



## Health: Body Mind and Spirit

### Food Security and Resilient Local Food Systems

#### Real Stories and Real Lives

Danny (4) and Linda (5) are being raised by their grandparents Tony and Lisa. They live about 90 miles from a grocery store and while both Tony and Lisa grew up growing food and know how to make do, they do not have access to water for irrigation. As retirees, Tony and Lisa live on a fixed income. They work hard to live within their means and manage their resources. The increased expenses of raising two growing children has resulted in Tony and Lisa regularly skipping meals to make sure the children have enough to eat. At a recent check-up for the kids, Tony and Lisa were asked what Linda and Danny like to eat. They were encouraged to introduce the children to more fresh fruits and vegetables. While there are many fresh foods the family enjoys, they are hard to purchase.

#### Social Conditions and Underlying Causes

According to the New Mexico Department of Health's Indicator-Based Information Systems (IBIS) [Health Indicator Report of Food Insecurity](#), "Inconsistent access to adequate amounts of nutritious food can have a negative impact on the health of individuals of all ages. The USDA estimates that as of 2017, 326,000 people, including over 118,000 children, in New Mexico are food insecure. That means 1 in 6 individuals (15.5%) and 1 in 4 children (24%) live in homes without consistent access to adequate food for everyone to live healthy, active lives. In the US, adults in food insecure households are much more likely than food secure adults to have hypertension, diabetes, heart disease, and other chronic health problems. Although food insecurity is harmful to any individual, it can be particularly devastating among children because they are more vulnerable to potential long-term consequences for their future physical and mental health and academic achievement."



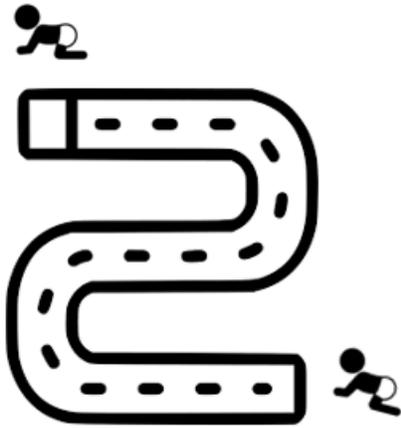
6%

Feeding America and Roadrunner Food Bank are using data from a variety of sources to estimate how the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) will affect food insecurity rates and the people who face hunger across New Mexico. The [report about New Mexico](#) is concerning. Between 2018 and 2020, the state's overall rate of food insecurity

increased from 15% to 21%, and the food insecurity rate for children increased from 24% to 34%. Counties varied considerably in their food-insecurity rates, with overall rates ranging from 12% in Los Alamos County to 27.5% in Luna and McKinley Counties. The rates for children ranged from 19.5% in Los Alamos County to 47.4 % in Catron County. A second analysis, using the U.S. Census' new [Household Pulse Survey](#), confirms this trend nationally, but cautions that high rates of child food insecurity are still lower than the even higher rates of food insecure households with children (27% nationally). Parents often ensure their children eat, even when that means skipping meals themselves.

New Mexico has a robust network of food banks, food pantries, food closets and urgent/emergency food relief providers. With regional food banks that serve multiple counties, this network of 500+ providers sources and delivers food to individuals and families in need across New Mexico. This critical infrastructure that is in place to provide a safety net across New Mexico is primarily funded by private donations.





Two studies by Children’s Health Watch add to the research documenting the negative impact that food insecurity has on children’s health and development. “[Too Hungry to Learn](#)” concludes that by kindergarten, food insecure children are too often cognitively, emotionally, and physically behind their food-secure peers. These effects carry through the early school years, hampering their ability to achieve educational success. These early set-backs, moreover, have implications for our nation’s economy and social vitality. “[Feeding our Human Capital](#)” argues that early and ongoing experiences of food insecurity add to healthcare costs, reduce the skills and productivity of our workforce, and weaken our communities. We know that the well-being of communities is comprised of the well-being of individuals and

families. With such high hunger rates in New Mexico, it’s clear how access to nutritious food is a determinant of health.

The New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department has agreements with community-based non-profit organizations and eligible for-profit organizations to administer the [Child and Adult Care Food Program \(CACFP\)](#). CACFP provides reimbursement to childcare providers for nutritious meals and snacks served to primarily low-income children in early learning settings. Settings include childcare centers, Head Start and Early Head Start programs, family childcare homes, after school programs, and emergency shelters. Adult Day Care centers that are licensed and provide care to adults in non-residential settings are also reimbursed through this program for the eligible meals they provide. The program is administered by the Family Nutrition Bureau (FNB) and is 100% federally funded. According to the USDA report [Child Nutrition Tables](#) released July 2020, 35,923 New Mexicans participated in the program in 2019.

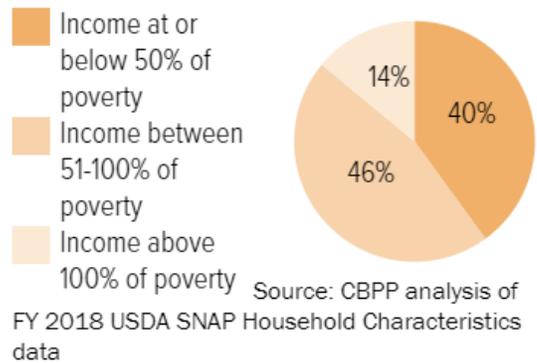
CYFD’s Family Nutrition Bureau (FNB) also administers the [Summer Food Service Program \(SFSP\)](#), which provides nutritious meals to children during the summer when school is not in session. Similar to CACFP, CYFD develops agreements with local nonprofit sponsoring agencies, local government agencies, faith-based organizations, summer camps, school food authorities and other eligible institutions to serve children. In 2019, 25,931 children participated.

[IBIS](#) reports that 89% of all New Mexico school districts have over 50% of their students who are eligible for free or reduced lunches. (NM-IBIS retrieved 2020) According to the [USDA Child Nutrition Tables](#), 208,952 children received free lunches and 141,632 children received free breakfasts in 2019. Strides have been made to distribute fresh, quality, locally grown food to New Mexico schools through a partnership between the NM Public Education Department, the New Mexico Farmers’ Marketing Association, and producers across the state.

The [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#) is administered by the NM Human Services Department. It is designed to provide families of low-income greater access to food. According to the [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#), 448,000 New Mexicans or 21% of our residents participated in SNAP in 2019. This is in comparison to the 12% participation rates across the US. 68% of families using SNAP benefits in New Mexico have children, and 29% have disabled or elderly family members. Over 50% of families have one or more members who are employed. The [SNAP Double-Up Food Bucks Program](#) allows people to use their SNAP benefits to purchase locally grown food and doubles their purchasing power. Not only is this good for our health, it is good for the health of our economy when resources are invested in local agriculture.

The Aging and Long-term Services Department administers the [senior meals and nutrition program](#). The nutrition program provides elders in New Mexico a “nutritional breakfast and lunch in an atmosphere that promotes good health, socialization, and nutritional education and counseling. The program’s focus and emphasis is on the importance of healthy eating as you age, feeding your body, mind, and soul!” During the pandemic, this program has pivoted to delivering meals to seniors’ homes. Aging and Long Term Services has also supported the purchase of New Mexico grown fresh fruits and vegetables for senior meals.

Share of participants by household income, FY 2018



Lack of access to food has many underlying causes in New Mexico, including but not limited to income insecurity and food deserts.

- According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation [2020 Kids Count Data Book](#), New Mexico is at the very bottom of national ranking in child well-being and economic well-being.
- Food deserts exist across New Mexico and are places with limited access to a range of nutritious and affordable foods. The reasons for food deserts may be due to lack of income to purchase food or the need to travel long distances to get food. According to the [United States Department of Agriculture \(USDA\)](#), food deserts exist in rural and urban settings, areas with higher poverty rates are more likely to have food deserts, and “The proportion of minorities in rural food desert tracts is around 65% greater than in non-food desert tracts.”
- Jeff Witte, Secretary of the NM Department of Agriculture, recognizes that our local food supply is very vulnerable. “NMSU, in a recent report, documented that as a state we export 97 percent of our agriculture production out of state or country to be further processed and added value. We then import over \$4 Billion of food to be consumed in New Mexico. We have an opportunity before us to not only grow our state economy, but provide a more efficient food system by increasing value added agriculture in New Mexico.” While many have worked to remedy this challenge, it still persists.

### **Policy Options to Increase Food Security and Strengthen Local Food Systems**

A cross sector approach is essential to alleviating food insecurity and strengthening local food systems. The causes of profound hunger across the lifespan point to the need for deep systems change, from peoples’ relationships with food, how food is grown, sourced, and distributed to how families access food during community-wide emergencies and personal emergencies. From stakeholders who care about emergency food relief, sustainable local food systems, and poverty alleviation to ethical uses of natural resources, economics, and health policy, multiple perspectives and resources must be brought to bear to gain positive momentum on food security and building healthy local food systems.

Three core policy areas have been identified by the statewide [Food, Hunger, Water, and Ag Policy Workgroup](#) to address hunger and strengthen local food systems:

- Develop policies which address the root causes of food insecurity.
- Identify and implement policies that support hunger relief, nutrition and feeding programs.
- Invest in strategies to develop local food systems and strengthen resilient local agriculture.