



Talking Points
Food Assistance & Hunger in the Heartland 2021
June 2022

This is an unprecedented study of Harvesters—The Community Food Network and its pantry partners. It is a comprehensive look at those in Harvesters’ 26-county service area of northwest Missouri and northeast Kansas who face food insecurity and the pantries that serve them.

This study illustrates the critical role food banks and pantries play in supplying food to struggling families. (54% of households served get at least half of their monthly food from a food pantry).

Harvesters worked with the Feeding America food banks in Kansas and Missouri, Feeding Missouri and the University of Missouri’s Interdisciplinary Center for Food Security to conduct this study.

Harvesters’ network of pantries helps feed more than 226,000 people every month.

This study examined need and food provided by food pantries and mobile food distributions. It does not measure the need and food distributed by other programs in Harvesters’ network such as community kitchens and shelters and after-school, summer and weekend feeding programs for children.

Data was collected in the summer of 2021 during the COVID-19 Pandemic. At this point of time, need was higher than pre-pandemic and need remains high today as many still struggle to get back on their feet and inflation has created high food, gas, and housing prices.

Nearly 75 percent of households facing hunger served by Harvesters’ network have annual incomes of \$25,000 or less and face tough choices to make ends meet. They choose between buying food and paying utilities, rent/mortgage, and medicine/medical care. Nearly half of all households have at least one member without any kind of health insurance.

Hunger impacts a wide range of neighbors. They live in rural, urban, and suburban areas. They’re children, seniors and working adults.

Food insecure neighbors can face significant health issues. They are more likely to have diabetes or pre-diabetes, high blood pressure or high cholesterol.

There are significant gaps between those who are eligible for safety net programs (SNAP, WIC and school lunch and breakfast programs) and those who participate.