

## Changes Over the Past 3 Years in EFAS Services and Possible Unmet Needs

There has been considerable interest in recent years in whether (and if so, how) the need for EFAS services has been changing. This chapter reports estimates by the respondents to the provider survey of changes in their scale of operation over the past 3 years. It also presents related data on possible unmet needs for EFAS services. We begin by discussing the policy context within which changes are of interest. Next, we describe the relevant survey data and its limitations and then discuss the survey findings in light of other recent estimates of changes in EFAS services. Subsequent sections report provider estimates of the extent to which the food supplies available to EFAS providers have changed and the views of providers about their ability to increase the size of their operations, if the need arises.

### Background

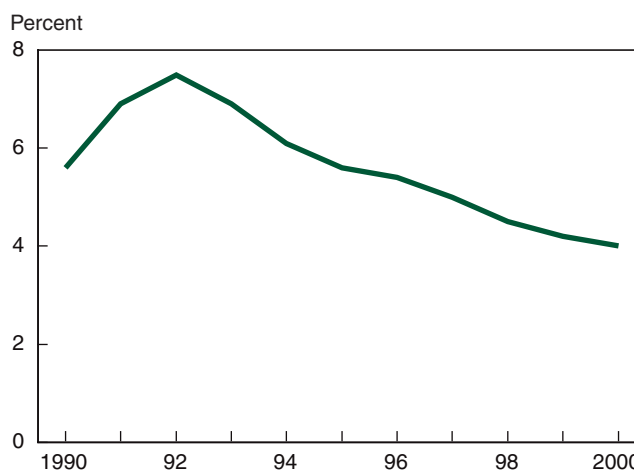
As noted in chapter 1, the 1997-2000 period was characterized by major changes in U.S. low-income-assistance policy. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 substantially increased emphasis on helping welfare clients find employment, while tightening standards for those who did not find work.

Simultaneously, throughout much of the Nation a robust economy was generating new jobs and economic opportunities. By the year 2000, the unemployment rate was at its lowest in 20 years (fig. 7.1), and real disposable income per capita rose from \$21,838 to \$23,739 between 1997 and 2000.<sup>51</sup>

The decrease in unemployment and increase in per capita income have been major factors in a substantial decrease in the number of people receiving cash assistance, which declined between 1997 and 2000 from

<sup>51</sup>U.S. Council of Economic Advisors 2001, table B.31.

Figure 7.1  
U.S. unemployment rate, 1990-2000



Source: U.S. Council of Economic Advisors (2001).

10.9 million to 5.8 million (fig. 7.2). In addition, the number of people participating in the Food Stamp Program (FSP) declined substantially, falling from about 22.8 million in 1997 to 17.1 million in 2000 (fig. 7.2).<sup>52</sup>

There are indications that the declining assistance rolls reflect genuine economic gains for at least some of America's low-income population. The percentage of households below the official U.S. poverty level declined from 13.3 in 1997 to 11.8 in 1999 (fig. 7.3).<sup>53</sup> Further, there is evidence that at least some gains have been experienced by even the poorest segments of the population. The percentage of the population living in households with incomes below 50 percent of the poverty line declined from 5.4 to 4.6 over the same period (fig. 7.3).<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup>USDA, FNS Website [www.fns.usda.gov/pd/fsfypart.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/fsfypart.htm).

<sup>53</sup>HHS. Census Historical Series. [www.census.gov/incomehistpov](http://www.census.gov/incomehistpov), table 5.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

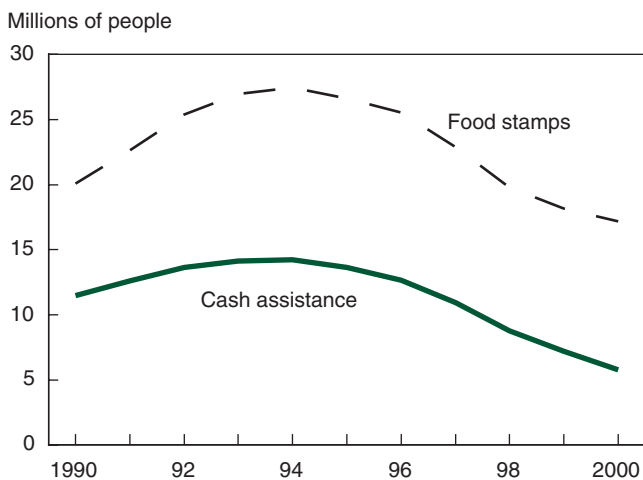
It is in the context of these gains that considerable attention has recently been focused on whether the need for emergency food assistance has changed, and if so, in what ways. This issue has direct significance for assessing the capacity of the EFAS to serve clients who rely on it. In addition, some observers view changes in the EFAS as a barometer of the impacts of the 1996 welfare reform. To the extent that welfare reform measures have achieved their objective of helping households reach self-sufficiency, they presumably have reduced the need for EFAS services. However, if the reforms have had the effect of moving people off welfare without giving them adequate tools to provide for themselves, then people who once relied on welfare assistance may now have an increased need for the EFAS.

A related interest in the need for EFAS services revolves around the exceptionally strong U.S. economy. Some

analysts believe that a strong economy improves conditions for all income groups. Others have questioned whether people at the lowest end of the income spectrum benefit fully from economic growth (Bernstein et al., 2000). Observing the use of EFAS services over time provides evidence that may help determine which view is the more accurate one.

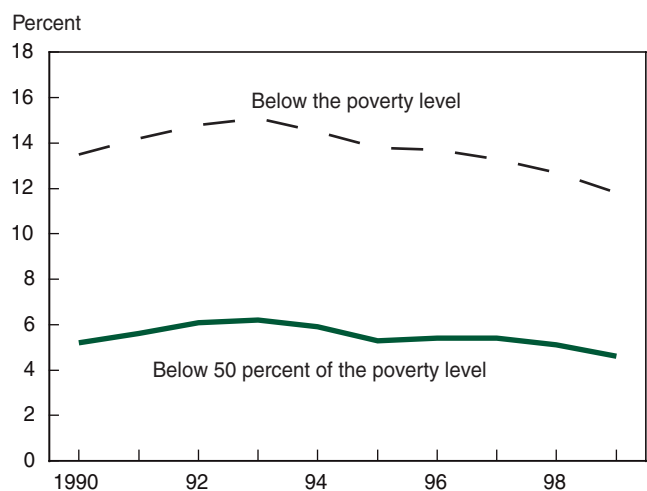
The data available to the current study team do not enable us to choose definitively between these hypotheses. However, by presenting EFAS providers' perceptions of how the need for their services has changed, we can potentially inform this debate. In this chapter, we bring together evidence from our survey about recent changes in the demand for system services, and we place our results in the context of data from three other data sets that relate to similar issues.

Figure 7.2  
**U.S. population receiving cash assistance and food stamps, 1990-2000**



Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Program Data (2000), USDA Program Data (2000).

Figure 7.3  
**U.S. population below the poverty level and below 50 percent of poverty, 1990-99**



Source: U.S. Council of Economic Advisors (2001).

## Data from the EFAS Provider Survey

Below, we review the provider survey data available for examining how providers believe the EFAS has changed in response to the forces discussed above.

### Overview of Data

As part of the survey, EFAS agencies were asked whether the use of their services had changed during the previous 3 years, from 1997 to 2000. For respondents who reported a change, we obtained the approximate percentage increase or decrease in the number of meals, clients, or client agencies they served. Information was also obtained on (1) changes in the amount of food available to the providers over the 3-year period; (2) changes in the frequency with which the respondents had to turn away clients or client agencies due to lack of food; and (3) respondents' perceptions of whether they could handle a future increase in the need for their services, and if they could, how large an increase.

### Limitations

In assessing the results reported below, several significant data limitations need to be kept in mind. Perhaps most important, the data generally reflect agencies' *perceptions* concerning changes in service usage, rather than actual changes based on service records. In addition, the accuracy of the information reported depends heavily on providers' ability to recall experiences from 3 years ago.

Because of the highly decentralized nature of the EFAS and its heavy reliance on volunteers, many EFAS providers do not maintain accurate or consistent records of their services. Further, many of the records that *are* kept are not consistent across providers and, even within a provider type, in the measures used. (For instance, pantries that keep records may measure their services in terms of pounds distributed, total household visits, the number of households served, or some similar measure.) To address this lack of consistency in recordkeeping and obtain comparable data from a broad range of agencies, the question sequences in the

provider survey focused on provider *perceptions*. Some agencies may have consulted records in developing their answers, but most probably did not.

Another limitation results from the fact that the questions were about changes over a 3-year period. Because of this, the sample for these data includes only those providers who were in operation during the entire period; providers who had been in operation for less than 3 years at the time of the interviews, and those who had been in operation 3 years prior to the study but had stopped providing EFAS services before the survey was administered, could not be included in this questioning sequence. Omitting these two groups may have had substantial effect on our estimates of change in EFAS usage, but we lack information with which to assess the net effect. (We do not have precise data on the number of organizations that have left the system in the past 3 years. However, we do know that, as reported in appendix A, at least 156 agencies in our sample had apparently once been operating but had stopped doing so. Also, we do know from tabulations in previous chapters that 18 percent of emergency kitchens and 28 percent of food pantries have entered the system in the past 3 years.)

In addition, to encourage respondents to give their "best estimates" of the variables of interest despite uncertainty as to the exact values, the questions on changes were asked using intervals expressed as percentages. This makes it necessary to impose certain assumptions when computing an average estimate of net change. In parts of the analysis that follow, we directly report frequency distributions of responses in terms of ranges. It is also useful, however, to make estimates of average *net changes*. To do this, we first imputed values equal to the midpoint of the interval selected by each provider and then calculated the average net change. (In these calculations, the figure used if a provider selected the highest interval category—more than 200 percent—was 220 percent.)<sup>55</sup>

<sup>55</sup>This category is not shown separately in the tables we present because in preparing the table the intervals in the question were collapsed into a smaller number of categories for clarity.

## Changes in Use of Services

All five types of EFAS agencies included in this study reported an increase in use of their services over the 1997-2000 period. Here we review these findings.

### Findings

For emergency kitchens, approximately half the respondents indicated that the number of meals they were serving increased during the preceding 3 years (table 7.1). Thirty-five percent reported serving about the same number of meals, and approximately 14 percent reported serving fewer meals.

About half of those serving more meals reported a 10- to 25-percent increase during the 3-year period. About 30 percent reported an increase of more than 25 percent. The sizes of the reported decreases in meals served tended to be somewhat smaller, with only 11 percent of respondents reporting decreases in excess of 25 percent.<sup>56</sup>

Kitchens reported an average net increase in use of 12 percent between 1997 and 2000. This translates into a *yearly* average increase of about 4 percent (fig. 7.4).

The pattern of responses observed for pantries is similar to that for kitchens. However, a somewhat higher percentage of pantries reported that the use of their services (measured in terms of the number of households served) had increased, and the average net increase was slightly higher than for kitchens, 17 percent, or about 5 percent per year.

The percentages of food banks and food rescue organizations reporting increased use of their services (measured in terms of the number of agencies served) were somewhat greater—75 and 74 percent, respectively. The average annual net changes were approximately 7 percent for food banks and 11 percent for food rescue organizations.

Somewhat fewer emergency food organizations (EFOs)—approximately 40 percent—reported increas-

es in the number of agencies they served between 1997 and 2000. In interpreting this finding, it is important to remember that the EFOs are tied specifically to TEFAP; thus, their observed changes may not reflect broader changes in the much larger private component of the EFAS.

It is somewhat difficult for us to put these changes in service usage into perspective because we lack comparable data on observed changes over a different 3-year period. However, overall, the changes reported appear to be substantial.

### Patterns of Change in Relation to Provider Characteristics and Locational Variables

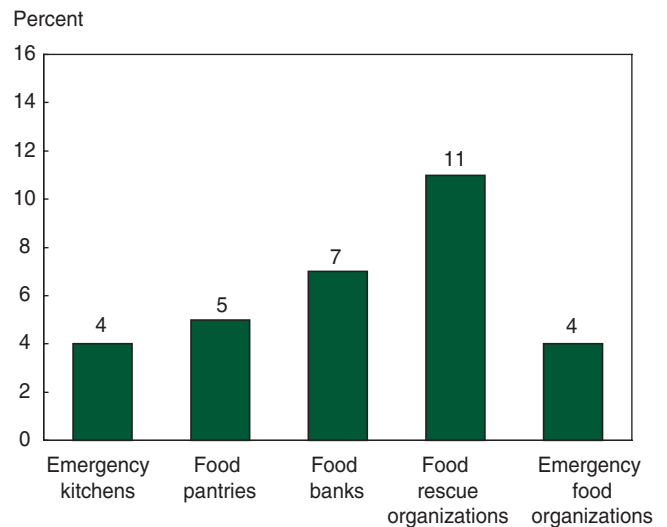
To determine whether there were relationships between changes in use and the characteristics or locations of providers, we examined reported changes in service use across different types of locations.

**Kitchens.** For kitchens, the characteristic that appears most strongly related to increases in the number of meals served is kitchen size (table 7.2). Large kitchens were about 13 percentage points more likely than small kitchens to report an increase in meals served; also, the average net change in the number of meals served by large kitchens over the 3-year period was substantially higher than for small ones.

Location in a ZIP Code area with a very high (or very low) poverty rate did not seem to systematically affect

Figure 7.4

### Annual increase in the use of EFAS services, 1997-2000



Source: National Emergency Food Assistance System Survey (2000).

<sup>56</sup>As with the other tabulations in this report, the data reported in the text on changes in services supplied are not weighted by size of provider. Thus, for instance, a 6-percent change in a large kitchen counts the same as a 6-percent change in a small one. As discussed later in the text, large agencies have, on average, experienced larger changes. Thus our estimates of the changes would be somewhat larger if weights were used. However, the basic pattern of results would not be different.

the probability of reporting an increase.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, as shown in the next two panels of the table, there seem to be no clear patterns linking the racial composition of the ZIP Code area with reported rates of change in kitchen use.<sup>58</sup>

State-level data were also linked to the kitchen information on the file. A change in State population does not appear to be closely related to changes in demand, nor are changes in State food stamp caseloads or in State per capita personal incomes. Classifying the data by region of the country also fails to reveal any clear-cut patterns.

<sup>57</sup>The text discusses the relationship between changes in kitchen use and levels of poverty. It would also be interesting to relate changes in kitchen use to changes in poverty. However, the available ZIP Code-based data do not enable us to conduct this analysis.

<sup>58</sup>It is possible that five-digit ZIP Codes are too fine a level of aggregation with which to meaningfully examine the data. However, we believe that three-digit ZIP Code areas would be too large to represent neighborhoods.

**Pantries.** Metropolitan status and pantry size appear to be related to changes in the number of households served by pantries (table 7.3). Large pantries were much more likely than small ones to report an increase (72 percent versus 37 percent). Also, 55 percent of metropolitan pantries reported an increase in number of households served, compared with 47 percent of nonmetropolitan pantries. Interestingly, neither changes in the size of the State population nor decreases in the number of food stamp participants appear closely connected with increases in the number of households served by pantries.

**Food Banks.** Changes in demand for services appear to be strongly related to the size of food banks. While similar percentages of medium-size and large food banks reported increases, the percentage of small food banks reporting increases was 18 to 20 percentage points lower (table 7.4). The percentage of the State population living in a metropolitan area was also positively associated with higher growth.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>59</sup>Tabulations of characteristics were not done for food rescue organizations and emergency food organizations because of small sample sizes.

**Table 7.1—Changes in use of service reported by EFAS agencies, 1997-2000**

Increase/decrease in service	Type of EFAS provider				
	Kitchens	Pantries	Food banks organizations	Food rescue	Emergency food organizations
	<i>Percent</i>				
<b>Changes in the use of services<sup>1</sup></b>					
More	47.7	52.9	75.2	73.8	38.8
Fewer	14.1	10.9	2.5	1.5	4.9
About the same	35.2	33.5	20.5	23.1	53.4
Missing data	3.0	2.8	1.9	1.5	2.9
<b>Percent increase in the use of services<sup>2</sup></b>					
Less than 10	15.3	11.8	14.5	8.3	17.5
10 to 25	52.5	49.5	52.1	37.5	42.5
26 to 50	19.9	20.1	21.9	29.2	27.5
More than 50	10.3	15.6	9.5	20.8	7.5
Missing data	2.0	3.0	2.1	4.2	5.0
<b>Percent decrease in the use of services<sup>3</sup></b>					
Less than 10	35.5	23.4	37.5	100.0	60.0
10 to 25	53.3	45.9	37.5	0.0	40.0
26 to 50	8.0	23.0	25.0	0.0	0.0
More than 50	2.7	4.7	0.0	0.0	0.0
Missing data	0.4	3.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Average net change</b>	<b>+12.2</b>	<b>+16.5</b>	<b>+21.1</b>	<b>+34.8</b>	<b>+10.9</b>
<b>Sample size (number)</b>	<b>1,257</b>	<b>1,154</b>	<b>322</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>103</b>

<sup>1</sup>Services = Meals served for emergency kitchens; households served for pantries; and agencies served for food banks, food rescue organizations, and emergency food organizations. <sup>2</sup>For agencies with increases. <sup>3</sup>For agencies with decreases.

Note: The sample includes only EFAS agencies operating in 1997, based on responses to the question, "When did this agency begin operating at this location?" Source: National Emergency Food Assistance System Survey (2000).

## *Comparisons With Other Data Sets*

**U.S. Conference of Mayors Survey.** As it has done periodically since 1985, the U.S. Conference of Mayors conducted a survey of officials in selected cities in the year 2000 to obtain information about hunger and homelessness. The survey questionnaire was sent to local officials in each city selected, and they were asked to gather information from EFAS service providers and other knowledgeable respondents in their respective cities.

Based on data collected in the 2000 survey, the Conference of Mayors estimated that the demand for EFAS food had increased by 17 percent during the previous 12 months. Its 1999 and 1998 surveys had produced annual estimates of 18 percent and 14 percent, respectively, implying a total increase in demand for EFAS food of approximately 57 percent over the 3-year period.<sup>60</sup>

The Conference of Mayors data thus suggest a considerably larger increase in the use of EFAS services than do the data from the current survey. However, it is important to note that the data from these two surveys are not directly comparable. Unlike the survey used for this study, the U.S. Conference of Mayors Survey is not based on a nationally representative sample. Also the direct respondents are city officials rather than EFAS providers.

**Current Population Survey Data.** Another source that provides information on possible changes in the use of the EFAS is the Current Population Survey (CPS), conducted monthly by the U.S. Census Bureau. The CPS is designed to provide the basis for the Federal Government's official unemployment statistics and to obtain data on other social and economic indicators. In one month of each year since 1995, CPS respondents who passed certain screening criteria have been asked whether they or anyone in their household had used a food pantry or an emergency kitchen during the previous 12 months.<sup>61</sup> Analysis of these data is complicated by the fact that both the survey-screening criteria and the month the survey has been administered have changed several times between 1995 and 1999. Furthermore, the CPS sample frame omits people who do not live in homes. This omission of the homeless may represent a significant limitation in a study of the EFAS, particularly a study of emergency kitchens. However, the sampling procedures have essentially been constant

<sup>60</sup>U.S. Conference of Mayors (2000).

<sup>61</sup>In general, the screening criteria are based on household income and are designed to avoid asking questions about food security for higher-income households for which they are not relevant.

during the relevant period, mitigating some of these effects for time series analysis of changes.

Within the context of these qualifications, table 7.5 presents preliminary tabulations of the relevant data. These tabulations have not yet been officially released by the Government and must be considered preliminary; thus, they should be treated with considerable caution.

The estimated percentage of U.S. households using food pantries "in the previous year" has been somewhat unstable during the 1995 through 1999 period. While it declined from 2.96 percent to 2.36 percent between 1995 and 1999, there is considerable fluctuation overall in the numbers from year to year in both directions. When 1997 is used as the starting point of the data series, placing the data in a roughly comparable period to that covered by the EFAS provider survey, an increase in pantry use (from 2.10 to 2.36 percent) is observed.<sup>62</sup>

A similar pattern is seen in the CPS data on use of emergency kitchens. The proportion of households estimated to have used emergency kitchens dropped from 0.46 of 1 percent in 1995 to 0.40 of 1 percent in 1999. Again, however, the conclusions seem to be quite sensitive to the reference year. If the period 1997-99 is examined, the estimated use rises from 0.35 to 0.40 of 1 percent, an increase of 14 percent.

**Second Harvest Data.** Another time series data set that provides information on the size of the EFAS is provided by America's Second Harvest. It contains the amounts of food that America's Second Harvest food banks report distributing to their affiliates each year.<sup>63</sup> This increased substantially between 1998 and 1999—from 1.18 billion pounds of food to 1.37 billion pounds, an increase of 16 percent (table 7.6).<sup>64</sup> (We focus on only these 2 years because available data from 1997 are not comparable and 2000 data have not yet been compiled.)

It is important to note that these data are not directly comparable with those contained in the other data sets. The Second Harvest data set provides information on the *supply* of food to EFAS providers, while the other data sets relate more directly to the *use* of EFAS service.

<sup>62</sup>Given the large sample sizes in the CPS, the food insecurity rates are measured with considerable precision and the differences are very unlikely to have been due to chance variation.

<sup>63</sup>All Second Harvest food banks are included in this administrative report.

<sup>64</sup>Based on internal administration data provided by America's Second Harvest.

## Summary

The data sources we have reviewed suggest that there have been increases in the use of EFAS services over the 1997-2000 period. The results of the present survey imply an increase of 4 to 5 percent annually over this period. However, the findings of the U.S. Conference of Mayors suggest a considerably larger average increase of approximately 14 percent per year during the same period. The CPS data on the percentage of

households using the EFAS show an annual increase of about 7 percent for kitchens, while the America's Second Harvest data show a 16-percent increase over the 1-year period for which comparable data are available.

In comparing these figures, several points should be noted. First, the four sources are reporting information on conceptually different (although related) variables. For instance, the current study asked about increases in actual number of clients served (or, in the case of

**Table 7.2—Changes in number of meals served by emergency kitchens by location characteristics, 1997-2000**

Location-related characteristics	Kitchens reporting increase in number of meals served	Average change in number of meals served over all kitchens in category	Sample size <i>Number</i>
	-----Percent-----		
<b>Size of kitchen</b>			
Small	43.0	8.7	362
Medium	44.9	13.3	421
Large	56.1	14.9	467
<b>In ZIP Codes with:<sup>1</sup></b>			
Less than 20 percent poverty	47.3	12.1	561
20 to 30 percent poverty	48.6	14.5	229
More than 30 percent poverty	48.0	12.5	385
<b>In ZIP Codes with:<sup>1</sup></b>			
More than 80 percent White	45.5	12.4	362
70 to 80 percent White	41.8	9.2	116
Less than 70 percent White	50.9	13.4	697
<b>In ZIP Codes with:<sup>1</sup></b>			
Less than 10 percent African American	43.9	12.4	423
10 to 30 percent African American	50.1	13.1	242
More than 30 percent African American	51.0	12.6	510
<b>Percent change in State population, 1996-98<sup>2</sup></b>			
Decrease or increase of less than 1	45.7	10.0	574
Increase of 1 to 3	50.3	14.4	454
Increase of more than 3	47.7	13.5	229
<b>Percent change in State food stamp participants, 1996-98<sup>3</sup></b>			
Decrease of more than 25 .	43.9	10.8	516
Decrease 20 to 25	48.1	12.8	352
Decrease or increase of less than 20	51.2	13.4	389
<b>Percent increase in State per capita personal income, 1995-98<sup>4</sup></b>			
More than 10	51.1	14.0	235
9 to 10	48.4	13.9	619
8 to 9	43.8	8.1	184
Less than 8	46.1	9.9	219
<b>Location</b>			
Metropolitan	47.6	11.8	1,199
Nonmetropolitan	48.2	14.6	58
<b>Region</b>			
West	50.5	18.2	293
Midwest	44.9	9.2	298
South	47.9	11.3	300
Northeast	47.8	11.0	366

<sup>1</sup>Based on 1990 U.S. Census data. <sup>2</sup>Based on U.S. Census projections. <sup>3</sup>Based on USDA program data. <sup>4</sup>Based on 1999 U.S. Statistical Abstract.  
Note: The sample includes only kitchens operating since 1997 or earlier, based on responses to the question, "When did this kitchen begin operating at this location?" Another potentially interesting variable, recent changes in State poverty levels, is not available.  
Source: National Emergency Food Assistance System Survey (2000), weighted tabulations, and other sources indicated above.

kitchens, number of meals served), whereas the U.S. Conference of Mayors study asked about changes in “need,” which could be different if significant proportions of the need were not being met.

The CPS asks whether respondents have *ever* used the EFAS during the 12-month period prior to the survey. Thus, with the CPS, if the same people began using

EFAS services more intensively or over more time, it is possible that the actual usage and need for the services could go up without the observed number of users increasing. Further, the reference periods covered by the CPS data and our study are not exactly the same. The America’s Second Harvest data only show food distributed by food banks; they do not pertain directly to service provision at the pantry and kitchen level.

**Table 7.3—Changes in number of households served by food pantries by location characteristics, 1997-2000**

Location-related characteristics	Pantries reporting increase in number of households served	Average change in number of households served over all pantries in category	Sample size
	-----Percent-----		Number
<b>Size of pantry</b>			
Small	37.3	7.6	428
Medium	57.5	19.6	431
Large	71.6	26.5	277
<b>Location</b>			
Metropolitan	55.2	17.5	837
Nonmetropolitan	46.9	14.2	317
<b>In ZIP Codes with:<sup>1</sup></b>			
Less than 20 percent poverty	51.1	15.8	762
20 to 30 percent poverty	57.0	18.5	181
More than 30 percent poverty	60.3	19.9	142
<b>In ZIP Codes with:<sup>1</sup></b>			
More than 80 percent White	51.4	16.4	686
70 to 80 percent White	53.9	18.2	97
Less than 70 percent White	57.2	16.7	302
<b>In ZIP Codes with:<sup>1</sup></b>			
Less than 10 percent African American	52.3	17.1	688
10 to 30 percent African American	49.2	14.8	179
More than 30 percent African American	59.5	17.0	218
<b>Percent change in State population, 1996-98<sup>2</sup></b>			
Decrease or increase of less than 1	53.1	15.6	481
Increase of 1 to 3	50.7	16.8	445
Increase of more than 3	57.1	17.9	228
<b>Percent change in State food stamp participants, 1996-98<sup>3</sup></b>			
Decrease of more than 25	52.0	15.8	433
Decrease of 20 to 25	54.2	16.2	254
Decrease of less than 20	53.0	17.4	467
<b>Percent increase in State per capita personal income, 1995-98<sup>4</sup></b>			
More than 10	49.9	19.3	246
9 to 10	58.1	17.8	501
8 to 9	47.5	12.8	200
Less than 8	48.5	13.8	207
<b>Region</b>			
West	56.2	18.3	184
Midwest	49.5	15.8	313
South	51.1	15.5	415
Northeast	57.7	17.8	242

<sup>1</sup>Based on 1990 U.S. Census data. <sup>2</sup>Based on U.S. Census projections. <sup>3</sup>Based on USDA program data. <sup>4</sup>Based on 1999 U.S. Statistical Abstract.  
Note: The sample includes only kitchens operating since 1997 or earlier, based on responses to the question, "When did this kitchen begin operating at this location?"

Source: National Emergency Food Assistance System Survey (2000), weighted tabulations, and other sources indicated above.



In addition to these conceptual differences across the surveys, there are substantial *methodological* differences. Three of the four sources rely largely on retrospective self-reports rather than detailed records; the America's Second Harvest information draws on actual records, but is based on the administrative records of food banks rather than those of direct service providers such as pantries and kitchens.

The CPS, in contrast to the other sources, is a household survey, but it is known to underrepresent at least one part of the population that uses the EFAS—the homeless. Also, it is important to note that the CPS estimates of EFAS usage have fluctuated somewhat over the 5 years during which they have been compiled, and it happens that 1997, the base year in the current comparisons, was the year with the lowest

reported usage, particularly for pantries. It is possible that for some reason the CPS estimate for that year is somewhat anomalous and that this atypical estimate is partly driving the CPS results. If, for instance, 1996 is used as the base year instead of 1997, the observed change in CPS measures for pantry use between the base year and 1999 is a *decrease* rather than the increase observed using 1997 as the baseline. Also, with the 1996 start date, the observed increase in kitchen usage becomes much smaller.

Overall we believe that, when taken together, the results reviewed above provide evidence that there may have been an increase in the use of EFAS services during the 1997-2000 period. Additional data are needed to assess whether any trend exists and if so, its direction and magnitude.

**Table 7.4—Changes in number of agencies served by food banks by location characteristics, 1997-2000**

Location-related characteristics	Food banks reporting increase in number of agencies	Average change in number of agencies served over all food banks in category	Sample size
	-----Percent-----		Number
<b>Size</b>			
Small	62.4	16.7	109
Medium	82.5	23.7	154
Large	80.4	22.7	56
<b>Percent change in State population, 1996-98<sup>1</sup></b>			
Decrease or increase of less than 1	73.9	16.2	92
Increase of 1 to 3	76.0	21.0	146
Increase of more than 3	75.0	26.6	84
<b>Percent change in State food stamp participants, 1996-98<sup>2</sup></b>			
Decrease of more than 25	79.2	25.5	125
Decrease of 20 to 25	69.9	18.8	56
Decrease or increase of less than 20	73.8	18.0	141
<b>Percent increase in State per capita personal income, 1995-98<sup>3</sup></b>			
More than 10	74.4	22.2	78
9 to 10	82.0	22.4	133
8 to 9	65.9	18.4	41
Less than 8	68.6	19.0	70
<b>Percent State population that is in a metropolitan area<sup>3</sup></b>			
Less than 75	69.7	20.5	122
75 to 85	75.2	18.5	109
85 to 95	80.5	26.8	41
More than 95	84.0	23.8	50
<b>Region</b>			
West	72.8	22.4	103
Midwest	68.7	15.7	67
South	80.0	25.6	101
Northeast	78.4	16.7	51

<sup>1</sup>Based on U.S. Census projections. <sup>2</sup>Based on USDA program data. <sup>3</sup>Based on 1999 U.S. Statistical Abstract. Note: The sample includes only those kitchens operating since 1997 or earlier, based on responses to the question, "When did this kitchen begin operating at this location?"  
Source: National Emergency Food Assistance System Survey (2000), weighted tabulations, and other sources indicated above.

**Table 7.5—Households using food pantries and emergency kitchens, 1995-99**

Providers	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
			<i>Percent</i>		
Food pantries <sup>1,2</sup>	2.96	2.49	2.10	2.52	2.36
Emergency kitchens <sup>2</sup>	0.46	0.38	0.35	0.36	0.40

<sup>1</sup>The relevant question for pantries was: "In the last 12 months did (you/your or other adults in the household) ever get emergency food from a church, a food pantry, or food bank?" The kitchen question is comparable. Note that these questions did not capture frequency or duration of use.

<sup>2</sup>Data do not include the homeless.

Note: Staff of the Economic Research Service tabulated the data for 1995 and 1999. In conducting the tabulations, they used techniques that controlled for changes between years in the survey screening criteria. Data for the intervening years were tabulated by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., but do not correct for changes in the survey criteria. For the 1 year of overlap in the ERS and MPR tabulations, 1995, the corrections for these changes do not materially affect the results.

Source: U.S. Census, Current Population Survey data.

**Table 7.6—Food distributed by America's Second Harvest food banks, 1997-2000**

Food source	1997	1998	1999	2000
			<i>Million pounds</i>	
Donated food	NA	839.0	988.3	NA
USDA commodities	NA	242.4	279.0	NA
Purchased food	NA	97.9	107.1	NA
<b>Total</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>1,179.3</b>	<b>1,374.4</b>	<b>NA</b>

NA = Not available.

Source: America's Second Harvest Administration Reports.

## Changes in the Supply of Food to EFAS Agencies

Additional insight into the changes in operations that may have been taking place in EFAS agencies over the past 3 years is provided by their responses to survey questions about their food supplies. When asked whether, and how, the quantity of food they received had changed in the 1997-2000 period, the EFAS providers gave responses that for the most part are consistent with the service-use data reported in the preceding section. About half the kitchens and pantries indicated that they were receiving more food at the time of the survey than they had received 3 years earlier. This percentage is somewhat higher for food banks and food rescue organizations (table 7.7).

### Analysis by Source of Food

We also examined changes in the sources of food (table 7.8). In particular, respondents were asked whether they had added new sources of supplies and whether they had food sources that had increased the amount of food offered since 1997. Slightly fewer than half the pantries and kitchens indicated that this had happened. The new or added sources most commonly mentioned as having

been added are those that receive the most mention in earlier chapters. They include wholesalers and retailers, food banks, and community donations.

Twenty-six percent of kitchens and 19 percent of pantries indicated that they had dropped a food source or substantially reduced their dependence on a particular supplier. The specific types of food sources mentioned in response to this set of questions were similar to those mentioned as having been added by those organizations who reported new sources.

### Incidence of Declining Food

Related to issues of food supply and adequacy is whether agencies found it necessary to decline free or subsidized food that was offered to them (table 7.9). About 20 percent of kitchens and 14 percent of pantries indicated that they had to decline some food. The percentages for food banks and food rescue organizations were considerably higher—45 and 35, respectively. Lack of storage space was by far the most commonly mentioned reason for having to refuse food. In addition, about 10 percent of each type of provider who reported declining free or subsidized food did so because the food was spoiled or the expiration date on the package had passed.

**Table 7.7—Changes in amounts of food received by EFAS agencies, 1997-2000**

Type of change	Type of EFAS provider				
	Kitchens	Pantries	Food banks	Food rescue organizations	Emergency food organizations
	<i>Percent</i>				
<b>Change in amount of food received</b>					
More	43.3	50.2	77.3	73.8	53.4
Less	8.9	8.4	5.0	9.2	14.6
About the same	43.1	38.2	15.8	16.9	26.2
Missing data	4.7	3.2	1.9	0.0	5.8
<b>Percent increase in food,<sup>1</sup></b>					
Less than 10	17.0	16.3	12.9	10.4	14.5
11 to 25	54.3	47.1	45.8	37.5	49.1
26 to 50	15.6	20.6	24.1	31.3	21.8
More than 50	7.9	10.9	14.1	18.8	9.1
Missing data	5.3	5.0	3.2	2.1	5.5
<b>Percent decrease in food<sup>2</sup></b>					
Less than 10	18.7	16.5	12.5	33.3	33.3
11 to 25	2.7	53.7	62.5	16.7	40.0
26 to 50	22.3	23.8	18.8	50.0	13.3
More than 50	4.4	2.5	6.3	0.0	0.0
Missing data	1.9	3.5	0.0	0.0	13.3
<b>Average net change</b>	<b>+10.1</b>	<b>+13.1</b>	<b>+25.6</b>	<b>+29.9</b>	<b>+12.0</b>
<b>Sample size (number)</b>	<b>1,258</b>	<b>1,154</b>	<b>332</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>103</b>

<sup>1</sup>For agencies reporting increases. <sup>2</sup>For agencies reporting decreases. Note: The sample includes only EFAS agencies operating since 1997 or earlier, based on responses to the question, "When did this agency begin operating at this location?"

Source: National Emergency Food Assistance System Survey (2000), weighted tabulations.

**Table 7.8—Changes in sources of food received by EFAS agencies, 1997-2000**

Type of change	Type of EFAS provider				
	Kitchens	Pantries	Food banks	Food rescue organizations	Emergency food organizations
	<i>Percent</i>				
<b>Have sources been added or have sources significantly increased supplies?</b>					
Yes	47.3	43.2	77.6	92.3	43.7
No	47.0	53.4	19.9	7.7	53.4
Missing data	5.7	3.3	2.5	0.0	2.9
<b>Sources added or increased for agencies adding sources</b>					
Allocation from food banks and/or similar nonprofit organizations	35.1	39.3	28.0	11.7	28.9
Wholesaler or retailer	34.0	25.2	51.2	61.7	20.0
Community donations	30.4	36.9	20.8	10.0	20.0
State or Federal programs	9.2	10.3	23.2	3.3	44.4
Farmers or growers	7.7	3.4	30.4	26.7	20.0
Direct donations from manufacturers	6.4	5.0	29.6	10.0	6.7
Other sources	5.0	7.0	9.2	5.0	11.1
Leftovers from places that serve food	4.8	0.7	3.6	35.0	2.2
Food rescue programs	3.9	1.0	4.4	1.7	4.4
<b>Have sources been dropped or significantly reduced supplies?</b>					
Yes	26.3	19.4	46.3	63.1	21.4
No	68.2	76.8	49.4	35.4	77.7
Missing data	5.5	3.8	4.3	1.5	1.0
<b>Sources dropped or reduced for agencies dropping or reducing sources</b>					
Wholesaler or retailer	32.4	27.3	42.3	39.0	27.3
Allocation from food banks and/or similar nonprofit organizations, such as Second Harvest	31.5	32.4	15.4	2.4	4.5
State or Federal programs	20.4	18.5	16.8	4.9	54.5
Community donations	9.7	13.4	7.4	9.8	4.5
Leftovers from places that serve food	5.1	0.6	0.7	24.4	0.0
Direct donations from manufacturers	4.6	8.2	30.9	17.1	13.6
Food rescue programs	4.4	0.8	0.7	2.4	0.0
Other sources	3.3	9.1	8.1	12.2	27.3
Farmers or growers	3.2	1.7	5.4	4.9	0.0
<b>Sample size (number)</b>	<b>1,257</b>	<b>1,154</b>	<b>322</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>103</b>

Source: National Emergency Food Assistance System Survey (2000), weighted tabulations.

**Table 7.9—Incidence of EFAS agencies that declined free or subsidized food**

Foods declined and reasons	Type of EFAS provider				
	Kitchens	Pantries	Food banks	Food rescue organizations	Emergency food organizations
	<i>Percent</i>				
<b>Did agency ever decline free or subsidized foods in past 12 months?</b>					
Yes	20.5	14.5	44.6	35.2	11.0
No	77.8	83.8	53.9	64.8	88.0
Missing data	1.6	1.6	1.5	0.0	0.9
<b>Types of food declined</b>					
Fresh fruit and vegetables	31.7	36.3	40.9	54.8	38.5
Meat, poultry, fish	25.3	27.4	14.2	6.5	30.8
Frozen, canned, dried fruits and vegetables	19.2	23.0	33.5	19.4	46.2
Bread products	15.2	13.1	13.6	16.1	0.0
Complete meals, entrees <sup>1</sup>	12.0	5.7	5.1	6.5	7.7
Dairy products	8.0	9.4	15.3	6.5	23.1
Dry/canned beans, eggs, nuts	7.1	3.1	4.0	6.5	0.0
Cereal, pasta, etc. <sup>2</sup>	6.7	4.2	5.1	3.2	7.7
Desserts	3.2	2.0	10.2	9.7	0.0
Spices and condiments	1.2	1.6	5.7	0.0	0.0
Snack foods	0.4	1.6	13.6	9.7	0.0
Nonjuice beverages	0.3	0.8	8.0	3.2	0.0
Fats and oils	0.2	0.8	1.7	0.0	0.0
Baby food and nutritional supplements	0.0	0.9	2.8	0.0	0.0
<b>Reasons for declining food</b>					
Not enough storage space	41.7	41.6	41.5	32.3	61.5
Food was spoiled or had expired dates	10.5	11.0	10.8	9.7	0.0
Did not need additional food	10.2	5.7	9.7	9.7	0.0
Did not have facilities to process, prepare, or store food	8.2	11.6	5.1	9.7	7.7
No transportation available to pick up food	5.3	7.8	9.1	25.8	0.0
Did not use that type of food	4.2	1.6	4.0	6.5	0.0
Slow demand for this food	3.8	2.4	8.0	9.7	0.0
No refrigerated transportation available	2.8	9.1	5.7	6.5	23.1
Insufficient staff or volunteer labor to obtain or process food	2.0	1.6	1.7	9.7	7.7
Did not have sufficient materials to package food	1.7	0.0	0.6	3.2	0.0
Could not pay for food	0.2	0.4	5.1	3.2	0.0
Other	17.6	15.0	15.3	6.5	38.5
<b>Sample size (number)</b>	<b>1,517</b>	<b>1,617</b>	<b>395</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>117</b>

<sup>1</sup>Includes packaged meals drawing on multiple food groups, such as canned meat and vegetable products or frozen lasagna dinners.

<sup>2</sup>Includes nonbread grain products, such as rice, barley, and noodles.

Source: National Emergency Food Assistance System Survey (2000).

## Possible Indicators of Unmet Needs

The previous section examined limitations in food supply as a possible indication of unmet need. Here we examine some more direct indicators.

### Turning Away People or Client Agencies Due to Lack of Food

Approximately 25 percent of the emergency kitchens reported turning away people in the preceding 12 months (table 7.10 and fig. 7.5). By far the most common reasons for doing so involved substance abuse by clients or other behavioral issues.

Approximately 17 percent of kitchens that had turned people away (about 4 percent of all kitchens) reported doing so for lack of food. About half of these kitchens reported having to do so more than 9 weeks of the year.

About a third of pantries reported turning away clients who requested food. The most common reasons were that clients were not eligible or came at the wrong time. Only 5 percent said that the refusal was directly due to lack of food.

The survey respondents were also asked about changes in the frequency of turning away clients due to lack of food over the past 3 years. Their answers suggest no

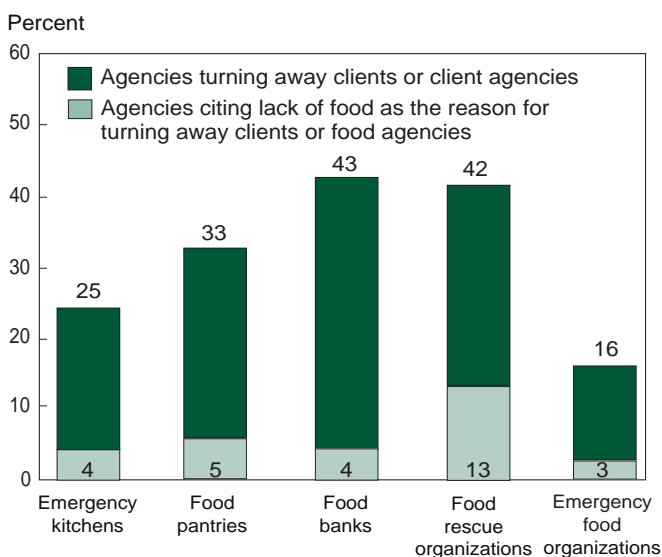
substantial change in unmet need as measured by this dimension. For instance, the majority of kitchens (69 percent) said they never turned away people for lack of food, while most of the rest indicated that the percentage had stayed about the same over the 3-year period. Only 2 percent indicated they were turning away more clients due to a lack of food, whereas 5 percent indicated that they were turning away fewer for this reason. Similar results are seen for pantries. This finding is particularly interesting in light of the fact that about half of pantries and kitchens and about three-fourths of food banks and food rescue organizations reported an increase in the use of their services. (The possibility that EFAS providers may respond to a lack of food by reducing the amount of food distributed to clients will be discussed in the next subsection.)

### Limiting Food Distribution

A less drastic response to being short of food may be to limit the distribution of certain types of food rather than to turn away clients altogether. Approximately 21 percent of emergency kitchens and 39 percent of food pantries reported doing so in the previous 12 months (table 7.11). Among those limiting distribution, about half believed it had caused problems in meeting client needs. The commonly reported reasons for having to limit foods include running out of the foods, not receiving adequate supplies from regular food sources, and not having sufficient funds to purchase the foods.

The types of foods that had to be limited most often were similar to those that EFAS agencies reported needing more of. In particular, meats, poultry, and fish, along with fresh fruits and vegetables, were often mentioned.

Figure 7.5  
Incidence of EFAS agencies turning away clients or client agencies



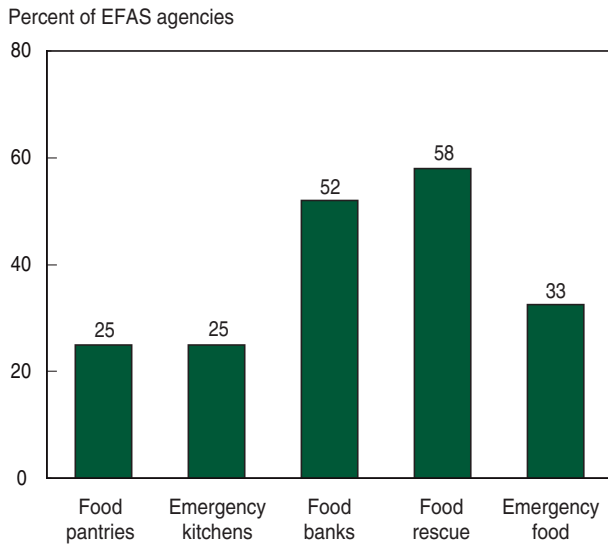
Source: National Emergency Food Assistance System Survey (2000), weighted tabulations.

### Agency Perceptions of Unmet Needs

Survey respondents were also asked directly whether they believed there were additional food-related services they were unable to fill. Approximately one-quarter of both kitchens and pantries believed that there are unmet needs for their services (table 7.12 and fig. 7.6). The proportions of food banks and food rescue organizations reporting unmet needs are greater—around 55 percent. This difference may reflect the fact that food banks and food rescue organizations supply food to substantial numbers of kitchens and pantries, so that even if there are only a few kitchens and pantries with unmet needs in a food bank's service area, the bank may view itself as facing unmet needs. It is also possible that operators of the food bank and food rescue organizations have a broader perspective than local providers of areas of possible need.

Figure 7.6

### Unmet need perceived by EFAS agencies



Source: National Emergency Food Assistance System Survey (2000), weighted tabulations.

Among agencies reporting unmet needs, most identified a need both to provide more services to existing clients and to serve additional clients. Additional services mentioned included extending hours of operation and increasing the amount and variety of foods. One-fifth of kitchens and pantries also wanted to provide nutrition education to their clients. Other target groups that the agencies would like to serve are people outside their service areas (in the case of all the providers) and additional agencies (in the case of food banks and food rescue organizations).

### Conclusions

A somewhat complicated picture of unmet needs emerges from these tabulations. It appears that many—perhaps the majority of—agencies perceive themselves as keeping up adequately with the need for their services. Only about 25 percent of kitchens and 33 percent of pantries reported turning people away, and the reasons involved client behavior more than lack of food. Similarly, most of the direct-provider agencies reported they had not had to limit the distribution of food due to lack of supplies.

Additional, and persuasive, evidence that client needs are being met reasonably well at most kitchens and pantries is that a substantial majority of these providers, when asked directly, said that they did not perceive unfilled needs for their services. (Further support for this conclusion will be provided in the next section, when we see that most agencies believe they could respond effectively to at least a modest increase in need.)

However, the numbers summarized above also suggest that—while it may not be typical—there probably are significant unmet needs for the EFAS, considering that some agencies have had to turn away clients and some have had to limit food distribution. Further, more than half of food banks and food rescue organizations responded in the affirmative to the question on unmet needs.

**Table 7.10—Incidence of EFAS agencies turning away clients or client agencies**

Variables surveyed	Type of EFAS provider				
	Kitchens	Pantries	Food banks	Food rescue organizations	Emergency food organizations
	<i>Percent</i>				
<b>During past 12 months, have turned away people or agencies that requested food</b>	25.2	33.1	42.8	42.0	16.2
<b>Reasons for turning people or agencies away<sup>1</sup></b>					
Lacked food to serve clients	16.5	16.0	8.3	29.7	21.1
Drug or alcohol problem or behavior problem	70.5	9.4	NA	NA	NA
Came at wrong time or came too often	5.2	27.1	NA	NA	NA
Client lacked proper identification	0.3	5.0	NA	NA	NA
Client/agency ineligible or could not prove eligibility	2.4	41.4	69.2	35.1	68.4
Client/agency unable to afford fees	0.8	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.0
Not located in service area	NA	6.6	4.7	2.7	0.0
Agency did not serve target population	NA	NA	1.2	2.7	0.0
Not able to provide transportation	NA	NA	0.0	2.7	0.0
Lack of processing/storage facilities	NA	NA	6.5	8.1	0.0
Agency was selling food	NA	NA	3.0	8.1	0.0
Agency was not a nonprofit	NA	NA	3.6	2.7	0.0
Duplication within service area	NA	NA	4.1	5.4	15.8
Agency did not pay bills	NA	NA	1.8	0.0	0.0
Agency placed conditions on distribution	NA	NA	1.2	0.0	0.0
Bad record keeping	NA	NA	1.8	0.0	0.0
Agency did not meet food safety and handling guidelines	NA	NA	0.6	8.1	0.0
Other	7.9	7.3	8.3	10.8	5.3
<b>Number of weeks turned away people in past 12 months for lack of food<sup>2</sup></b>					
Less than 5	37.2	52.9	69.2	18.2	75.0
5 to 9	17.0	18.1	0.0	18.2	0.0
10 to 24	32.4	17.4	7.7	18.2	25.0
25 to 40	1.4	4.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
More than 40	10.7	5.0	7.7	45.5	0.0
Missing data	1.3	2.6	15.2	0.0	0.0
<b>Compared with 3 years ago, how often are EFAS agencies turning away clients due to lack of food?<sup>3</sup></b>					
More often	2.2	4.3	8.4	7.7	2.9
Less often	5.1	9.4	5.9	4.6	4.9
About the same	21.0	29.4	32.3	35.4	35.9
Never turn away clients for lack of food	69.5	54.7	51.6	50.8	52.4
Missing data	2.3	2.2	1.8	1.5	3.9
<b>Sample size (number)</b>	<b>1,517</b>	<b>1,617</b>	<b>395</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>117</b>

<sup>1</sup>Includes only EFAS agencies that turned away people or agencies seeking food during the past 12 months.

<sup>2</sup>Includes only EFAS agencies that turned away people or agencies seeking food during the past 12 months due to lack of food.

<sup>3</sup>Includes only EFAS agencies operating since 1997 or earlier, based on responses to the question, "When did this agency begin operating at this location?"

NA = Not applicable

Source: National Emergency Food Assistance System Survey (2000), weighted tabulations.



**Table 7.11—Incidence of EFAS agencies limiting distribution of food in past 12 months**

Variables surveyed	Type of EFAS provider				
	Kitchens	Pantries	Food banks	Food rescue organizations	Emergency food organizations
	<i>Percent</i>				
<b>Did agency limit distribution of certain kinds of foods in past 12 months?</b>					
Yes	21.1	38.5	53.9	31.8	32.5
No	77.1	60.2	45.1	67.0	66.7
Missing	1.7	1.3	1.0	1.1	0.9
<b>Was that a problem in meeting client needs?</b>					
Yes	56.9	59.4	81.2	46.4	60.5
No	42.2	39.5	18.8	50.0	39.5
Missing data	0.9	1.1	0.0	3.6	0.0
<b>Types of food limited for agencies limiting certain types</b>					
Meat, poultry, fish	59.9	59.0	72.8	30.8	65.2
Fresh fruit and vegetables	32.5	21.8	23.7	38.5	17.4
Frozen, canned, dried fruits and vegetables	24.6	33.5	42.2	7.7	43.5
Dairy products	21.1	25.7	20.8	30.8	34.8
Cereal, pasta, etc. <sup>1</sup>	18.8	26.7	23.1	0.0	13.0
Dry/canned beans, eggs, nuts	16.2	17.0	27.7	0.0	21.7
Bread products	8.5	7.3	4.6	15.4	17.4
Fats and oils	8.0	7.1	7.5	0.0	4.3
Snack foods	7.0	2.9	6.9	0.0	4.3
Complete meals, entrees <sup>2</sup>	5.6	4.9	9.8	7.7	4.3
Desserts	5.6	2.6	5.2	0.0	0.0
Baby food and nutritional supplements	5.3	6.9	10.4	0.0	0.0
Nonjuice beverages	5.2	3.2	11.0	0.0	4.3
Spices and condiments	4.6	4.3	5.2	0.0	0.0
<b>Reasons for limiting food distribution</b>					
Ran out of these foods	33.4	39.3	38.7	38.5	26.1
Did not receive these food types in sufficient quantity from TEFAP or other USDA distributions	22.0	22.4	32.9	15.4	73.9
Received little or none of this type of food from usual suppliers	30.3	27.6	30.1	30.8	30.4
Could not afford to purchase these types of food from wholesale/retail supplier	18.1	13.3	6.4	0.0	13.0
Other	18.2	22.1	13.3	23.1	26.1
Missing data	3.0	1.9	5.2	7.7	0.0
<b>Sample size (number)</b>	<b>1,517</b>	<b>1,617</b>	<b>395</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>117</b>

<sup>1</sup>Includes nonbread grain products, such as rice, barley, and noodles.

<sup>2</sup>Includes packaged meals drawing on multiple food groups, such as canned meat and vegetable products or frozen lasagna dinners.

Source: National Emergency Food Assistance System Survey (2000), weighted tabulations.

**Table 7.12—Agency perceptions of unmet needs for their services**

Need-related variables	Type of EFAS provider				
	Kitchens	Pantries	Food banks	Food rescue organizations	Emergency food organizations
	<i>Percent</i>				
<b>Are there current additional needs for food-related services EFAS agencies are not able to fill?</b>					
Yes	25.1	25.4	52.4	58.0	32.5
No	70.5	71.6	45.1	40.9	66.7
Missing data	4.4	3.0	2.5	1.1	0.9
<b>Perceived additional needs<sup>1</sup></b>					
More services to current clients	90.6	86.1	91.8	80.4	81.6
Services to new clients	82.0	80.1	87.4	84.3	92.1
<b>Additional services mentioned<sup>2</sup></b>					
Serve more meals each week	21.2	NA	NA	NA	NA
Provide nutrition education	18.9	20.3	1.1	7.3	6.5
Provide increased amount of food	14.7	24.7	35.3	48.8	45.2
Provide increased variety of food	12.7	23.4	28.9	31.7	41.9
Extend hours of operation	12.0	9.8	10.0	7.3	16.1
Provide food resource management	4.5	6.5	14.2	14.6	3.2
Other	63.6	59.6	67.9	46.3	58.1
<b>Additional groups of clients mentioned<sup>3</sup></b>					
Clients outside of service area	15.0	12.0	19.3	27.9	11.4
People not meeting income guidelines	6.8	8.6	NA	NA	NA
People without referrals	6.5	9.6	NA	NA	NA
Non-U.S. citizens	5.7	2.9	NA	NA	NA
Households without children	5.3	3.9	NA	NA	NA
More pantries	NA	NA	32.0	34.9	42.9
More shelters	NA	NA	17.1	34.9	22.9
More emergency kitchens	NA	NA	16.6	25.6	11.4
Other	74.3	70.8	56.9	46.5	54.3
<b>Sample size (number)</b>	<b>1,517</b>	<b>1,617</b>	<b>395</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>117</b>

<sup>1</sup>Among those indicating additional needs.

<sup>2</sup>Among those needing additional services for current clients.

<sup>3</sup>Among those needing services for new clients.

Source: National Emergency Food Assistance System Survey (2000), weighted tabulations.

## Capacity To Handle Future Changes in Demand

A further important issue is whether the EFAS has the resources to respond effectively to increased needs for its services if they arise. The current structure and size of the emergency food network reflects a long period of economic prosperity in the United States, one in which poverty rates have decreased significantly. An end to this prosperity, with the country in a recession and more people once again becoming impoverished, would likely increase the need for EFAS services—perhaps substantially. Would the current system be able to meet that need?

Most providers believe they could cope with an increased demand for their services over the next year (table 7.13 and fig. 7.7). Ninety percent of kitchens and 87 percent of pantries say that they could respond successfully to at least a 5-percent increase in demand, and roughly 69 percent of kitchens and 61 percent of pantries believe that they could handle at least a 10-percent increase. When respondents were asked about a 20-percent increase, the percentage responding affirmatively decreased substantially; only about a third thought they could handle that volume.<sup>65</sup>

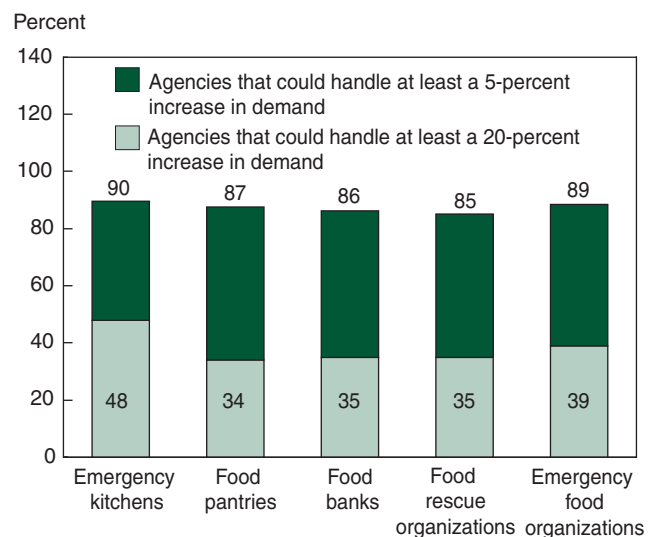
Overall, these data seem to indicate some capacity in the system to handle increased need, should it arise. The data also suggest that most EFAS providers believe that they are meeting the current needs for their services (since a belief that additional demand could be accommodated presumably reflects a perception that current demand is being adequately met). As

<sup>65</sup>A somewhat puzzling question is why the percentages of kitchens and pantries that said they could handle a 5-percent increase in demand is greater than the percentages (shown in table 7.12) that said that they did not face unmet needs. For instance, 89 percent of kitchens said that they could handle a 5-percent increase in demand, whereas only 71 percent said that they did not have unmet needs. This means that some kitchens must have given the seemingly paradoxical set of answers that they had unmet needs but nevertheless they could handle an increase in demand for their services. How could this be? While we cannot know exactly what was in respondents' minds when they answered the two lines of questioning, one conjecture is the following: it may be that many of the respondents who answered positively to the questions about unmet needs were thinking broadly of additional services they could provide and additional client groups that they could serve; whereas in answering the question about whether they could respond to a 5-percent increase in demand, they may have been thinking more narrowly of a 5-percent increase in their current clientele for the services they are currently providing.

discussed in the previous section, EFAS providers appear to have coped reasonably well with the increase in demand for food between 1997 and 2000, providing additional evidence of their ability to deal with future increases in food demand. However, it is also important to note that most respondents thought they could accommodate only a *limited* increase in demand—less than 20 percent. Thus, additional support for the system might be required in the context of a very large increase in need. Furthermore, we do not know exactly how respondents interpreted the concept of responding to increased demand. In particular, we do not know the extent to which they had in mind stretching existing food supplies, as compared with tapping additional resources to maintain their current levels of service.

During the questioning sequence in the interviews, once a maximum potential increase in services had been determined, respondents were asked what constraints there would be on increasing their services beyond that point. As shown in table 7.13, a broad range of answers was received, including lack of volunteers and funding and difficulty obtaining food supplies. The most common response, however, was that the respondent thought his or her agency would reach “maximum capacity.” Unfortunately, this response is somewhat difficult to interpret with the available data. In particular, it is not clear whether this response (1) was given

Figure 7.7  
EFAS agency perceptions of capacity to handle increased demand



Source: National Emergency Food Assistance System Survey (2000), weighted tabulations.

as a substitute for one of the more specific reasons, (2) had to do with physical plant, or (3) reflected a general sense that the EFAS staff could not easily conceptualize how they would deal with the requirements of significant expansion.

Interestingly, the one type of agency that did not focus primarily on this “maximum capacity” response was food rescue organizations. Their response patterns suggest quite clearly that lack of volunteers and available foods were key obstacles to growth for them.

**Table 7.13—Agency perceptions of capacity to handle increased demand**

Increased-demand variables	Type of EFAS provider				
	Kitchens	Pantries	Food banks	Food rescue organizations	Emergency food organizations
	<i>Percent</i>				
<b>Agencies that could handle increase in demand of at least 5 percent</b>	89.5	87.1	86.1	85.2	88.9
<b>Size of increase agencies could handle<sup>1</sup></b>					
5 to 9 percent	17.6	23.3	23.2	24.0	20.2
10 to 19 percent	30.5	31.8	32.9	32.0	30.8
20 to 29 percent	12.0	13.3	15.0	21.3	11.5
30 or more percent	34.3	25.3	25.6	20.0	32.7
Missing data	5.6	6.4	3.2	2.7	4.8
<b>Constraints on handling greater demand<sup>2</sup></b>					
Not enough paid staff	10.9	4.8	20.0	8.3	16.7
Not enough volunteers	15.3	18.2	18.0	41.7	8.3
Not enough funding	19.7	24.2	14.0	8.3	25.0
At maximum capacity	53.5	39.0	66.0	41.7	50.0
Cannot obtain adequate food supply	13.0	28.9	16.0	50.0	16.7
Other	14.4	11.9	16.0	33.3	33.3
<b>Sample size (number)</b>	<b>1,517</b>	<b>1,617</b>	<b>395</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>117</b>

<sup>1</sup>Among those that could handle a 5-percent increase in demand.

<sup>2</sup>Among those that could not handle a 5-percent increase in demand.

Source: National Emergency Food Assistance System Survey (2000), weighted tabulation.