up

to half of their food stocks.⁶⁶ Among more well-established food banks with diverse resource streams, TEFAP still provides a significant share of food supplies.⁶⁷

Table 4 displays how central TEFAP commodities are to the work of six of Iowa's eight[‡] food banks.⁶⁸

At local food pantries, TEFAP commodities may comprise a larger or smaller share of total food stores. For instance, at the Johnson Country Crisis Center Food Bank, TEFAP commodities comprise just 15 percent of food stores. At the

Table 4. TEFAP Commodities: Large Share of Iowa Food Banks' Supply

Food Bank	Location	Iowa Counties Served	TEFAP Commodities as percent of overall food stocks
North East Iowa Food Bank	Waterloo	16	up to 25%
Food Bank of the Heartland	Omaha, NE	8	33%
Hawkeye Area Community Action Program Food Reservoir	Hiawatha	7	42%
Food Bank of Iowa	Des Moines	42	up to 40%
Food Bank of Siouxland	Sioux City	8	30%
River Bend Foodbank	Moline, IL	5	35%

Source: Author's correspondence with food bank personnel.

North Liberty Food Pantry, conversely, TEFAP commodities are half of food stores at any given time.⁶⁹

Even if TEFAP is not the primary source of food for an EFO, it is the source of the EFO's best food. TEFAP commodities have high nutritional value.⁷⁰

In addition to being highly nutritious, TEFAP commodities are consistent. Because large corporate donations to food banks are often foods that did not sell as anticipated or were overstocked, the frequency and size of such donations are irregular and unreliable. Deliveries of TEFAP commodities on the other hand, tend to be regular, reliable and predictable.⁷¹

The importance of TEFAP to combat food insecurity cannot be overstated. Even recognizing the program's importance as a reliable source of nutritious food, as well as the ratio of TEFAP commodities to total food distributed or stored at an EFO fails to capture the vitality of the program to EFOs.

Thanks to TEFAP, a dollar donated to an EFO can be stretched much further than it could otherwise. TEFAP provides funding to food banks to help defray the costs of storage and distribution. Local pantries and food kitchens share the storage and coverage distribution costs with food banks, paying a nominal fee per pound of food. TEFAP storage and distribution costs range anywhere from 0 to 14 cents per pound; privately donated foods cost about 18 cents per pound to store and distribute.⁷²

From January to May of 2011, the Johnson County Crisis Center Food Bank spent \$4,588.76 on transportation and storage for over 42,500 pounds of TEFAP commodities, an average of just over 9 cents per pound.⁷³ At 18 cents per pound — the storage and distribution cost for privately donated foods — storage and distribution costs would have been 65 percent higher, approaching \$7,600. And had the Crisis Center Food Bank been forced to purchase that amount of food at retail prices, it would have cost nearly \$72,000.⁷⁴

In the event of a large cut to TEFAP — or the elimination of the program altogether — few EFOs could scale up their fundraising to meet the need,⁷⁵ even if there was a large enough supply of privately

[‡] The remaining two food banks, St. Stephen's Food Bank in Dubuque and the Food Bank of Southern Iowa in Ottumwa, receive the majority of their foods from the North East Iowa Food Bank and the Food Bank of Iowa, respectively.

donated foods to replace TEFAP commodities. The 65 percent cost increase would result in fewer people receiving emergency food help, and the possible closure of many EFOs — particularly smaller, newer pantries that were organized to meet increased demand during the recession.⁷⁶

The Commodity Supplemental Food Program

Administered much like TEFAP, but targeted at WIC populations and the elderly, the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) provides food commodities to an average of 518,000 people per month in FFY10.⁷⁷

CSFP food packages are intended to provide vulnerable, eligible populations with nutrients that the target populations often are lacking. Because nutritious foods, such as fruits, vegetables, meat, poultry and fish, are often more expensive than less nutritious food, CSFP is a vital resource for low-income seniors and families. Elderly people with income at or below 130 percent FPL and women, infants and children whose income is at or below 185 percent FPL are eligible to participate in the program. Women, infants and children who participate in other public assistance programs, such as Medicaid, SNAP, or TANF are automatically eligible. As WIC participation has increased and the nation’s senior population has grown, low-income seniors have become the main population served by CFSP, constituting a full 90 percent of CFSP enrollment.⁷⁸

Like TEFAP, commodities are distributed by the federal government to states, which in turn distribute the foods to public and private nonprofit agencies. Unlike TEFAP, however, the federal government fully covers administrative costs. In Iowa, the program is administered by the Polk County Department of Community, Family, and Youth Service, and serves the following counties: Polk, Dallas, Warren, Jasper, Madison and Boone.⁷⁹ An average of 3,238 Iowans participated in the program in 2009.⁸⁰

Child Nutrition Programs

Federal nutrition programs touch the lives of millions of children across the nation. Table 5 displays the participation at the national and state level for a number of these programs.

Even students not receiving free or reduced-price school lunch or breakfast may purchase meals that are partially paid for by USDA. Free and reduced-price and paid-for meals are nutritious, meeting nutrition standards set by USDA. Millions more children are served by additional USDA programs: receiving after-school snacks, meals and snacks in child care or clubs, as well as continued summer breakfast and lunch. Even the milk many students and children in child care is paid for by the USDA.

Millions of children nationwide receive healthy meals at school through the National School Lunch (NSLP) and School Breakfast (SBP) programs.

Every meal sold by a participating school — whether paid for by the student at full price, reduced price or free — is partially subsidized by USDA. Breakfast and lunch meals must meet certain nutrition guidelines set by USDA. Children from families

Table 5. Participation in Child Nutrition Programs

	Program	Iowa	U.S.
Breakfast	Free & Reduced-Price	60,280	9,433,285
	Paid	23,620	1,902,512
Lunch	Free & Reduced-Price	163,954	19,967,133
	Paid	229,684	10,995,180
	Summer Nutrition Program	13,758	2,815,058
	Child and Adult Care Food Program - child care center participation	24,812	2,457,590

Note: Summer Nutrition Program and Child and Adult Care Food Program data for 2010.

Source: Food Research and Action Center.

with income at or below 130 percent FPL qualify for free meals, and those with income between 130 and 185 percent FPL are eligible for reduced-price meals.⁸¹ Children from families with income levels exceeding 185 percent FPL may purchase the meal at a price set by the school. For the 2011-12 school year, participating schools will be reimbursed \$2.77 for free lunches, \$2.37 for reduced-price lunches, and 26 cents for paid lunches; schools in which more than 60 percent of lunches served were free or reduced-price receive an additional 2 cents per meal served.⁸² The State of Iowa contributes 4 cents per meal served.⁸³

The nutritional needs of school children, of course, do not end with the school year. Children from low-income families have access to two meals and a snack each day through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). Like many other nutrition programs, each state administers its own program. In Iowa, the program is administered at the state level by the Department of Education, which in turn authorizes local school districts, church groups, sports camps, Boys and Girls Clubs,⁸⁴ and other organizations to purchase and distribute food to eligible children at 203 different sites.⁸⁵

Children participating in child care programs, Head Start, afterschool programs, or residing in homeless shelters receive snacks and meals through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). As the name suggests, the program also provides meals to adults — seniors and persons with disabilities in non-residential child care settings — however, the vast majority of beneficiaries are children.⁸⁶ The program is administered at the state level by the Department of Education.⁸⁷ Overall, an average of 3.4 million children and seniors were served daily by the program in FFY10.⁸⁸

Schools and institutions which do not participate in NSLP, SBP, or CACFP may participate in the Special Milk Program, which reimburses the institutions for milk purchased and served to children, allowing the children to purchase the milk at a lower price. Though the Special Milk Program served 78 million half-pints of milk in 2009, the program has shrunk in recent decades as more and more schools and districts have implemented NSLP and SBP.⁸⁹

Other Programs

FDA operates a number of other food assistance and distribution programs, most of which are much smaller in scope than those listed above.

FDA programs help those facing natural disasters. In the event of a presidentially-declared disaster, such as a hurricane or flooding, USDA may issue SNAP benefits (known as “D-SNAP”). Households that normally wouldn’t qualify for regular SNAP benefits may qualify for D-SNAP, if they have expenses relating to protecting, repairing, or evacuating their homes, or if they have lost income as a result of the disaster. Households already receiving SNAP benefits may receive additional benefits.⁹⁰

Low-income seniors may receive help purchasing fresh fruits and vegetables through the Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program. USDA awards grants to states, which in turn provide seniors with vouchers to be redeemed at farmers’ markets, community supported agriculture programs, and roadside stands.⁹¹ Participants may receive up to \$50 total in benefits over the course of a year. In Iowa, the program is administered through the Department of Agriculture. In 2010, over 21,200 senior Iowans participated in the program, redeeming \$525,078 in SFMNP vouchers.⁹²

USDA foods also help low-income Native Americans living on reservations. An alternative to SNAP, the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) delivers commodities purchased by the USDA to Indian Tribal Organizations or state agencies, which then distribute the foods to eligible people. In FFY10, a monthly average of 84,609 people participated in FDPIR.⁹³

Additional Food Assistance in Iowa

In Iowa, hunters have a unique opportunity to help Iowa's food insecure. The Help Us Stop Hunger (HUSH) program, administered by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), allows hunters to donate venison to Iowa EFOs.

HUSH originated in 2003-2004 hunting season, as a joint effort to reduce the deer population in Iowa and provide quality meat to Iowa's low-income Iowans.⁹⁴ Hunters may take their deer to one of 86 meat lockers across the state, which are registered participants in the program. The lockers process the skin, bone, and grind the meat, and deliver it to the Food Bank of Iowa, which subsequently distributes the food to local pantries and kitchens.

For each deer processed, lockers receive \$75; the Food Bank of Iowa receives \$5 per deer to cover administrative costs. The program is financed through hunting license fees — one dollar from each license goes to the program; any costs beyond the HUSH funds come out of the Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund.⁹⁵

Since its inception, HUSH has provided 45,756 deer to Iowa EFOs.⁹⁶ The number of deer donated by hunters through HUSH peaked in the 2007-08 season at 8,369, and has since slowly declined to 6,320 in the 2010-11 season. The combination of a smaller herd in the state and hunters retaining more deer as a result of the recession are the likely reasons for the decrease, according to DNR staff.⁹⁷ Despite recent declines, hunter donations' have provided 8.2 million meals at a cost of just \$3.2 million.⁹⁸

Similar programs operate in a number of states, including Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New York and others.

Apart from state-level administration of federal food assistance programs and the limited-in-scope HUSH program, however, Iowa does not operate any other emergency food programs.

Food Assistance Initiatives in Other States

In addition to administering federal food assistance programs, a number of other states also administer food assistance initiatives of their own. These programs are as simple as state grants to food banks and as complex as commodity surplus distribution programs. A few such programs are noted below.

Since 1984, New York's Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) has provided direct state funding to EFOs. Foods purchased with HPNAP funds must meet high nutrition standards, modeled after USDA nutrition standards.⁹⁹

Pennsylvania boasts the largest such program, called the State Food Purchase Program (SFPP).¹⁰⁰ Created in 1991, the state distributes grants through SFPP to the counties, which subsequently distribute those funds to EFOs, for the purchase of foods.¹⁰¹ More than 2.4 million Pennsylvanians benefited from the program in 2009, thanks to a state allocation of \$18 million.¹⁰²

Since 2007, New Jersey has administered a similar program with an identical name. New Jersey's State Food Purchase Program has provided legislatively appropriated funds to food banks for the express purpose of purchasing healthy foods from New Jersey farmers, when available.¹⁰³ In state fiscal year 2011, \$6.8 million was allocated to the program.¹⁰⁴ Legislative action in 2009 allows taxpayers to donate directly to the SFPP on their tax return.¹⁰⁵

Among Iowa's neighbors, both Minnesota and Illinois operate programs that provide grants to EFOs. The Minnesota Food Shelf Program received an appropriation of \$2.5 million for the 2010-2011 biennium; those funds are then distributed by the state food bank association to local food pantries and

kitchens based on the number of individuals each serves.¹⁰⁶ Illinois has had several similar programs in recent years, including an FY2010 direct appropriation of \$1 million to food banks.¹⁰⁷ Beginning with the 2010 tax year, Illinois residents can contribute directly to the state's food bank association, Feeding Illinois, on their tax return form.¹⁰⁸

In Texas, the Surplus Agricultural Grant Program, better known as Texans Feeding Texans, helps food producers donate surplus foods to EFOs. Since 2002, the program has provided funds to producers to cover the cost of harvesting, packaging and transporting surplus produce donated to EFOs. Today, the program awards \$2 million.¹⁰⁹

In Iowa, the implementation of a modest grant or food-purchasing program could provide a needed boost to the state's food banks and local pantries and kitchens.

The Recession, ARRA and Recovery

Though the Great Recession officially began in December 2007,¹¹⁰ Iowa workers were spared its impact until August 2008, when Iowa's economy began shedding jobs.¹¹¹ In fact, Iowa's job market didn't hit bottom until December 2009 — six months after the official end of the recession.¹¹² Employment in Iowa peaked in July 2008, at 1.52 million jobs; in December 2009, that had fallen to 1.46 million jobs.¹¹³

With millions upon millions of Americans newly out-of-work, several food programs were expanded under the 2009 stimulus bill, or ARRA. The largest beneficiary of all food programs was the program with the largest reach, SNAP. ARRA increased the share of administrative costs covered by the federal government, increased SNAP benefit levels by 13.6 percent,¹¹⁴ or an average additional monthly benefit of \$18 per person per household,¹¹⁵ and expanded SNAP eligibility for unemployed, childless adults.

ARRA provided an additional \$295 million[§] to cover administrative costs.¹¹⁶ In Iowa, the increased benefits meant an extra \$165 million in the Iowa economy, and the \$2.7 million in administrative SNAP coverage provided the state with some fiscal breathing room.¹¹⁷

The ARRA expansion had several objectives in addition to reducing food insecurity, particularly among households impacted by the recession. Expanding SNAP was also intended to provide an immediate jolt of stimulus to the economy to create and save jobs. SNAP benefits are redeemed almost immediately, meaning that extra benefits or increased usage pumps more money into the economy, allowing firms to retain employees and possibly create new jobs. Recent USDA research suggests that each federal SNAP dollar generates upwards of \$1.75 in economic activity.¹¹⁸ A February 2010 Iowa Fiscal Partnership brief estimated that increased ARRA funding for SNAP and one other food program, the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), created or saved 428 jobs in state FY09 and 418 in state FY10.¹¹⁹

SNAP appears to have had a significant impact in reducing food insecurity during the nadir of the recession. As noted above, food insecurity remained virtually unchanged from 2008 to 2009, despite the unemployment rate more than doubling. Among low-income households — particularly those eligible for SNAP benefits under the ARRA expansion — food insecurity actually declined in 2009, despite climbing unemployment.¹²⁰ Further suggesting that ARRA had a major impact in steadying overall food insecurity and reducing it among low-income households is the fact that food-insecurity figures did not improve for households just above the eligibility threshold.¹²¹

Despite the expansion of SNAP, however, local food agencies saw an enormous increase in food pantry usage during the course of the recession. Fortunately, TEFAP was also boosted by ARRA, receiving an

[§] \$145 million in FFY09 and \$150 in FFY10. ARRA also expanded WIC coverage and provided \$100 million for WIC enrollment technology improvements.

increase of \$150 million (\$100 million to purchase food and an additional \$50 million to cover distribution and storage costs).¹²² In Iowa, the ARRA boost to TEFAP translated into a total of nearly \$1.4 million — \$792,717 for direct food purchases and \$603,265 for administrative costs.¹²³ Thanks to the ARRA boost, Iowa food banks' administrative costs were fully covered, freeing up resources to serve more food-insecure Iowans, right at the worst of the Recession's effects.¹²⁴

Throughout Iowa, thousands of Iowans benefitted from the TEFAP expansion, as EFOs experienced unprecedented use. The executive directors at the Food Bank of Iowa in Des Moines and the Siouxland Food Bank in Sioux City both increased distribution of foods to food pantries, kitchens, and shelters by 30 percent or more as a result of the recession;¹²⁵ the Food Bank for the Heartland, based in Omaha and serving Western Iowa, increased distribution by as much as 40 percent from pre-recessionary levels.¹²⁶

Despite the ongoing economic recovery, by and large, EFOs have yet to see an abatement in their usage.¹²⁷ In fact, in some parts of Iowa, usage is still, according to one director, "on the uptick."¹²⁸ The reason for continued food pantry usage is likely a confluence of different phenomena: increasing food and fuel costs, the expiration of unemployment insurance benefits, and localized job losses as manufacturing plants have continued to close. Perhaps most importantly, Iowa is still 72,600 jobs shy of pre-recessionary employment levels.¹²⁹ In addition, the sectors hardest hit by the recession in Iowa — manufacturing and construction jobs — tend to include high-wage jobs. The sectors with the strongest job growth in the recovery — leisure and hospitality and retail trade — have the lowest average wage.¹³⁰

Food Assistance Programs and the Federal Budget

Recent negotiations in the nation's capital leave all of the federal food assistance programs subject to significant cuts, transformations or eliminations.

In August, President Obama and congressional leaders reached an agreement to raise the nation's debt ceiling. The Budget Control Act raises the debt ceiling, cuts discretionary programs by \$1 trillion over the next decade and may exact an additional \$1.2 trillion in cuts.

The initial \$1 billion in cuts would come from the discretionary portion of the budget — meaning Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, child nutrition programs, and most of SNAP are exempt as non-discretionary programs. The agreement tasks the new Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction with developing legislation that would further reduce projected deficits by \$1.5 trillion through 2021. If the committee fails to develop a plan, the plan is rejected by Congress or vetoed by the president, across-the-board cuts totaling \$1.2 trillion would be triggered.

At every step of the way, discretionary budget nutrition programs — such as WIC, TEFAP, CFSP, Farmers' Market programs and food aid to Indian Reservations — will be subject to cuts. While child nutrition programs (free and reduced-price lunch and breakfast, Summer Nutrition Program and the Child and Adult Care Food Program) and most of SNAP funding are exempt from the initial cuts and from the triggered cuts, both may be cut by the Joint Select Committee, should it reach an agreement.¹³¹ The scheduled \$1 trillion in discretionary cuts would mean a cut of 9 percent to programs in the discretionary portion of the budget, including the nutrition programs listed above.¹³²

The relative paucity of the triggered cuts belies how devastating they would be to EFOs across the country. TEFAP does not merely provide quality food, it also provides funds to help defray the cost of storing and distributing those foods. As noted above, as a result of TEFAP administrative funding, privately donated foods cost 65 percent more to store and distribute than TEFAP commodities. EFOs would either have to significantly ramp-up their fundraising, reduce the food they distribute per person, or turn people in need away.

Cuts to WIC and other programs could mean a smaller individual benefit or fewer individuals served by the program. WIC benefits are already frugal, averaging \$1.17 per recipient per day in Iowa in FFY10.¹³³ Benefit levels in other programs, such as the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program and the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program are similarly meager; a 10 percent cut to such programs would further dampen their impact.

Conclusion

Hunger in the United States and Iowa is kept at arm's length through a complex web of financing and services provided by the federal government, state and local governments, private nonprofit and faith-based organizations, and individual and corporate donors.

Though the food assistance web was temporarily strengthened by the federal Recovery Act — both to meet increased need as a result of the recession and to provide a jolt to the economy by increasing consumer demand — the unabated need for food assistance, coupled with the expiration of the Recovery Act and impending fiscal austerity, threaten its integrity. The ability of private charities to scale up to fully meet the nation's food assistance needs is questionable.

Absent an economic turnaround — meaning more and better-paying jobs — both the nation's and Iowa's food-insecure population is likely to remain higher than historical levels. Coming federal budget cuts will make it increasingly difficult for emergency feeding organizations to help those that come to their door.

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