Hunger in the Ozarks

Executive Summary
August 2014

According to Hunger in America 2014, Ozarks Food Harvest and its partner agencies continue to serve thousands of clients. This study provides much needed data to support the stories we've been hearing over the past year. The economy has experienced an unusually slow recovery since the deep recession, and many families still struggle to afford food. The nation has experienced higher-than-average inflation and the rising cost of food. While unemployment rates have declined, many workers at the bottom of the labor market have not seen a real increase in wages for many years.

Hunger in America 2014 study revealed Ozarks Food Harvest and its network of member pantries are now serving more than 260,000 unduplicated individuals annually. This is a 69 percent increase since the Hunger in America 2010 study. And despite the fact the last study interviewed clients at the height of the recession in 2009.

Who is hungry in the Ozarks?
The average Ozarks Food Harvest client may not be who you’d expect...

He or she is most likely white, age 30-49, with 2-3 members in their family. These parents have high school diplomas and rent or lease a home. Their annual household income is less than $10,000, making them food insecure each month. They have medical bills to pay, and make the hard choice between paying for food or medical care. Sometimes, that choice is between food and utilities.

Their child is likely age 6-17 years old and participates in the NSLP (National School Lunch Program), which allows them to receive free meals at school. This means the family has to provide an extra 5-10 meals each week during the summer when school is not in session.

These parents would like more fresh fruits and vegetables. They are forced to purchase inexpensive, unhealthy food to make ends meet. Most of all, they expend a great deal of effort to piece together solutions that reduce the likelihood of hunger in their household.
### Selected demographic characteristics of Ozarks Food Harvest clients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Characteristics</th>
<th>All Food Programs Count*</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-5 years</td>
<td>17,500</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-17 years</td>
<td>55,400</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-29 years</td>
<td>31,900</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-49 years</td>
<td>71,100</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59 years</td>
<td>31,200</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-64 years</td>
<td>9,600</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 years or older</td>
<td>31,300</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>248,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>228,700</td>
<td>87.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>6,900</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic, Latino</td>
<td>11,800</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some other race</td>
<td>12,800</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>260,200</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education level of adult clients</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school (HS)</td>
<td>54,200</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level of adult clients</td>
<td>61,700</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General equivalency diploma or GED</td>
<td>21,200</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>License, certificate, or degree beyond HS</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college or two-year degree</td>
<td>29,800</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year college degree or higher</td>
<td>2,600</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>183,500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Source: Hunger in America 2014 Client Survey
*Client counts are less than 261,300 due to non-reporting clients
Ozarks Food Harvest Client Demographics

- **Unduplicated Number of Clients** accessing food from the charitable food assistance network:
  - 27,700 clients served in a typical week (10,800 households)
  - **261,300 served annually** or 94,500 households
  - OFH clients are reached 1,824,600 times annually

- **Ethnicity:** 88 percent of clients identify themselves as white, 3 percent as black or African American, and 5 percent as Hispanic or Latino.

- **Age:** Among all clients, 29 percent are children under age 18, and 16 percent are seniors age 60 and older.

- **Education:**
  - An estimated 70 percent of all clients have attained a high school degree, GED or greater
  - 25 percent of all clients have post-high school education (including license, certification, some college, a two-year degree or a four-year degree).

- **Employment:** An estimated 39 percent of client households have a household member who had worked for pay in the last 12 months.
  - 76 percent of households, the most-employed person is currently out of work.
    - In these households where the most-employed person is not actively seeking work, 59 percent are disabled, in poor health, or act as a caretaker for another. 32 percent are retired.
  - **27 percent report someone in their household has served in the US Armed Forces or as a member of the Military Reserve or National Guard.** This includes those currently serving or previously served.

- **Income & Poverty:**
  - 83 percent of clients have annual household incomes of <$20,000
  - 67 percent of client households have incomes that fall at or below the federal poverty level.
    - In 2013, annual cash income at or below
      - $11,490 for family of one
      - $15,510 for family of two
      - $19,530 for family of three
      - $23,550 for family of four

- **Housing:** An estimated 96 percent of households reside in non-temporary housing, such as a house or apartment. **Only 4 percent reside in temporary housing, such as a shelter or mission, a hotel, or on the street.**
  - 62 percent of OFH clients rent or lease their home.
  - 23 percent or respondents have lived in at least two places in last 12 months.
  - 12 percent of respondents have experienced a foreclosure or eviction in the past five years.
  - 45 percent of households chose between paying for food and paying their rent or mortgage at least once in the past 12 months.

- **Health:** An estimated 32 percent of households report at least one member with diabetes; 58 percent of households report at least one member with high blood pressure. These chronic diseases, and subsequent medical bills, are further preventing these families from improving their situation and becoming food secure.
  - **62 percent of households chose between paying for food and paying for medicine or medical care at least once in the past 12 months.**
  - 61 percent of client households have medical bills to pay.
  - 22 percent of client households have no members with health insurance of any kind.
• **SNAP Participation:** The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as Food Stamps) is the largest nutrition assistance program. Participating low-income households receive monthly benefit allotments in the form of electronic debit cards (also known as EBT, or electronic benefit transfer).
  - An estimated 53 percent of client households currently receive SNAP benefits.
  - An estimated 19 percent of client households neither currently receive SNAP nor have ever applied for SNAP benefits.

• **Client Coping Strategies & Tradeoffs:** Many clients are forced to engage in coping strategies to make ends meet. For 68 percent of clients, accessing charitable food assistance on a regular basis is one of those strategies.
  - **67 percent of households were forced to choose between paying for food and utilities in the past year.**
  - 65 percent of households chose between paying for food and transportation.
  - An estimated 79 percent of households reported using multiple strategies for getting enough food in the past 12 months, including eating food past its expiration date, growing food in a garden, pawning or selling personal property, and watering down food or drinks.
  - **84 percent of clients report ‘purchasing inexpensive, unhealthy food’**
  - 67 percent of clients report ‘purchasing discounted food in dented or damaged packages’ from a retailer to make their food budget stretch further.

### Ozarks Food Harvest’s Member Agencies

• **Agency Staff:** An estimated 77 percent of the food bank’s partner agencies reported employing paid staff.
  - The median number of paid full-time-equivalent staff (assuming a 40-hour work week) was 4.

• **Program Volunteers:** A median of 11 volunteers provided a median of 76 volunteer hours each week.

• **Reducing Services:** Some member agencies experience economic conditions and other circumstances that impact their ability to provide food and services.
  - **20 percent or member agencies reported they had to cut back on services in the past 12 months**
  - An estimated 8 percent reduced hours of operation, 6 percent laid off staff, and 14 percent limited the geographic area served.

• **The Food Bank:** 82 percent report that no longer receiving food from OFH would have a major effect.

### Ozarks Food Harvest’s Follow-Up

Client survey data collection occurred during summer 2013. At that time, clients reported their top three desired products not currently received. The most requested item was fresh fruits and vegetables, followed by protein items like meats and dairy products. The Food Bank had heard these requests were being made and have **DOUBLED the amount of fresh fruits and vegetables and dairy distributed this past year!!** Meat/fish/poultry has increased by 37% and non-meat protein increased by 233%. This has provided wholesome meals for 94,500 families across the Ozarks, in addition to allowing them to lead healthy lifestyles with less medical problems.

### About Hunger in America (HIA)

Hunger in America 2014 is Feeding America’s sixth extensive study of hunger, which has been conducted quadrennially since 1993. Utilizing agency and client surveys, the study captures detailed information about who is in need of emergency food assistance and their circumstances. It provides an invaluable resource for charitable feeding organizations to help develop programs that best support people in need. The results also inform advocacy work and the public policy discourse so that federal nutrition programs can better serve families facing hunger. Hunger in America 2014 study placed greater focus on nutrition programs and practices, as well as elevated accuracy of data.