

Long-Range Planning Issue Brief

Food Security



As Minnesotans face rising costs and economic challenges, many struggle to access enough food for active, healthy lives. In 2023, the USDA estimated that 9.1% of Minnesota households experienced food insecurity, which was below the national level of 12.2%.¹ Food shelf visits totaled a record high of nearly 9 million in 2024, according to data from The Food Group and Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF).² While a range of federal, state, and charitable food assistance programs exist to meet this need, the support system remains fragmented.

Minnesota has recently taken steps to support food security, such as implementing programs to ensure all students can eat at school. **A unified statewide strategy for food security can align emergency and long-term support systems, improve public program impacts, and strengthen coordination and role clarity across sectors to ensure everyone in the state has reliable access to nutritious food.**

Where Are We Now?

Food insecurity affects both rural and urban communities, with households of color and those with children disproportionately impacted. When families face economic hardship, they often must choose between buying food and covering other essentials. Food insecurity not only reflects broader economic inequities—it can also contribute to and worsen health conditions, including obesity, diabetes, mental health, developmental challenges, and learning difficulties.^{3,4}

Barriers like transportation, proximity to grocery stores, income, rising living costs, and uneven food distribution further compound the issue, especially in underserved areas. A range of public programs help expand access to nutritious food—some based on income, others focused on specific groups such as students or seniors. These programs may offer direct grocery assistance, fresh or shelf-stable items through food banks, or access to prepared meals.

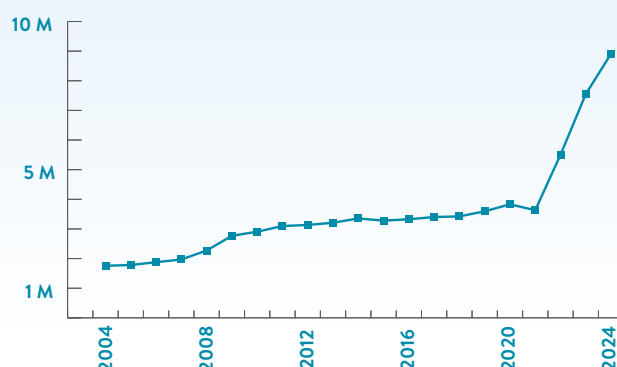
Minnesota's hunger relief ecosystem is made up of nonprofits and informal community efforts, forming a diverse but often financially vulnerable system that relies on grants, donations, and volunteers. Yet across this landscape, local creativity, care, and collaboration continue to drive progress. Together, these efforts offer hope and opportunity to build a more food-secure future for all Minnesotans.

Stories & Trends

"I recently found childcare so I could go back to work after being a stay at home mom for the last year and we were struggling to pay bills with our mortgage going up. Once I started working we lost our food stamps so now I work to pay for groceries and can't help with bills so we are right back to where we were before I started working. The income guidelines for assistance does not align with the cost of living! I can't make it to the food shelf closest to me because of my work schedule."

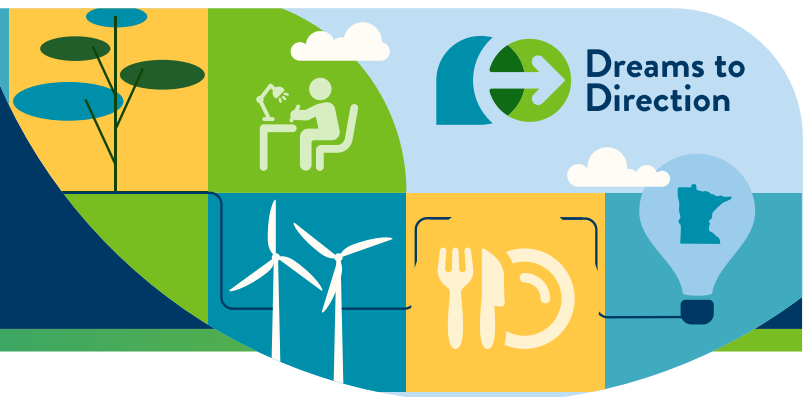
Storyteller identified as: Woman, age 26-39, \$40,000 - \$54,999 household income

Food Shelf Visit Growth (2004 - 2024)



Source: [The Food Group](#)

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What Could Progress Look Like?

Minnesota can bolster food security collectively across public, private, and non-profit sectors.

Minnesota state agencies have opportunities to come together to support food security, from technical systems improvements like improving the application process for benefits programs or better using administrative data for measurement and evaluation, to deepening connections with strategic partners, including health care providers and schools, to streamline experiences.

Creative outreach and thoughtful administrative changes could help more eligible Minnesotans access public programs. For example, in 2021, only 61.5% of those eligible participated in the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, and Minnesota ranks 33rd nationally in the share of eligible residents who are accessing benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).^{5,6} While SNAP and WIC are federal programs, county and Tribal governments lead their implementation in Minnesota with partnership from state agencies and non-profits. This collaboration is especially important as uncertainty in federal support could lead to reduced funding —putting at risk the programs and services many Minnesotans depend on.

We can also build broader food systems connections and celebrate cultural traditions. Historically, public nutrition assistance has been tied to support for agricultural producers—a link Minnesota continues through farmers market programs and efforts to create new market channels for emerging farmers within emergency food networks. Urban agriculture, farm-to-school initiatives, and other education-based programs foster skill building and community connection. Across the state, Tribes, non-profits, and entrepreneurs are highlighting Native and ethnic foodways, offering culturally rooted solutions to food insecurity in specific communities. These efforts reflect a more holistic and inclusive approach to building food security.

How Can Long-Range Planning Help?

The issue of food security is particularly ripe for long-range planning as meaningful progress requires both coordination to meet needs through the emergency food system, as well as focused, collaborative work to bolster overall economic security to reduce the scale of such need in the future. The Long-Range Planning team can explore and prioritize action through creation of a unified strategy among public, private, Tribal Nations, and non-profit partners across the state and build on recent research, engagement, and momentum.

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated new ways of working and greater collaboration given the immediacy of need; progress can build on the innovations. Climate change will drastically shift domestic and international food production and distribution. How can our state ready its agricultural systems and supply chains for resiliency? Beginning to explore this question is just the start of a much longer conversation—one that will shape Minnesota's food security for years to come. The Long-Range Planning Team is well-positioned to convene partners who can take an even longer-term view than typically applied, helping to align today's decisions with future needs.

mn.gov/planning

Get Involved

Join us in shaping Minnesota's future! If you have questions or want to participate, contact the Long-range Planning team at planning.mmb@state.mn.us.