

# **HUNGRY IN MONTANA:**

## **Factors Contributing to Emergency Food Needs**

**2004 Client Hunger Survey**



**Report by  
The Food Policy Council  
Montana Food Bank Network**



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## I.

## Executive Summary

Hunger and lack of Food Security are symptoms of a root cause, namely poverty and lack of income to buy adequate food. Most low-income people, including those that are employed, have to make a choice between buying food or paying the rent, heating bill, child care or medications. Our state has the sixth lowest per capita income and has consistently ranked among the bottom 12 states for food insecurity and hunger. Most food insecure households avoid hunger (the uneasy or painful sensation caused by the lack of food) by relying on public and private food programs.

Good nutrition is a critical component in human development and plays a significant role in the physical, psychological, and cognitive development of children from birth to 18 years of age. Being deprived of good nutrition limits a child's ability to grow and lead a long-lasting life. Yet children are the largest single group impacted by hunger and poor nutrition.

Increasingly, communities have turned to food banks to solve the problem of inadequate food for families. There is a general belief that as long as communities instigate charity and support food banks and pantries, they have done their share to reduce food insecurity. However, building more and bigger food banks is not the answer, and in fact denies facing the real issue – poverty and its resulting lack of long-term food security. Yet food banks and pantries in Montana have seen a rapid surge in the demand for food in all areas of the state and from all sections of the population, young, old, employed and disabled. Thus, until long term solutions can be adequately achieved, food banks and pantries remain vital to reduce the immediate need.

**Food Security:** *is the ability to access food in a consistent and socially acceptable manner and the ability to meet the family's nutrition needs. A person who is food secure has the financial means to buy food, to grow food or has food resources through long-term food assistance programs and does not have to rely on emergency food.*

In 2003 the poverty rate in Montana rose to 14.2 percent, an increase of 7.6 percent since 2000. The national poverty rate was 12.5 percent in 2003. The poverty rate for children under 18 in Montana rose to 17.5 percent in 2003, an increase of 2.2 percent since 2000. As poverty in the state increased, there was a rapid increase in the need for food assistance in Montana. About 47 thousand families in Montana are food insecure or hungry. The rate of food insecurity

in Montana went from 11.2 percent in 1996-98 to 12.8 percent in 2000-2002, while the national rate for food insecurity in this period was 10.8 percent.

Although Montana ranks well for low unemployment, Montana has the 4<sup>th</sup> highest rate of people holding 2 jobs and ranks 50<sup>th</sup> in the nation for median family income.<sup>1</sup>

Recent indicators have demonstrated the growing need for Food Assistance in the state:

- There was a 195 percent increase in pounds of food provided through the Montana Food Bank Network's 144 agencies between 2000 and 2003. There was also a 132 percent increase in the meals served at feeding sites in the state between 2000 and 2003.
- Looking at public food programs, the State Food Stamp Office reports that food stamp outreach activities have been initiated and there was a 30 percent increase in participation in the Food Stamp Program between 2000 and 2004. The most recent analysis of Montana's Food Stamp participation rate show that 50 percent of those estimated to be eligible were participating in 2002<sup>2</sup>. The state WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children) serves approximately 66.8 percent of the eligible women, infants & children. Of the 150,890 children enrolled in the School Nutrition Programs, 51,774 are eligible for free or reduced price meals. Although many new Summer Food Programs have been started for school children, the need has increased significantly.
- More than 20,000 seniors are considered low-income. Yet funding for commodity food programs for seniors has been frozen at providing for 6,728 seniors. Some seniors had to be dropped off the program.

Most food insecure households avoid hunger by limiting the types of food they buy. A recent BRFSS (Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey) study in Montana found that cost and access to fresh fruits and vegetables is a major barrier for low-income people. At the same time, obesity rates have increased in Montana from 9 percent in 1990 to 19 percent in 2001. The human cost of obesity is highest among

<sup>1</sup>Department of Labor & Industry. <http://www.ourfactsyourfuture.org/?PAGEID=67&SUBID=148>

<sup>2</sup>USDA, Food and Nutrition Services. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FILES/Participation/Reaching2002.pdf>

low-income people who do not have consistent access to food and have to rely on what food is available through emergency food assistance.

In order to understand this increased need for food assistance, the Food Policy Council conducted a study of clients seeking emergency food to better understand what factors, life situations, and social and economic conditions brought them to the food pantry for emergency food.

Our study was conducted in July 2004. The study revealed multiple issues that families and individuals are facing in order to meet their struggle for survival and their need for food.

- Over 80 percent of the clients surveyed had come to the food pantry more than once in the past year. Forty one percent of the respondents stated that they had gone without food or skipped a meal at various times so others in the family, especially children, could eat. In some cases they skipped meals because there was no food in the house. About 54 percent of the clients had been coming for food assistance for more than one year.
- Almost half the food pantries' clients were receiving food stamps (48 percent\*) yet of those in the Food Stamp Program 57 percent had come for emergency food more than six times in the past year.
- The number of families living below poverty was very high and this number was even greater among clients living on the reservations – up to 90 percent. Yet 44 percent of those below poverty did not participate in the Food Stamp program. Participation in other public food assistance programs was also not significant. Participation in the WIC and school lunch program was

around 60 percent by the clients surveyed. And a very low number of households with children (14 percent) reported receiving TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) benefits.

- Almost half – 44 percent of the households surveyed had at least one adult working, and about 25 percent of the primary wage earners had more than one job in the previous year. Of the households with no employed adults, more than three-fourths were unemployed due to health problems including chronic disease and disability.
- Of the clients surveyed, 14 percent were over age 65. While less than half of them were receiving food stamps (43 percent) or assistance through the Senior Nutrition programs (21 percent), over half of seniors (56 percent) received no other food assistance through family, friends or public programs.
- Lack of food was a problem for most times of the year. Lack of employment and high heating bills were a major reason for running out of food in winter. In summer, families with children out of school had difficulty getting enough food since the School Lunch program was not available.
- Of all factors studied, the main reason people came to the food pantries for food was that they had exhausted their limited income on essential needs like rent, heating bills, medical costs or child care. Many others were living on fixed incomes, or unemployed or dealing with disabilities. The loss of public assistance, as well as low wages were also cited as significant reasons why families simply could not stretch their dollars to get through each month.

\* This includes receiving Food Stamp Benefits or Commodities.

## II

## Survey Methodology

The Montana Food Bank Network (MFBN) completed its first annual client survey in the summer of 2004 to study the needs of clients seeking emergency food assistance. The survey was conducted at seven different agencies across the state: Helena, Kalispell, Hamilton, Roundup, Plains, Ronan and Wolf Point. The sites were selected due to location across the state in hopes of gaining a “snapshot” of food and food-related issues as they may or may not differ in Western Montana versus Eastern Montana and in more urban areas versus rural and reservation areas.

All adults (19 years or older) who sought emergency food services at the seven agencies at the time of the survey were asked to participate in the study

and were granted the right to refuse. Trained agency staff and volunteers, as well as MFBN survey coordinators, conducted the interviews. Overall, 342 clients completed the survey (see Chart 1). These respondents represented 1,045 household members, of which 420 were children 18 years old or younger. The survey was completely voluntary and confidential.

By standard research methodology this was not a random survey, and thus the results are not intended to be generalized to all food pantries or clients in the state. The results are only representative of the households interviewed at the seven agencies where the survey was implemented.

### The Framework for Reporting: Defining Sites in Terms of “Urban,” “Rural,” and “Reservation”

According to the 2000 Census, Montana ranks 44th in the nation for its total population and is one of six states with less than one million residents. In such a rural state, defining the terms *urban* and *rural* becomes problematic (see Appendix A).

In order to better understand how factors such as geographic location affect households experiencing food insecurity, the sites were categorized by their relative population distribution (see Appendix A). Findings from Helena, Kalispell, and Hamilton were compiled into one category and termed as “Urban.” Although Plains, Roundup, Ronan, and Wolf Point

share close resemblances in regards to their counties’ population density, only Plains and Roundup were termed “Rural.” Ronan and Wolf Point were compiled and termed as “Reservation” because both are situated on American Indian Reservations.

Despite vast differences, all the sites faced the challenges of providing food in a rural state. For example, many food pantry workers noted that transportation poses a barrier to their client’s ability to gain access to food. Forty-four percent of the clients surveyed indicated that they lived outside city limits.

## III.

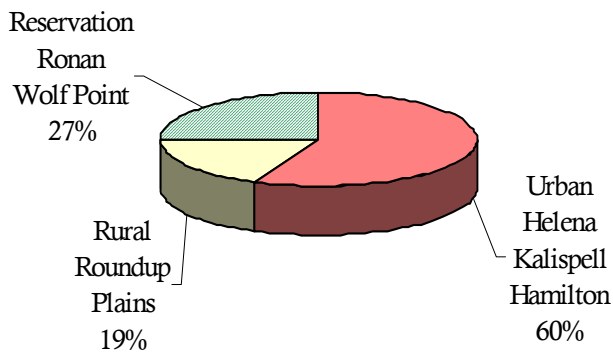
### Respondents: Demographics of the Survey’s Respondents

The median age of respondents at all sites was in the forties except the Musselshell County Food Bank in Roundup where the median age was significantly older (see Table 1). The majority of the respondents were female at all the surveyed sites, except for Wolf Point, where the gender distribution was near equal (see Table 1).

Over one-third of the respondents reported receiving their high school diploma or GED, and nearly 30 percent reported receiving trade/technical certificates or some college. The share of respondents who were employed ranged by site from 4.8 percent to 35.8 percent. (see Table 1). However, respondents may not have been the households’ primary wage earner and other household adults may have been employed (see Table 2). Respondents stated many factors contribute to unemployment (i.e., child-rearing, retirement, health, lack of jobs). These findings revealed that education does not always provide security.

**56% of households had at least one child 18 years or younger.**

**Chart 1. The Number of Surveys (N= 342) Collected For Each Categorized Site: Urban, Rural, and Reservation.**



***“A lot of people are dependent on food banks for daily food needs.”***  
- Food Pantry Client

**Table 1. Respondents' Age, Gender, and Employment Status.**

	All Sites (N=342)	Helena (n=101)	Kalispell (n=65)	Hamilton (n=28)	Plains (n=45)	Roundup (n=17)	Wolf Point (n=65)	Ronan (n=21)
<b>Median Age</b>	44.0	45.5	42.0	44.0	41.0	62.0	43.0	47.2
<b>Gender</b>	F = 62% M = 38%	F = 63% M = 37%	F = 59% M = 42%	F = 68% M = 32%	F = 64% M = 36%	F = 82% M = 18%	F = 49% M = 51%	F = 71% M = 29%
<b>Employed</b>	24.6%	35.8%	27.7%	25.0%	20.0%	23.5%	16.9%	4.8%
<b>Reported Seasonal Employment</b>	7.0%	5.0%	5.5%	3.6%	4.4%	5.9%	12.3%	0.0%

F = Female  
M = Male

**IV. Moving Beyond the Foundation: How Poverty Impacts a Household's Food Security**

In Montana, households struggling with poverty dot the landscape. According to the 2000 Census, 14.6 percent of Montanans live at or below poverty. Yet, defining poverty can be a daunting task. Poverty is extremely relative to each household's circumstances (i.e., number of members, income, additional expenses), and the deleterious effects of poverty (e.g., poor health) can be diminished or exacerbated by

factors related to physical, mental, and emotional well-being; the availability of public or private assistance; the presence of social supports; job security, etc.

Participating households were defined as living in poverty if their annual calculated income<sup>1</sup> met the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services' 2004 Federal Poverty Guidelines (see Appendix B).

**Table 2. Households' Calculated Median Income, Percentage in Poverty, and Employment.**

	<u>Helena</u>	<u>Kalispell</u>	<u>Hamilton</u>	<u>Plains</u>	<u>Roundup</u>	<u>Wolf Point</u>	<u>Ronan</u>
<b>Calculated Monthly Median Income</b>	\$ 967.34	\$1000.00	\$993.00	\$1072.00	\$1000.00	\$530.00	\$564.00
<b>Percentage at or Below Poverty</b>	66.3%	69.2%	67.9%	57.8%	53.0%	89.0%	90.5%
<b>Households with at Least One Adult Employed</b>	49.5%	58.5%	50.0%	37.8%	35.3%	32.3%	19.0%
<b>Primary Earner Employed at More than One Job</b>	26.8%	24.0%	17.9%	17.8%	5.9%	10.8%	19.0%

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix B to learn how income was calculated for the purposes of this report.

## Household Employment

Employment can provide a household with some tools necessary to battle poverty (e.g., steady income, health benefits) yet, employment is not poverty's "silver bullet," especially in Montana. According to the Department of Labor and Industry, Montana ranks ninth in the nation with a relatively low unemployment rate of 3.7 percent as of December 2004; however, the wages brought home by Montana's workforce fall decidedly short. Montana ranks 50th in the nation for the median wages earned by its workforce (\$24,264) and ranks fourth in the nation for the percentage of workers (9.3 percent) employed at more than one job<sup>1</sup>.

These trends are reflected in the survey's find-

ings. For example, Urban households reported the greatest percentage of households with at least one adult working and households where the primary wage earner worked more than one job in the past year. Yet, households surveyed at these sites also reported a high rate of poverty. The lack of employment opportunities appeared most prevalent among Reservation households.

***"I think that the administration has to look at minimum wage laws. People cannot live on a minimum wage. Improvement of wages is most important."***  
- Food Pantry Client

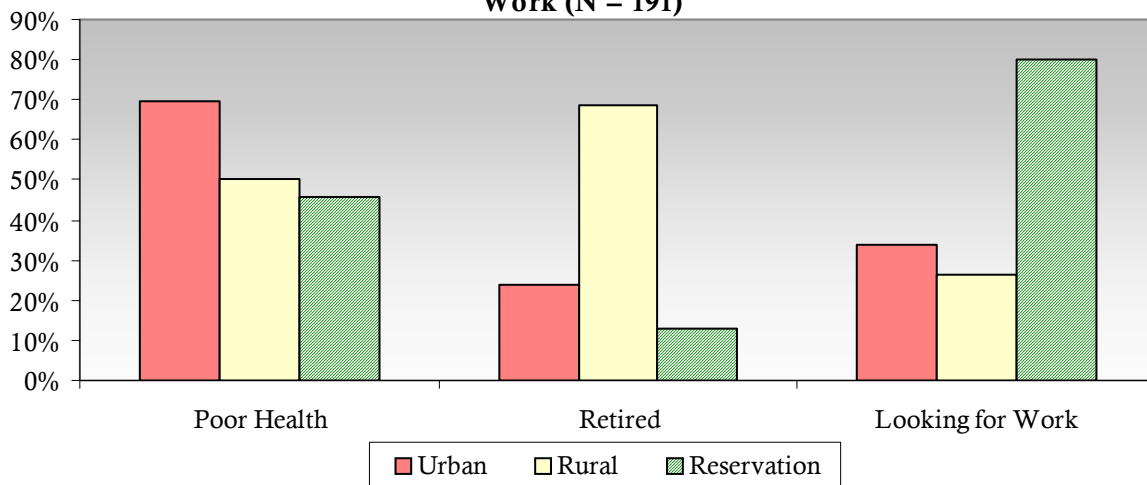
## Unemployment and the Attributed Factors

The significance of unemployment, despite Montana's low ranking, cannot be emphasized enough. Over half (55.8 percent) of the surveyed households reported no adults to be working at the time of the survey. Among the households with no adults employed:

- 58.1 percent attributed the lack of employment for at least one adult to "Poor Health"<sup>2</sup>;
- 30.3 percent attributed the lack of employment for at least one adult to retirement; and
- 47.1 percent stated lack of employment but were "looking for work" (see Chart 2).

Findings show that unemployment is a significant hardship faced by many clients seeking emergency food, especially for those on American Indian Reservations. Nearly 71 percent of surveyed Reservation households had no working adults. Reservation households had the lowest percentage of adults not working due to "Poor Health" (45.9 percent) (see Chart 2) and the highest percentage of households with at least one adult seeking employment (80 percent). While the findings of the survey were of great concern, they revealed only a glimpse of the multiple challenges that exist on Montana's reservations.

**Chart 2. Among Households with No Employment, Main Reasons for At Least One Adult Not Working, and At Least One Adult Looking for Work (N = 191)**



<sup>1</sup> Department of Labor & Industry. Retrieved 4/04/2005 from <http://www.ourfactsyourfuture.org/?PAGEID=67&SUBID=148>

<sup>2</sup> "Poor Health" includes disabled, injured and poor health.

**V. The Importance of Housing**

The findings revealed a relatively high rate of homeownership among Rural households, which may be connected to an older median age among respondents of rural sites. A greater percentage of households in Urban and Reservation sites reported renting housing.

Among Reservation households, the survey’s

design did not account for housing assistance available in tribal communities, although many stated tribal housing assistance as a source of support.

*“It’s financial. We don’t make enough money. The costs of living goes up, and people can’t afford to live.”*  
- Food Pantry Client

**Homelessness**

Overall, twenty-one households were classified as homeless or “in transition,” which included living rent-free with friends or relatives. Urban and Rural households had high rates of homelessness. It appears that among Urban sites, growth and development

**3.6% of ALL the children represented lived in households defined as “Homeless” or “In Transition.”**

in recent years have also brought an increase in cost-of-living expenses that strained households financially and has resulted in many adults having to work more than one job (see Table 2) or affected households’ stability. Many Urban participants— both new and old residents—reported moving frequently. A few stated that they became “homeless” during the Summer months (living out of cars, tents, etc.), in order to save money for the winter.

**Table 3. Rates of Home Ownership and Homelessness (N=21).**

	<u>Urban</u>	<u>Rural</u>	<u>Reservation</u>
<b>Rates of Home Ownership</b>	23.2%	40.3%	17.4%
<b>Rent</b>	64.4%	45.2%	75.6%
<b>Households Considered “Homeless” or “In Transition”*</b>	9.3%	8.1%	4.7%

- Factors that Attributed to “Homelessness” or “In Transition”**
- **Death of a Spouse**
  - **Medical Bills**
  - **Loss of Job**
  - **Waiting for Work to Call**
  - **Injury/Disability**
  - **House Burned Down**
  - **Recently Moved to Area**

\* “In Transition” included households that reported living “Rent Free” with relatives or friends.

**VI. Participation in Public Assistance Programs**

When assessing the participation rates of surveyed households in public assistance programs, it became evident that participating households, especially Urban and Rural, receive limited public assistance (see Table 4). Less than 5 percent of Urban and Rural households reported receiving TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) (see Chart 4).

Compared to Reservation households, Urban and Rural households also had low rates of participation in the Food Stamp Program (37%) as well as Medicaid (25.4%). Overall, when asked about other forms of public assistance, the respondents stated:

- 21.1 percent received Social Security;
- 16.1 percent received Disability (SSDI, Workmen’s Compensation, or Veteran’s Administration Benefits);
- 11.7 percent received Supplemental Security Income (SSI);
- 6.7 percent received an Earned Income Tax Credit; and
- Less than 5 percent received General Assistance, Unemployment, or assistance through student loans/grants.
- 6.4 percent received assistance from family or friends.

**Table 4. Percentage of Households Receiving TANF, Food Stamps, Medicaid, and “No Additional Financial Sources.”**

	<u>Urban</u>	<u>Rural</u>	<u>Reservation</u>
<b>TANF</b>	3.1%	10%	53%
<b>Food Stamps</b>	35.1%	41.9%	81.4%*
<b>Medicaid</b>	24.2%	29.0%	61.6%**
<b>No Additional Financial Sources</b>	30.9%	29.0%	13.0%

*“I struggle with the judgmental attitudes that people sometimes have towards those that use the food bank...It could happen to anyone.”*  
- Food Pantry Client

\* Includes households receiving commodities (n = 7).

\*\* Includes households receiving health coverage from Indian Health Services (n = 12).

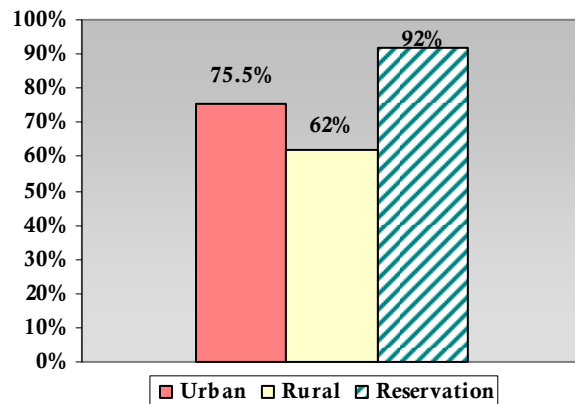
## VII. Providing for Montana’s Children

As previously noted, 56 percent of all households surveyed reported having at least one child 18 years or younger. Overall, 80 percent of these households reported incomes at or below the poverty level (see Chart 3).

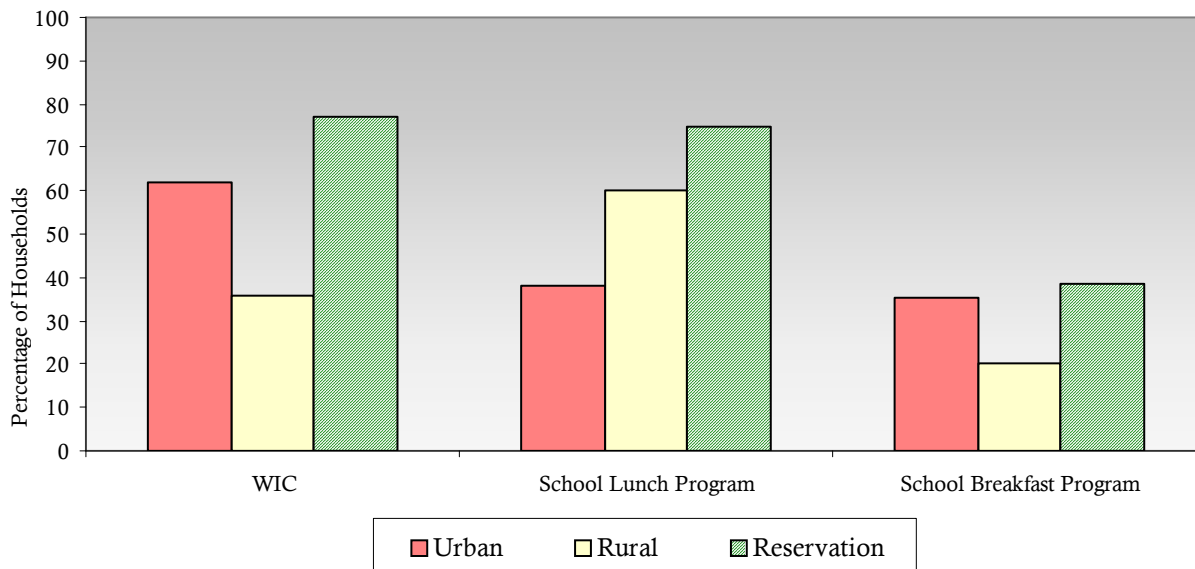
Good nutrition is essential for growth and development in children. The impact of poor nutrition can lead to health and social problems in adulthood. Federal Child Nutrition Programs are vital sources of good nutrition for low-income children (see Chart 4).

In Urban areas, participation in children’s programs was decidedly low in comparison to the high rate of poverty. Rural households reported especially low participation rates for School Breakfast programs. Reservation households reported the highest rates of participation in children’s nutrition assistance programs.

**Chart 3. Percentage of Households with Children Below the Poverty Line.**



**Chart 4. Types of Public Nutrition Assistance Reported Among Households with Eligible-Aged Children.**



**VIII. Surviving on One Income: Single-Adult Households with Children**

Households with children face the daunting task of providing a safe and healthy environment for their children while juggling work, transportation, and covering other cost-of-living expenses.

**100% of single-adult households with at least one child at the Reservation sites reported living at or below the poverty level.**

Households with children headed by one adult confront

further limitations. Among the households with children, single-adult headed households comprised 28.8 percent of those surveyed. Of households with children headed by a single-adult:

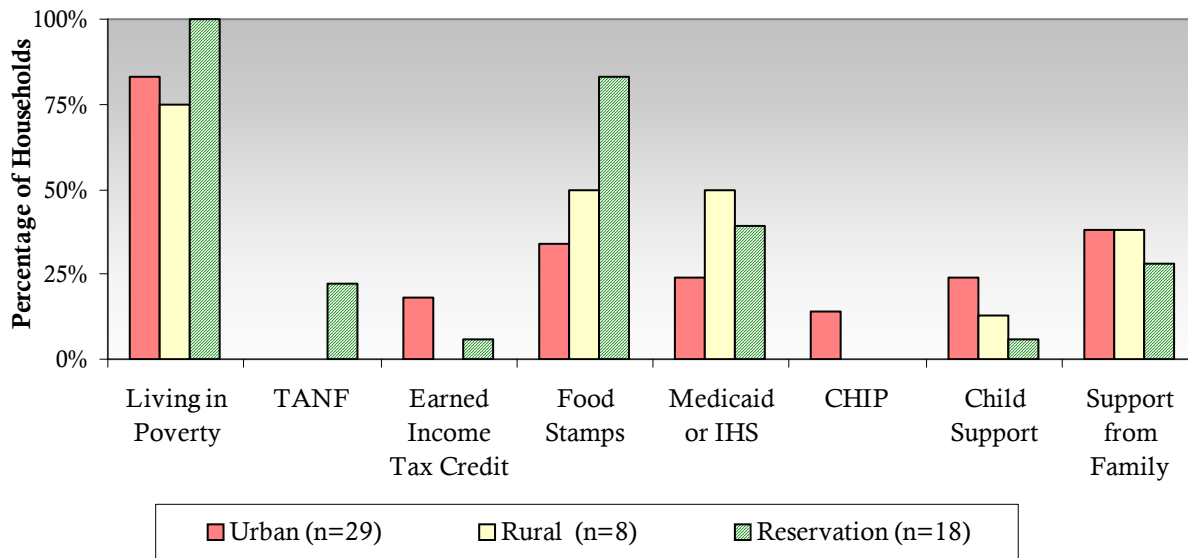
- 87 percent lived in poverty (compared to two-thirds of households with children and at least two adults);
- Nearly three-quarters were headed by women;
- 33 percent of single adults worked; and

- 47 percent of the working adults reported working more than one job in the past year.

Many of these households did not participate in various public assistance programs (see chart 5), and few reported receiving outside financial assistance from family, friends, or child support. Single-adult households with children in comparison to households with two or more adults reported that they were more likely to skip meals so that others could eat, and were also more likely to attribute their inability to gain access to food to low wages and housing costs.

*“Single women who are single parents do not fall into the stereotype of a woman with 10 kids by 10 dads. I’ve worked for 35 years, and I’m not lazy. We’re expected to be super moms all of the time.”*  
- Food Pantry Client

**Chart 5. Percentage of Single-Adult Households with at Least One Child (N=55) Living At or Below Poverty and the Percentage that Receive Various Forms of Public and/or Private Assistance.**



**IX. Serving the Needs of Senior Citizens**

According to the 2000 Census, 13.4 percent of Montanans are 65 years or older, and according to a report released by Montana’s Department of Transportation (2002), the aging population in the state continues to grow.

- Montana’s aging population outpaces the national average by 2.2 years; and

- The median age of Montana’s population (37.5 years) is older than all its neighboring states.

Representation of senior citizens among surveyed households closely paralleled the state’s demographics. Over 14 percent of the survey’s participants were at least 65 years-old, and comprised 11 percent of the

adults represented, overall. Forty-seven percent of participating seniors reported living alone. Of all seniors, 43 percent reported receiving Food Stamp benefits, and 21 percent reported receiving nutrition assistance from at least one nutrition support service available for seniors (e.g., Senior Meals, Meals on Wheels, and soup kitchens).

However, 56 percent of seniors reported receiving no additional nutrition assistance—such as support from family and friends.

*“As you get older, medical problems go higher and it’s very difficult to handle with a fixed income. Each time I try to catch up, something else comes along.”*  
- Food Pantry Client

**X. The Food Stamp Program: Staving Off Food Insecurity and Hunger**

During the summer of 2004, national participation in the Food Stamp Program averaged 24.9 million. In Montana, over 77,000 households participated in the Food Stamp Program for the 2004 Fiscal

Year; however, it is estimated that around half of Food Stamp-eligible households do not receive benefits.

**Food Stamp Program: Participation and Non-Participation**

Less than half (48 percent) of the survey’s participants reported receiving Food Stamp benefits or Commodities. A cross-site comparison revealed that benefit distribution greatly varied between participating households on reservations and

*“Winter [is the hardest] everything is more expensive and work is hard to find.”* - Food Pantry Client

those in urban or rural areas (see Appendix C). The higher rates of poverty and unemployment, cited earlier, may contribute to the difference in allotted benefits. While benefits vary based on eligibility and household characteristics, statewide qualifying Montanans receive an average of \$85.00 per person per month<sup>1</sup> or less than \$1.00 per meal.

**Reasons for Non-Participation in the Food Stamp Program**

Most frequently, participants reported not applying (36 percent) for Food Stamps or that their application was denied (28.5 percent) as reasons for not-participating in the Food Stamp Program. Other reasons included “Waiting for the Application to be

Processed” or that their benefits “Have been Sanctioned.” Less than 3 percent of non-participating households reported drug convictions as the reason that barred access to the Food Stamp Program.

**Top Three Reasons For Being Denied**

- Exceeded limit for household income (67%)
- Exceeded limit for household assets (9%)
- Children left home (3%)

**Top Three Reasons for Not Applying**

- Don’t want to be on “welfare” (24%)
- Don’t know if I am eligible (19%)
- Work requirements too stringent (16%)

**Comparing Food Stamp Participating Households with Non-Participating Households**

The differences in Food Security levels between households participating in the Food Stamp Program and households not participating are notable and possibly counter intuitive. Households reported how medical expenses, childcare costs, and employment impacted their ability to secure food, how frequently households accessed emergency food assistance programs, and the frequency in which respondents reported skipping meals so that others could eat.

**Participating households were 1 ½ times more likely to report having at least one child in the household.**

Responses to these indicators were compared be-

tween Food Stamp Program participating households and non-participating households (see Table 5).

Overall, 41 percent of the survey’s respondents reported skipping meals at least once a month so that others in the household could eat. Further, in-depth data analysis revealed that participants from Food Stamp participating households were more likely to skip a meal than survey respondents from non-participating households.

While half of those skipping meals indicated doing

<sup>1</sup> FY 2004: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/fsavgben.htm>

\* For a more information about the Food Stamp Program see Appendix C.

so at least once a week, households that received food stamps were more likely to skip meals with higher frequency.

In addition to skipping meals, a strong indicator of a household's inability to secure food, the survey also queried participants about the frequency in which they depended on emergency food services. Overall, 83 percent of the survey's respondents stated that this was not their first visit to the food pantry in

the past 12 months, and 63 percent of the participants indicated that they had been depending on emergency food services for more than one year.

Households participating in the Food Stamp Program in Urban and Rural areas accessed emergency food pantries more frequently (see Table 5).

*"[We have a] very limited income—being a home care provider for my husband and family."  
- Food Pantry Client*

**Table 5. Comparing Food Security- Frequency of Skipping Meals and Dependency on Food Pantries as Emergency Food Assistance- Between Participating and Non-Participating Food Stamp Households.**

	<u>Urban</u>		<u>Rural</u>		<u>Reservation</u>	
	<u>Non-Participating</u>	<u>Participating</u>	<u>Non-Participating</u>	<u>Participating</u>	<u>Non-Participating</u>	<u>Participating</u>
<b>Skipped Meals</b>	<b>39.8%</b>	<b>51.5%</b>	<b>16.7%</b>	<b>34.6%</b>	<b>30.4%</b>	<b>54.0%</b>
<b>Of those who skip meals— Doing so AT LEAST once a week</b>	<b>67.3%</b>	<b>57.1%</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	<b>5.6%</b>	<b>28.6%</b>	<b>47.1%</b>
<b>Accessed Pantry (6+ Times a Year)</b>	<b>42.3%</b>	<b>58.8%</b>	<b>55.6%</b>	<b>73.1%</b>	<b>52.2%</b>	<b>33.3%</b>

***But Why the Greater Need Among Households Participation in the Food Stamp Program?***

The greater food-insecurity reported among Food Stamp-participating households does not imply that the Food Stamp Program is ineffective. Rather, it speaks to how households participating in the Food Stamp Program continuously battle with poverty—despite receiving assistance.

Households that received food stamps and accessed emergency food services at the time of the survey reported median earnings far less than non-participating households (see Table 6). Participating households were also more likely to have children present and were more likely to have children in a home where no adults were employed at the time of the survey—with at least one adult not working due to poor health. Finally, participating households were more likely to report receiving no additional nutrition assistance, which included utilizing soup kitchens and relying on family and/or friends.

Households with income below 130 percent of the poverty line are eligible to receive food stamps, provided they meet other eligibility criteria. Once

households move beyond 130 percent of poverty, they no longer remain eligible for benefits. However, according to USDA, food insecurity was nearly six times as prevalent in households with annual incomes below 185 percent of the poverty line as in households with incomes above that range<sup>1</sup>.

*"[There] needs to be an increase in Food Stamps...prices are too high to buy everything that I should eat for a balanced diet."  
- Food Pantry Client*

**Non-participating households were THREE TIMES more likely to report that the day of their interview was their first time seeking emergency food Assistance.**

Households not receiving food stamps who accessed emergency food services at the time of the study were relying on the assistance due to a crisis or unstable period. In fact, over 21 percent of households that did not receive food stamps stated that this was their first visit to their local food pantry compared to 8.3 percent of households participating in the Food Stamp Program.

This spoke to the chronic need and poverty that strikes at many of the households that utilize public services on multiple levels in order to survive.

<sup>1</sup> Household Food Security in the United State, 2003. Report available at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/fanrr42/>

**XI.**

**Overall Food Need**

Surveyed households reported a number of varying reasons for their need to access emergency food services at the time of the survey. While 15 percent reported that their visit to the local food pantry was their first time in the past year, 83 percent reported that they had received an emergency food box more

than once in the past year.

Additionally:

- 31 percent reported accessing emergency food services more than 12 times in the past year;
- 41 percent of the respondents have gone without food or skipped meals so that others could eat and/or be cause there was not enough food; and
- 54 percent reported accessing emergency food services for more than one year.

(see Table 7 for Site comparison).

**Table 6. Reported Monthly Median Income Comparisons Between Food Stamp-Participating and Non-Participating Households.**

	<u>Non-Participating</u>	<u>Participating</u>
Helena	\$1100.00	\$711.50
Kalispell	\$1000.00	\$900.00
Hamilton	\$1043.00	\$987.50
Plains	\$1133.50	\$816.50
Roundup	\$1347.50	\$833.00
Wolf Point	\$592.00	\$500.00
Ronan	\$574.00	\$564.00

*“Medical bills are dragging me down. The main reasons for going to the food bank is medical bills and prescriptions.”  
- Food Pantry Client*

*“Policy-makers need to realize that there is a real problem here. Food problems are related to the costs of living. Increased fuel costs, health care costs, and transportation are also problems.” -  
Food Pantry Client*

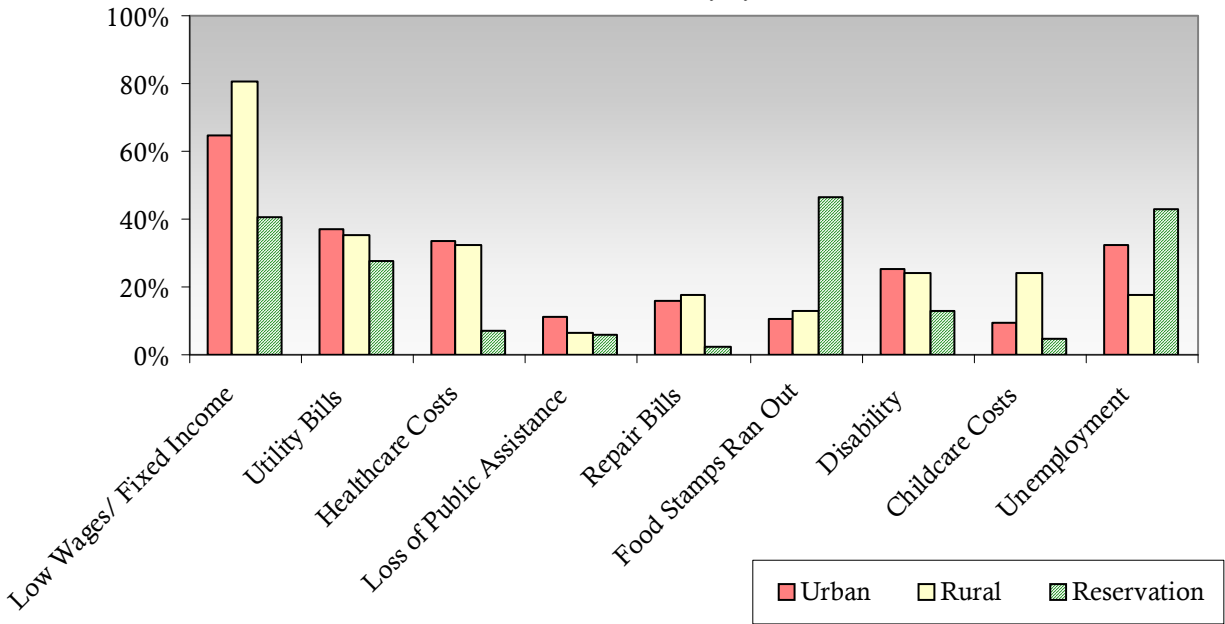
**Table 7. Emergency Food Needs.**

	<u>Urban</u>	<u>Rural</u>	<u>Reservation</u>
<b>Accessed More than 12 Times in the Past Year</b>	27%	47%	25%
<b>Skipping Meals</b>	43%	24%	47%
<b>Needing Assistance for More than 1 Year</b>	50%	56%	60%

As noted, some respondents reported their need to be based on traumatic events or crisis (i.e., death of a spouse, house fire, sudden loss of employment); yet, many of the households reported chronic instability and food-insecurity that cycled with the seasonal changes of employment, heating costs, and transportation.

In order to assess how other factors affected households’ ability to independently secure food, the survey asked respondents to indicate all the factors that limited their food-security (see Chart 6). The respondents were not limited to one response and they could indicate all that applied.

**Chart 6. Factors that Contributed to Food-Insecurity by Site.**



**XII. How Well Food Pantries Met Surveyed Households' Emergency Food Needs**

When asked about their ability to access emergency food services when in need:

- 16 percent of the survey's participants reported not being able to access emergency foods at some period of time or for various reasons; and
- Almost half (48.9 percent) reported being able to access their local pantry within two to three days; however, nearly 20% reported having to wait one week (see Chart 7).

**Food Boxes: Their Ability to Stave Off Hunger and Meet Food Needs**

Thirty-nine percent of the respondents reported their food boxes last two to four days, which is the expected time to meet the purpose of emergency food boxes. Nearly one-half (45.9 percent) reported their emergency food boxes to last one week or more, in part because many households use emergency food boxes to supplement their existing food supplies.

In addition to asking how long their most recent food box lasted, the survey aimed to assess how well emergency food boxes met clients' nutritional needs (i.e., are households receiving enough protein, dairy, fruits and vegetables). Forty-four percent of the respondents reported that their last food box was "adequate." Yet, when asked more specifically about what foods were lacking in their previous boxes, clients provided an array of answers (see Chart 8).

Households with children and teenagers were

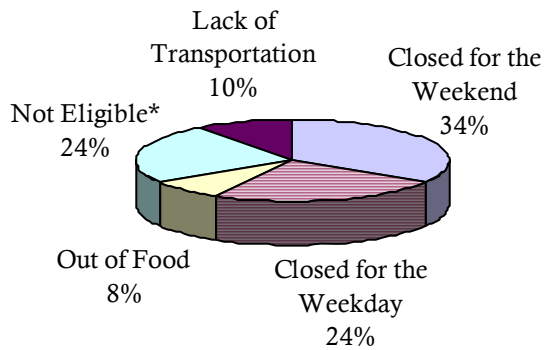
*"[I would like] more healthier food, less junk food with little nutritional value."  
- Food Pantry Client*

Many of the respondents expressed a desire to have access to a healthier diet. They expressed a desire to see higher quality, more nutritional food offered at their local food pantry. They also expressed concerns about occasionally receiving foods that were spoiled and/or expired.

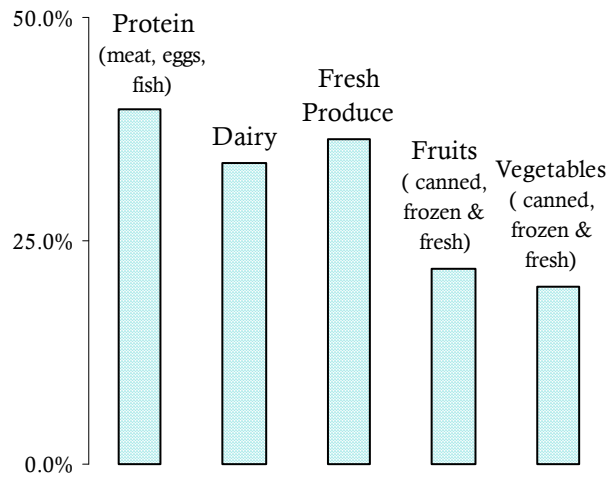
very earnest in their desire to receive more food. Most importantly, households wished to have greater access to protein sources (meat), dairy, and fresh fruits and vegetables.

*"[In the last food box] the milk and cheese were spoiled and the creamed soups were out of date."  
- Food Pantry Client*

**Chart 7. Reasons Why Respondents Were Unable to Access Local Food Pantry**



**Chart 8. Types of Foods that Households Would Have Liked More of in Their Last Food Box**

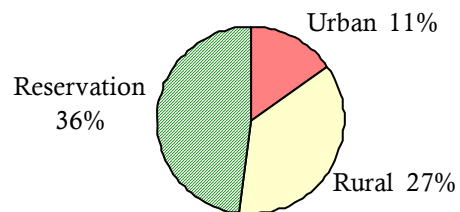


**XIII. Special Food Needs: Assessing the Prevalence of Diabetes, Food Allergies, and Pregnant or Breast-Feeding Mothers**

Special dietary needs place added stress on households that access emergency food services. The rate of diabetes– the predominant reported special dietary need- especially among Reservation households is particularly evident (see Chart 9). Overall, 20 percent of surveyed households reported diabetes; however, over one-third (36.1 percent) of Reservation households surveyed reported diabetes.

Survey respondents reported needing special diets due to illness such as cancer or kidney failure, and common special dietary needs ranged from hypoglycemia or diets that require low sugar consumption to lactose intolerance, and diets requiring high levels of protein or B complex vitamin supplements.

**Chart 9. Percentage of Households Reporting Diabetes as a Special Dietary Need (N = 70)**



**Households with Pregnant or Breast-Feeding Mothers**

While only 4.4 percent (n=15) of households reported having pregnant or breast-feeding mothers, these households reported a high level of food insecurity:

- 73.3 percent reported that their visit to the pantry at the time of survey was not their first visit for the year;
- 63.6 percent of these households had been relying on emergency food services for more than one year;
- 26.7 percent of the respondents reported skipping meals; and
- over two-thirds of these households supported at least one additional child.

#### XIV. Uncovering the Perceptions of Food Insecure Households Regarding Emergency Food Services, Hunger, and Areas of Social Concern

When asked about their perceptions of emergency food services, all of the respondents expressed that food pantries provide a much needed service to the community. A number of the respondents praised the work done at their local food pantry and expressed appreciation for the food they received. Yet, despite their appreciation and recognition of the service provided, some respondents still revealed the

*“ I hate to use it...but it’s a blessing when its there...I appreciate it.” - Food Pantry Client*

depth of their food insecurity by their expressed desire for more food

or the option to visit the pantry more frequently. Some voiced resentment at individuals whom they felt may be abusing the services. But most poignantly, a few shared the shame they felt because they struggled with being food insecure.

Perceptions of hunger among the categorized sites ranged to some degree; however, the vast majority of survey respondents felt that childhood hunger (79.5 percent) and hunger among senior citizens (73.7 percent) was at least “somewhat” a problem.

*“ [They are] good...but I would never tell anyone.” - Food Pantry Client*

Finally, the survey sought to identify the immediate social concerns that households experiencing food-insecurity felt should be addressed by community

leaders and policy-makers. Three options were provided to the respondents in addition to free space that allowed individual comment. Overall, the most pre-dominant issue was a lack of a living wage.

#### Perceived Areas of Immediate Concern

- 71.9% Lack of a Living Wage
- 62.6% Lack of Affordable Housing
- 35.1% Lack of Affordable Childcare

Additional issues that respondents felt should be addressed by community leaders and policy-makers included:

- healthcare (i.e., prescription costs, healthcare costs, health insurance);
- a stronger economy– job development– in addition to job training;
- housing (i.e., affordable, housing for people with disabilities, increase number of shelters);
- improved access to healthier, more nutritious foods for low-income households;
- increased awareness/education surrounding social issues– most noted were healthcare, food, discrimination, and drugs; and
- increased funding for social programs.

#### XV. Greatest Challenge Faced in the Past Year

*“ The last 5 years, my husband died; we had a house, some money...now to this.”*

*“Our house burned down, we had a car accident, we lost the car, and now I’m injured and can’t work.”*

*“Losing everything and having to start over.”*

*“Getting enough money. We’re behind on bills, we sacrifice bill payments to take care of kids.”*

*“Not knowing where my next meal or money will come from.”*

*“Premature baby with many disabilities. We have to travel long distances every month, and have astronomical medical costs.”*

*“Paying bills, I have over \$20,000 outstanding medical bills, while my hours were reduced at work.”*

*“My mother’s and grandmother’s deaths in an auto accident. As well as losing my home. My boyfriend left and left behind bills. Now I’m supporting 7 people on 1 income.”*

*“I couldn’t afford medication in January.”*

*“Last winter it snowed for a month, during the same time I had a broken toe, I live in a remote area and meals on wheels couldn’t get to because the roads were bad, so I had no food.”*

*“I can’t fill my prescriptions. My son got divorced and I take care of his kids. There’s not enough money for food and medications.”*

*“Trying to keep the business going and losing. Now I’m looking for work.”*

*“My father died, my child gets seizures and I had to go off welfare.”*

*“The sewage system in our home needed major repair. The cost to replace it was beyond our family’s means.”*

*“Getting calls from creditors when my husband is unemployed. Being poor and having bad credit is a terrible thing.”*

*“Power bills are too high. It’s hard to keep warm.”*

*“We keep getting behind on bills, especially energy bills.”*

*“Raising three children that are disabled, and losing one to suicide.”*

*“A car accident while having no insurance.”*

*“Financial challenges. We don’t make enough money. As the cost of living goes up - people can’t afford to live.”*

*“I am diabetic and have heart problems. I can’t do what I used to do.”*

*“A back injury, I was hospitalized 2 months. My wife had to quit working to take care of me.”*

*“I was diagnosed with cancer.”*

*“My husband has a mental illness but we cannot afford his prescriptions – so his mind wanders.”*

*“Depression, anxiety attacks.”*

*“Homeless.”*

## **XVI.**

### **The Hardest Time of the Year**

#### **Winter:**

- Employment is down, there are layoffs, very hard to find a job, not even odd jobs.
- At the same time cost of living goes up, gas, heating oil cost more. Had an energy bill of \$300/month.
- Transportation is harder, car has problems. The weather and roads make it hard to get around,
- No car but bus does not run on weekends so no transportation to the stores.
- Food is hard to come by and you can’t grow anything in the garden.
- Husband laid off and home all the time – goes through food faster.

#### **Summer:**

- Kids are home from school and eating 3 meals a day – no school breakfast or lunch
- We don’t have a garden so there is never enough food.

- Food runs out in summer and till hunting season starts.

#### **All the time:**

- When the working person is unemployed for 3-4 months, living expenses keep going up, and incomes are down and there are children to take care of.
- Getting enough food is hard all the time.
- Every month – between pay days
- End of the month, when food runs out and food stamps run out. It’s the same every month.

#### **Holidays**

- Food budget is used for other things.



Stamp Program as compared to those not in the program. This illustrated two points: food stamps are an extremely critical need for those who receive them, and, people on food stamps are among the poorest of the poor – many of whom are well under the eligibility levels of the program. It takes a combination of both food stamps and the food pantries to try and reach their family's food needs.

- More than half the clients had families with children. Half the families with children lived in single-parent homes. The level of poverty and need for food assistance was higher among families with children. It was discouraging to find that many of the households with children did not participate in child nutrition programs such as WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children) the School Lunch program, School Breakfast program or the Summer food program.
- Almost half the clients had at least one working adult in the family. Many adults had two or more jobs. Yet, employment did not lift households out of poverty – 71 percent of all households surveyed lived below the poverty guidelines. Education also did not assure employment or a livable income. More than 38 percent of the clients surveyed had achieved an education beyond their high school diploma. In households where there was no employment, serious or chronic health problems as well as disability were the primary reasons.
- The food pantry clients and their families faced tremendous challenges and personal stress due to health problems, unemployment, financial losses, loss of home, transportation costs and death in the family.

Solving the problem of hunger in Montana takes a variety of actions and a commitment towards lifting people out of poverty. Public food programs in Montana must continue actions initiated to bring people who are eligible into the programs. Not only do the public programs provide food for children, seniors and adults, they are a crucial source of good nutrition for the family. Efforts to de-stigmatize the programs for potential clients as well as society are in place and

must continue.

As obesity, heart disease and diabetes levels rise in the state, better nutrition will play a major role in preventing chronic diseases which create a huge burden on the few programs that provide health care.

Another largely unrecognized benefit of increasing enrollment in the public programs is that dollars they bring to the state and into the local economy are spent at local grocery stores and increase employment in local communities.

The study showed that employment did not bring people out of poverty and that high school or college education did not guarantee a livable wage to meet basic needs. Considering all this, it is inconceivable that many of these programs, especially Medicaid and Food Stamps– are facing serious cuts in the Federal Budget. Unless working people are able to earn a wage they can live on and one that includes health care benefits, low-income households will not be able to rise out of poverty.

Food is a basic human right. Low-income households' inability to gain access to an adequate diet must be a matter of public and political debate. Food provides essential nutrition for pregnant women, infants, children, adults and seniors. This is a right that does not belong only to those who are not poor. The segment of the population that suffers from lack of consistent and wholesome food is the same population that is crippled with lack of health care and other supportive services.

Food pantries in Montana make exceptional efforts to meet the food needs of their clients. However, this cannot be our on-going solution to hunger. The state and each Montana community must increase their awareness of this issue and work towards long-term, community-wide food security that does not depend on emergency food.

## Appendix A: Defining Urban and Rural

### Defining “Urban” in Montana for the Purposes of this Study

Ranking 44th in the nation in terms of its population size (902,195), according to the 2000 Census, the state conversely ranks 4th in the nation in terms of its land mass– 145,556 square miles. In a state with a population distribution of 6.2 persons per a square mile (versus the national statistic of 79.6 persons per a square mile), very few areas in Montana qualify as *urban*, which the Bureau of the Census defines as an area with a population density of at least 50,000 people and includes the surrounding areas that averages 1,000 people per square mile. Yet according to the 2000 Census, only three cities in Montana (Billings, Great Falls, and Missoula) qualify as urban areas. None of the seven sites surveyed meets the

federal government definition (see the chart below). Recognizing that many areas in the United States do not qualify as *urban areas*, the Census Bureau also categorizes areas as *urban clusters*, which are densely settled areas, territories, or census blocks that together consists of a minimum of 500 people per a square mile (>2500 people/square mile < 50,000 people/square mile). Statewide, 54 percent of the population (487,465) live in urban settings- *urban areas* (26 percent) and *urban clusters* (28 percent)- as defined and calculated by the Census. The remaining half of the state’s population reside in areas that the Census defines as *rural* (farm and non-farm).

### City and County Population Distribution for Each Site, as Calculated by the 2000 U.S. Census, and the Percentage of Households Living Outside each Site’s City Limits.

<u>Survey Site and (County)</u>	<u>City Limits</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>Surveyed Households that Lived Outside City Limits</u>
<b>Hamilton (Ravalli)</b>	3,705	36,070	57%
<b>Helena (Lewis &amp; Clark)</b>	25,780	55,716	46%
<b>Kalispell (Flathead)</b>	14,223	74,471	26%
<b>Roundup (Musselshell)</b>	1,931	4,497	29%
<b>Plains (Sanders)</b>	1,126	10,227	44%
<b>Ronan (Lake)</b>	1,812	26,507	48%
<b>Wolf Point (Roosevelt)</b>	2,663	10,620	49%

In order to compare the differences as well as draw comparisons in how poverty manifests itself in different contexts, new classifications of *urban* and *rural* were created for the purposes of this report. While Helena, Hamilton, and Kalispell’s population fall substantially short of the federal government’s definition of *urban areas*, their respective counties contained some of the largest population distributions in the state (according to the Census). Furthermore,

these three urban centers also contained a dense enough population to be classified as *urban clusters*; Plains’ and Roundup’s smaller populations did not meet the federal definition. While Ronan’s and Wolf Point’s population distribution meet the federal government’s definition of an *urban cluster*, their situation on American Indian Reservations necessitated a separate category.

## Appendix B: Defining the Federal Poverty Guidelines, Calculating Households' Income.

### Defining Poverty

The Federal Poverty Guidelines are released each year by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) and attempt to reflect changes in the costs-of-living expenses in conjunction with national

wages. Federal programs such as the Food Stamp Program and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) use the guidelines as a basis for determining program eligibility.

### Calculating a Household's Income

Reporting for household incomes varied. Many of the respondents living on a fixed income were able to report their income each month exactly. Other respondents, especially those with unstable and/or seasonal employment, could not affix a specific amount to either their monthly or annual income. In this case, the respondents were encouraged to estimate their monthly and/or yearly incomes. For those that

reported an exact amount for their monthly income, the number was multiplied by 12 in order to calculate their annual income. For the responses reported as a range— either monthly or annually— the average of the range was calculated and then multiplied by 12 (if a monthly range) to calculate the annual income or divided by 12 (if an annual range) was recorded.

#### 2004 Federal Poverty Guidelines

<u>Size of the Family</u>	<u>48 States &amp; D.C.</u>	<u>150% Yearly</u>	<u>185% Yearly</u>
1	\$9,310	\$13,968	\$17,232
2	\$12,490	\$18,744	\$23,112
3	\$15,670	\$23,508	\$28,992
4	\$18,850	\$28,284	\$34,884
5	\$22,030	\$33,048	\$40,764
6	\$25,210	\$37,824	\$46,644
7	\$28,390	\$42,588	\$52,524
8	\$31,570	\$47,364	\$58,416
For each additional person, add	\$3,180		

## Appendix C: The Food Stamp Program

The Food Stamp Program was designed to help low-income households gain access to a healthier diet by increasing its purchasing power. Since its implementation, the program has changed greatly and recently underwent a series of drastic changes with welfare reform in 1996. Such changes included redefining eligibility criterion and imposing participation time limits for households without dependent children. As a result, participation rolls in the Food Stamp Program rapidly declined in the late 1990s, and the

effects carried into the twenty-first century. However, according to the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)- a national organization devoted to eradicating hunger, trends over the past five years indicate steady increases in program participation as states continue to simplify the application process, lessen the income and asset barriers, and conduct more outreach efforts.

### Averaged Monthly Food Stamp Benefits Allotted to Surveyed Households by Site Type.

<u>Household Size</u>	<u>Urban</u>	<u>Rural</u>	<u>Reservations</u>	<u>Total Average</u>
<i>1 Person</i>	\$80.61	\$59.20	\$126.15	\$87.50
<i>2 Persons</i>	\$123.88	\$121.67	\$237.38	\$161.34
<i>3 Persons</i>	\$194.37	\$213.25	\$268.75	\$221.01
<i>4 Persons</i>	\$164.22	\$156.5	\$234.96	\$182.23
<i>5 Persons</i>	\$296.25	\$375.01	\$352.63	\$328.17
<i>6 Persons</i>	\$311.78	\$462.00	\$311.20	\$361.92
<i>7 Person</i>	\$260.00	\$127.00	\$290.00	\$225.67
<i>8 Persons</i>	N/A	N/A	\$603.00	N/A
<i>9 Persons</i>	N/A	N/A	\$600.00	N/A
<i>10 Persons</i>	N/A	N/A	\$650.00	N/A