

2014 HUNGER

Alameda County Uncovered



ALAMEDA COUNTY
COMMUNITY
FOOD BANK



“Client choice” — used at agencies like Faith Lutheran Church in Castro Valley — empowers clients to handpick food they’re most likely to use.

1 in 5

By 2014, the Great Recession seemed like a distant memory for much of the United States. In the San Francisco Bay Area, hardly a trace remained: unemployment was at 5.3% (virtual “full employment” by economist standards); employee compensation — driven by a booming tech industry — ranked among the nation’s highest; housing prices had nearly doubled in two years.

Even once-distressed cities like Oakland were rebounding beyond expectation.

Yet, our community was facing one of the most profound poverty issues of our generation: **in 2014, we learned 1 in 5 Alameda County residents was relying on food bank assistance to feed themselves and their families.**

The economic recovery left 20% of our neighbors in the rubble.

WINNING A LOSING RACE

Nationally, local food banks were serving 1 in 7 residents. That ratio is startling to begin with. Yet, the figure in Alameda County — in the heart of

the Bay Area — far outpaced the national number.

How could this happen in a country like ours — in one of its most prosperous regions?

The answer is an economic recovery riddled with holes.

Jobs had emerged, although primarily in low-income and part-time work. Compensation had soared for skilled positions, while the minimum wage still did not provide a living wage. Government funding for critical safety net programs plummeted by \$15 billion, while record-high profits in the private sector remained in the top tiers of society.

Meanwhile, on neglected neighborhood sidewalks, hard-working families were standing in food lines, cutting coupons — stretching each dollar as far as it would go.

It had become virtually impossible for low-income households to survive.

The end result is a community that was hungrier than ever before.

The “P” Word

Hunger does not exist in isolation: it is a symptom of poverty that arises when people lack resources and access to food.

When we consider that California has the nation’s highest poverty rate and one of the lowest Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, or food stamps) participation rates, it’s no surprise that our neighborhoods are hungry. With \$15 billion in cuts to critical safety-net programs since 2007, few resources are available to intervene. Bay Area families are stranded — and sinking.

The numbers speak volumes.

- ✦ **\$86,000:** the annual income required to make ends meet for a family of four with two working parents in Alameda County, according to California Budget Project.
- ✦ **\$10,000 or less:** the annual income of nearly half of households served. That is less than \$833 (gross) a month to feed, clothe, and house entire families.

This is the hidden story surfacing in our community: low-income working families in the Bay Area are living in profound poverty, even though 54% of our client households have had a member work for pay in the last year. Of client heads of household who report unemployment, 60% are disabled and 22% are retired.

65% of clients have incomes below the poverty level

We neither see nor hear their everyday struggle, yet **the silence holds agonizing truths:** one-third of Food Bank clients have been forced to live with friends or family in the past 12 months; another third lack access to cooking facilities and/or food-preserving equipment — stove, hot plate, refrigerator, or freezer; three-quarters must regularly rely on one of our 240 member agencies.

Thousands of our neighbors — infants, young children, working adults, seniors, veterans, and the disabled — are hungry. But their search extends far beyond nourishment through food and drink. They want their fair share of hope and dignity.

Meal programs like the one at Downs Memorial United Methodist Church in Oakland provide clients — many of whom lack access to cooking facilities and food-preserving equipment — with a hot, healthy meal.





Children, like these at our Mobile Pantry distribution in Oakland, comprise nearly half of the 116,000 clients we serve each month.

Extreme coping

If you had to choose, which would you fill? An empty fridge or a hollow prescription bottle? Your child's lunchbox or the gasoline tank in your car, which takes you to work?

Food is a necessity. Yet for the 116,000 neighbors we serve each month, it is a luxury.

Food Bank clients are paralyzed — rather than empowered — by choice. Approximately half choose between paying for food and utilities, medicine, or rent. What's worse is that these tough decisions are serial — at least 20% of clients face these decisions every month. They risk the loss of electricity in their rooms, their health, even the houses they inhabit — all while going hungry, too.

"My kids need milk, but we can't afford it. So, I buy condensed milk and water it down," says Claire, a mother of two.

63%
of clients use
extreme
coping
strategies

Claire relies on Alameda Food Bank, one of the Food Bank's 240 member agency pantries, when CalFresh (food stamps) benefits run out halfway through the month. Without a car, she must bike more than a mile to bring home groceries.

The reality is that thousands like Claire are forced to strategize when confronted with empty cupboards:

- ✦ 52% of client households eat expired food
- ✦ 74% buy the cheapest food available, regardless of nutritional content
- ✦ 36% water down food and drink.

And of all coping strategies, one stands out: time and again, Claire skips meals so her kids won't have to.

Spiraling into sickness

You're hungry, but your pantry is empty. A 20-minute bus ride stands between you and the nearest provider of healthy, fresh food. Just steps from your front door, the corner store brims with cheap soda, candy bars, and plastic-wrapped pastries. They may not be your first choice — but they fill you up.

For Food Bank clients, proper nutrition isn't just unaffordable. **It's nearly impossible to access in the first place.**

And the consequences go far beyond a growling stomach. Forty percent of client households report members are in only fair or poor health. 1 in 5 households reports at least one member with diabetes; 2 in 5 have at least one member with high blood pressure.

Simply put, **food is often the most critical factor in our clients' health.**

40% of clients are in fair or poor health

Poor nutrition chips away at healthy bodies, propagates illness, and prevents proper recovery. And how can sick individuals recover when they lack access to nutritious food, and therefore continue to consume harmful ones? And how can clients afford healthy food when 26 percent face outstanding medical bills, and 33 percent lack health insurance altogether?

It's a spiral that begs to be controlled.

Inadequate nutrition — and therefore poor health — threatens everyone, not just those with a diagnosis. When one suffers, so does our shared prosperity. When 75 cents of every federal dollar spent on health care links to chronic disease, according to Robert Wood Johnson Foundation — food insecurity being one of its root causes — the impact is clear: **hunger costs our community.**

After enjoying a hot meal, clients can also take home a bag of fresh produce at Open Heart Kitchen in Livermore.



food desert (*fūd dez-ert*)
n. an urban area in which it is difficult to access affordable or quality fresh food.



Assemblymember Nancy Skinner is among a corps of legislators – from local to federal government – working with us to end hunger in Alameda County.

Mobilizing a movement

We all deserve a place at the table. With that comes the responsibility — and power — to fill every plate with readily available, affordable, and healthy food. From donors to grocers, advocates to city councilmembers, we all play a role in pursuing a hunger-free community.

Here's the good news: **collectively, we have the resources to end hunger.** Alameda County Community Food Bank staff and board work toward a solution with our five-year strategic plan, which employs the following three pillars:

MORE FOOD, BETTER FOOD

We will continue to acquire millions of pounds of farm-fresh produce and high-nutrient staples, annually increasing the amount distributed. Through grocery rescue programs, and purchased and donated food, we enlist the partnership of local grocers and retailers, vendors, other hunger-relief organizations, and neighbors filling barrels throughout the community.



PROVIDE RESOURCES — KNOWLEDGE & FOOD — TO OUR NEIGHBORS IN NEED

To provide knowledge, we will educate neighbors about nutrition and work toward full enrollment in federal nutrition programs. To bring food to the community, we will continue to enhance our emergency food helpline and empower our 240-member agency network through trainings, clinics, presentations, and more.



SYSTEMS CHANGE

We must take a bold stance, share our vision, and demand change from policymakers in order to rebuild the safety net: enact policies that support low- and middle-income workers; protect and reinvest in services — CalWORKS, Supplemental Security Income, CalFresh — that stabilize vulnerable children, seniors, and adults; and support a living wage so that working families can survive in Alameda County.

= **LASTING CHANGE**



Faith Lutheran Church, Castro Valley

Methodology

Hunger in America 2014 — the largest, most comprehensive study ever on domestic hunger — was commissioned by Feeding America, the national network of food banks. Data were collected primarily through electronic surveys in two stages: first, Alameda County Community Food Bank's member agencies completed the Agency Survey, providing information about their services, capacity, and food distribution; then, randomly sampled clients at select food programs completed the Client Survey through a confidential touchscreen, tablet-based interface, providing

information about themselves, their households and the circumstances that led them to seek Food Bank services. The surveys were fielded from October 2012 to January 2013 and April through August 2013, respectively.

Researchers from Westat and the Urban Institute designed the research protocol and conducted analysis of the data collected to produce Alameda County Community Food Bank's local report in the summer of 2014.

Publication Acknowledgements

Executive Director: Suzan Bateson
Director of Policy & Services: Allison Pratt
Project & Research Manager: Keisha Nzewi

Managing Editor: Michael Altfest
Writer: Tiffany Kang
Contributing Writer: Shanti Prasad

Design and Illustration: Antonio Mena
Photographer: David Bacon
Publication Date: January 2015



Together, we can end hunger

Alameda County Community Food Bank
7900 Edgewater Drive, Oakland, CA 94621
Mailing address: P.O. Box 2599, Oakland, CA 94614
Tel: (510) 635-3663 | Fax: (510) 635-3773
www.accfb.org



**ALAMEDA COUNTY
COMMUNITY
FOOD BANK**

MEMBER OF
**FEEDING
AMERICA**

Quick Reference Guide

The Food Bank serves **1 in 5** Alameda County residents



Every month, **116,000** unduplicated clients rely on the Food Bank — two-thirds are children and seniors.

Our clients work, but can't make ends meet.



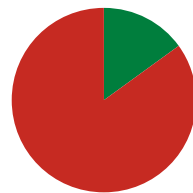
54%
of households
have at least
one member
who is
employed

Of client heads of household who report unemployment, 60% are disabled and 22% are retired.



65%
of households
have incomes
below the
federal poverty
level.

42% of households make less than \$10,000 a year. That's under \$833 (gross) a month to feed, clothe, and house entire families.



85%
of households are
food insecure

At some point in the last year, 85% of Food Bank clients indicated they were unsure of how they would access their next meal.

How food reaches our clients:

240 AGENCIES
in the Food Bank network operate
326 FOOD PROGRAMS



47%
rely entirely
on volunteers

In order to obtain enough food, clients must make tough decisions.



74%
purchase
inexpensive,
unhealthy food



52%
eat food past
the expiration
date



40%
receive help
from family
or friends



36%
water down
food or
drink



16%
sell or pawn
personal
property

In addition to the above strategies, 57% of clients have to choose between paying for food and utilities; 51% between food and medical expenses; 49% between food and transportation; 46% between food and housing; and 31% between food and education.



CalFresh (Food Stamps) Participation

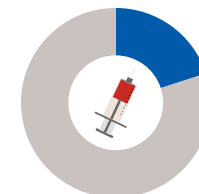
26% of client households
receive CalFresh benefits.

California has one of the lowest participation rates in the nation. Only 55% of eligible Californians receive CalFresh benefits, compared to 75% nationwide.

40% of client households have a member in fair or poor health.



39%
of households
have at least
one member
with high blood
pressure.



20%
of households
have at least
one member
with diabetes.

In addition to high rates of poor health among client households, 33% also lack health insurance of any kind, and 26% have outstanding medical bills to pay.

Five-Year Strategic Plan

Impact Goal: 90 Million Meals by FY18*

**Systems Change
Through Partnership**
56.8 MILLION MEALS

Work with legislators to enact policies that ensure access to and full participation in safety net resources.

**CalFresh Application
Assistance**
4.6 MILLION MEALS

Maximize enrollment in CalFresh (food stamps) among Alameda County residents.

**Food
Distribution**
28.9 MILLION MEALS

Increase distribution of nutritious food by 5.5% annually, with at least half being farm-fresh produce.

Community, corporate and foundation support funds the infrastructure to achieve these goals.

*90 million meals = 1 meal a day for every food insecure person in Alameda County.