



Position Paper on Food Insecurity

1. Objective

The objective of this paper is to better educate and inform the readers on what food insecurity is, what its impact on the lives of individuals are, what EFAA's current role and responsibilities in addressing food insecurity are, and to provide thoughts on how EFAA might better address food insecurity in our community.

2. Understanding the food insecurity context

Definitions for key terms used in discussions about food insecurity. Based on accepted definitions from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Feeding America (FA) include:

- **Food insecurity** is the 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 food.
- **Food security** is access by all household members, at all times, to enough food for an active, healthy life.
- **Hunger** is an individual level physiological condition that may result from food insecurity. So, you could be hungry whether or not you are food insecure.
- **Food bank** refers to regional facilities that are generally providing food to food pantries which, in turn, provide food to individuals in need. There are five food banks serving the entire state of Colorado. Community Food Share is the regional food bank serving EFAA's locale.
- **Food pantry** is a local organization providing food directly to individuals and families, such as EFAA within the City of Boulder, OUR Center for the Longmont area, and Sister Carmen for east Boulder County, among others.
- **Poverty Level Income (PLI)** is the indicator used by the United States government to define who is poor. The PLI varies by family size as noted in Table 1. Two commonly used income levels that serve as guidelines for participation in different USDA Nutritional Programs are also included in this table.

Table 1 - Poverty Level Incomes by Family Size

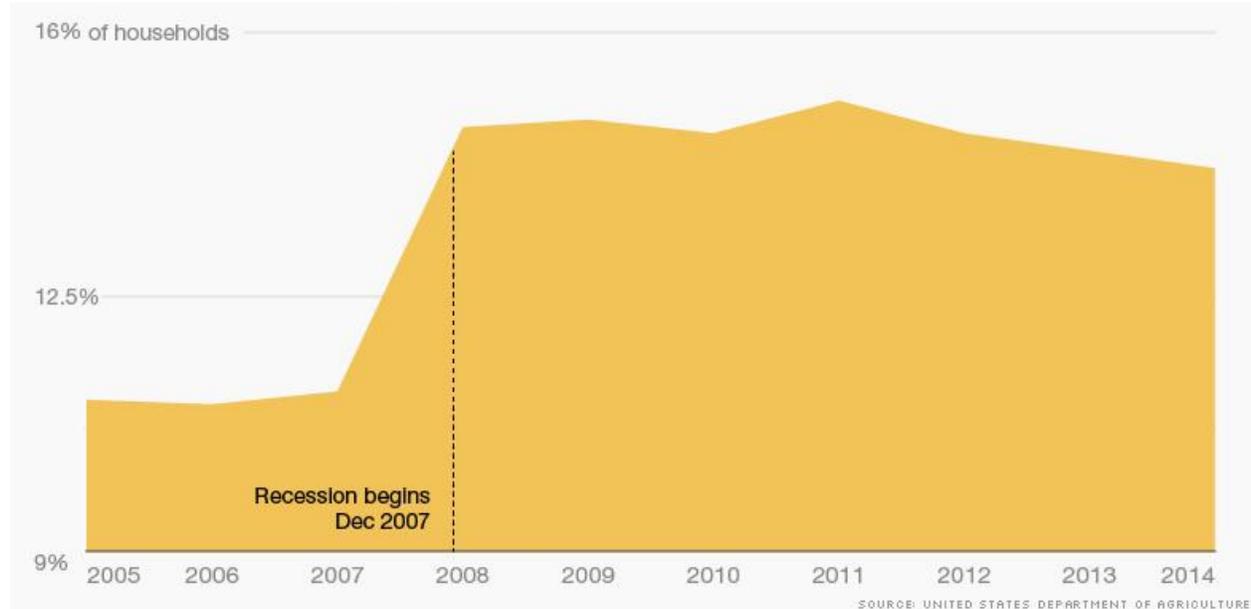
% of Federal Poverty Threshold	Number of Family Members				
	1	2	3	4	5
100%	11,820	15,980	20,140	24,300	28,460
130%	15,370	20,760	26,180	31,590	37,000
185%	21,870	28,560	37,260	44,960	52,650

Levels of food insecurity

In 2015 over 12.7 % of all households in America were food insecure. This translates to over 42.2 million individuals, including over 13.1 million children and over 6.2 million seniors. Although

the percentage of food insecure households has seen a slight decline since the height of the recession, it is still well above the pre-recession level, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - Food Insecurity in the United States as a Percent of Households (2005-2014)



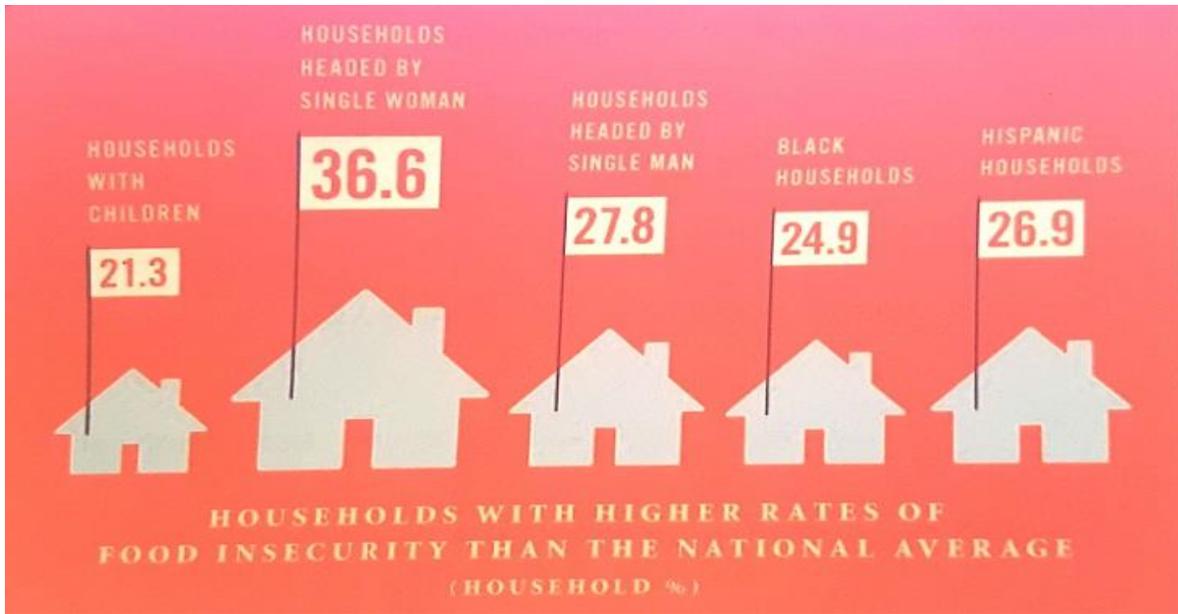
The Boulder County community is not immune from food insecurity, with over 13.3% of the Boulder County population being food insecure - over 40,500 individuals, including roughly 10,630 children. This is a higher level of food insecurity than exists, on average, in the state of Colorado (12.9%).

Who is food insecure?

Food insecurity is directly related to economic insecurity. While we continue to hear that the economy has "improved", for Americans living at the bottom of the income distribution - most of EFAA's participants - it has not improved. A 2014 bulletin from the US Federal Reserve reported that families at the bottom of the income distribution continue to experience substantial declines in average real income and average real net worth since the start of the 2007 recession.

Food insecurity is significantly higher for certain households, as noted in Figure 2. Of note is that the majority of EFAA households fit into these situations; households with children, households headed by a single parent, and Hispanic households. In a recent limited survey of EFAA participants, 59% answered questions that would indicate they are food insecure.

Figure 2 – Household with Higher Rates of Food Insecurity than the National Average



3. Responses to Food Insecurity

There are a number of programs aimed at addressing food insecurity:

USDA Food Nutrition Programs. Under the purview of the USDA, there are a large number of food nutrition programs aimed at ending food insecurity. In 2015, these programs cost over \$100 billion. These programs are all geared for families with incomes no more than 185% of poverty level income. Table 2 contains a listing of USDA's primary nutrition programs, their allowable income requirements, and the number of individuals served. A brief description of each program is included in the Appendix.

Table 2 - USDA Main Nutrition Programs

Program name	Allowable Income Level	Individuals served (million)
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	< 130% PLI	47
National School Lunch Program (NSLP)	< 130% PLI	30
School Breakfast Program (SBP)	< 130% PLI	13.5
Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	< 185% PLI	8.8
Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)	< 130% PLI	3.7
Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)	< 130% PLI	2.6

Local food distribution and food insecurity programs. In addition to the USDA food nutrition programs, there are a number of very robust feeding programs run through non-profits. Including:

- **Feeding America (FA)**, and its network of 200 regional food banks and over 60,000 food pantries provide food annually to over 46 million individuals, including 12 million children

and 7 million seniors. Their network is the primary source of food for most all food pantries across the USA. Every four years FA conducts county wide surveys of food insecurity (Map the Meal Gap) which provides the most detailed and comprehensive information on food insecurity at the county level currently available.

- **Community Food Share (CFS)** was founded in 1981 as the FA food bank serving Boulder (and subsequently Broomfield) County. CFS provided over 9.5 million pounds of nutritious food to their member agencies and directly to those in need in FY 2016. CFS obtains nearly 80 percent of their food from local donors, grocery stores and businesses. They obtain the remainder from local food drives, purchases, USDA (TEFAP), and other sources.
- **Local food pantries.** EFAA is one of the main providers of food assistance in the City of Boulder. There are a variety of other entities within EFAA's service area that provide food to those in need. They include one other major food pantry, Harvest of Hope, a small food bank in Nederland and a number of entities providing meals to those in need - primarily homeless individuals. Boulder Food Rescue, a non-profit that collects perishable food from grocery stores on a daily basis in the City of Boulder, provides the food it collects to those serving the needy, like EFAA, or directly to those in need, such as individuals staying at Boulder Housing Partner complexes.
- **Boulder County Department of Public Health**, in collaboration with the Farmer's Market, has instituted a program whereby folks who are enrolled in SNAP can get double the value of their dollars for every purchase they make at the Farmer Markets in Boulder County. The program has been so successful that it is being used as model throughout Colorado and is currently the largest such program in the United States.

4. What is the current reality and dynamic relative to food insecurity?

Food insecurity is a major concern for many Americans, including over 40,500 individuals living in our local community. Food insecurity is not just an issue for those whom have incomes below the poverty level. In Boulder County nearly 40 percent of food insecure individuals live in households with an income above 185% of poverty level income (\$ 44,955 for a family of four).

Only 59 percent of food insecure households across the nation report that they participate in one or more of the federal nutrition programs. Although some of these households would not meet all of the requirements for eligibility, many would. Colorado has typically ranked low in accessing national programs, whether it be for health care or food. In a recent study completed by a number of nonprofits, including the Colorado Center on Law and Policy and Hunger Free Colorado, Colorado ranked 45th in the nation for the percentage of eligible households accessing SNAP benefits and effectively lost out on more than \$680 million in grocery sales due to the low enrollment level. Within the state, Boulder County ranks in the bottom third for enrollment of individual who would qualify for SNAP benefits. A similar picture emerges for other national nutrition programs, such as WIC, NSLP, and others.

There are a lot of barriers that make it difficult for individuals to access existing programs that might meet their nutritional needs. These include:

- **Accessibility.** According to USDA surveys, vehicle access is perhaps the most important determinant of whether or not a family can access affordable and nutritional food. Food choices may be constrained by limits on how much can be carried when walking or using public transit or if someone is home bound. Proximity of the food pantry to those in need and to public transportation can be a barrier. The inability to communicate in the same language can be a barrier.
- **Stigma.** There is still a real and perceived stigma experienced by those who are receiving benefits. This is often the primary reason cited for why school backpack programs do not work as well as they might. Children feel stigmatized if they are viewed by their peers as being in need.
- **Food pantry practices,** such as operating hours, shopping frequency, food quality and quantity, culturally acceptable food, required paperwork, special dietary needs, and such can all be barriers to food insecure individuals obtaining the nutritional food they need.
- **Disability.** Physical or mental disabilities can make it difficult for folks to obtain the quantity and quality of nutritional food they need.
- **Awareness.** If people are not aware of the existence of a food pantry or of programs that they can benefit from they cannot effectively access these services.
- **Fear.** Some households, including immigrants, have concerns about how applying for government benefits may impact their immigration status.
- **Eligibility.** Many households experiencing food insecurity do not qualify for government benefits due to their income or assets being over the allowed maximum.

5. Responses to food insecurity – EFAA's role

EFAA's food pantry distributed over 638,000 lbs of food at a value of \$1,098,000 to over 1,700 unduplicated households in FY2016. EFAA's food pantry is a member agency of CFS and typically obtains around 60 percent of the food they distribute from CFS. The remaining food comes from individual donations, food drives, and food picked up from grocery stores (35%) and from purchases (5%). In FY 2016 (by pounds) 31% of food distributed was fresh produce, 34% was dairy, and 12% was protein (meat, beans, etc.). The remaining 23% was made up of canned goods, grains, dry beans, breads and desserts.

EFAA has conducted a number of surveys of our participants over the years on their needs, wants, and preferences. In general respondents have provided EFAA positive marks on the quality and quantity of food we have available and the freedom they have to select what they desire. They have also been positive on the overall shopping experience. Priorities for types of pantry food have not changed much with the most desired pantry items being protein (particularly meat), dairy (particularly milk), and fresh fruits and vegetables. EFAA typically does not have enough meat and milk to meet the wants or needs of all participants but generally has enough fresh fruit and vegetables.

Respondents have consistently indicated that they would like to shop more frequently (weekly), that they have some type of dietary need or restriction, and that they would like to see more diverse food consistent with their respective cultures.

In EFAA's most recent survey (Hunger Free Colorado Survey - April 2016), a very large proportion of the participants who completed the survey reported being food insecure, despite having access to our food pantry. Over half worried that food would run out before they could obtain more. Forty-two percent stated that they ran out of food before they could obtain more. Thirty percent had to skip a meal so that someone else in the household could eat. Twenty-one percent went to bed hungry.

EFAA has recognized that they can play a larger role in ending food insecurity and is taking steps to address food insecurity for its target population. EFAA recently formalized a program to help assure that participants are all accessing the full range of benefit programs available to them - with an initial focus on SNAP benefits. They have created a Food Pantry Work Group to look at what can be done through our food pantry to better meet participants' needs. Currently Boulder County Healthy Kids and Adults work on site at EFAA two days each month to enroll and recertify households and to answer questions about government benefits.

6. Community challenges in food insecurity

Continued economic insecurity among lower-income households. Stagnant lower-income wages combined with rapidly rising housing and childcare costs put the squeeze on household budgets. Carving out enough money to ensure consistent and nutrition food is a challenge for thousands of families in Boulder County.

Improving the quantity and quality of food available to food insecure households. Food pantries like EFAA play a vital role in supplementing access to food and stretching household resources. Policies and physical investments will be needed to increase the donated food stocks, quality of food and alignment with participant preferences.

Potential changes to the Federal food safety net. With the bulk of food assistance coming from the Federal level, in particular through food stamps and school feeding programs, current conversations about changes to the Federal safety net could have significant implications for food insecurity at the local level. Any decrease in Federal support will put pressure on local agencies to fill in gaps.

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Appendix

The following are additional pieces of information that may be of interest and that are either referenced in the main text or contained in the listed references.

Current Population Survey (CPS). A nationally representative survey conducted by the US Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics providing employment, income, food insecurity, and poverty statistics. According to CPS, food secure individuals spend an average of \$58.29 per week on food (\$2.79/meal). This translates to \$233 per week and \$1,010 per month for a family of four. On national level food insecure individuals report needing an additional food budget of \$16.28 per week.

Obesity. Today about one in three American kids are overweight or obese. The prevalence of obesity in children more than tripled from 1971 to 2011. Among children today, obesity is causing a broad range of health problems that were not previously seen until adulthood. These include high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and elevated blood cholesterol levels. Obesity is such that this generation of children could be the first in the history of the United States to live less healthful and shorter lives than their parents (Olshansky, et al).

Map The Meal Gap. This is Feeding America's means to determine the number of food insecure individuals within a specified area. They use a model that has been calibrated with national level survey data, including such items as unemployment, poverty, home-ownership, income, and race. Using local demographics they can then use the model to estimate the number of food insecure individuals for that area. Every four years they do their own on the ground research to attempt to confirm the model results. Using local costs for a meal they use another model to calculate the annual food budget shortfall. According to Feeding America, the annual food budget shortfall in Boulder County is around \$24 million.

Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) is one of several food plans developed by the USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion. It serves as a national standard for a nutritious diet at minimal costs. It also serves as the basis for SNAP allotments. For different age groups they have determined how many pounds of what foods should be eaten to meet nutritional needs at the lowest cost. For instance, for individuals in the 19-50 year age bracket they would suggest that their diet, by weight, include 8% grains, 22% vegetables, 17 % fruit, 34% milk products, 13% meat/beans, and 6% other. For a family of four with two elementary school aged kids this would translate to around 131 pounds of food per week.

USDA Grocery and Meal Programs. The following provides some additional information on major programs:

- **SNAP** is the largest of 15 domestic nutrition assistance programs under the purview of the USDA. In 2015 this program provided food to over 47 million individuals (20.4 million children) at a cost of \$74 billion. Eligible participants must be US citizens or legal residents that have been in the country for five years. Cannot have assets of more than \$2,250 in the bank, \$3,250 for seniors. Children may be eligible even if parents are not. SNAP, formerly known as the food stamp program, is a "grocery benefit program" where folks qualify for receipt of a defined amount of money that is added to an electronic benefits transfer EBT card each month. The amount of money is based primarily on income - lower income translates to higher benefit. The money can only be used for groceries (i.e. not toiletries or prepared meals, for instance). The average national benefit is \$126 per person per month and the maximum a family of four can receive is \$632 per month.
- **WIC** is for pregnant, postpartum, and breast feeding mothers and children under the age of five. No immigration requirements. In 2012 WIC benefits were provided to 2.1 million women, 4.7 million children, and 2.0 million infants. WIC is a "grocery benefit program" that provides supplemental food, health care referrals, and nutrition education

for low-income women, infants, and children up to the age of five. It is accessed each year by over 50% of all children born in the USA.

- **NSLP** provided free and reduced lunches to over 30 million children in 2015 at a cost of \$12.6 billion. NSLP and the School Breakfast Program (SBP) are meal programs that provide free and reduced meals to school children. In the 2015-16 school year, 14,618 children in Boulder County schools (28% of all children) participated in these programs, Meals are free for children from families with income less than 130% PLI and are reduced for children from families with income between 130-185% PLI.
- **SBP** is similar to NSLP in operation with a key difference that qualifying schools can apply for universal coverage in which all children would receive breakfast at no cost. Breakfast is served during their first class. In 2015 13.5 million children were served at a cost of \$3.7 billion.
- **CACFP** served over 3.7 million children and adults in 2015 at a cost of \$3.1 billion. The program is patterned after the NSLP with an open site concept similar to the universal breakfast option. CACFP provides meals and snacks to children at family day care homes, child care centers, homeless shelters, and after school programs, and to older or functionally impaired adults at adult day care centers.
- **SFSP** served over 2.6 million children during the summer of 2015 at an annual cost of \$490 million. It is administered similar to the CACFP. In the summer of 2015 there were 4 open and 8 closed sites in Boulder County. SFSP meets a vital need for families who count on schools to provide lunch during the school year as they do not have funds to meet their children's lunch needs over school breaks.
- **The Emergency Food Assistance Program TEFAP** provides actual food to States who contract with Food Banks who provide food to individuals in need. This is generally high value food like nuts, dried fruit, juice, whole wheat grains, and frozen meat.
- **Commodity Supplemental Food Program (TEFAP)** provides food each month to qualifying low-income adults over the age of 60. This consists of a box of non-perishables and a block of cheese.

Food Pantry Work Group. The following are some current thoughts on issues that the food pantry work group may be addressing as we operationalize our strategic plan.

1. Update our nutritional guideline and develop a new operational guideline to implement recommendations.
2. Determine level of effort to be spent to ensure we reach all food insecure households in our target population.
3. Determine what role we will play in ending food insecurity in our target population.
4. Train our food pantry volunteers so that they may better understand the nutritional value of the foods we have and may better assist participants in making food choices.
5. Train participants in the importance of nutrition for themselves and their family

Boulder Food Rescue through active engagement with food insecure individuals has identified a number of challenges and themes that are similar to those identified in EFAA's surveys of our partners.

- Lack of financial resources
- Value fresh, healthy foods
- Lack of adequate quality and quantity of food available
- Transportation challenges
- Limited hours of operation of food pantries
- Red tape and paperwork
- Shame and stigma
- Lack of respect from food pantry folks
- Lack of control in the overall experience of obtaining food.
- Desire to have a meaningful voice in meeting their nutritional needs.