

Food Security Needs Assessment 2022

Executive Summary

Food insecurity is defined as a “household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food.”¹ Food insecurity rates increased in Ramsey County during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially among those who struggle to overcome its resulting economic challenges. Ramsey County commissioned a Needs Assessment to examine food insecurity, rooted in community engagement and broad stakeholder inputs across the system, to answer the question: **“What is Ramsey County’s role in supporting greater food security?”**

This assessment started with a review of Ramsey County-specific quantitative data, followed by in-depth interviews, an online survey for service providers and food support recipients, and in-person surveys with community members. This document summarizes the results of this analysis; the full report can be found at: <https://www.ramseycounty.us/sites/default/files/Assistance%20and%20Support/Ramsey%20County%20Food%20Assessment%202022%20FINAL.pdf>

Measuring Food Insecurity Ramsey County

Food insecurity rates in Ramsey County are **above the state average**: in 2021, 11% of the county’s adults and 17% of the county’s children were food insecure, compared to 9% and 13% statewide, respectively.

Usage rates for SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, reveal wide disparities in the extent to which various racial and ethnic groups access food benefits. In 2021, nearly **half of the total Black/African American population** in Ramsey County were on SNAP, about a **third of the total Asian population**, and **20% of all Native residents** used SNAP that year. Conversely, lower proportions of White, Hispanic/Latinx, and Multiple Race residents accessed SNAP benefits: about **10% of all Hispanic/Latinx and Multiple Race residents** and about 5%, or **one out of every 20 White residents**, used SNAP in 2021.

Mapping food insecurity rates across the county (Figure 1) shows that the **highest** concentrations in the University Avenue, Midway, Frogtown, and Capitol Heights areas of Saint Paul, shown with red borders. The **lowest** rates are found in the northern suburbs and the southeast corner of the county, shown with green borders.

Food Shelf usage rates show demand for food shelves has increased since the start of COVID and, in 2022, is on track to be nearly 50% higher than pre-pandemic levels. Usage rates have grown the most among seniors, increasing 160% since 2020.

Meals on Wheels served 1,375 total recipients in 2021. Usage rates were highest in Roseville (55113), East Side (55106), North End (55117), and University-Midway (55104). White residents make up about two-thirds of the recipients, but Black/African American and Mixed-Race recipients rose by 10% between 2019 and 2021.

School Feeding Rates were higher in Ramsey County (56%) than the state average (37.5%) in 2018. During the pandemic, universal free school lunch was provided to all students; this benefit ended in 2022 but students whose family income is less than 185% of FPG are still eligible. SNAP and MFIP recipients are automatically enrolled; those on WIC must submit a formal application.

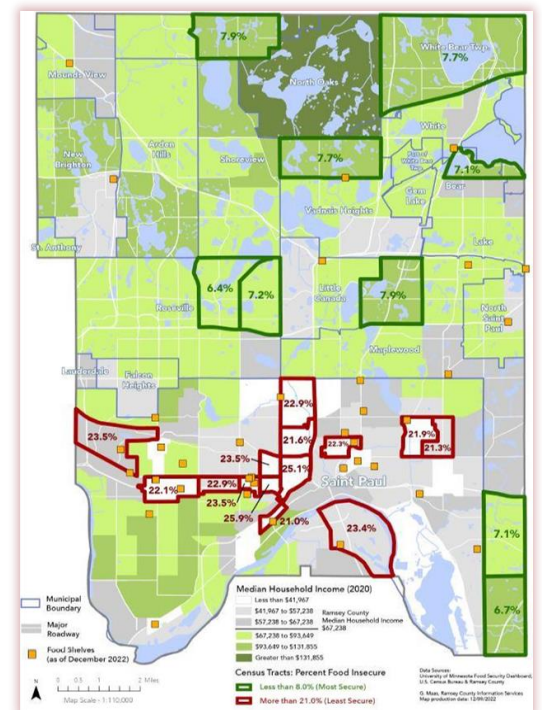


Fig.1. Food insecurity rates by census tract

¹ USDA ERS (2021, Sept. 8). “Definitions of Food Security.” <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/definitions-of-food-security/>

Community Vision for a Better Food System

Ramsey County's Food Security Coordinator engaged more than 400 individuals representing service providers and recipients of food assistance, through one-on-one interviews, an online survey, and in-person qualitative surveys at six pop-up events hosted at food distribution sites conducted in June 2022. **Four Key Themes emerged from these discussions;** each of these themes and the planned activities to address them, are discussed below.

Theme 1: Expanding the Food Safety Net System

This theme will support enhanced capacity of food shelves and other safety net providers through improved transportation options to support food distribution; more culturally appropriate, fresh, and healthy options offered; increased distribution services to meet immediate community needs; and easier processes for residents to access food assistance from food shelves.

"Everyone has a garden in their backyard ... expanding farmers markets, rooftop farming, fruit trees, fruits grown locally ... taking people out to go fishing for their own food."

Black Transgender, age 45-64
zip code 55102

Theme 2: Expanding Urban Agriculture

This theme will support expanded availability and productivity of community gardens and other urban growing spaces to promote food sovereignty. This will be achieved through enhanced planning processes to ensure accessible community-based urban agriculture that accommodates multi-year growing seasons and long-term investments in agricultural development focusing especially on low-income urban communities with diverse racial and ethnic residents.

Theme 3: Increasing Access to Public Benefits

This theme will promote greater access to food-security benefits like SNAP and WIC through increased number of access points at which to apply for benefits; improved co-enrollment processes; increased benefit redemption rates, especially among demographic groups with low usage rates; and increased health care screening and referral programs to access county benefits holistically.

"We barely survive paying for daily essentials and rent ... The cost of food should be realistic and not just a high cost for all. If that can't be, then the income limits for SNAP should be higher."

Multiracial female, age 25-34
zip code 55112

Theme 4: Expanding Food Availability and Affordability

This theme will promote more affordable food options available in the community through expanded subsidy programs; increased redemption of Farmers Market Bucks; maintaining stable and consistent food access points for all residents; and strengthening the local economy through system upgrades.

Food Security Strategic Leadership

Going forward, the Food Security Coordinator will manage implementation of the activities under these Key Themes with guidance from the Internal Steering Committee and External Governance Team, described below.

Internal Steering Committee is comprised of Ramsey County food security and health service team members, including staff from WIC and FAS, Policy and Planning, Research and Evaluation, and Race and Health Equity teams, who will provide internal guidance and implementation support for the key thematic areas.

External Governance Team includes representatives of food security and health services providers within Ramsey County, who will provide support and strategic guidance for the county's efforts.

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