

Missing Meals Report Executive Summary:

Introduction

This project, completed by staff at Second Harvest Heartland, compiles data from many sources to create a baseline of information on the adequacy of food (meals) for low-income people in the service areas of the Feeding America member food banks.

This is not original research. It is the first time that comprehensive information about all food sources has been compiled in one place and will be used to drive planning efforts, create advocacy positions and measure progress in our efforts to achieve our collective mission—to end hunger through community partnerships.

The data includes conversion formulas and the assumptions used for them. Most of the data is “as good as what is available,” and primarily includes information as recent as 2007. In those places where the data is from a different time source, that has been indicated.

We thank Kelsey Beck, Public Policy manager at Food Lifeline in Seattle, Wash., and his staff for their willingness to share their “Missing Meals Report” and the process that they used. We modeled our work after the groundwork that they established.

Project Background

We know that hunger exists in the Midwest because data from the USDA Food Security Report identifies it and because individuals and families turn to food shelves, meal programs, food banks, and federal nutrition programs for help. However, until now, it has been unclear how many more meals are needed to address the problem of food insecurity and hunger and ensure that all low income people have access to three meals a day, 365 days a year.

Second Harvest Heartland embarked on the Missing Meals data gathering project to provide a baseline of information and begin quantifying this need so that we, along with our partners in the hunger relief community, can understand the scope of the problem and provide leadership for solutions.

To end hunger, we need to understand it.

Methodology

The Missing Meals project was conducted using secondary data gathered from a variety of sources. Sources include: U.S. Census Bureau and USDA; the Minnesota and Wisconsin departments of human services; public school district information in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Local charitable sources of food also reported data for the project.

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The guiding formula for calculating the “missing meal” or gap data is as follows:

Total Meals Needed for All Low-Income people for One Year
<MINUS>
Number of Meals Low-Income People Provide for Their Families from cash resources
<MINUS>
Number of Meals Provided by Public Sector (Federal and State) Nutrition Programs
<MINUS>
Number of Meals Provided by Nonprofit / Charitable Hunger Relief Programs
**= EQUALS THE TOTAL NUMBER OF MEALS REMAINING TO END HUNGER IN
MINNESOTA AND WESTERN WISCONSIN**

The formula used to calculate how many meals low-income people and families could be expected to provide for themselves is:

Total population (the estimated number of people living in households with incomes below 185% of the federal poverty level)
x MULTIPIED BY
\$35.89 per person per week x 52 weeks per year (\$1,866 per year)
**= EQUALS THE NUMBER OF MEALS LOW-INCOME PEOPLE PROVIDE FOR
THEMSELVES FROM CASH RESOURCES**

Results

- Second Harvest Heartland’s Missing Meals Report presents data from 2007, showing that more than 165 million meals are still needed each year in Minnesota and western Wisconsin to ensure that all low-income families and individuals have three adequate meals a day (125 million meals in Minnesota and 40 million meals in western Wisconsin).
- This means that even after low-income families use resources such as federal nutrition programs and nonprofit food banks and meal programs, as well as their own ability to purchase food, 15 percent of the food they need is still missing (12 percent in Minnesota and 18 percent in western Wisconsin). This is the equivalent of all individuals in low-income families missing 14 meals a month—maybe missing dinner every night for two weeks each month.
- The data shows that less than 25 percent of the meals needed to end hunger in Minnesota and western Wisconsin are currently being provided through public nutrition programs and hunger relief organizations (22 percent in Minnesota). Perhaps most surprising, low-income individuals provide 63 percent of meals for themselves and their families from their own cash resources (61 percent in Minnesota).

Moving Forward

- The economic downturn in 2008 means that even more people are struggling to make ends meet. The data in the Missing Meals report is meant to be a baseline and reflects information from 2007.
- In order to end hunger in Minnesota and Wisconsin, the buying power of low-income people must be increased, more food must be made available through food banks, food shelves and meal programs to supplement household resources, and access to and participation in federal nutrition programs must be improved.
- The MN Food Support (food stamp) program currently provides 12 percent of the meals needed to feed low income people in Minnesota. The WI Food Share program currently provides eight percent of the meals needed in western Wisconsin. A variety of outreach, education, and application assistance efforts are needed to increase participation in this primary nutrition program. Millions of dollars of local economic activity are lost each year because eligible low-income people do not participate in this federal nutrition program.

Additional Information

The complete Missing Meals report is accessible via www.missingmeals.org. Results are available by county and region as requested.

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