



8.1 Feeding the Hungry — June 2006

Since Last Report

As food stamp participation in Western New York increases, the demand for food assistance also remains strong. Crisis assistance through visits to soup kitchens and shelters comprised the majority of non-governmental food support activity in the region from 2001 through 2004, while visits to food pantries held steady during this period.

About the Indicator

The Food Bank of Western New York distributes food and grocery items to over five hundred agencies located throughout Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie and Niagara Counties. FoodLink services soup kitchens, shelters and emergency food pantries in Allegany, Genesee, Orleans and Wyoming Counties. Both organizations distribute food to non-emergency service programs such as after-school programs, camps and adult homes. The U.S. Department of Agriculture administers the Food Stamp Program under which eligible participants are issued monthly benefits that can be used to buy food at retail grocery stores. Eligibility and benefit levels are based on income, household size and other factors. The New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance maintains statistics on New York State's Food Stamp Program.

Regional Performance

Food stamp participation in Western New York increased 26% between 2000 and 2004, from 70 food stamp cases per 1,000 population to 88 cases per 1,000.

This regionwide increase reverses a decreased reliance on food stamps in the region between 1998 to 2000, when participation fell from 80 cases per 1,000 population to 70 cases per 1,000.

As food stamp participation increased, so too has the region's demand for non-governmental food support. This suggests that food stamps do not completely meet the food needs of program participants or that not all of those who are eligible for food stamps actually participate in this governmental program. Visits to soup kitchens rose by 378,000 visits, or 42%, from 2001 to 2004. At the same time, demand for food assistance at shelters increased 23%, from 83,000 visits in 2001 to 102,000 visits in 2004. The demand for supplemental food at the region's food pantries remained stable from 2001 to 2004, running at about 65,000 visits annually.

Due to an aggressive food donation and collection campaign—which included various philanthropic organizations, nonprofit groups and corporate sponsors—pounds of food donated to FoodLink and the Food Bank of WNY topped the 12 million mark in 2004, an increase of 23% from 2000. Monetary donations to the two programs exceeded \$2 million by 2004, an inflation-adjusted increase of 65% over the same period.

Closer Look

Variation by county in food stamp participation is more closely associated with poverty than urban-rural location. The counties with the highest poverty rates—Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua and Erie—also have the highest levels of food stamp participants per 1,000 population. This positive correlation suggests that many of those who are eligible for food stamps are taking advantage of them. At the national level, only 54% of those eligible for food stamps in 2002 participated in the program.

Although all eight counties experienced an increase in food stamp cases between 2000 and 2004, this growth greatly varied by county. Genesee County experienced a 56% increase in the number of participants per 1,000 compared to an increase of 20% in Erie County.

The increase in Food Stamp Program participation rates across Western New York mirrors nationwide trends which reflect unemployment levels, changes in the food stamp program's eligibility rules, eligibility awareness campaigns and the transition to Electronic Benefit Transfer cards, which are designed to remove the stigma associated with the paper food coupons these cards replace.

Progress Toward Goals

The region continues to lack an accurate, regional-level system for tracking specific food needs and services.

The region continues to lack a fully coordinated regional food service system for special populations such as youth and seniors.

By 2006, the region should gather better data on the percentage of Western New Yorkers who are eligible for food stamps who actually participate in the food stamp program, in an effort to maximize local participation in this federally-funded program. To the extent this is accomplished, local food support organizations will be relieved of having to provide assistance that might duplicate assistance offered at the federal level. The region as a whole will benefit, too, through the increased influx of federal dollars corresponding with higher participation rates.

Data Sources and Notes

Food Stamp Program data are provided by the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA). The OTDA posts monthly Food Stamp Program reports at <http://www.otda.state.ny.us/bdma>.

Food stamp participation rates per 1,000 population were calculated for each county using population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau's Population Estimate Program accessed at <http://www.census.gov/popest/archives/2000s/>, for the years 2001-2004. For 1998 and 1999, intercensal estimates were used, available at http://www.census.gov/popest/archives/2000s/vintage_2001/CO-EST2001-12/CO-EST2001-12.html. Population data for 2000 reflect figures drawn from the 2000 Census.

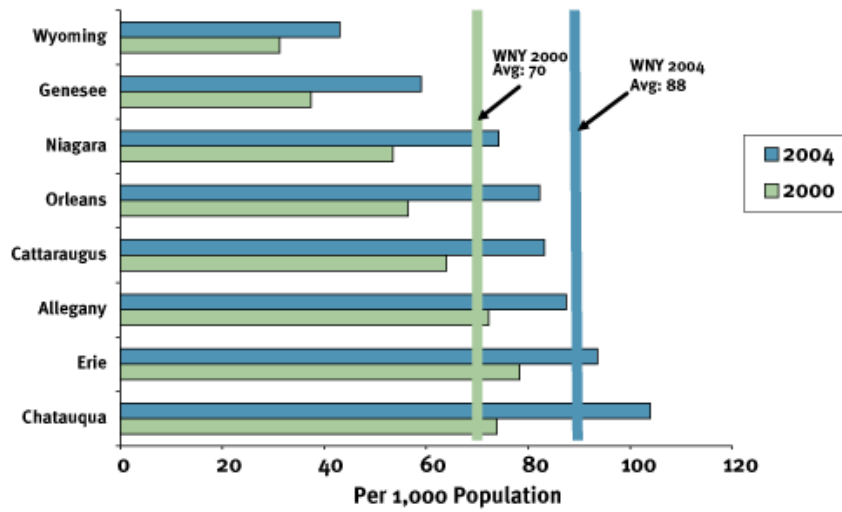
The Food Bank of Western New York and FoodLink provide countywide food assistance data.

The Nutrition Consortium of New York State, Inc., a nonprofit hunger organization, provides information and data on hunger and related assistance programs, available online at <http://www.hungernys.org/index.html>.

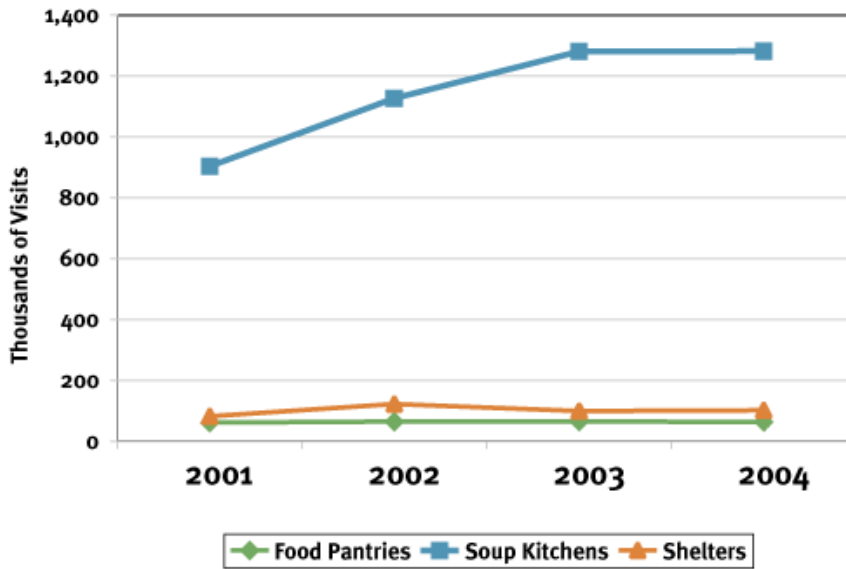
Related Indicators

- 1.5: Cost of Living**
- 4.1: Foundations for School**
- 8.4: Elder Care**
- 9.1: Distribution of Poverty**

Food Stamp Participation in WNY, 2000 and 2004



Visits to Food Bank Programs, 2001-2004



Food Stamp Participation and Poverty, WNY

County	2004 Food Stamp Cases Per 1,000	Poverty Rate, 2000
Wyoming	43	8%
Genesee	59	8%
Niagara	74	11%
Orleans	82	11%
Cattaraugus	83	14%
Allegany	87	16%
Erie	94	12%
Chatauqua	104	14%

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