Key Local Findings
Food Assistance and Hunger in the Heartland 2021

The study documents the critical role Harvesters and its nonprofit partner food pantries play in supporting struggling families in northwest Missouri and northeast Kansas. *Food Assistance and Hunger in the Heartland* provides a snapshot of people—their circumstances, the challenges they face, and the difficult choices they make between food, rent, utilities or healthcare—living on limited household incomes.

As many as 384,874 different people receive food assistance annually through food pantries in Harvesters' network.

- Harvesters' network of food pantries serve 384,874 different people annually. As many as 226,000 different people receive assistance from Harvesters' network each month.
- Every year, Harvesters' network of pantry partners provides food assistance to someone in our 26-county service area more than 3.6 million times.
- Across Harvesters' network, 67 percent of agencies reported an increase in the number of clients receiving food assistance compared to 2020.

NOTE: Food Assistance and Hunger in the Heartland 2021 surveyed food pantries and mobile food pantries in Harvesters' network. The report does not cover other food bank programs including shelters, community kitchens, after-school and summer programs such as Kids Cafe or weekend feeding programs such as BackSnack.

Food recipients represent a diverse cross-section of Harvesters' 26-county service area in northwest Missouri and northeast Kansas.

- 35 percent of all household members served are children under age 18 (134,705 children a year), including 11 percent of household members (42,336 children) who are age 4 and younger.
- 15 percent of neighbors served are seniors age 65 or older.
- Harvesters' network serves racially and ethnically diverse clients: 57 percent are white, 16 percent are Black, 20 percent are Hispanic, and the remainder are from diverse racial or ethnic groups.
- 81 percent of clients have attained a high school degree or general equivalency diploma (GED).
- In 15 percent of households, at least one member has served in the military.

While Harvesters' network feeds many working families, under-employment and low household income are key factors in the high need for food assistance.

- 61 percent of the households have an adult member who worked for pay during the last 12 months.
- 47 percent of households have incomes of $15,000 or less, and 23 percent have incomes of $15,001 to $25,000.
- Nine percent of clients are in temporary housing or are houseless.

In addition to challenges related to employment and food, the households relying on Harvesters may face challenges related to their health and well-being.

- 38 percent of households have at least one member with diabetes or pre-diabetes.
- 55 percent report at least one member with high blood pressure.
- 46 percent report at least one member with high cholesterol.
- 47 percent of households have at least one member without health insurance.

Harvesters' network food receipients are food insecure or experiencing hunger.

- 72 percent of households served by Harvesters are food insecure, using the U.S. government's official food security scale, and have difficulty providing enough safe, nutritious food.
- For 54 percent of households, at least half of the food consumed in a typical month is obtained from a food pantry. 48 percent of respondent households utilized a food pantry nine or more months during the past year,

Many food recipients make difficult choices between food and other necessities.

- 49 percent of households have had to choose between paying for food or utilities. 40 percent have had to choose between paying for food and paying for medicine or medical care, and 38 percent have had to choose between paying for food and paying their rent or mortgage.
- Households cope with food insecurity in a variety of ways. 63 percent report buying the cheapest food available regardless of its nutritional value. 48 percent have eaten food past its expiration date, 26 percent pawned or sold personal items, and 22 percent have watered down food or drinks.

Participation in government support or food assistance programs by pantry food recipients is limited.

- 30 percent of households receive benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP or food stamps).
- 78 percent of households have incomes making them eligible for SNAP/food stamp benefits.
- 58 percent of surveyed households with children ages 5 to 18 participate in free or reduced-price school lunch programs.
- 35 percent of households receiving food assistance participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).

Faith-based pantries provide the vast majority of food assistance locally.

- 65 percent of pantry partners are faith-based or located in a religious entity.

Many pantries rely entirely on volunteers for their work.

- 58 percent of Harvesters pantries reported having no full-time staff.
- Volunteers give an average of 43 hours a week at a pantry. 39 percent of pantry volunteers are ages 19 to 59. Fifty-five percent of volunteers are age 60 and older.
- 41 percent of agencies report at least some difficulty in obtaining new volunteers.

Harvesters is the single most important source of food for most local pantries.

- Pantries in Harvesters' network get 74 percent of the food they distribute from Harvesters. 19 percent of the food distributed is obtained through other donations and 7 percent is purchased.
- 92 percent of pantries reported that if they no longer received food from Harvesters it would have a major effect on their program.
- 21 percent of pantries reported turning clients away because they had run out of food during the past 12 months.
- 65 percent of pantries restrict client visits to only once a month. 31 percent allow weekly visits.
- Neighbors often desire products not always available at a pantry. 61 percent want fresh fruits and vegetables, 58 percent want protein foods like meats, and 36 percent want dairy products such as milk, cheese or yogurt.

Harvesters' network pantries also provide nutrition education and SNAP/food stamp assistance.

- 48 percent of pantries provide some type of nutrition education program, ranging from distributing literature to providing cooking or nutrition classes.
- 46 percent of pantries provide some type of SNAP/food stamp assistance, including screening clients for eligibiliy, application assistance, and SNAP education.