



RHODE ISLAND COMMUNITY  
**FOOD BANK**

**40** YEARS | ENSURING NO ONE  
GOES HUNGRY

# IMPACT REPORT

## INNOVATING TO END HUNGER

Winter/Spring 2022

### Familiar Foods Welcome Diverse Food Pantry Guests

#### *Food Bank focuses on culturally responsive foods*

A variety of healthy foods are critical to good nutrition. But a lack of diverse food choices makes it difficult for people to find healthy foods that reflect their cultural preferences — especially at food pantries. The Food Bank has addressed these needs by providing more culturally responsive foods to agencies in our network.

These foods include plantains, bok choy, taro root and collard greens, among others. Central Falls-based Progreso Latino, one of the largest pantries, serves an average of 5,800 guests each month. The pantry routinely orders papaya, mangoes, plantains and cilantro, along with yellow rice.

“Latinos, immigrants and communities of color in Rhode Island face both extreme poverty and inequities in food security,” said Mario Bueno, executive director of Progreso Latino. “We support the expansion in cultural food offerings as an anti-hunger strategy that also improves nutrition, aids with dietary restrictions, provides cost savings to families and reduces food waste.”

Rosibelle, a Progreso Latino food pantry guest, says she visited the pantry more often during the pandemic to feed her husband and two daughters. “I love the plantains — they’re very delicious,” she said. “And the rice and beans are important to feed the children. It allows us to have a meal and share it as a family.”

Maria, a Progreso Latino volunteer and former guest, says the availability of fresh produce has brought many more people to the pantry. “Our people use yuca, sweet potatoes and plantains,” she says. “They were so happy when the produce came for the first time.”

The Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center in Newport serves an average of 900 guests each month. “We’re a client choice pantry, and everybody who comes in can select what they like,” said Ed Crowley, director of hunger services. “We try to have as few limitations on that as possible. The Food Bank has been really great in helping us source things that our clients need.”

Those needs — particularly for guests who come from Central America and the Caribbean — have included a variety of gourds, squash, plantains, cassava, greens and herbs, he said.

“As we’ve had more fresh, culturally responsive produce in our mobile pantry, we’ve seen the turnout increase,” Crowley said. “More and more people have come out.”

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— Ed Crowley, Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center



To provide more culturally relevant foods, the Food Bank has begun testing offerings like bok choy, yellow rice and plantains at select member agencies. Volunteers like Maria, at Progreso Latino, share that their guests appreciate the variety.



## Farm to Pantry Increases Variety of Fresh Foods

*Food Bank investments expand access to fresh, local foods*

For many years, the Food Bank has prioritized expanding access to fresh produce, to provide as much healthy food to food pantry guests as possible. Often, that meant huge quantities of a handful of items donated from national wholesalers and local farms — carrots, onions, potatoes, cabbage and apples. The items were often “seconds,” perfectly edible and nutritious, but the wrong shape or size to sell at retail.

While they appreciated the fresh foods, food pantry staff and guests expressed a desire for more variety. That’s why the Food Bank has made securing food from local farms, fisheries, and gleaners a top priority. As we aim to distribute 16 million pounds of food this year — the highest amount ever — our partnerships with local food suppliers increase our ability to help food-insecure families access a broader variety of fresh foods than the Food Bank normally has access to in donations.

We either buy food directly at wholesale prices from our partners, or pay a value-added processing fee (VAP) for donated food. This small per-pound fee helps defray harvesting, packaging and shipping costs faced by farmers and processors and encourages them to donate seconds and unsold product.

This year, we will continue to build and strengthen this critical fresh food network by investing in credits at local non-profit, Farm Fresh RI. This will enable member agencies to order a wide variety of fresh produce, meat, dairy and eggs at wholesale cost, expanding the variety of foods available to our guests and supporting the local farming economy. Orders are delivered directly to the food pantries, rather than passing through the



**A team member at Farm Fresh Rhode Island packages up fresh mushrooms for direct distribution to our member agencies.**

Food Bank, to keep fresh foods fresher and get them into the hands of guests sooner. Partnerships with the Commercial Fisheries Center of RI, gleaning organization Hope’s Harvest, and even Wright’s Dairy Farm will help us expand the food selection available to pantry guests.

“Thanks to the support of our donors, we’ve been able to make strategic investments in fresh foods from sources across the state,” said Andrew Schiff, Food Bank CEO. “This means that our food insecure neighbors can feed their families with the most nutritious food possible, while we also support Rhode Island’s food economy. It’s a win-win.”



**Jailine Ortiz, from the Food Bank’s SNAP outreach team, assists a guest at St. Peter’s by-the-Sea food pantry in Narragansett.**

## Connecting Families with Resources

*SNAP outreach program helps people access needed benefits*

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) — a federally-funded program administered through the RI Department of Human Services — improves food security by providing EBT cards with benefits that families can use to buy nutritious foods in supermarkets, farmers’ markets and at some online retailers. Formerly called food stamps, SNAP is the nation’s largest program for fighting domestic hunger.

SNAP is a critical benefit for Rhode Islanders who need food assistance, especially during the pandemic. Yet some eligible Rhode Islanders struggle to sign up, as the enrollment process can be lengthy and complicated.



# Rhode Islanders Struggle to Afford Adequate Food

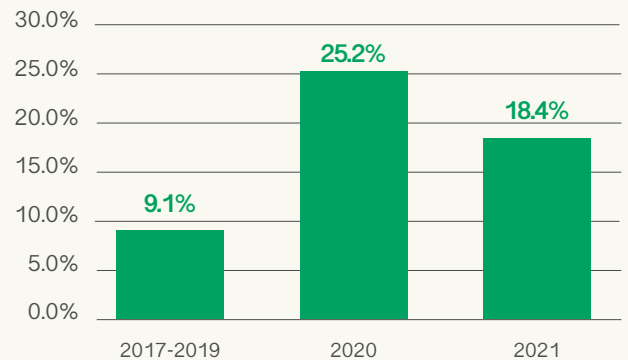
## Food insecurity disproportionately impacts communities of color

One in six Rhode Island households struggles to afford adequate food and the rate of food insecurity is even higher for non-white households. The Food Bank's *2021 Status Report on Hunger in Rhode Island* noted these and other critical findings.

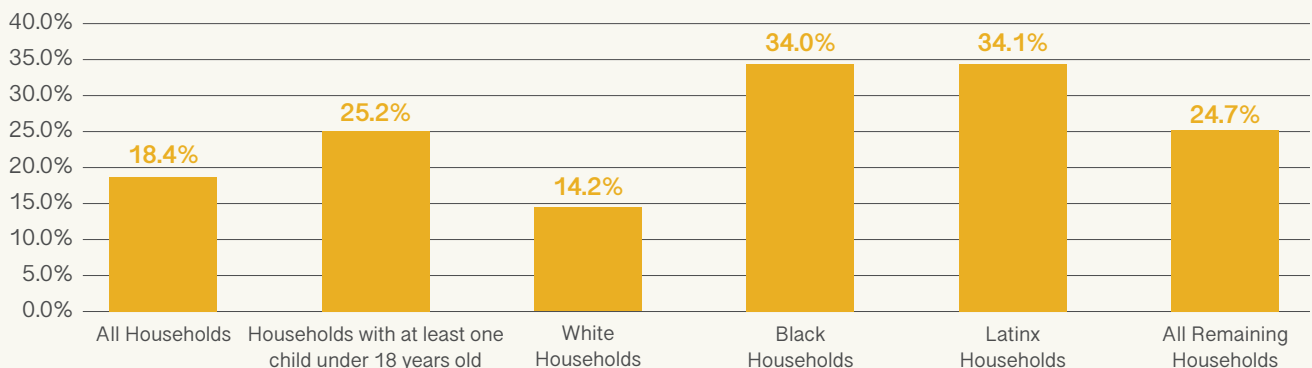
Federal COVID-19 benefits that helped many Rhode Islanders afford food during the pandemic are gradually ending. Yet many still face pandemic-related economic impacts, keeping the prevalence of food insecurity far above pre-COVID levels.

Just over 25% of households with children suffer from food insecurity: one in four. And communities of color are the most impacted. Thirty-four percent of Black and Latino households reported having difficulty affording adequate food (compared to 14% of White households). These challenges add to the disproportionate health and income burdens that COVID-19 has had on these communities.

**Prevalence of Food Insecurity Among All Households in RI**



**Prevalence of Food Insecurity Among Different Demographics in Rhode Island**



\*All remaining households include Asian, Native American/Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, and more than one race/ethnicity.

In November 2021, the Food Bank deployed a trained team to educate and advocate for those who need SNAP assistance. Community outreach manager, Lihna Agostini and SNAP outreach coordinator, Jailine Ortiz visit member agencies across the state each month to assist guests who may be eligible for SNAP. The team helps guests fill out forms, answers questions and makes referrals to RI Legal Services when guests need legal help. Support is available in English and Spanish and translation services are available for many other languages.

“Applying for SNAP benefits can be difficult. Our goal with the Outreach Program is to break down the barriers to applying so that people can get the help they are entitled to,” Ortiz said. “We’re providing a service that many times, the community members we work with didn’t even realize

they were eligible for. It’s not just completing the application; it’s also troubleshooting and connecting people to resources to get help. And it’s making an impact.”

“These forms are so hard,” said Sara, a guest at St. Peter’s by-the-Sea food pantry in Narragansett. “If you make one small mistake, everything gets sent back. Then you have to start again and you can’t get help right away. Having Jailene here has really helped me because I know it’s going to be filled out right and go where it needs to go. It’s a big relief.”

To learn more about our SNAP Outreach Program and see the outreach visit schedule, visit [rifoodbank.org/SNAP](https://rifoodbank.org/SNAP)



Three satisfied diners at Segue Institute for Learning in Central Falls, one of three Kids Cafe meal distribution sites that serves hot, nutritious dinners to kids in after-school programs.

## Breaking Bread Together

### *Expanded Kids Cafe program builds nourishing communities*

Hectic schedules, limited resources and long working hours make evening meals a challenge for many families. Schools often finish lunch by 11:30 a.m. and students arrive hungry to afterschool programs. The Food Bank's *Kids Cafe* program addresses this nutrition gap by serving healthy evening meals to children at risk of hunger in afterschool programs at local community centers.

Each day, Food Bank chefs and Healthy Habits staff prepare approximately 200 healthy meals for delivery to the East Providence Boys & Girls Club, the Pawtucket YMCA and now the Segue Institute for Learning in Central Falls. This year, we expect to increase the number of meals served daily to 320.

"We have after school programs Monday through Friday, to allow as many students to participate as possible," said Angelo Garcia, founder and executive director at the Segue Institute. "By the time a parent picks up their child from the program, they've eaten a nutritious dinner and participated in an activity like basketball, theater and more. There was a time when feeding a student dinner had a stigma attached to it, but now it's part of the culture of our school. We break bread together. There's no shame in that."

Each child gets a fresh, healthy meal designed to encourage them to try new foods — especially fruits and vegetables. The Food Bank's Healthy Habits team incorporates fun educational activities, with kids voting for the foods they like and selecting favorites for the next month's menu. The team visits each site monthly with new age-appropriate activities to help expand even the pickiest eaters' palates.

***"There was a time when feeding a student dinner had a stigma attached to it, but now it's part of the culture of our school. We break bread together. There's no shame in that."***

**— Angelo Garcia, Segue Institute for Learning**

Caely Flynn, an 8th grade Innovations teacher at Segue, shared, "The food is really good and the kids love it. It's really fun to get to know them over a meal. It's a relaxing time where we can just talk. And just knowing the food is there for them is a relief."



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