



Meeting Emergency Food Needs

Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development

Overview

A study on the role of community food services during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that community food services, including food pantries and soup kitchens, were crucial in helping Americans meet their food needs, especially in the first five months of the pandemic. Middle-class households benefited more than other groups from these services.



Key findings of the research:

- Food insufficiency increased across all income classes during the pandemic, but especially for lower- and middle-income households.
- The beneficial effect of community food services was most significant for households earning between \$50,000-74,999 per year before the pandemic, suggesting that this income group may have experienced food insecurity for the first time.
- Community food services provided critical short-term emergency relief while people waited for access to government assistance programs, particularly for those whose pre-pandemic earnings exceeded eligibility limits for programs like SNAP.
- The presence of community food services helped mitigate reported household food insufficiency across all income classes, even when controlling for other factors such as poverty, racial composition, unemployment claims, and daily new coronavirus cases.

Additional Resources

- Tian, Z., C. Schmidt, & S.J. Goetz. 2022. The Role of Community Food Services in Reducing US Food Insufficiency in the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics*, 7(3), 580–597. <https://bit.ly/479y8ko>.
- More American Couldn't Get Enough to Eat in 2022 – a Change that Hit the Middle Class Hardest. Published in *The Conversation*, September 23, 2021. <https://bit.ly/3kJRjuf>.

US food insufficiency rose in 2020, including for middle-income households

The share of Americans who said they experienced food insufficiency, meaning that they didn't have enough to eat at some point during the past seven days, increased after the COVID-19 pandemic began. The growth was sharpest for households with \$50,000-\$75,000 in annual income, according to an average of data collected starting April 23, 2020 and compared to pre-pandemic levels.

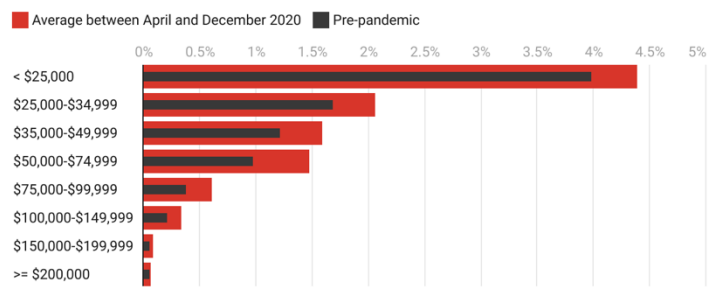


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