

Helping to Create Hunger-Free Communities

Hunger is a reality for 1 in 5 children in the FaHN region. An estimated 79,760 people of which 27,950 are children experience food insecurity at some time during the year. And startling numbers of residents are suffering from diseases such as obesity and diabetes, partly due to nutrient poor diets. Food insecurity means lack of regular access to basic food needs. Communities pay a high price for hunger: Medical problems, learning difficulties, fatigue and emotional distress to name a few.

Poverty, low wages, economic insecurity, unemployment, adult low literacy rates ranging from 9 to 12 % in the region, and rising costs of living expenses are an intertwined and toxic mix for low-income families struggling to afford nutritious food. This is especially harsh on children.

Poverty rates for children are 3 times higher than poverty rates for seniors in the FaHN region:

- Children, 0-17.....21%
- Adults, 25-64..... 12%
- Seniors, 65+.....7 %

When children are chronically malnourished it can affect their ability to learn and thrive. When children are well nourished their potential for future job opportunities, better incomes and breaking the trap of generational poverty grows.

Communities Working to Address the Root Causes of Hunger

While emergency food assistance programs are *essential*, they are not the whole answer. Ending hunger requires ongoing, integrated and sustainable solutions for economic security. Families need positive opportunities to break the cycle of poverty, to experience the benefits of eating nutritious food, and to be empowered by public policies and practices that build on community and neighborhood assets. Here are a few examples of promising community initiatives to reduce hunger in the FaHN region:

Policy and Advocacy

The **Broome County Child Hunger Task Force** was created to address policies and practices for reducing root causes of hunger.

"The Broome County Child Hunger Task Force, while still in its infancy, has mobilized stakeholders from various sectors around the issue of child hunger, which has a tremendous negative impact on our community. The reality is that it costs more to ignore hunger than it does to eliminate it, but doing so requires collaboration among non-profit agencies, government, education and the business community. We all have a role to play in ensuring that every child has access to enough nutritious food to be a healthy, engaged and contributing member of society." *Natasha R. Thompson, Co-leader Broome County Child Hunger Task Force; President & CEO, Food Bank of the Southern Tier.*

Food Security through Financial Security

In **Broome County**, the **United Way** partners with the **Department of Social Services** to offer free tax return preparation for low to moderate income Broome and Tioga County residents through their **Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program (VITA)**. After VITA volunteers receive IRS certified tax training, they help residents receive all tax benefits for which they are eligible, including the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). According to the Tax Policy Center, after SNAP benefits, the EITC is our country's largest cash or near cash assistance program for low income families. EITC is considered the single most powerful tool to lift children out of poverty.

For all sites in Broome, VITA's efforts yielded \$1.7 million in tax refunds for residents in 2012. At Broome United Way's site, from 2010 to 2013, VITA volunteers helped prepare 1,045 tax returns, resulting in \$2,124,624 in tax refunds, which families can use for essentials such as food.

Growing our own food

Caroline Food Pantry's **Chicken Coop Project** in **Tompkins County** started when a group of special needs children were incubating eggs for their science class. When they wondered what to do with the chicks after they hatched a connection with the Caroline Food Pantry resulted in the Chicken Coop Project. Food pantry clients helped build chicken coops in their backyards; each received 6 chickens and the egg laying began. Children whose families are participating seem healthier: An elementary school teacher noticed that students eating eggs for breakfast were more alert and ready to learn.



Delaware County Cooperative Extension's "Choose Health Through Gardening" program engages Eat Smart New York CCE staff at 5 schools. Hands on nutrition and gardening lessons are fun for students in Hancock, Sidney, Andes, Margaretville and Roxbury schools.

Chenango County Cooperative Extension's Grow, Cook, Eat program, funded by United Way, is designed to give participants an integrated and holistic program so that the whole experience is greater than the sum of its parts. Requirements for graduation include taking 17 classes ranging from gardening, cooking and nutrition, food preservation, and physical fitness to completing 10 hours of volunteer work in the community. In 3 years 37 residents have participated. Participants have reported that they were eating healthier by using produce from their gardens, shopping at farmers' markets or farm stands and using healthier recipes.



The Food & Health Network's Food Systems Assessment (FSA) tracks progress towards a healthy, thriving, and food-secure regional food system. This 2014 report focuses on the food security component of the FSA and highlights trends towards the Network's vision for a hunger free community. Indicators on this page address the need for: (1) Decreases in the number of food insecure individuals. (2) Increases in percent of children in low income areas benefitting from summer lunch programs. See tables below and data sources on the last page.



What is Food Insecurity? What Does it Look Like?

An estimated 75,000+ residents in FaHN's 8 county region are hungry. Over 27,000 are children. These statistics, from Feeding America's **Map the Meal Gap** analysis of counties in the US, reflect major determinants of the need for food, such as unemployment and poverty.

Food Security refers to the USDA's measure of: Lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active healthy life for all household members, and limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods. Food insecure households are not necessarily food insecure all of the time in a given year. For example, there may be seasonal food insecurity and children may go hungry in communities without **Summer Food Service Programs**. Food insecurity may reflect a household's need to make tradeoffs between basic needs, such as housing and medical bills and purchasing nutritionally adequate foods.

From 2009 to 2012 all counties experienced a decrease in the number and percent of children who were food insecure. In many counties, however, the percent of food insecure children is still nearly *double* the rate of all residents. From 2009 to 2012, all counties except Tompkins experienced a decrease in the number and percent of total residents who were food insecure.



"Child hunger is a health problem, an education problem, and a workforce and job readiness problem. Ending child hunger is an economic imperative." *Child Food Insecurity: The Economic Impact on our Nation, Feeding America*

	Estimated Number of Food Insecure Individuals in 2012		Estimated Percent of Food Insecure Individuals in 2012	
	Children	All Residents	Children	All Residents
Broome	9,060	25,880	22.5%	12.9%
Chemung	4,550	11,410	23.0%	12.9%
Chenango	2,520	5,660	22.0%	11.1%
Cortland	2,150	6,130	20.9%	12.4%
Delaware	2,100	5,490	22.5%	11.5%
Otsego	2,360	7,140	20.5%	11.5%
Tioga	2,170	4,770	18.3%	9.3%
Tompkins	3,040	13,280	18.4%	13.1%
Region	27,950	79,760	Not available from source	Not available from source
NYS			21.8%	14.1%

Hungry Kids Need Summer Lunches

As noted by **Hunger Solutions New York** in *Bridging the Summer Nutrition Gap*, during the school year many low income children and teenagers rely on reduced price or free school meals. Fortunately, the **Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)** provides federal and state funding to qualified organizations to serve free meals when school is out. These meals help prevent hunger in children. Non-profits, schools, and faith-based groups use this funding to serve free, nutritious meals at locations such as parks, schools, libraries and churches. See www.summermealsny.org for summer meals locations in each county.

SFSP benefits children: Free, nutritious meals promote healthy development and help curb obesity. The accompanying educational and enrichment programs keep them learning, engaged, active and safe during summer vacation and promote positive peer interactions.

SFSP benefits communities: Free meals help parents stretch food dollars. Despite these benefits, not enough hungry children are participating: In 2013, only 20% of children in the region eating free or reduced price lunch during the school year benefitted from summer lunch programs. Delaware and Cortland Counties had the highest participation rates.

County	# Low-Income Children Eating School Year Reduced/Free Lunch		# Low-Income Children Eating SFSP Summer Lunches		% of Eligible Children Participating in SFSP Summer Lunches	
	2009	2013	2009	2013	2009	2013
Broome	9,697	10,392	2,321	2,201	24%	21%
Chemung	4,364	4,376	439	446	10%	10%
Chenango	3,298	3,165	319	556	10%	18%
Cortland	2,351	2,448	659	778	28%	32%
Delaware	2,450	2,574	955	966	39%	38%
Otsego	2,662	2,450	305	207	12%	8%
Tioga	2,750	2,858	565	342	21%	12%
Tompkins	3,250	3,212	827	832	26%	29%
Region	30,822	31,475	6,390	6,328	21%	20%

By increasing regional average participation rates from 20 % to 40%, 6,328 more children in the region would be better nourished. And the region's economy would be bolstered by \$22,148 *per day* in state and federal dollars, based on an estimated reimbursement of \$3.50 per meal.

FaHN encourages communities to take action to reduce barriers to participation. Accessible meal site locations in both urban and rural areas, activities at sites to attract children and teens, and outreach to increase awareness of the free meal sites can increase participation rates. The new **Chemung County Child Hunger Task Force** is working to enhance program outreach, provide resources for community feeding sites to attract participation, and create a plan for future improvements.



The Food & Health Network's Food Systems Assessment indicators on this page address the need for: (1) Increases in the availability of fresh produce and local healthy meats for residents who need food from food banks and food pantries. (2) Increases in percent of eligible residents benefitting from SNAP, the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program formerly called Food Stamps.



Healthy, Local Food Benefits Limited Resource Residents

Hunger relief agencies feeding children: Every Friday during the school year, the **Food Bank of the Southern Tier's Backpack Program** offers children backpacks filled with nutritious, kid-friendly food. The program operates in 39 school districts across the Southern Tier, serving about 2,200 children each week. A great way to help stave off hunger over the weekend. Thanks to a grant, a new pilot program in 3 of the school districts ... Corning/Painted Post, Ithaca and Binghamton ... features the addition of locally grown fruits and vegetables to children's backpacks.

High protein, low fat venison: Thanks to a partnership with the **NYS Venison Donation Coalition**, meat processors and food banks, hunters can donate deer to help nourish hungry residents. Processors, who are reimbursed through the NYS Department of Health's **Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program**, process the meat into handy, one-pound frozen bags, for distribution through regional food banks. This program is an example of a successful partnership connecting locally available food with hunger relief, while managing an abundant natural resource. From 2012 to 2013, food banks serving FaHN counties distributed 6,293 pounds of frozen, ground venison. A 52% increase in 2 years! Three counties are not yet participating: FaHN encourages processors in Delaware, Otsego and Tompkins Counties to consider participating in the venison donation program during the next hunting season. For a list of processors see www.VenisonDonation.com.

Fresh Produce: 1,218,395 pounds of fresh produce were distributed by our region's food banks to hunger relief agencies last year. A 24% increase in fresh produce between 2010 and 2013 is helping to combat nutrient-deficient diets. This increase is noteworthy since less than 1 in 3 of all residents in the region consumed the recommended 5 or more servings a day.

County	Lbs. of Venison Donated to Food Banks		Lbs. of Fresh Produce for Hunger Relief Agencies	
	2010-11	2012-13	2010	2013
Broome	427	871	211,318	236,460
Chemung	956	2,550	279,261	289,173
Chenango	0	606	32,848	87,324
Cortland	1,078	470	48,031	75,208
Delaware	0	0	37,135	91,762
Otsego	0	0	104,068	145,099
Tioga	1,669	1,796	127,443	145,379
Tompkins	0	0	140,730	147,810
Region	4,130	6,293	982,834	1,218,395

NYS grown food for emergency food providers: In FY 2011-12, the **Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP)** contractors reported locally grown food purchases of \$1.2 million.

SNAP Reduces Hunger & Fuels the Economy

SNAP helped over 91,000 residents put healthy food on their tables in 2013. That's 1 in 7 residents. SNAP is our country's first line of defense against hunger, and primarily benefits households with children, seniors and disabled family members. **Nutrition Outreach & Education Program (NOEP)** coordinators in each county help connect residents with nutrition assistance, such as SNAP. In 2013, monthly SNAP benefits in the region averaged about \$132 per recipient. Please see www.FoodHelpNY.org and www.myBenefits.ny.gov for assistance.

From 2009 to 2013, the FaHN region had a 27% increase in the number of residents benefitting from SNAP, from 71,926 to 91,267. Increases in SNAP participation may be in part due to a streamlined application process, increased outreach and increased use of Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards.

SNAP generated over a quarter of a billion dollars in economic activity in the region in 2013: According to the **Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)**, every dollar in SNAP benefits generates \$1.79 in economic activity. SNAP recipients in the FaHN region bought \$144,894,000 worth of food in grocery stores and farmers markets in 2013, resulting in a \$259,360,000 positive impact on the economy.

County	Est. % of Eligible Residents Receiving SNAP		Total SNAP Recipients		Total Population	% of Total Population receiving SNAP
	2009	2013	2009	2013	2013	2013
Broome	62%	73%	27,714	31,195	197,534	16%
Chemung	73%	99%*	12,376	16,008	88,506	18%
Chenango	76%	79%	6,953	8,046	49,503	16%
Cortland	62%	82%	5,911	7,403	48,976	15%
Delaware	51%	80%	4,539	6,418	46,722	14%
Otsego	38%	55%	4,866	6,316	61,683	10%
Tioga	76%	90%	5,357	6,461	50,243	13%
Tompkins	37%	46%	7,210	9,420	103,617	9%
Region	58%	73%	71,926	91,267	646,784	14%

The estimated SNAP participation rates in the above table are based on FRAC's methodology: The rate is the number of SNAP recipients as a percent of the number of residents with incomes below 125% of Federal poverty level. SNAP eligibility factors beyond income are not taken into account in developing these percentages. Since some population groups with incomes under 200% of poverty may be eligible for SNAP, the participation rates may be *lower* than these estimates. *For example, Chemung's actual rate is probably not 99%. Caution is advised in drawing conclusions about trends and county specific comparisons. The best approach, for example, would be to note that Chemung reaches considerably more low income residents with SNAP than does Otsego.

Everyone is a stakeholder when it comes to healthy, locally grown food.

PLEASE JOIN US! BECOME A MEMBER OR SPONSOR TODAY!

www.FoodandHealthNetwork.org

FaHN members represent the agricultural, food security, nutrition and public health, environmental health, sustainability, planning, economic development, business, educational, consumer and community sectors. FaHN is a coalition administered by the non-profit Rural Health Network of South Central New York, based in Whitney Point.



Strong farm to consumer connections are essential for a thriving local food system. This report also highlights FaHN's Food Systems Assessment vision that local food citizens of all income levels are connected to local agriculture and consume more locally produced, fresh, safe, healthful food. Indicators to track progress towards this vision are: (1) Increases in the number and percent of farmers' markets using Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) for customers to purchase local foods with SNAP and other benefits. (2) Increases in the value of sales from EBT at farmers' markets.

Creating Strong Farm to Consumer Connections with SNAP Benefits at Farmers' Markets

The number of farmers' markets in the region with EBT authorization increased from 18 in 2010 to 27 in 2013. EBT sales at farmers' markets in the region increased 28% during this same period. Chemung, Cortland, Otsego and Tioga Counties experienced percent increases in EBT sales greater than the regional average in the past three years.



The NY Farmers' Market EBT/Food Stamp/SNAP program, is a collaborative partnership of 2 state agencies and the **New York Farmers' Market Federation**, which can help increase use of EBT benefits at farmers' markets. See www.snaptomarket.com.

Community Supported Agriculture ... CSAs Benefitting Residents with Limited Resources

Building community health, food equity and farm viability, several CSAs in the region offer limited resource residents subsidized prices for CSA shares, while paying local farmers a fair price for their products. Farmers benefit. Consumers benefit with local, fresh, healthy food.

Healthy Food for All, a partnership with 10 local farms and **Tompkins County Cooperative Extension**, is recognized as one of the region's most successful local food programs that benefit low income residents. The program subsidizes the price of CSA shares and offers resources to support healthy lifestyle choices. In 2013, 120 low income households participated. The program recently expanded to Dryden and Groton. Plans are to double the number of subsidized CSA shares for 2014-16.

Two other areas started programs for low income residents in 2013:

Cortland Community Action Program partners with **Main Street Farms** and offers subsidized CSA shares by paying for half of the cost up front and the remainder paid with EBT. Four families participated in 2013. Plans are to expand the program to 10 families in 2014.

Binghamton Farm Share in **Broome County** offers a weekly box of vegetables grown by local farmers. EBT/SNAP and cash payments are matched by subsidies from Binghamton's Community Development Block Grant and Broome's United Way. In 2013, the program distributed up to 8 shares per week for 23 weeks to customers receiving SNAP as well as additional shares to lower-income customers who did not receive SNAP. In 2014, the program is expanding eligibility for the matching subsidy funds to all income eligible customers, not just those who receive SNAP.

County	# of Farmers' Markets with EBT		EBT Sales at Farmers' Markets		% Increase in EBT Sales 2010-13
	2010	2013	2010	2013	
Broome	5	2	\$4,468	\$4,849	9%
Chemung	1	5	\$2,207	\$3,011	36%
Chenango	0	3	N/A	\$443	—
Cortland	2	3	\$1,877	\$4,522	141%
Delaware	0	0	N/A	N/A	N/A
Otsego	1	1	\$106	\$435	310%
Tioga	1	5	\$364	\$1,131	211%
Tompkins	8	8	\$12,719	\$13,483	6%
Region	18	27	\$21,741	\$27,874	28%

Farmers' markets are using creative strategies to increase access to local, healthy food for low-income residents. In **Otsego County**, for example, the **Cooperstown Food Bank's "Give 'Em a Sprout Out"** children's' voucher program provides children and teens 16 and under with \$2 vouchers for fruits and vegetables at the farmers' market. In **Tioga County**, plans are underway to create a new evening farmers' market to increase access for residents receiving SNAP and Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) benefits.

Data Sources for Tables

Food Insecurity: Map the Meal Gap, Feeding America, 2012.

Poverty: American Community Survey Fact Finder US Census. NYS Community Action Association.

SNAP: Recipients: Temporary and Disability Assistance Statistics, December 2009 & 2013 Reports. Table A-3. New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance. Poverty: American Community Survey 3-year Estimates for 2008-10 and 2010-12. US Census Bureau.

Fresh Produce for Food Banks and Hunger Relief Agencies: Matthew Griffin, Food Bank of the Southern Tier. Kerry Leary, Regional Food Bank of NENY. Heather Hudson, Food Bank of Central NY. Note that the produce data does not include Broome County CHOW's distribution to hunger relief agencies that does not go through the food bank. **Venison:** Venison Donation Coalition.

Participation of Children in Summer Food Service Program: www.HungerSolutionsNY.org. Misha Marvel, Hunger Solutions New York. NYS Education Department provided data on number of meal claims. SFSP participation rates are the average daily # of claims for SFSP lunches in July, divided by the average daily # of claims for reduced/free lunches in March of the same school year.

Farmers' Markets with EBT & EBT sales: Diane Eggert, Farmers' Market Federation of New York. Avi Miner, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Tompkins County.

Food and Health Network of SCNY PO Box 416 2663 Main Street Whitney Point, NY 13862
www.FoodandHealthNetwork.org 607-692-7669 rhsc-rf@rhscny.org

Promoting Healthy Environments, Economic Vitality through Agriculture, Strong Farm to Consumer Connections & Healthy People