



State of Wisconsin  
Department of Health Services

Tony Evers, Governor  
Kirsten L. Johnson, Secretary

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April 25, 2023

Governor Tony Evers  
115 East Capitol  
Madison, WI 53702

Dear Governor Evers:

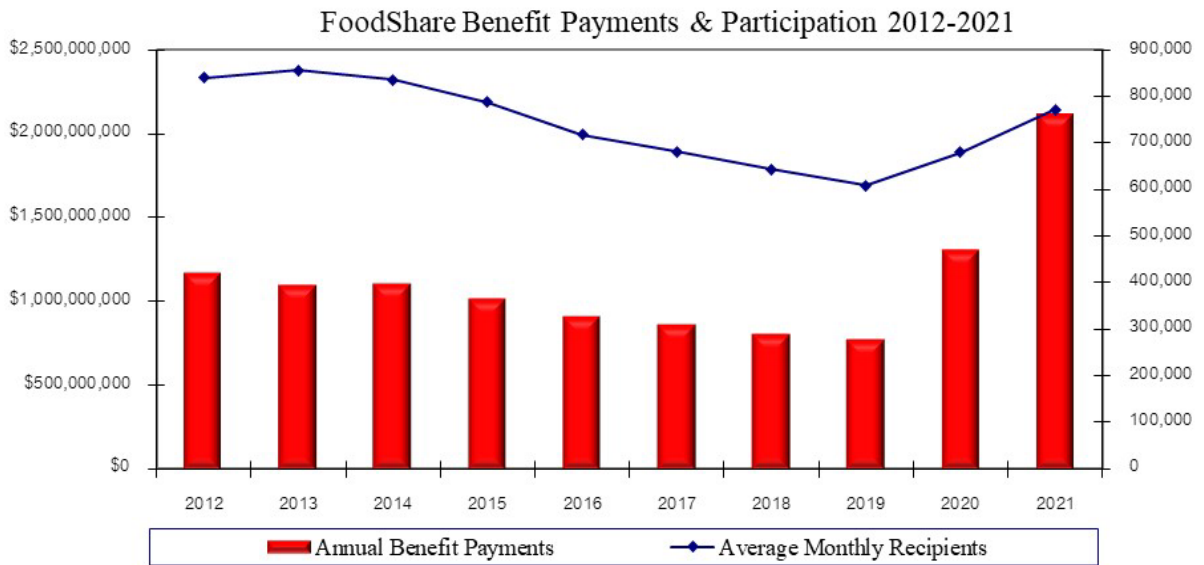
As required under Wis. Stat. § 49.76, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) provides this report on the participation of low-income households in DHS food programs during 2021. All programs are funded by United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The USDA Economic Research Service Report states that, “Most U.S. households have consistent, dependable access to enough food for active, healthy living—they are food secure. However, some households experience food insecurity at times during the year, meaning their ability to acquire adequate food is limited by a lack of money and other resources.”

Wisconsin’s USDA food and nutrition assistance programs aim to increase food security by providing low-income households access to healthy and nutritious foods. Access to healthy foods allows individual and families to make healthy food choices. The goal is to provide all residents across the state access to a nutritious diet to help ensure long-term health outcomes for everyone.

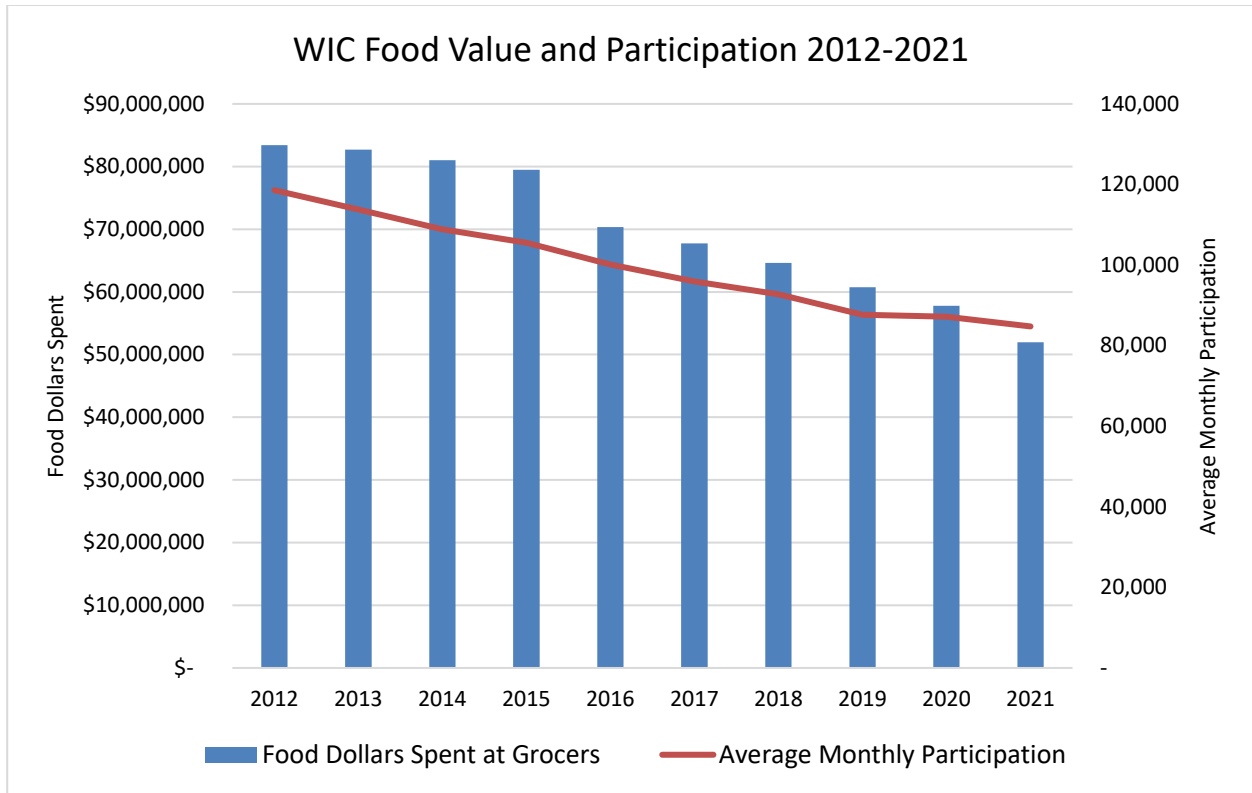
### The FoodShare Program

FoodShare is Wisconsin’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which provides monthly food allowances to qualified, low-income residents, is the largest nutrition assistance program. In 2021, FoodShare provided benefits to a monthly average of 771,668 Wisconsin residents to purchase a total of \$2,120,937,014 in approved foods at grocery stores and farmers markets. 2021 participation was 13.5% higher than in 2020. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, Wisconsin has been receiving an additional **\$50 million or more a month** in SNAP emergency allotments which can increase the monthly benefit issuance by more than 50%. In December 2021, FoodShare reported that 55% of members were female; 33.8% of assistance groups included minors; 45.3% had an elderly, blind, or disabled member; the average monthly allotment was \$268 per household; the average household size was 2 persons; and the average monthly income of assistance groups was \$409.



### **The Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC)**

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a discretionary program. WIC serves low-income women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, as well as new mothers, infants, and children up to 5 years of age, who have a nutritional need. WIC provides breastfeeding support, nutrition education, referrals to health care, social supports, public health services, and access to supplemental nutritious foods. In 2021 the WIC program served 132,913 women, infants, and children. During 2021, monthly participation averaged 84,769 participants including 16,590 women, 18,713 infants, and 49,466 children who received WIC-approved foods. A total of \$51,978,508 was spent to purchase food at grocery stores. There was sufficient funding to serve all WIC applicants determined to be eligible.



### The Elder Nutrition Program

The purpose of the Elder Nutrition Program is to reduce hunger and food insecurity, to promote socialization of older individuals, and to promote the health and well-being of older individuals by providing assistance to gain access to nutrition and other disease prevention and health promotion services. The program is funded by a combination of federal and state funds, local public and private funds, and participant contributions, and has substantial operating support from volunteers. The nutrition program consists of two programs, each with specific purposes. The congregate (senior dining) program provides meals in a community environment that promotes socialization and healthy aging. Home-delivered meals, also known as Meals on Wheels, provide meals and daily social contact to those who are determined to be homebound and therefore unable to prepare daily meals or attend a senior dining center. In CY 2021, Wisconsin continued to provide carryout and home-delivered meals in numbers unprecedented prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Approximately 3.6 million carryout and home-delivered meals were served to 42,608 older adults. In CY 2021, 83% of Wisconsin’s nutrition programs also resumed congregate meal service and served 210,611 meals to 13,950 older adults. Many nutrition programs continued to provide carryout meals as an additional option for at-risk older adults. Approximately 18% of senior dining participants and 42% of home-delivered meal participants in Wisconsin are at high nutritional risk.

## **The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)**

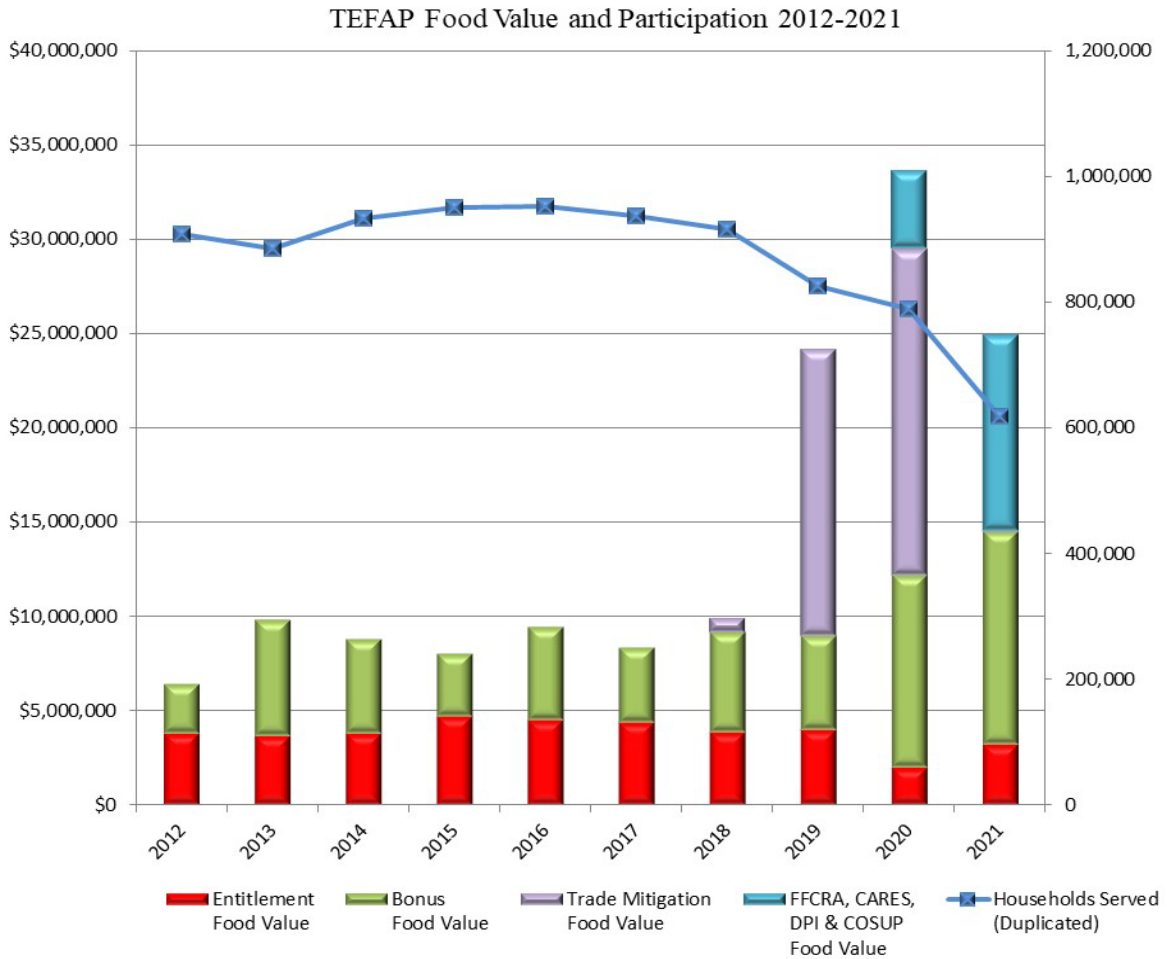
In 37 counties, DHS provides monthly food packages to seniors with income at or below 130% of the federal poverty level through the Commodity Supplemental Food Program. In 2021, an average of 10,419 seniors each month received food from 214 distribution sites. The total value of food distributed in 2021 was 3,389,256, approximately \$27.24 per person per distribution.

## **The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)**

The Emergency Food Assistance Program provides USDA commodity foods to 353 participating food pantries, meal sites, and homeless shelters in Wisconsin for distribution to qualifying low-income households. Products include frozen and shelf-stable meats, fruits, vegetables, juices, grains, dairy, and cereals – and increasingly, fresh produce, shell eggs, and fresh fluid milk. TEFAP supplements outlets' private sector inventories.

States purchase 'Entitlement' food from a diverse menu with funds the USDA allocates in accordance with each state's proportion of unemployed persons and persons living in poverty. Because TEFAP is also a price-support program for farmers, the USDA purchases surplus products from growers and offered to states as additional 'Bonus' foods. The USDA also purchased 'Trade Mitigation' foods to offset farmers' losses from reduced sales caused by trade wars. Lastly, the USDA provided supplemental pandemic foods with funding from 'Families First Coronavirus Response Act' (FFCRA), 'Coronavirus, Aid, Relief and Economic Security' (CARES), and the 'Covid Supplemental' (COSUP).

In 2021, Wisconsin warehouses, food banks, and outlets received 21.8 million pounds of TEFAP commodities worth \$24.9 million dollars. Approximately 95% went to 277 food pantries and mobile pantries who combined it with an additional 41.4 million pounds of privately donated, grown, and purchased foods for a total public/private distribution of 61 million pounds. The remaining 5% of TEFAP commodities were distributed to 76 meal sites and shelters that combined it with private resources to provide 1,430,947 meals to food insecure individuals. Food pantries in the TEFAP network served 618,818 food insecure households (duplicated) in 2021, a 21% decline from 2020. Although the pandemic initially caused food insecurity rates to increase, emergency food demand fell dramatically as households received unprecedented federal and state financial and nutritional support, including stimulus payments, child tax credits, unemployment insurance, supplemental FoodShare, rental assistance, school meals, and other emergency food aid. Despite recent declines in utilization, food pantry demand in 2021 remained 5% higher than in 2007 before the great recession.



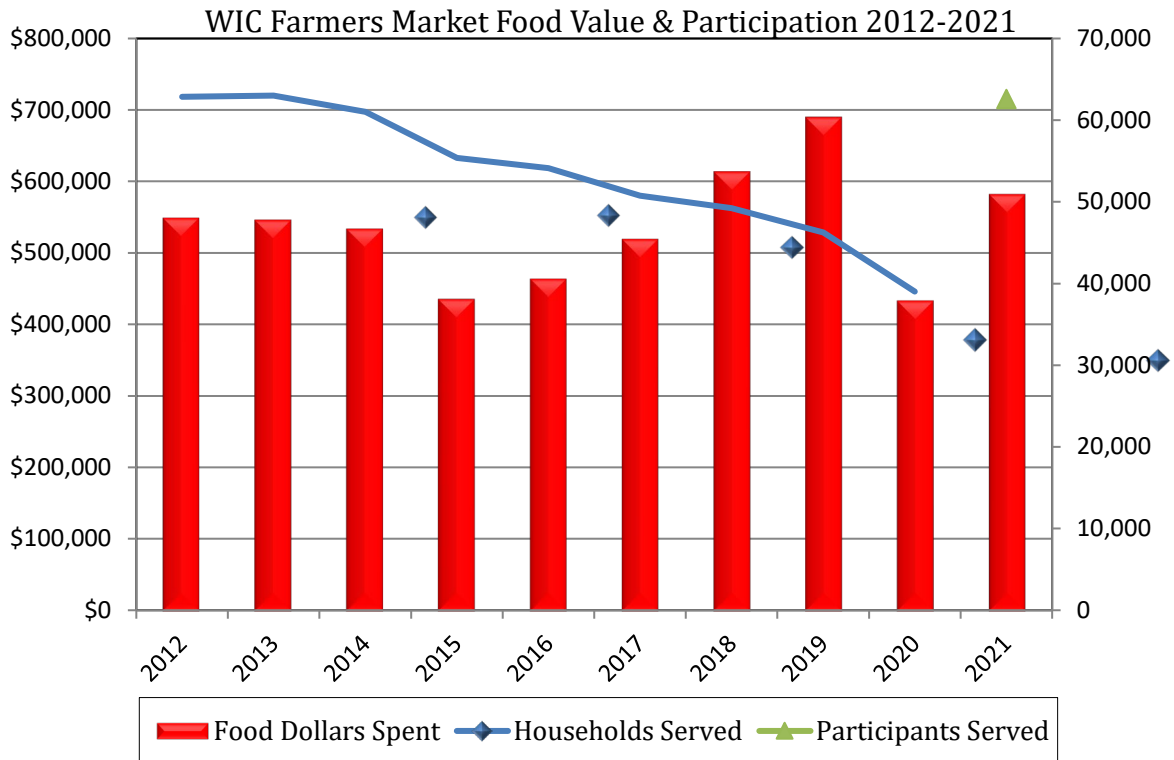
### The Senior Farmer Market Nutrition Program

The Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program provides a \$25 benefit to low income seniors, enabling them to purchase locally grown fruits, vegetables, and herbs from farmers markets and roadside stands. Seniors must have incomes at or below 185% of the federal poverty level (FPL) and be at least age 60 (Native Americans may participate at age 55). The program operates in 52 Wisconsin counties and in 2021 served 16,041 households with redemptions totaling \$244,750. The 2021 participation was higher by 3,030 households compared to 2020, which exhibits the great need and interest in this program.

### The WIC Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program

From June through October, the WIC Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program provides WIC participants \$30 benefit as well as the opportunity to purchase fresh produce directly from farmers. Surveys indicate these purchases increase interest in year-round

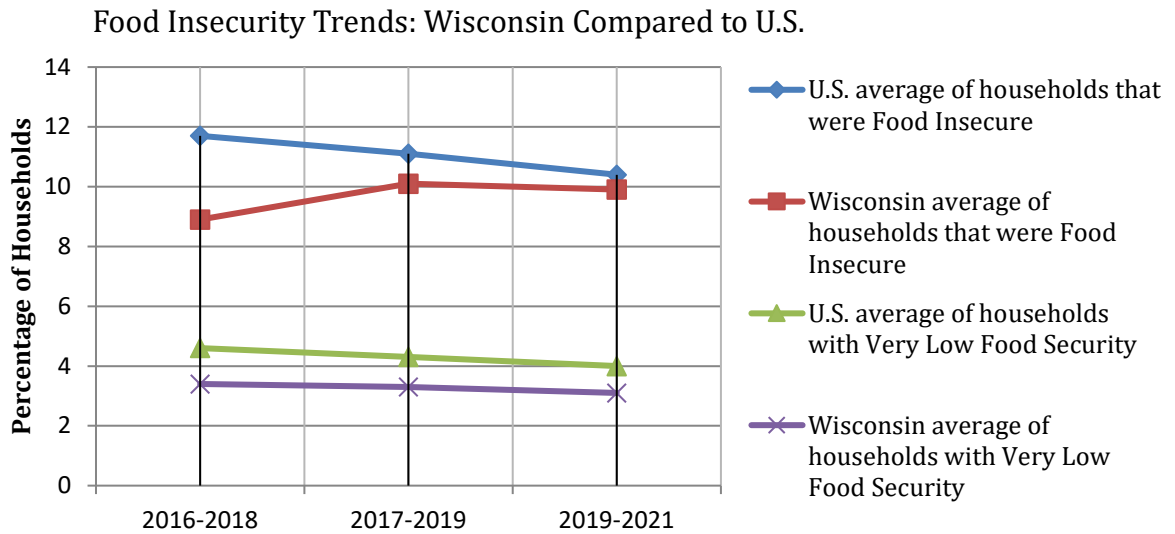
consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables. In 2021, 1,120 local farmers redeemed \$582,402 from 62,588 WIC individuals who spent their benefit at Wisconsin farmers markets and farm/roadside stands. The 2021 participation was much higher than in 2020, likely due to a transition in issuance from household to individual distribution of benefits. This change allowed WIC participants to potentially increase the number of persons in a household who were eligible for the program.



### Food Insecurity Trends in Wisconsin Compared to the U.S.

An important source of national food security data is the Economic Research Service (ERS) of the USDA, which surveys households about difficulties meeting basic food needs. Households are classified as “*food insecure*” if they reported three or more food-insecure conditions. A subset of “*food insecure*” households reports having “*very low food security.*” This means that, at times during the year, members reduced their food intake and disrupted their normal eating patterns because they lacked resources for food.

The most current ERS data available indicates Wisconsin’s food insecurity prevalence has declined slightly. From 2019 through 2021, Wisconsin’s average rate of food insecurity was 9.9%, compared to the higher national average of 10.4%. Wisconsin’s food insecurity rate has declined .1% from 2016-2018. Wisconsin’s average rate of households with “*very low food security*” in 2019-2021 was 3.1%, compared to the higher national average of 4%.



Both nationally and in Wisconsin, food insecurity is highest among households with incomes near or below the poverty level; households with children that are headed by a single parent/guardian; households comprising of women and men living alone; and households headed by individuals who are Black, Hispanic, or Native American.

In conclusion, the effort and challenges represented by the data in this 2021 report indicate the need for a continued commitment by DHS to fight hunger in Wisconsin.

Sincerely,

Kirsten L. Johnson  
Secretary-designee