

Second Harvest

Need Statement for Benton-Franklin Counties

There is no doubt the food need within Benton and Franklin counties are great. Second Harvest works to prevent hunger locally by providing food to those in need. Nationwide, 42 million Americans are at risk of hunger. There is much importance in local food banks having the most up-to-date information and statistics regarding food need in local area in order for the assistance within the community to be as effective as possible.

Feeding America organization tracks food insecurity annually throughout the nation. According to Feeding America, food insecurity refers to “lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members and limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods.” Based on Feeding America’s most recent research data, 11.3% of people in Benton County are food insecure. The rate is 6.7% in Franklin County (or 9.8% combined). On the surface, these numbers may not seem significant, but that is approximately 26,690 people who have limited access to food. This means that right now, one in ten people in Benton and Franklin counties face hunger.

Benton and Franklin counties also have high rates of food insecurity among children. Benton County has a child food insecurity rate of 20.6% and Franklin County has a child food insecurity rate of 20.1% (or 20.4% combined). Collectively, these counties share 16,020 food insecure children. That is one in five children facing hunger. According to No Kid Hungry (national nonprofit that works to end child hunger in America) research shows that children who do not receive proper nutrition are more likely to struggle in school, suffer from increased health issues and are less likely to finish high school or earn a college degree. These children will grow into adults who are less likely to earn a livable wage and continue the cycle of poverty and hunger. Childhood hunger also heightens the risk of making impulsive decisions that can lead to early pregnancy, incarceration and other life-altering events. This is why it is of the utmost importance to address hunger early in life. Local food banks often indicate the higher level of poverty and unemployment in the counties to be the main underlying cause for hunger the community.

The correlation between unemployment, poverty, and food insecurity rate is undeniable. Studies performed by the USDA found that as the unemployment rate increases so does the rate of food insecurity or specifically “an increase of 1 percentage point in the unemployment rate (measured as the highest monthly unemployment rate in the past calendar year) was associated with an increase of 0.5 percentage point in the prevalence of food insecurity.” USDA and Feeding America both report that living below the poverty line is a noteworthy risk factor for dealing with food insecurity. A USDA study reports that food insecurity “was strongly associated with household income and employment. For example, households with incomes 1.5 times the poverty line were about 6 percentage points less likely to be food insecure than households with

incomes at half the poverty line.” Within Benton and Franklin counties 41,419 people live below the poverty line.

According to the Bureau of Labor, Benton County has shown a 7.0% unemployment rate and Franklin County a 9.5% unemployment rate. Both are higher than the national average of 4.3%. Benton County has seen a significant increase in individuals living below the poverty line. In 2012, Benton County’s population living below the poverty line was 12.9% and according to the most recent data increased to 14.2%. That is approximately 3,600 new individuals who have fallen below the poverty line in Benton County. Franklin County has a poverty rate of 18.3% which is higher than the national rate of 14.8%. Single-mother households have a considerably higher probability of falling below the poverty line. Statistically, single-mother families living below the poverty line were 49.7% for Benton County and 62.6% for Franklin County. These families are at high risk for struggling with hunger. Single-mother households living on government assistance (SSI, Food Stamps/SNAP benefits) was 55.7% in Benton County and 54.7% in Franklin County. USDA reports that single-mother households are 9.6 percentage points more likely to be food insecure than other households. Benton and Franklin counties struggle with unemployment and poverty can explain the increasing food insecurity rates in the area. Children who fall under the poverty line are likely to receive free or reduced lunch through the school districts. For many children in the area this is their only access to a consistent meal; moreover, during the weekends and summer months these children often go hungry.

“Fighting hunger, feeding hope: Second Harvest brings community resources together to feed people in need through empowerment, education and partnerships.” This deeply rooted mission statement drives Second Harvest’s work to get healthy food to every person, every day. Second Harvest secures and distributes donated food to more than 25 food banks, meal centers and other hunger-relief programs that are feeding hungry people in Benton and Franklin counties. Second Harvest also organizes charitable events. Five years ago, Second Harvest opened up the distribution center in Pasco. The facility was part of Second Harvest’s system-wide, capacity-building upgrade to get more food to where it’s needed most. The new Pasco facility will help in Second Harvest increase food distribution in the Columbia Basin and Yakima Valley to 9 million pounds of food annually by 2018. With this facility up and running, Second Harvest continues to expand its relationships with local farmers, manufacturers, and grocers to get more donated food for hungry children, families, and seniors.

Resources:

Benton Franklin County Health District. (2016). *“Assistance available for kids, older adults who face food insecurity.”* Tri-City Herald.

Feeding America. (2017). *“2017 Overall Food Insecurity: Data by County & Congressional District in Each State.”*

USDA. (2014). *“Prevalence of U.S. Food Insecurity Is Related to Changes in Unemployment, Inflation, and the Price of Food.”*

US Census Bureau. (2015). *“2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates”*.

U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2016). *“Unemployment rates”*.