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Good Shepherd
FOOD BANK OF MAINE

RESEARCH REPORT

Hunger Pains

Widespread food insecurity threatens Maine's future

A collaborative project of Good Shepherd Food Bank and Preble Street

Final Report
February 2017

Hunger Pains

Widespread food insecurity threatens Maine's future

Introduction

During the Great Recession, hunger in the United States skyrocketed, rising in just a single year from 11.1 percent of households in 2007 to 14.6 percent in 2008.¹ Maine saw a similar increase. In the years since the recession officially ended in 2009, much of the nation has experienced recovery and relief, but Maine is moving against the national trend, and high rates of poverty and hunger continue to harm our state. The rate of hunger, or “food insecurity,” in the United States as a whole dropped to 12.7 percent in 2015. In Maine, it remained elevated at 15.8 percent.²

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), one in six Mainers is food insecure, meaning they live without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food.³ The rate of food insecurity among Maine children is even higher: nearly one in four children in Maine experiences food insecurity.⁴ Maine also ranks third in the nation for the portion of households experiencing “very low food security,” an indication that one or more people were hungry at times during the year because they could not afford enough food.

These statistics mean that every day, roughly 203,000 Maine people are struggling with hunger, more than the total number of people living in Maine's six largest municipalities—Portland, Lewiston, Bangor, South Portland, Auburn, and Biddeford—combined.⁵

The rate of hunger, or “food insecurity,” in the United States as a whole dropped to 12.7 percent in 2015. In Maine, it remained elevated at 15.8 percent.

While hunger rates are high across Maine, the highest rates of food insecurity are in some of Maine's less-populated northern and rural counties: Washington (17.2 percent), Aroostook (17.1 percent), and Piscataquis (16.9 percent). The lowest rates are in the coastal counties of Sagadahoc (13.4 percent), Knox (13.6 percent), and Lincoln (13.7 percent).⁶

¹Alisha Coleman-Jensen, Matthew P. Rabbitt, Christian A. Gregory & Anita Singh, *Household Food Security in the United States in 2015*, USDA, September 2016, p. 7. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/err215/err-215.pdf?v=42636>.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 21. What we commonly refer to as “hunger” is termed “food insecurity” by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and divided into two categories: low food security is characterized by a reduction in the quality and variety of diet, and very low food security by “disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.” Detailed definitions can be found at <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security.aspx>.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Gundersen, C., A. Dewey, A. Crumbaugh, M. Kato & E. Engelhard, *Map the Meal Gap 2016: Food Insecurity and Child Food Insecurity Estimates at the County Level*, Feeding America, 2016. http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/our-research/map-the-meal-gap/2014/ME_AllCounties_CDs_MMG_2014.pdf.

⁵ *Population and Housing Unit Estimates*, U.S. Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest/data/data-sets.html>.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Not surprisingly, the three most populous counties have the largest numbers of Mainers facing food insecurity. A 2016 report conducted by Feeding America, a national hunger relief charity, identified 40,330 people as food insecure in Cumberland County, which includes Portland and South Portland; 27,590 in York County, which includes Biddeford; and 25,280 in Penobscot County, which includes Bangor, compared to 2,910 people facing food insecurity in sparsely populated Piscataquis County.⁷

Alarmed by the persistence of widespread food insecurity in Maine, Preble Street Maine Hunger Initiative and Good Shepherd Food Bank sought to look beyond the numbers to gain a clearer understanding of who is struggling with hunger in Maine and what challenges they face in their attempts to attain food security. This research focuses on people who receive food assistance through hunger relief organizations in Maine and examines their household demographics, use of charitable food assistance, participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and employment. The report also examines the effects of two recent policy changes in Maine's administration of SNAP and the impact on food security for individuals who have lost benefits because of the changes.

The research team for this project consisted of staff people from Good Shepherd Food Bank and Preble Street Maine Hunger Initiative, AmeriCorps VISTA members serving at the Maine Hunger Initiative, graduate students at the University of Southern Maine overseen by Dr. Michael Hillard, and Jean Bessette, doctoral student at the University of New Hampshire.

Hunger in Maine

Mainers who face food insecurity look to both charitable organizations and federal and state assistance programs in order to access enough food for themselves and their families.

Charitable Food Assistance

Forty-seven million Americans rely on the charitable food assistance system.⁸ Although hunger relief organizations were conceived as an emergency service for people who are temporarily in need, they have

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instead become an ongoing source of food support.⁹ In 1980, there were just 200 food pantries in the entire country. By 2013, there were more than 40,000.¹⁰

Maine has seen a similar expansion of the emergency food system, with the number of pantries increasing an

estimated tenfold since the 1980s.¹¹ The state's charitable food assistance network consists of hundreds of food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, and other community-based organizations that provide for the needs of people who lack access to sufficient food. Good Shepherd Food Bank, Maine's only statewide food bank, partners with the majority of these local organizations to distribute millions of pounds of food

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Nancy S. Weinfield et al., *Hunger in America 2014*, Feeding America, August 2014, p. 44. <http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/our-research/hunger-in-america/>.

⁹ J. Molnar, P. Duffy, L. Claxton, & C. Bailey (2001). "Private food assistance in a small metropolitan area: Urban resources and rural needs," *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 28: 187-209.

¹⁰ Peter Pringle (ed.), *A Place at the Table* (Participant Media, 2013), p. 137.

¹¹ While statewide figures are not available, historical data for southern Maine show four pantries in 1979, 60 in 2005, and 80 in 2010. Donna Yellen, Mark Swann, and Elena Schmidt, "Hunger in Maine," *Maine Policy Review* 20.1 (2011): 140-150. <http://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mpr/vol20/iss1/21>.

throughout the state each year. As of December 2016, the Food Bank had 399 partners—303 food pantries, 50 meal sites, and 46 other organizations, including homeless shelters, youth programs, and group buying clubs. Hunger relief organizations are spread throughout the state, although there are fewer in less densely populated areas.

Local food pantries and meal sites are typically small organizations with limited resources and cannot meet the food needs of all Mainers who are struggling with food insecurity. A 2014 report by Good Shepherd Food Bank and Feeding America found nearly three-quarters of Good Shepherd’s partners reported employing no paid staff and relying entirely on volunteers. Nearly half of the volunteers were over 60 years old. Local organizations also reported having to scale back their programs or turn clients away for various reasons, including lack of financial resources and not having enough food to meet the need.¹²

The 2014 report counted more than 178,000 Mainers who regularly sought assistance at local food pantries and meal sites. This estimate does not account for children and families who participate in Good Shepherd’s school-based initiatives such as school food pantries and programs that fill student backpacks with food for the weekend. The study found that people were visiting a local hunger relief charity 11 out of 12 months a year, on average, indicating chronic food insecurity and an ongoing need for food to supplement what they could obtain through other means.¹³

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Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, also known as Food Stamps, or the Food Supplement Program) is an important component of the nation’s social safety net. The program is designed to help individuals and families stretch their food budgets and buy the nutritious foods they need to live healthy lives. SNAP provides financial assistance for food purchases, on average about \$1.40 per person per meal, to eligible persons via an electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card. These benefits are entirely federally funded.¹⁴ As of October 2016, 43.5 million people were participating in SNAP nationally at a cost to the federal government of about \$75 billion annually.¹⁵

Nationally, half of SNAP recipients participate for just 10 months or less, until they get back on their feet or find higher-paying employment. Fifty-eight (58) percent leave the program within one year.¹⁶ Since 1980, households with full-time, year-round workers have grown as a share of SNAP recipients more than

¹² *Hunger in America 2014: Report for Good Shepherd Food Bank*, Feeding America, August 2014. http://www.gsfb.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/FB259_report.pdf.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ “Policy Basics: Introduction to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP),” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, March 24, 2016. <http://www.cbpp.org/research/policy-basics-introduction-to-the-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>.

¹⁵ *SNAP Program: Number of Persons Participating*, USDA, data as of January 6, 2017. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/pd/29SNAPcurrPP.pdf>.

¹⁶ “A Review of Strategies to Bolster SNAP’s Role in Improving Nutrition as well as Food Security,” Food Research & Action Center, updated January 2013.

any other group.¹⁷ This means that more people who are working full time are not paid a wage high enough to sustain their families.

In Maine, SNAP is administered by the state Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), with the federal government sharing half of the administrative cost. SNAP enables participants to shop at a local grocer when and where it is convenient, like any other Maine family. The program provides a step toward a sense of normalcy and stability for families struggling to make ends meet.

SNAP is not only our nation's first line of defense against hunger, but it also stimulates the economy through a multiplier effect.

In November 2016, DHHS reported 188,425 Mainers were participating in SNAP, a decline from the previous year and a substantial decline from 2013 when 249,119 Mainers were participating.¹⁸ Thirty-six (36) percent of

SNAP households in Maine are families with children, 25 percent have one or more people 60 years and over, and 35 percent have one or more people with a disability.¹⁹

SNAP is not only our nation's first line of defense against hunger, but it also stimulates the economy through a multiplier effect. During fiscal year 2015, SNAP brought \$282,015,650 in federal funds to grocery stores and other retailers throughout Maine.²⁰ With \$5 in SNAP generating \$9 in the local economy, these funds could be expected to generate more than \$500 million in total economic activity.

SNAP Policy Changes in Maine

Maine recently enacted a **time limit** on receipt of SNAP benefits for childless adults aged 18 to 49. After three months of receiving benefits, members of this group become ineligible for SNAP unless they can find work, job training, or volunteer opportunities. Since Maine instituted the time limit in early 2015, more than 9,000 food-insecure individuals have lost access to SNAP benefits, and the state's economy has lost the economic benefits federal SNAP dollars provide.²¹

Since 1996, Congress has recognized the difficulty of finding work in areas with high unemployment and given states the option to waive the three-month limit on SNAP in those areas. Congress has also provided for discretionary waivers from the time limit for certain vulnerable populations, including veterans and the homeless. Maine has consistently sought these waivers in the past as factories, in particular paper mills, and fisheries downsized and/or shut their doors. Under these past policies, Maine has offered critical food assistance to those struggling to find livable wage jobs, so they have the basic sustenance they need to survive. Beginning in 2015, Maine no longer requested these waivers even

¹⁷ James P. Ziliak, "Why Are So Many Americans on Food Stamps? The Role of the Economy, Policy and Demographics," in J. Bartfield, C. Gunderson, T. Smeeding, & J. Ziliak, *SNAP Matters: How Food Stamps Affect Health and Well-Being* (Stanford University Press, 2015), p. 27.

¹⁸ *Geographic Distribution of Programs and Benefits for November 2016*, Maine Department of Health and Human Services, p. 25. http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ofa/reports/2016/GeoDistrib_Nov.pdf; *Profile of SNAP Households*, USDA, March 2015. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ops/Maine.pdf>.

¹⁹ *Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2015*, USDA, November 2016. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ops/Characteristics2015.pdf>.

²⁰ *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, State Activity Report, Fiscal Year 2015*. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/snap/2015-State-Activity-Report.pdf>.

²¹ "APNewsBreak: More than 9,000 fewer Mainers receiving food stamps under new work requirements," March 24, 2015. <http://www.usnews.com/news/us/articles/2015/03/24/apnewsbreak-9-000-mainers-lose-food-stamps-under-new-rules>.

though there are still many Mainers in need and high unemployment areas in the state that would qualify for the time-limit waiver.

There is no evidence that dropping people from SNAP leads them to find jobs, particularly in regions with high unemployment. While some argue that the three-month time limit functions as an incentive for

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SNAP participants to enter the workforce, according to the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, “Many able-bodied SNAP participants aren’t working because they can’t find a job or enough job training, or because they face challenges that prevent them from getting or keeping a job, such as health issues or homelessness.”²²

Many who are willing and able to work are in need of job training, but such programs are not consistently available. A person who needs job training, but for whom a placement in a job training program is not available, still loses all SNAP benefits after the three-month period. A qualifying disability can exempt a person from the SNAP time limit, but low-income people often lack access to a regular health care provider who could certify a disabling condition. For many in this group, obtaining necessary treatment or getting documentation to qualify for a waiver from the time limit can be an uphill battle.²³

In 2016 Maine also instituted an **asset test** to reduce the number of adults eligible for SNAP. Previously, Mainers with income at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty line were eligible for SNAP regardless of assets. With the recent policy change, many Mainers are ineligible for SNAP benefits if they have more than \$5,000 in assets.

Nearly all states have eliminated asset tests for seniors and those with disabilities, making Maine an extreme outlier as one of only five states that apply an asset test to these two groups.

Disqualifying assets for households now include most second cars, any property other than a primary home (like a lot used for harvesting wood for heating), and any money in savings.

Families with children are not subject to the asset test, but seniors and those with disabilities are. Nearly all states have eliminated asset tests for seniors and those with disabilities, making Maine an extreme outlier as one of only five states that apply an asset test to these two groups.²⁴ Asset tests can disqualify needy retirees who rely on income from modest retirement savings.²⁵

²² Brynne Keith-Jennings, “Limiting SNAP Doesn’t Boost Employment,” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, August 18, 2015. <http://www.cbpp.org/blog/limiting-snap-doesnt-boost-employment>.

²³ Ed Bolen et al., “More Than 500,000 Adults Will Lose SNAP Benefits in 2016 as Waivers Expire,” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, March 18, 2016. <http://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/more-than-500000-adults-will-lose-snap-benefits-in-2016-as-waivers-expire>.

²⁴ *USDA Categorical Eligibility for SNAP*, USDA, updated August 2016. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/snap/BBCE.pdf>.

²⁵ “Press Release: Government Programs Penalize Retirement Saving By Low- and Moderate-Income Households,” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, June 21, 2005.

Summer Challenges for Families

Low-income parents face an additional challenge in the summer months when school-based meals may be unavailable or inaccessible.²⁶ During the school year, schools often provide children who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals with both breakfast and lunch. A family with two school-age children must provide an estimated 200 additional meals over summer vacation.

While the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), funded by the USDA, offers meals for eligible children, many families do not have access to summer meal sites. In 2015, SFSP reached only 25 percent of eligible Maine children with summer meals.²⁷

During the summer recess, children from low-income families often lack access to recreational and academic enrichment opportunities as well as adequate nutrition. Learning loss that occurs during the summer months, the so-called “summer slide,” accounts for about two-thirds of the achievement gap in reading between low-income ninth graders and their higher-income peers.²⁸ When summer meals are offered together with summer learning programs, these initiatives can provide necessary nutrition and help address the achievement gap.

Transportation

Access to reliable transportation is important for employment options as well as food access. Getting to and from work can be a challenge for low-income workers. The expense and the time involved in commuting to low-wage jobs can be daunting, and coordinating available transportation options to accommodate both family and work obligations is often difficult.

Car ownership can be critical to the ability of low-wage workers to maintain employment, especially in areas where public transit is minimal or nonexistent.

A 2006 study of a rural welfare-to-work program identified the lack of reliable transportation as an impediment to employment among low-income adults. In the study region, as in most of Maine, public transit was extremely limited.

Approximately one-third of the study sample did not own a car or have reliable access to one or have access to public transportation.²⁹

Numerous studies have found that car ownership can be critical to the ability of low-wage workers to maintain employment, especially in areas where public transit is minimal or nonexistent. For recipients of public assistance, car ownership is associated with higher rates of employment and higher earnings.

²⁶ Rachel L. Wilkerson, Durwesh Khalfé, and Kathy Krey (2015), “Associations Between Neighborhoods and Summer Meals Sites: Measuring Access to Federal Summer Meals Programs,” *Journal of Applied Research on Children: Informing Policy for Children at Risk*, Vol. 6: Iss. 2, Article 9.

²⁷ *Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report*, Food Research & Action Center, June 2016, p. 6. http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2016_summer_nutrition_report.pdf

²⁸ Karl L. Alexander, Doris R. Entwisle, and Linda Steffel Olson, “Lasting Consequences of the Summer Learning Gap,” *American Sociological Review*, April 2007, Vol. 72:167–180. http://www.ewa.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/summer_learning_gap-2.pdf; National Summer Learning Association infographic, undated. <http://summerlearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/TheAchievementGapInfographic.pdf>

²⁹ Alicia Meckstroth et al., “Paths to Work in Rural Places: Key Findings and Lessons from the Impact Evaluation of the Future Steps Rural Welfare-to-Work Program,” Mathematica Policy Research, March 22, 2006. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/paths_to_work.pdf.

Research has also shown that car ownership has a greater impact on low-skilled workers than it does on higher-skilled workers. In addition, individuals who have access to a car are likely to be unemployed for shorter periods.³⁰

Hunger and Maine's Labor Market

The national recession of 2007-2009 caused the loss of tens of thousands of Maine jobs, especially in rural Maine, and was followed by a slow jobs recovery. Maine lost about 30,000 jobs during the recession, and three years into the recovery, had regained only 5,900 of the jobs lost. Employment has now recovered to about three-quarters of its prerecession peak. While economic recovery overall has been hampered by both population and labor force stagnation, there are still large numbers of discouraged workers (not technically in the labor force but who would take a job if available) and part-time workers in Maine who would prefer full-time work but can't find it.³¹

Very low incomes for roughly one-third of Maine workers are an important factor underlying food insecurity; for many, having a job does not liberate them from persistent hunger. Maine's employment structure provides a livable wage for only about two-thirds of its roughly 620,000 workers. Full-time work at \$10 an hour provides annual income of about \$20,000, less than even the most conservative estimate of a livable wage for a single adult.³²

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Simply put, a huge portion of Maine's labor market does not provide wages adequate for meeting basic needs for food, housing, utilities, a vehicle, and health care. Low wages make workers and their families economically insecure; a car repair or eviction notice can easily rob them of the stability and means to maintain employment and avoid even more dire poverty.

Ongoing changes in the structure of the Maine labor market also exacerbate the inability of the Maine economy to provide access to employment and sufficient wages to avoid food insecurity. Economists considering structure look at changes in the mix of employment by occupation, industry, and the location of jobs. On the employment side, rural Maine continues to see the loss of manufacturing jobs, most visibly with serial and permanent shutdowns of the state's historic paper mills in Millinocket and East Millinocket, Bucksport, Lincoln, Madison, and elsewhere. From 2007 (4th quarter) to 2016 (2nd quarter), Maine lost 8,672 manufacturing jobs, a 12.8 percent decline. Manufacturing employment fell by 40.7 percent in Penobscot County (East Millinocket was home to now-shuttered Great Northern Paper); by

³⁰ "Shifting into Gear," National Consumer Law Center, April 2014, p. 2. <http://www.workingcarsforworkingfamilies.org/images/files/shifting-into-gear.pdf>.

³¹ Maine employment peaked at 621,000. At the end of the recession in summer 2009, Maine employment had contracted to 592,100; in August 2012 it had recovered to only 598,000. Maine employment reached 617,800 in July 2016. Maine Department of Labor, Center for Workforce Research and Information. <http://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/ces.html>. On discouraged and involuntary part-time workers, see "Policy Basic: Maine's Unemployment Rate, More than Meets the Eye," Maine Center for Economic Policy, May 2016. http://www.mecep.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Unemployment-calculation-5-18-2016-Final_final.pdf

³² Projections for the impact of the state's new minimum wage law show some 181,000 Maine workers benefitting from the increase to \$12. Recent estimates of a livable wage in Maine range from approximately \$10.38 per hour for a single adult up to \$26.87 per hour for a household with a single adult and two children, benchmarks that assumes full-time, year-round work. MIT Livable Wage Calculator, <http://livingwage.mit.edu/states/23/locations>; Maine Center for Economic Policy, "Restoring the Value of Work," August 2016. http://www.mecep.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Minimum-wage-brief_final_08-17-16.pdf.

30.3 percent in Oxford County (home to historic Rumford paper mills); by 17.5 percent in Franklin County (Jay was home to the former International Paper mill); and a 17.3 percent decrease in Aroostook County (home to a number of small paper mills and the former Fraser Paper mill in Madawaska).³³

With the exception of health care, growth in better-paid service employment is concentrated far away from where rural Mainers losing factory jobs are located. The ongoing decline of employment options in rural Maine is so strong that rim counties (Oxford, Franklin, Somerset, Piscataquis, Aroostook, and Washington) are seeing sizable losses of population and labor force participants, as many flee to southern Maine or out of state seeking employment, or move into a premature semi-retirement.³⁴

Compounding the loss of jobs is the aging of Maine's labor force; older workers face more challenges in gaining new skills when they lose jobs and are more likely to have injuries or other disabilities that make

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them unattractive to employers. The cost-benefit profile for older workers seeking retraining is relatively poor, as they have fewer years to benefit from the higher wage.

Southern Maine's economy is relatively prosperous, and it is where better-paying

service jobs (health care, law, banking and insurance) are concentrated. One-third of Cumberland County employment is in low-wage retail and service occupations, however. Data for 2015 show that 32.8 percent of the Portland/South Portland labor market's 195,055 jobs were concentrated in low-wage industries, with annual earnings ranging from \$20,611 to \$26,366.³⁵ While employment growth in southern Maine's economy has been strong, for many the combination of low wages and rising rents threatens their ability to feed themselves.

In sum, the realities of Maine's labor market for up to one-third of our workforce are that low wages mean vulnerability to hunger. Despite the state's current low unemployment rate, the decline of Maine's rural manufacturing employment and the concentration of employment growth in low-wage service occupations mean that gaining employment does not ensure an end to food insecurity.

³³ Maine Department of Labor, Center for Workforce Research and Information. <http://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/qcew1.html>.

³⁴ Population in rim counties alone decreased by 8,522 between 2010 and 2015. Personal email communication with Glenn Mills, Chief Economist, Maine Department of Labor, Center For Workforce Research, January 3, 2017.

³⁵ These low-wage sectors include retail trade, leisure and hospitality, along with health care/social services industries (residential mental health facilities, continuing care assisted living facilities, social assistance, individual and family services, and childcare).

The Research

Methodology

To achieve a holistic understanding of the problem of hunger in Maine, we employed both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. We administered a four-page paper survey at food pantry sites across Maine. We then conducted a series of focus groups in various geographic locations, and several in-depth follow-up interviews with people who participated in either the survey or the focus groups, whose comments help to illustrate the quantitative data.

Administering the Survey

Surveys were administered at hunger relief organizations, including food pantries and meal sites, in all 16 Maine counties. Members of the research team visited organizations over a four-month period and handed out surveys to be completed on-site. Respondents were offered assistance if needed to fill out the survey. Copies of the survey were also mailed to hunger relief organizations across the state. Organization staff administered the survey during food distributions, collected completed surveys from clients, and mailed them to the research team. As it was not feasible to develop a random sample of food pantry users, the research team set general targets for the number of surveys to be collected from each county in order to reflect the approximate distribution of food-insecure individuals across the state. The survey tool is provided in Appendix A.

Focus Groups

We held six focus groups to gather qualitative data about respondents' experiences with food insecurity in Maine. Two focus groups were held in

Portland at a food pantry with an on-site soup kitchen; the other four were held at food pantries in Bridgton, Ellsworth, Waterville, and Presque Isle. Focus group participants were recruited through contact information they voluntarily provided on the completed paper surveys and by food pantry directors who sought out pantry clients willing to participate. Members of the research team conducted the focus groups using a standard set of facilitation questions. The conversations were audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. The focus group protocol is provided in Appendix B.

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Interviews

University of Southern Maine graduate students supervised by Dr. Michael Hillard conducted in-depth follow-up interviews with three people, and Preble Street staff conducted an additional seven in-depth interviews. Interviewees were identified by Preble Street staff who were familiar with their circumstances. The students developed a set of interview questions related to food acquisition, experience with public assistance programs, work history, transportation issues, and public perceptions of low-income citizens in Maine. The conversations were audio recorded and then summarized by the students. The interview questions are provided in Appendix C.

Study Results

Demographics of Survey Respondents

In total, 2,053 people responded to the survey.³⁶ Respondents came from 244 different towns spread across all 16 Maine counties. The geographic distribution of survey respondents is shown in Figure 1.

One-third of food-insecure Mainers reside in just two counties: Cumberland County is home to 20.1 percent and Penobscot County to 12.6 percent.³⁷ The research team collected surveys in these two counties at similar rates: 22.2 percent of surveys were collected from Cumberland County residents, and 12.6 percent of surveys were collected from Penobscot County residents.

One-third of food-insecure Mainers reside in just two counties: Cumberland County is home to 20.1 percent and Penobscot County to 12.6 percent.

Figures 2, 3, and 4 present selected survey respondent and household characteristics. All demographic data collected are available in Appendix D.

Respondents ranged in age from 15 to 95, with an average age of 52. One in 5 respondents was 65 or older. Two-thirds of respondents were female, and 93 percent were white (see Figure 2).

Figure 1. Surveys Collected by County

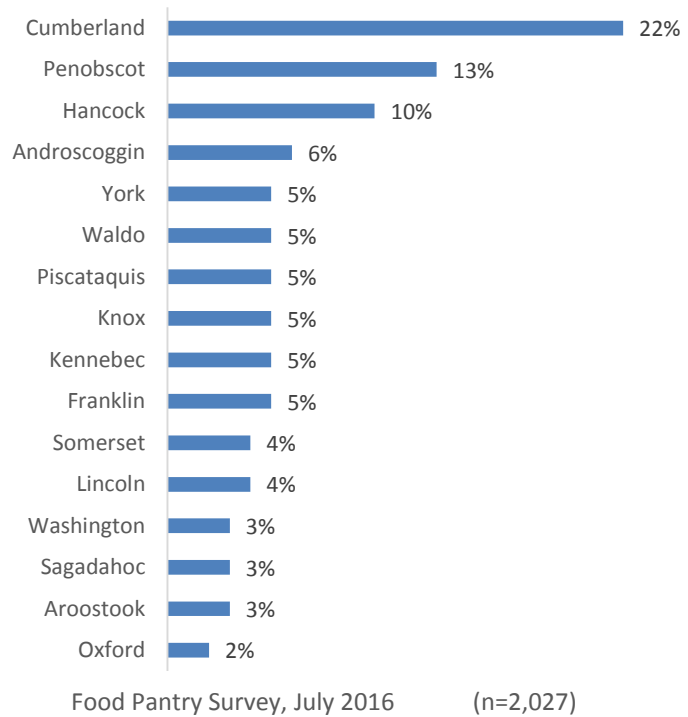
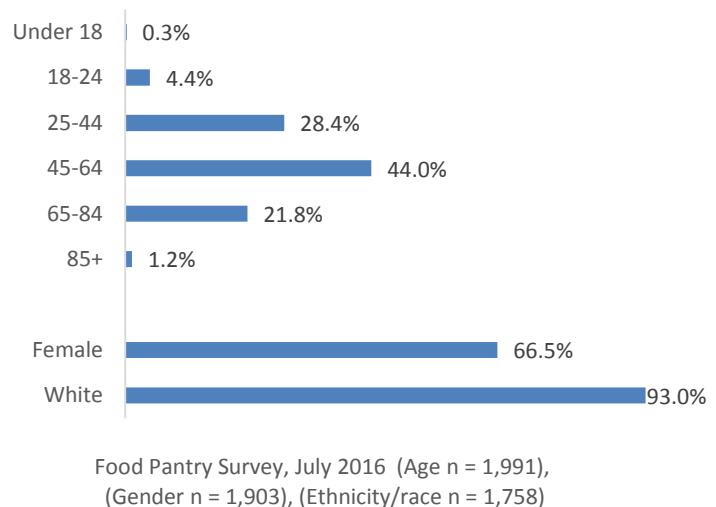


Figure 2. What is your age, gender, ethnicity/race?



³⁶ Since respondents did not always answer all survey questions, the totals in this section may not equal 2,053.

³⁷ Gunderson et al., *Map the Meal Gap 2016*.

The majority of households had one or two members. Average household size was 2.7, with a range of one to 14 household members (see Figure 3).

Thirty-five (35) percent of respondents indicated that they had a child under 18 living in their household. Nearly half of respondents (49 percent) reported a person with a disability living in the household. Thirty-eight (38) percent reported a senior over the age of 60 living in the household. In total, 87 percent of households surveyed (n = 1,785) contain a child, a senior, or a person with a disability, and some contain members of more than one of these groups (see Figure 4).

Focus group participants offered insights into the kinds of issues that Mainers face. They spoke about a wide array of disabilities and health problems, from autism, diabetes, depression, and heart attacks to a rare eye disease and a bone infection linked to surgery after a broken limb.

“Last year right before Christmas we had to dish out almost \$600 because my husband has a disease in his eye that runs in the family. So we had to sit down with the kids and say, ‘We can’t do Christmas because Dad’s got to have surgery to correct this.’” — Mother in Kennebec County

“Right now I am so exhausted because I have a bipolar son. I tried to get him help and the police threw him in jail. If you have a bipolar child and are poor, most everybody ends up in jail—that is just the way you get any treatment at all.” — Mother in the Lakes Region

Figure 3. How many people are living in your household?

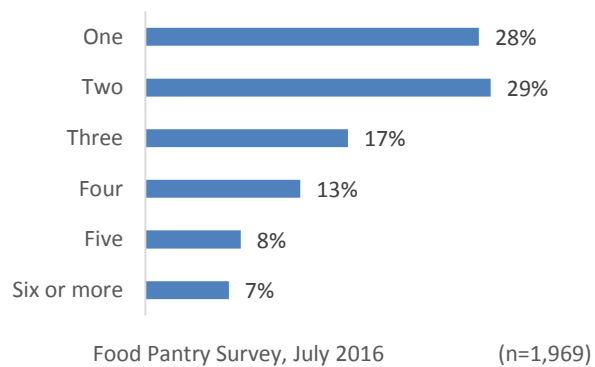


Figure 4. Respondent households with...

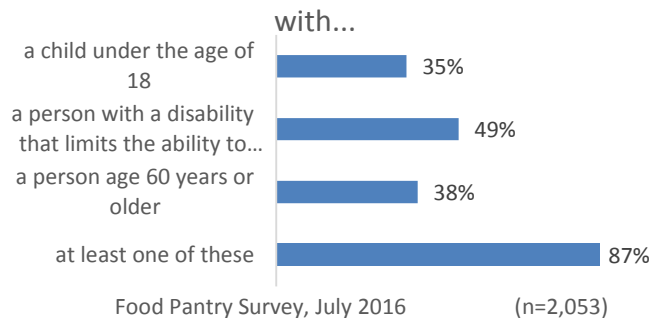
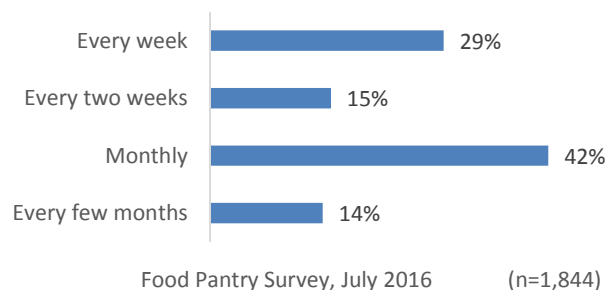


Figure 5. How often do you utilize a food pantry now?



Use of Charitable Food Assistance

Figure 5 shows how frequently survey respondents visit food pantries. Eighty-six (86) percent of respondents report using a food pantry at least once a month. More than 40 percent of households use a food pantry monthly, and an additional 44 percent are using a pantry every week or every two weeks.

Many food pantries only distribute food once a month, so for those visiting the pantry monthly, that frequency may reflect the pantry’s limited operations. The household may be in need of assistance more

often than once a month. Households reporting more frequent use may be visiting multiple pantries to meet their needs.

Among households with children, 40 percent use a pantry more than once a month; among households with a member who has a disability, 46 percent use a pantry more than once a month; half of households with a member 60 years or older use a pantry more than once a month.

Fifty-nine (59) percent of respondents report that they are using the food pantry more this year than they did last year, including 8 percent who reported that they did not use a pantry at all the previous year.

Many focus group participants noted their reliance on food pantries, along with a patchwork of other resources, including meal sites, SNAP, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Social Security, Meals on Wheels (for homebound seniors and individuals with disabilities), afterschool and summer meals for children, and more.

“The pantry helps us out a whole lot. We try to budget the best we can. We’re getting some food stamps, but they cut them back, so we never know from month to month what they’re going to be. They don’t give you much, that’s for sure.” — Senior man in Aroostook County

“I don’t know what we would do without the food pantry. It is something I think about a lot because I do not know where we would be.” — Middle-aged mother in the Lakes Region

The limitations of charitable food assistance are evident to those who rely on it. Focus group and interview respondents spoke about the difficulty of relying on food pantries and other charities for food on an ongoing basis. Problems included the amount or variety of food offered, the hours of distribution, and the fact that in some cases you can only receive assistance once a month.

“I do rely on the food pantries and soup kitchens a lot of the time around here, and it has been very hard for me to eat.” — U.S. Navy veteran in Knox County

“For nutrition, I used to use canned vegetables and fruits. With my husband being diabetic, he has to watch what he eats and it is very difficult—pantries mostly offer pasta and carbs.”
— Middle-aged mother in the Lakes Region

“Coming here [to the pantry], it helps a lot. We go to the evening program [meal site], and it does help, but we try not to go there all the time because it’s always the same thing—sandwiches. After a while, you get tired of sandwiches. You want a home-cooked meal.” — Mother in Kennebec County

Food-insecure Mainers, including the veterans we interviewed, report skipping meals because they can’t get the food they need. One U.S. Navy veteran in Knox County describes eating one soup kitchen meal per day and meeting the rest of his food needs by stretching the food from the one pantry box he receives each month. He often only has the resources to eat one meal per day. A veteran of the U.S. Marines in Androscoggin County similarly skips breakfast and supper because he must rely solely on the limited soup kitchens and food pantries in his area.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

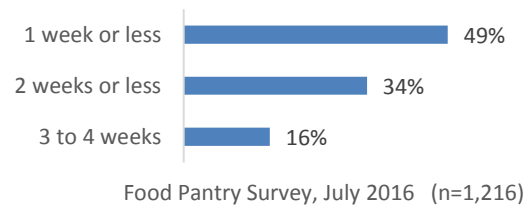
Fifty-seven (57) percent of survey respondents indicated that they receive monthly SNAP benefits. Of the respondents who receive SNAP, 83 percent report that their benefits last two weeks or less, as seen in Figure 6.

The amount of SNAP received each month depends on the number of people in the household. The vast majority of survey respondents reported SNAP benefit amounts of between \$16 and \$200 a month (see Figure 7).

“When they are establishing the amounts for the food stamps they need to check the regular grocery stores, because those prices are going up, and it may take years to get an increase in food stamps.”

— Middle-aged man in Portland

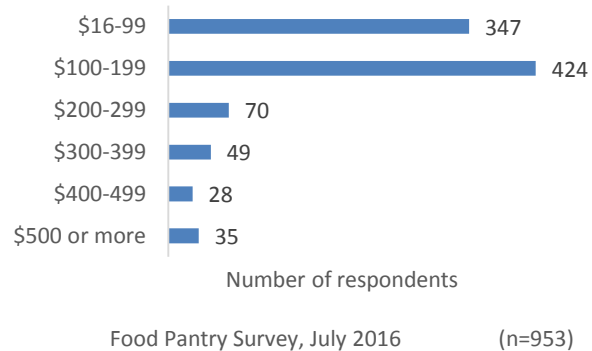
Figure 6. How long do monthly SNAP benefits last?



Loss of SNAP Benefits

One in four survey respondents (486 people) indicated that they had lost SNAP benefits in the past year. Nearly one-third of this group said they were removed from the program because of recent state policy changes, specifically the three-month time limit (24 percent) and the asset test (7 percent). The remaining two-thirds who lost SNAP benefits were dropped from the program for a variety of reasons including increased earnings, marriage, lost application paperwork, and being unable to schedule a required interview with a DHHS caseworker.

Figure 7. How much money in food stamps do you receive each month?



Time Limit

Maine’s time-limit policy applies only to childless adults aged 18 to 49 who do not have a documented disability. Of the 100 respondents who lost benefits because of this time limit, 13 percent reported health and caregiving barriers that likely should have made them exempt from the time limit and eligible to continue receiving SNAP assistance.

A veteran of the U.S. Marines living in Androscoggin County explained in an interview that he is disabled and receives a disability pension from the Veterans Administration (VA) due to an injury incurred during the Gulf War. Even though specific guidance from the USDA makes it clear that this should exempt him from the time limit, his benefits were cut when Maine made the policy change. His benefits were only restored in January 2017 after several years without access to SNAP.

A veteran of the U.S. Army living in Waldo County who has disabling medical conditions was dropped from SNAP because of the time limit until he could get connected to VA health care and linked with a provider. During the months it took him to make this happen, he struggled to get the food he needed.

Of the 100 respondents who lost benefits because of the time limit, 59 percent reported looking for work and not being able to find it or not having transportation to get to work.

A U.S. Navy veteran in Knox County who was dropped from SNAP because he couldn't find work explained in an interview, *"It's been a six-year struggle to get back on my feet. I have a whole list of skills, if I brought my resume it would shock you."* Despite his extensive job search, he cannot find work and was dropped from SNAP due to the time limit policy's work requirements. He frequently skips at least one meal a day, regularly experiences hunger, and cannot make ends meet. As he explains, *"The whole point of these benefits, after you have served your country, is to be able to rely on them. Then I find myself having to jump through hurdles to access them and it doesn't work."*

Seventy-nine (79) percent of those who lost SNAP benefits because of the time limit report using the food pantry more this year than they did last year.

Seventy-nine (79) percent of those who lost SNAP benefits because of the time limit report using the food pantry more this year than they did last year.

Asset Test

Of the 27 respondents who lost SNAP benefits as a result of the asset test, 63 percent have a household member over 60 years old, and 44 percent have a household member with a disability. (Families with children are exempt from the asset test.)

Of those who lost SNAP benefits due to the asset test, 58 percent report using the food pantry more this year than last.

Summer Hunger

Respondents with children under age 18 in the household reported overwhelmingly that their supplemental food needs increase in the summer (see Figure 8).

Trade-offs and Challenges

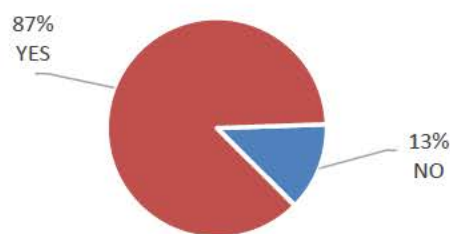
When asked whether they have to sacrifice other necessities in order to be able to afford food, 73 percent of respondents said yes. The trade-offs that were reported most often were between paying for food and paying for utilities and other bills, medication and health care, and transportation.

The necessity of making trade-offs because of limited income is amplified for people who have lost access to SNAP. Of those who lost SNAP benefits because of the time limit, 86 percent report making difficult choices between getting food on the table and paying for rent, heat, health care, and transportation. Similarly, of those who lost benefits because of the asset test, 86 percent said they have to make trade-offs between buying food and paying for necessities.

Focus group participants echoed these survey findings, reporting that they have to skip bills, pay for expensive car repairs, and choose between buying food and buying medications.

"You can have the grocery money to go to the store, but not have the gas to get there."
— Middle-aged mother in the Lakes Region

Figure 8. Does your need for food go up in the summer when your kids are out of school?



Food Pantry Survey, July 2016 (n=493)

“I feed my children before I feed myself. And I hate this, but I have to limit the portions that [my children] can have for a meal.” — Middle-aged mother in the Lakes Region

“We are on a strictly tight budget. My other half works...I’m here [at the pantry] every two weeks. I don’t work. I’m disabled. I have three kids, so it’s hard...If we have to skip a bill, we skip a bill, to put food on the table. If that means that Dad and I don’t eat, to make sure our family is provided [for]—as parents, you have to do what’s right for your kids.” — Mother in Kennebec County

“My biggest concern is insurance, because insurance is even hard for the elderly. Elderly people are dropping their medicines, to keep money for them to survive...It’s either the medication or they don’t buy food.” — Senior man in Kennebec County

Transportation was cited as a major obstacle for Mainers trying to obtain the food they need. In rural areas particularly, commute times can be long, and cars are often necessary for work, school, health appointments, and food acquisition. But cars require frequent repair and maintenance, as well as registration, inspection, and insurance, and the expenses compound. One respondent indicated that he/she can only afford gas money by collecting and redeeming returnable bottles and cans.

“I cannot get my car inspected, and the sticker is expired. I am just crossing my fingers every time I see a trooper.” — Middle-aged mother in the Lakes Region

“I had a [car] and things kept going wrong with it. I needed to repair it because I needed to get to work...then my brake line went, then this, and that, and I had to spend it all to get it fixed so I could go to work. The day that I had it fixed I couldn’t work, so I was out money that day plus the cost to fix it.” — Young single mother in the Lakes Region

Respondents who live in more densely populated areas, including Portland, Waterville, and Rockland, find that public transportation routes do not always link residential neighborhoods with supermarkets and food pantries. Getting food home can be a major difficulty, especially for people who are elderly or disabled.

“South Portland has some places [to get food], but I can’t get there on the buses, and walking is hard because I have to carry all of the stuff by myself.” — Single mother in Portland

“For food it will take me about an hour to just get there, then walk back in the rain, sleet or snow, with my groceries the same distance.” — U.S. Navy veteran in Knox County

“We’re fortunate because he’s got the truck. But you leave here [the pantry] with five or six bags and you’ve got to carry it home? When I was living a mile or so out of town, I was just hoping that my little rolling bag didn’t give out. It’s one thing to get here, but to haul everything home, it’s hard.” — Middle-aged woman in Kennebec County

Labor Market Participation

When asked to describe their work ethic, 96 percent of survey respondents responded positively, using words such as good, excellent, hardworking, dependable, timely, and honest. A senior man from Hancock County explained, *“If I’m working as hard as I do, I want to have the right to survive and live instead of going hungry.”*

When the survey asked about the highest hourly wage at respondents' last job, the median response was \$10 per hour—below the federal poverty level for a family of four.

A very small portion of respondents reported receiving benefits at their current or last job. Only 15 percent reported having access to health insurance through their current or most recent employer. Thirteen (13) percent currently have or previously had sick days, and 15 percent have or had vacation days.

Of those currently working either full time or part time, 78 percent still have to make difficult trade-offs between buying food and paying for rent, health care, and other expenses.

“Jobs that are here just aren't paying. The standards, the pay rates are not keeping up with the rest of the country. Minimum wage has to be livable for the area that you're in.” — Middle-aged woman in Kennebec County

“Many of the women that I work with...they're in that position...if they don't have the means to feed their family it might keep them in the abusive situation longer. That fear of not keeping a roof over their heads or being able to feed their kids is a big thing.” — Middle-aged woman in the Lakes Region

“I consider my family low- to middle-income, but we struggle every day.” — Mother in the Lakes Region

With the collapse of the manufacturing industry in rural areas, Mainers struggle to find work.

“I'm 67 years old, and if they brought a mill back, I'd go back to work in a heartbeat.” — Senior man in Kennebec County

“Back when he started, you had six guys on a paper machine. Now you might have five guys on the entire floor, but they're not on the floor...now it's all computer screens...you don't need workers anymore.” — Working-age man in Kennebec County

“The work is all fast food and jobs that don't pay them enough.” — Senior man in Aroostook County

Of those who were looking for work but having a hard time finding it, fully half faced significant barriers, such as

- schooling, training, or experience in the field in order to prepare them for a job
- resources to improve their mental and/or physical health
- a driver's license, functioning car, or access to a vehicle or public transportation in order to get back to work.

Some people need a job that accommodates special family circumstances, e.g., a *“part-time night job so I can be home with my kids because I'm a single parent.”*

Survey Respondents' Thoughts on Ending Hunger in Maine

Ninety (90) percent of respondents agreed that Maine has a high rate of hunger. Respondents point to three key factors: the ailing labor market, lack of access to SNAP benefits, and lack of transportation options. Maine jobs with livable wages are hard to come by, and the seasonal and temporary nature of

many jobs also contributes to hunger. One respondent explained, *“Seasonal work is high in this state, so a lot of people suffer in the winter.”*

Many respondents noted that the closing of factories and mills, which once provided lifetime employment for many Mainers, makes it hard to get by in rural areas. For those who are lucky enough to have found work, low wages in Maine keep people hungry. Respondents said that the pay is insufficient to keep up on expenses while also buying food.

Lack of transportation also contributes to hunger. Respondents said that lack of transportation not only makes it difficult for them to get to food pantries and grocery stores, but also poses a major barrier to getting to work. Respondents explained that transportation is expensive: bus passes, gasoline, and upkeep for a vehicle all add up.

When asked about solutions to hunger, respondents called for livable wage jobs, increased availability of SNAP benefits, and improved access to transportation.

Many anticipate that boosting the minimum wage will ease rates of hunger. Mainers want increased access

to public assistance programs like SNAP. One respondent asserted that people should *“get more food stamps until you’re stable on your feet.”* Respondents called for eliminating both the time limit and the asset test and for expanding access for all struggling Mainers to participate in SNAP.

Respondents want to strengthen community and to form networks for people to help one another. As one respondent said, *“people have to look after one another.”*

Mainers care for each other. One respondent said we need to *“find a way to dispel the stigma of people who use public assistance,”* while another says we must *“treat everyone equally,”* and another suggests we should *“pay more attention to the needy and homeless”* to end hunger. Respondents want to strengthen community and to form networks for people to help one another. As one respondent said, *“people have to look after one another.”*

Discussion and Policy Recommendations

In Maine, we are both independent and interdependent people. When Mainers have access to nutritious food, our communities thrive and grow. Hunger hurts us all. When one Mainer experiences hunger, there is a ripple effect: these are our friends, neighbors, grandparents, and children.

Hunger has reached epidemic proportions in Maine. Our results show that while SNAP is a critical safety net, it is not catching enough people. SNAP policy changes have forced many Mainers to rely more heavily on charitable food programs to meet their basic food needs, but charity alone can’t feed everyone who’s hungry. Just like clean water, public safety, and education, making sure everyone has enough to eat is an obligation of a just society, not something that should be done only when individuals and private donors feel generous.

Food pantries and soup kitchens are typically run by small, grassroots groups struggling to meet the ongoing needs of communities facing economic hardships. Churches, nonprofits, and other private food charities have already been stretched too thin and are not the answer to ending hunger in our nation. Charity is not enough, and Maine families go without.

The trend toward reducing access to SNAP and forcing Mainers to rely on charitable resources moves us toward a two-tiered food delivery system: food pantries and soup kitchens for people living in poverty and grocery stores for everyone else. Federal nutrition programs like SNAP are the single fairest and most

efficient way to feed low-income Americans. When people get food from a food pantry, while it's a laudable community effort, it is not a success. It's a failure of American policy.

In the 1970s, the United States succeeded in virtually eliminating hunger.

We must focus on the underlying problems of poverty and inequality. Ending poverty could be within our reach; we just need to harness the political will to do it. In the 1970s, the

United States succeeded in virtually eliminating hunger. Livable wage jobs and increased access to USDA programs like SNAP and child nutrition programs in schools to fill the gaps made ending hunger possible. Since the 1970s, Maine has been on a steady decline: loss of manufacturing jobs, growing income inequality, high rates of hunger and poverty.

Maine is at a crossroads. Will our state continue to rely on an ever-expanding charitable food assistance system that cannot stem rising food insecurity? Or will Maine start to turn the tide and, like other states across the country, commit to ending hunger in our state?

We offer the following set of urgent and immediate policy recommendations:

➤ Protect and preserve the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

- ▶ Maintain SNAP's effective programmatic structure, which enables it to
 - ▶ respond to increased need in economic downturns
 - ▶ meet the needs of increasing numbers of older Mainers as our population ages
 - ▶ provide access to essential nutrition to those in our communities who cannot afford an adequate diet.

➤ Restore and bolster access to SNAP in Maine

- ▶ Pursue geographic waivers to the time limit in areas that qualify for a federal waiver because of high unemployment
- ▶ Pursue an exemption from the time limit for veterans
- ▶ Follow USDA guidance to ensure that exemptions for those with work-limiting disabilities and those experiencing homelessness are correctly and uniformly administered
- ▶ Join the vast majority of states in eliminating the asset test for SNAP.

➤ Bolster childhood nutrition programs in schools

- ▶ Require high-need schools to serve breakfast after the bell
- ▶ Invest in more summer meal sites across the state
- ▶ Eliminate the reduced-price category for school meals
- ▶ Create a statewide online application for school-based meals.

➤ Support Maine workers and families

- ▶ Require basic benefits for all employees including sick time and paid family leave
- ▶ Invest in job training and education programs for workers.

➤ Invest in transportation

- ▶ Develop programs that provide access to affordable transportation for low-income Mainers through taxi fare assistance, car donation, or subsidized lease or loan programs
- ▶ Improve public transportation options statewide and provide free or discounted bus passes to low-income people.

➤ Expand health care coverage

- ▶ Encourage legislators to accept federal funds to make MaineCare (Maine's Medicaid program) available to 75,000 Maine people with low incomes who need health care and can't afford it.

➤ Invest in affordable housing

- ▶ Build more permanent, affordable housing
- ▶ Fund Housing First initiatives to end homelessness in Maine
- ▶ Increase access to housing vouchers
- ▶ Create a housing voucher option for TANF families.

In addition to implementing these policies, Maine should

➤ Strengthen the charitable food assistance network to serve as an effective emergency food system

- ▶ Invest in Maine's network of hunger relief charities as a public-private partnership to ensure all Mainers have access to nutritious food when and where they need it.

Preble Street is a social work organization founded on the principles of access for everyone and unconditional positive regard. Since 1975, Preble Street has served some of the most vulnerable people in Maine, working to turn hunger and homelessness into opportunity and hope through 14 low-barrier programs throughout the state. As the hub of services in northern New England's largest urban area, Preble Street provides round-the-clock services 365 days a year to not only meet urgent needs, but to empower people to move beyond the crises in their lives, and to build and advocate for solutions to homelessness, hunger, and poverty. Contact: (207) 775-0026; www.preblestreet.org; www.facebook.com/preblestreet; www.twitter.com/PrebleStreet.

As the largest hunger relief organization in Maine, Good Shepherd Food Bank provides for Mainers facing hunger by distributing nutritious food to more than 400 partner agencies across the state, including food pantries, meal sites, schools, and senior programs. Together with its network, the Food Bank helps combat the root causes of hunger by engaging in advocacy, nutrition education, and strategic partnerships. In 2016, the Food Bank distributed more than 21 million meals to families, children, and seniors in need throughout Maine. Contact: (207) 782-3554; www.feedingmaine.org; www.facebook.com/feedingmaine; www.twitter.com/feedingmaine.

Appendix A

The Survey

The Maine Hunger Initiative and Good Shepherd Food Bank of Maine want to hear about your experiences with getting your food needs met. Your participation in this survey is voluntary and confidential. There is no right or wrong answer to these questions and you may choose not to answer a question at any time. Your answers will not affect your ability to get food from the food pantry or other food assistance programs.

Your Background

1. What town do you live in? _____
2. How many people are living in your household that share meals? _____
3. Check if someone in your household is:
- A child under the age of 18
 - Age 60 or older
 - Has a disability that limits their ability to work
4. What is your age? ____ 5. What is your gender? ____
6. Do you currently receive Food Supplement (Food Stamps/SNAP) benefits?
- Yes No
- 6a. How much money in food stamps do you receive each month? _____
7. Did you or someone in your household lose food stamp benefits any time in the last year?
- Yes No
8. If yes, why did you (or they) lose benefits?
- I lost my benefits after 3 months because of the new work rule
 - I had more than \$5,000 in assets
 - I tried to reapply for benefits but my paperwork got lost
 - I was not able to do my interview in-person or over the phone
 - Other _____
9. If you lost your benefits because of the work requirements, check all that apply:
- I looked for work but couldn't find it
 - I was not able to find a volunteer placement
 - I wanted more education or training but couldn't get it
 - I am not able to work but lost benefits anyhow
 - I don't have transportation to get work/volunteer
 - Other: _____
10. If you lost your benefits because of the work requirements and participated in a food supplement employment and training program did those services help you? Please describe: _____
11. How often do you utilize a food pantry now?
- Once a week
 - Every two weeks
 - Once a month or more
 - Once every few months
 - I don't use a food pantry
12. Did you use the food pantry more this year than last year?
- Yes
 - No
 - I didn't use a food pantry last year
13. If you have asked for help from Maine's Department of Health and Human Services recently, please tell us about your experience. Are these statements true or not true?

TRUE	NOT TRUE	N/A	Statement
			DHHS staff helped me get the information and help I needed.
			I was able to get through on the phone to DHHS and get the information I needed in a reasonable amount of time.
			I was treated respectfully in my interaction(s) with DHHS staff.
			I discontinued my application process/benefits because of my experience.
			I experienced delays in getting the help I needed.
			I received inconsistent information from different DHHS staff

Cost of a Healthy Diet

14. When do you use all of your food stamps?

- On the first day I get them
- During the first week I get them
- Within the first 2 weeks after I get them
- They usually last 3-4 weeks

15. Does your need for food go up in the summer when your kids are out of school?

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

16. Do you ever have to make choices between spending money on food and spending money on other needs? (such as medications, heating fuel, rent, car repairs, etc.)

- Yes
- No

17. If yes, what sacrifices have you had to recently make to put food on the table?

Work History

18. Are you or anyone in your household currently employed?

- Yes, full time
- Yes, part time
- No

19. If you are not working, would you take a job if one were available?

- Yes
- No

20. If No, why not? _____

If no, skip to question 28

21. How would you describe your work ethic?

22. If you had appropriate support or training, what would your dream job be?

23. If you aren't working right now, what do you think you need to re-enter the labor market?

24. Did any of your previous 3 jobs last more than a year?

- Yes
- No

25. What was your highest hourly wage at your current or last job? _____

26. Which benefits do/did you have at your current/ last job:

- healthcare
- paid sick days
- vacation
- childcare
- none

27. What services would be most useful to help you find a job:

28. What is your citizenship status?

29. What is your ethnicity/race?

- White
- Black
- Hispanic/Latino
- Middle Eastern
- Asian
- Other: _____

30. Do you agree with this statement? Maine has a high rate of hunger

- Yes
- No

If yes, why do you think there is so much hunger in Maine?

31. What changes are needed to make sure that you and others you know have enough to eat?

32. Would you like to receive the results of this survey and information about what we are doing to end hunger and how you can help?

If yes, please fill out the information below:

Name

Phone

Email

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix B

Focus Group Questions

Thank you for being here today. We are interested in finding out the experiences of people in Maine struggling to make ends meet. We'll be using this information to educate the public and inform policy change. We appreciate your time and input. We plan to create a report from this information and hold events moving forward. We would love for you to be part of that. Please fill out the demographic form, the consent form, and let us know if you'd like to stay involved. Your answers today will remain completely confidential.

1. Please tell us your name and a little about yourself.

2. What do you do to get enough food for yourself and your family?

(What is a typical day for you? What is that like?)

3. What are some of the things that make it difficult to make ends meet and get enough food? Can you explain?

(E.g., wages too low, not enough jobs, disability that limits your ability to work, or disability in the house that limits household income, rent too high, number of people in the household sharing food, cost of childcare, lack of transportation, other expenses – medical, rent, transportation, etc.?)

4. What works about SNAP (Food Supp/Food Stamps)? Is there anything you would change?

(Tell us experiences you or people you know have had with SNAP? Have you lost SNAP? Do you know people who have lost SNAP?)

5. What would make it easier for you and others you know to have enough to eat without having to come to a food pantry?

6. When you watch television, read the newspaper, or hear Maine politicians speak, how do they portray Mainers living in poverty?

(Do you think this is accurate? How does that make you feel?)

7. What do you think your life will be like in 5 years?

8. Is there anything else you think we should know that we didn't think to ask?

Appendix C

In-Depth Interview Questions

Food:

Describe what you eat over the course of a week. What are the ways you get your food?

Benefits:

What benefits are currently available to you? How do these benefits affect your life? Your ability to get food (SNAP status, been cut, why)?

Work:

Are you able to work? Can you describe your current work situation (barriers, part-time, full-time, wages)? What kinds of jobs did you have in the past?

What are the barriers to working faced by other people you know?

Transportation:

In your daily life, how do you get around? (get food, get to job, public transportation, walking, biking, cabs, own or borrow car)

How do you get to your food sources?

Perceptions:

In your view, how do the media and politicians depict Mainers in poverty? In general, how well do you feel supported by society?

Appendix D

Survey Respondent Demographics

	Number of respondents	Percent of respondents	Mean
Age (n=1,991)			52
< 18	5	0.25	
18-24	88	4.42	
24-44	565	28.38	
45-64	875	43.95	
65-84	434	21.8	
85+	24	1.21	
Gender (n = 1,903)			
Female	1265	66.47	
Male	628	33.00	
Other	10	0.53	
Race/ethnicity (n=1,758)			
White	1634	92.95	
Black	62	3.53	
Hispanic	29	1.65	
AI/AN	21	1.19	
Other	12	.69	

	Number of respondents	Percent of respondents	Mean
Number in household			2.7
One	545	27.68	
Two	563	28.59	
Three	326	16.56	
Four	247	12.54	
Five	159	8.08	
Six or more	129	6.55	
Total	1969		
Households with children under 18			
Yes	725	35.31	
No	1328	64.69	
Total	2053		
Households with member with disability			
Yes	1009	49.15	
No	1044	50.85	
Total	2053		
Households with member over 60 years of age			
Yes	777	37.85	
No	1276	62.15	
Total	2053		