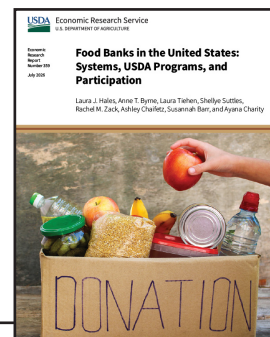




A report summary from the Economic Research Service

Food Banks in the United States: Systems, USDA Programs, and Participation

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Key Points

- Food banks and food pantries are privately-run organizations that are available nationwide. In 2021, the percent of the population using their services varied by State, ranging from 2.6 percent in New Hampshire to 8.2 percent in New Mexico.
- USDA operates two programs that distribute food through food banks: the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP). These two programs combined to distribute over \$639 million dollars worth of fruits, vegetables, legumes, protein foods, grains, and dairy products in fiscal year 2022.
- As much as 39 percent of the food distributed annually through the food banking system comes from USDA Foods programs such as TEFAP and CSFP.
- Many food pantry clients also participate in Federal assistance programs. In 2021, approximately 48 percent were also beneficiaries of USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), 11 percent participated in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), 41 percent in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), and 38 percent in the School Breakfast Program (SBP).
- While privately run, food banks and food pantry distributions are shaped by government policies, including policies that protect those who donate fresh food and provide tax incentives for donors.

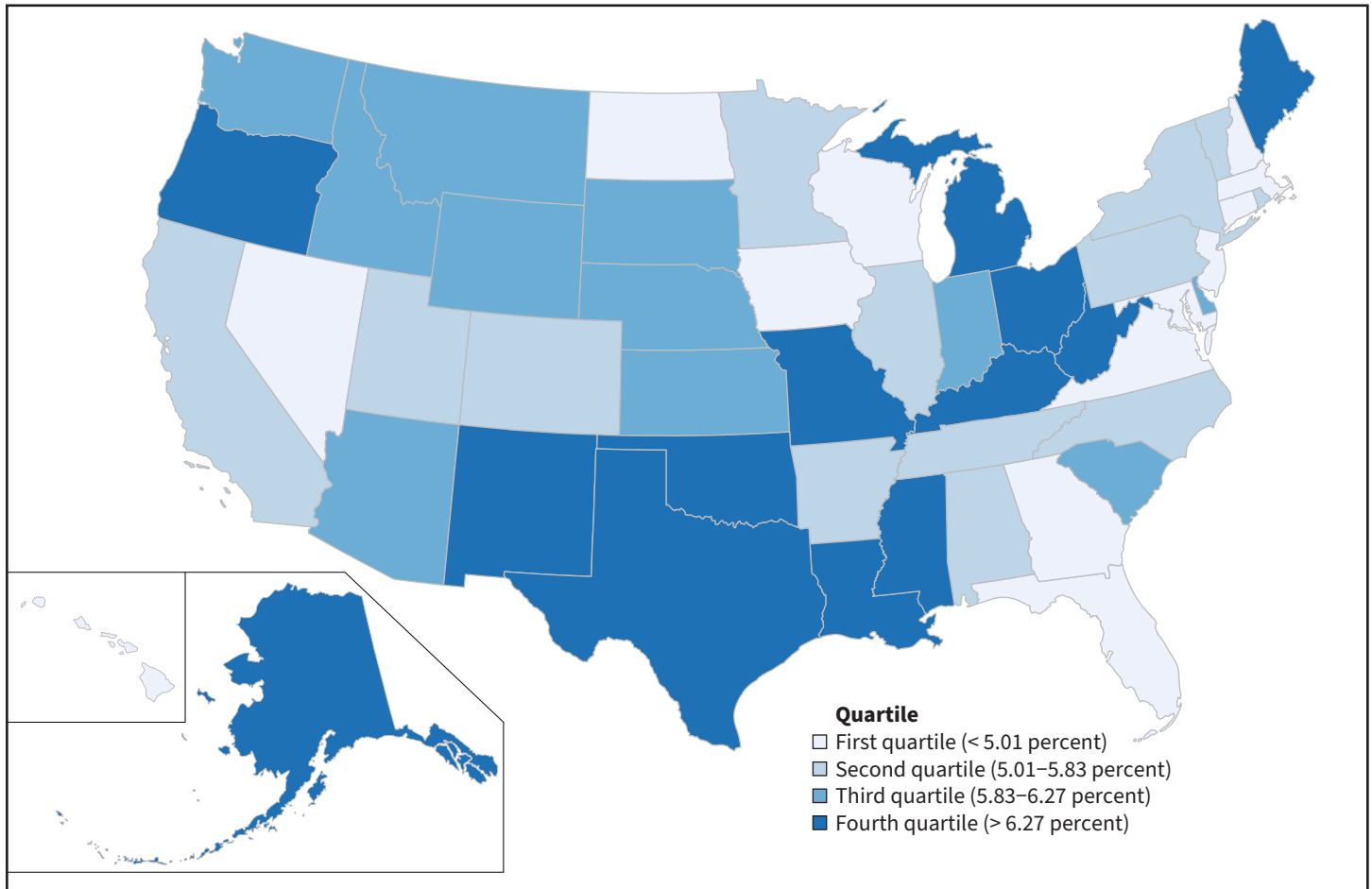
Why Does This Matter

Food banks and food pantries form a key component of the food security safety net in the United States, collectively distributing free groceries to millions of U.S. residents every year. Using data from the USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, the Current Population Survey, and Feeding America, this report provides new information on the current state of food bank systems and food pantry participation at the national level between 2021 and 2023, with historical trends from 2007–21. Information is included showing differences in rates of use and TEFAP eligibility across States, as well as summary statistics on food bank organizations. Food banks collect, organize,

and distribute food supplies to their partners. Most of these partners are food pantries, which directly distribute groceries to those in need. Households who use food pantries at higher rates include those who are low income, headed by single females with children, located in rural areas, and those with Black or Hispanic reference persons (the survey reference person is an adult household member in whose name the housing unit is owned or rented). Food banks differ in terms of size, resources, and services offered, with some also offering Federal benefit assistance, nutrition education, skill building or job training, and essential nonfood supplies.

A Few More Details

Rates of food pantry use vary by State



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service calculations using pooled data from the 2019–21 U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements.

Food Pantry Use Varies by State

The number of households receiving services from food pantries, and the subsequent rate of use, vary by State. Among the States in the fourth quartile of food pantry use, over 8 percent of people living in New Mexico, Missouri, and Oklahoma used food pantries, according to data from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census' Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement. Among the States in the first quartile of food pantry use, New Hampshire (2.6 percent), Iowa (3.5 percent), and Virginia (3.8 percent) had the lowest number of households receiving these services. A list of States and the percent of their population who used food pantries is available in table 6.

Knowledge of Food Banks

Recent research finds that approximately 98 percent of U.S. counties have a food pantry, but there is a gap between the availability of those resources and potential user knowledge. According to the Current Population Survey, of the food-insecure households it surveyed, 59 percent knew of at least one food pantry in their area but only 29 percent received free groceries. Among households that were both food insecure and did not use food pantries, those with Hispanic (48 percent) or Black (53 percent) reference persons were less likely than those with White non-Hispanic reference persons (68 percent) to report knowing those services were available within their community.

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