



**GREATER
CHICAGO**
– **FOOD** –
DEPOSITORY®

HUNGER IN OUR COMMUNITY

A 2020 STATUS REPORT

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

In its 41-year history, the Greater Chicago Food Depository has never seen a hunger crisis like the current one caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Before March of 2020, poverty and hunger were already significant issues in Cook County. Feeding America estimated that pre-pandemic, more than **half a million Cook County residents** were living in food-insecure households, including 12% of local children.¹

Many more were on the edge of food insecurity. **Thirty-five percent of Cook County residents** lived in households that **earned less than the basic cost of living** for the U.S.²

Today, even more of our neighbors are struggling to put food on the table as a result of record unemployment, school closures, and other barriers that have made it more difficult to afford food. Feeding America estimates that **food insecurity in Cook County has risen by 51% in 2020.**³

THE FOOD DEPOSITORY'S NETWORK OF FOOD PANTRIES AND SIMILAR PROGRAMS HAS SEEN VISITS INCREASE, ON AVERAGE, BY MORE THAN 50% AND AT TIMES UP TO 150% DURING THE PANDEMIC.

Even when vaccines become widely distributed and the worst days of the pandemic are behind us, the economic recovery – and the return to pre-COVID hunger rates – will not be immediate. The Food Depository expects to address the impact of this crisis for months and even years to come.



FOOD INSECURITY IN COOK COUNTY, 2020

Feeding America estimates that annualized food insecurity in Cook County has jumped:



the equivalent of a

51% **increase** in food insecure households in Cook County, or

270,000

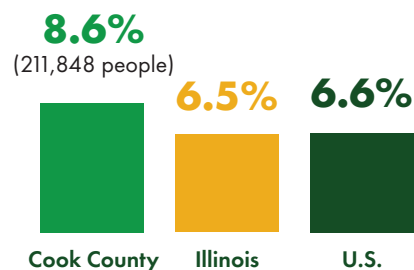
additional people facing food insecurity at some point throughout the year.



JOB LOSSES ACCELERATE FOOD INSECURITY

Business layoffs, reduced hours and closures have led to staggering unemployment, compounding a hunger crisis that existed before the pandemic. Since March 8, 2020, there have been more than **2.3 million new unemployment claims in Illinois**.

In October 2020, the unemployment rate for Cook County was significantly higher than the rate for Illinois and the nation.⁴ State unemployment filings are increasing again, as of December 2020.



In April, Cook County reached its **unemployment peak at 18.1%**. There's been a corresponding increase to the number of people seeking food assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). As of June 2020, nearly 544,000 households in Cook County were participating in the program – an increase of more than 28 percent from the same period a year ago.⁵

4 IN 10

Black and Latino households with children report they are food insecure according to a recent Northwestern University study.⁶

BLACK AND LATINO HOUSEHOLDS AT GREATER RISK

For generations – long before the pandemic – systemic inequities and racial injustice have led to disproportionate rates of poverty and food insecurity among our Black and Latino neighbors. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Black and Hispanic households face food insecurity rates more than **double** those of white, non-Hispanic households.⁷ The current crisis has only worsened those disparities, leaving residents of color not only more likely to contract the virus, but also suffer from the economic fallout.

OUR RESPONSE

To meet the unprecedented demand, the Food Depository has purchased, received and distributed record amounts of food since the start of the pandemic. Between March and November 2020, the Food Depository distributed:

48% more pounds of food compared to same time period in 2019,

an increase of

30.1 MIL additional pounds of food

including:

475,000 emergency boxes filled with 25-30 pounds of food each

350,000 summer meals for children in partnership with more than 115 community organizations





Throughout the pandemic, the Food Depository has launched more than **55 new partnerships** with community and faith-based organizations. Many of these new partners hosted pop-up food distributions, a temporary service model designed to provide equitable food assistance to predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods on the city's South and West Sides and in suburban Cook County.

55+

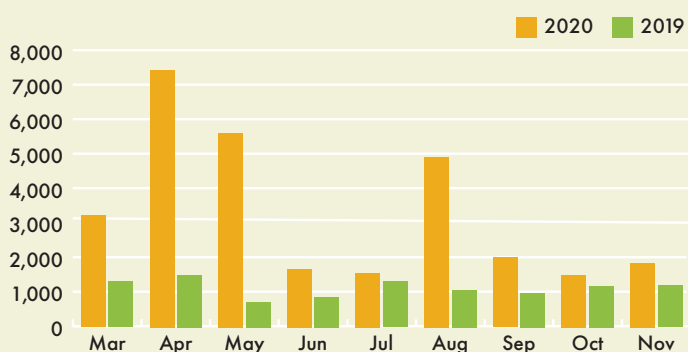
new partnerships with community and faith-based organizations.

Thanks to generous donors, the Food Depository has been able to keep up with rising food costs, which are up more than 133% compared to last year. Additional support has allowed us to offer more than **\$2.3 million in equity grants** to our community partners, many of which have faced increasing operating expenses. These grants are distributed with an emphasis on Black and Latino neighborhoods and high-need areas.

\$2.3 MIL

in equity grants provided to our community partners.

CALLS TO FOOD DEPOSITORY SNAP HOTLINE



In addition to providing food, the Food Depository's staff responded to the highest demand for public benefits assistance it has ever faced.

From mid-March to the end of October, the benefits outreach team submitted more than 3,000 benefit applications – mostly for SNAP – on behalf of households in need.

This is an increase of nearly 87% compared to the previous year, and equals \$9 million in local economic impact and 2 million meals.

CHARITY ALONE CANNOT SOLVE THIS CRISIS

The Food Depository expects the economic fallout of the pandemic to outlast the public health crisis. Food banks will be responding to elevated need for months and likely years to come. Congress and the USDA have provided much needed food, funds and flexibility to help food banks and the people we serve, but sustained relief will be necessary. We urge our federal leaders to continue enacting legislation that protects low-income families and essential workers with nutrition assistance, unemployment insurance, housing assistance and other vital supports. We also urge Congress and the USDA to provide additional commodities to food banks to meet the increased need. **Food banks are projected to see a 50% reduction in USDA food in 2021** without further action⁸ – the equivalent of **27.7 million lost meals in Illinois**.

SOURCES CITED

¹ Feeding America's 2018 Map the Meal Gap report (<https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2018/overall/illinois/county/cook>)

² United for ALICE report (<https://www.unitedforalice.org/illinois>)

³ Feeding America's Impact of Coronavirus on Food Insecurity report (<https://www.feedingamericaaction.org/the-impact-of-coronavirus-on-food-insecurity/>)

⁴ Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) and The Bureau of Labor Statistics/LAUS

⁵ Illinois Department of Human Services

⁶ Northwestern University analysis of Census Household Pulse Survey data (<https://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/news/2020/schanzenbach-household-pulse-survey-analysis-report-2.html>)

⁷ <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/interactive-charts-and-highlights/>

⁸ Feeding America - IL (feedingamericaaction.org)