

### SNAP and TEFAP Food Programs at a Glance

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) offers nutrition assistance to millions of eligible, low-income individuals and families and provides economic benefits to communities. The SNAP/Food Stamp Program is the largest nutrition assistance program administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). As of August 2013, 47.6 million persons were participating in SNAP. The goal of the program is “to alleviate hunger and malnutrition by increasing food purchasing power for all eligible households who apply for participation” as stated in the Food Stamp Act of 1977, as amended (P.L. 108-269).

In Wisconsin, SNAP is called FoodShare. FoodShare was created to help stop hunger and to improve nutrition and health. FoodShare helps people with limited money buy the food they need for good health. Each month, people across Wisconsin get help from FoodShare. They are people of all ages who have a job but have low incomes, are living on small or fixed income, have lost their job, retired or are disabled and not able to work.

Who receives FoodShare benefits in Wisconsin? *All data is for (or as of) the month of October 2013.*

- **Poverty:** 15% of the 5.7 million people in Wisconsin receive FoodShare.
- **Assistance Groups (AG's)/Individuals\*:** 421,395 Assistance groups are made up of 856,324 individuals. The AG's count decreased by 631 from the previous month. There is an average of 2.1 people in an AG.
- **Gender:** 55% of the recipients are female and 45% are male.
- **Adults/Minor:** 58% are adults and 42% are minors. 42% of AG's have minors in them.
- **Minors and their Parents:** of the AG's that contain minors, 65% have one parent in the AG, 34% have two parents, and 2% have no parents in the household.
- **Parents that are Minors:** There are 940 minors in 932 FoodShare AG's that are parents.
- **Age Distribution:** Children, age 4 and under has the largest number for any age grouping making up 13% of recipients. 50% of the recipients are 23 and younger.
- **Elderly/Disabled:** Nearly 20% of FoodShare recipients are elderly, blind, or disabled. 38% of AG's contain at least one individual that is elderly, blind, or disabled. The average allotment for AG's that contain an elderly, blind, or disabled member is \$167. However, 17% of the elderly, blind, or disabled caseload receives an allotment of \$20 less.
- **Work/Earnings:** 33% of the AG's have at least one person working. The average monthly earned income of those AG's is \$1,270. 39% of adult FoodShare recipients are employed.

*\*Eligibility is based on the composition of an “assistance group,” which generally includes all members of a household.*

On November 1, 2013, families receiving food assistance through SNAP began receiving fewer benefits each month. The federal law called the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 raised SNAP amounts in 2009 to help individuals and families impacted by the economic downturn. These extra benefits are no longer available since this law expired on November 1, 2013. These benefit reductions depended on many things like income, household size, and expenses – but a typical household of four had their monthly benefits decrease by about \$36. The Center on Budget Policy & Priorities estimates Wisconsin households will lose \$90 million in nutrition benefits during the first year. For many families, coping with this cut will be tough, particularly during the holidays and school vacations.

### Farm Bill

The Farm Bill is a comprehensive piece of legislation that guides and authorizes funding for most federal farm and food policies, including SNAP. Every five years, Congress renews the Farm Bill through the reauthorization process. On February 4, 2014 the Senate adopted the Farm Bill conference report, preceded the previous week by the House adoption. SNAP is important because the program is critical to struggling households and to the nation and its economy. The Farm Bill, the Agricultural Act of 2014, cuts \$8.8 billion from SNAP over the next decade by limiting states' ability to provide small energy assistance payments to SNAP recipients. Wisconsin and 16 other states made these small payments because

they triggered a SNAP utility deduction that resulted in larger monthly benefits for tens of thousands of households. These cuts will fall only in Wisconsin and the 16 other states – reducing SNAP payments by about \$90 monthly for about 850,000 households nationwide (1.7 million people). As the Farm Bill provision rolls out in Wisconsin, households that can document a separate heating or cooling bill will preserve their current SNAP benefit levels; those who can only document other utility bills like water or sewer or phone will see a modest cut in benefits; while those who cannot document any utility bills will see the largest benefit reduction.

As a country, we have always prided ourselves on providing a responsive food assistance safety net through the SNAP. SNAP recipients have fallen on tough times, and the program provides temporary help to put healthy food on the table, but what does it mean in real terms?

- **SNAP recipients come from all walks of life.** 91% of SNAP recipients live in households with children, an elderly family member, a disabled person who cannot walk, or adults who are working. SNAP serves 900,000 veterans each month.
- **SNAP recipients are poor.** The vast majority of SNAP recipients have incomes far below the federal poverty level. For a family of four, that’s just a little over \$23,000 per year. Last year, the extra support provided by SNAP lifted 4.7 million Americans, including 2.1 million children, out of poverty.
- **SNAP recipients play by the rules.** Over 99% of those receiving SNAP benefits are eligible. Over the last 15 years, USDA has reduced fraud in SNAP from 4% to around 1%.
- **SNAP recipients are working.** In households where at least one adult is able to work, more than 80% work in the year before or after receiving SNAP. In fact, the program is designed to encourage work. Each additional dollar SNAP participants earn results in only about a 24-cent reduction in benefits. This provides a boost of 10% or more to a low-income worker’s wages and allows them to stretch their dollars further as they get back on their feet.

**SNAP Helps Families Make Ends Meet**

SNAP provides a modest but important boost to many Wisconsin families. In July 2013, 860,000 people in Wisconsin received help from SNAP – about one out of every seven Wisconsinites. The average monthly SNAP benefit is relatively low, but it can make a big difference in helping to put food on the table. In Wisconsin, SNAP benefits average about \$115 per person per month, about \$1.30 per meal. The cuts to SNAP last November mean that a family of three will lose \$29 a month in nutrition benefits. The Farm Bill cuts will further reduce benefits for tens of thousands of Wisconsin households. Children make up a large share of those who get help from SNAP in Wisconsin. Statewide, 452,000 children, or one out of every three children participated in SNAP in 2012 and will see benefit cuts.

**SNAP Cuts to Hinder Local Economies**

In addition to helping feed hungry families, SNAP is one of the fastest, most effective ways to stimulate a struggling economy, because benefits are immediately spent on food at local grocery stores. Every \$1 increase in SNAP benefits generates about \$1.70 in economic activity, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. The reduction in SNAP means that families will spend less in the community, with the loss being felt by local businesses.

The November cut to SNAP will hurt low-income people living in the Coulee Region. Estimated reductions for the period November 2013 through September 2014 are in the table below. There are no estimates currently available for the impact on the Coulee Region of the more recent Farm Bill cuts.

County	SNAP Reduction
Crawford	\$197,000
La Crosse	\$1,343,000
Monroe	\$612,000
Vernon	\$314,000

SNAP is a powerful tool that helps keep families out of poverty. Reducing benefit levels or restricting eligibility during slow economic times will make it harder for families to make ends meet, and will hit families with children the hardest.

**The Food Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)**

In addition to SNAP, emergency food providers help supplement the diets of low-income Americans by providing free food assistance through local food pantries, meal sites and shelters. The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) is a USDA nutrition program that provides federal commodities to local emergency food organizations to augment their supplies of privately donated and purchased foods. In Wisconsin 13 Community Action Agencies and three non-

Community Action agencies coordinate the distribution of 12.8 million pounds of TEFAP commodities worth \$10 million dollars through 330 participating food pantries, meal sites and shelters statewide. Participating food pantries alone distributed nearly 44 million pounds of food to needy households, of which TEFAP commodities accounted for about 25%. Couleecap, one of these coordinating agencies, assists individuals and families with their emergency food needs through 11 food pantries in its four county area (Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe, and Vernon).

The recently passed Farm Bill modestly increased funding for TEFAP commodities in stages over the next four years. By 2018 Wisconsin's TEFAP program is estimated to receive an additional \$1.9 million in food purchase funds – a 50% increase over 2014. Unfortunately, this increase in funding can't begin to offset the enormous cuts in SNAP benefits that households will have to absorb.

An increase in the number of families coming into a food pantry or applying for FoodShare is often a sensitive indicator of economic problems. Since the onset of the recession in 2007, household demand for emergency food assistance in Wisconsin has risen dramatically.

- The number of people served by Wisconsin TEFAP food pantries increased by less than 1% over last year, but remains 57% higher than in 2007.
- TEFAP food pantries now serve an average of 202,602 people a month.
- The average number of monthly visits per food pantry is 48% higher than before the recession, rising from 198 to 292 households.
- At Couleecap, 89% of the food distributed is from the private sector.
- The average size of food packages that Couleecap distributes per family is 66 pounds/visit.

Many food pantry recipients have lost their jobs, are homeless, have reduced work hours, have exhausted unemployment benefits, or are elderly or disabled. Many households are single moms with children. Couleecap is seeing more first time recipients over age 50 who have had an established career until losing their job.

In 2013, Couleecap conducted a needs assessment to gather information regarding the needs of low-income individuals and households in a four county service area (Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe, and Vernon). The responses from low-income households represents at least 3,906 people (adults and children). Demographic information includes:

- 68% had annual incomes less than \$20,000; an additional 16% had incomes between \$20,000 and \$29,999.
- 47% had income from wages; 8% had income from self-employment.
- 8% received unemployment.
- 43% received support from FoodShare.
- 40% received support from Food Pantries.

In 2012, 20,906 people received emergency food assistance through Couleecap's emergency food assistance program (TEFAP). In addition, 2,828,654 pounds of food were collected and distributed, and 805 Farmers Market coupons were distributed to food pantry recipients in Crawford County.

Like SNAP, food pantries make a difference by providing nutritional support to people at risk of hunger. Food is a basic need, a staple for sustaining human life. A constant struggle to keep food on the table directly affects one's quality of life. The lack of adequate nutrition has a number of negative impacts on a community's residents including: poor health, reduced productivity, learning disabilities, and an increased demand for social services. Food and nutrition programs are critical to the health and well-being of low-income adults and children.

### **Ways to Help**

- Donate and support your local food pantry all year round. Items in demand include peanut butter, canned vegetables, fruit, and tuna, oatmeal, rice, baby food, canned stew, soups, cereal.
- Support local elected officials who care about food insecurity, hunger, and poverty issues.
- Educate yourself about food insecurity and hunger.
- Advocate for a higher minimum wage, more jobs that pay living wages, more public funding for child care and healthcare, so working families have adequate money to cover food needs.

Couleecap, Inc. is a private non-profit 501(c)3 charitable organization created in 1966. Our mission is to fight poverty and promote self-sufficiency, economic development, and social justice. We are *People Helping People*, and everyday our *actions* make a difference in the lives of people and families throughout the Coulee Region. We currently implement more than 50 contracts in the areas of housing, emergency assistance, child and family development, business development, employment, transportation, and health. Each year, Couleecap helps more than 38,000 people work towards self-sufficiency. Visit our website at [www.couleecap.org](http://www.couleecap.org) or like us on Facebook.

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