



# 2025 ANNUAL REPORT ENDING HUNGER IN MAINE

FEBRUARY 2026



## FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

Maine's Ending Hunger Initiative is united by a shared vision: a Maine free from hunger, where everyone has the resources they need to thrive. Guided by Maine's Roadmap to End Hunger, the initiative is grounded in the belief that hunger is not inevitable but a solvable problem when we align policy, programs and people toward lasting solutions.

Over the course of 2025, the initiative laid the groundwork to advance priorities outlined in Maine's Roadmap, led by the Ending Hunger Advisory Committee and a new State Cross-Agency Food Security Group. These groups are strengthening coordination across our food security systems and ensuring that efforts are informed by the voices and expertise of those closest to the issue.

At the same time, the work is unfolding in a rapidly changing federal landscape. Many of the Roadmap's strategies rely on the strength of federal nutrition programs, such as SNAP, WIC, GusNIP, and the National School Lunch Program, that have long been proven to reduce food insecurity. However, this year, SNAP faced the largest cuts in the history of the program, taking food assistance away from thousands of Mainers. These historic changes, alongside cuts or reductions to other key supports, will make it more challenging for Mainers who rely on these programs to meet their basic needs, forcing many to choose between paying the rent, picking up a prescription, or filling the refrigerator or gas tank.

These setbacks underscore what we already know: the work to respond to and prevent hunger in Maine has never been more critical.

Despite the challenges, Maine continues to step up. This year, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) brought on Maine's first SNAP outreach providers to help more eligible households access benefits. More kids received free meals at school. Trusted community-based organizations continued to deliver responsive programming and address gaps in traditional food assistance. And when SNAP benefits were threatened during the federal government's shutdown, communities across the state mobilized to support fellow Mainers.



Maine's Roadmap to End Hunger shows us the path forward: meeting immediate needs with equitable and responsive food access, while going upstream to address the root causes of hunger.

This report highlights the challenges as well as the collective efforts that are moving Maine closer to a hunger-free future. We are deeply grateful to the individuals, partners, staff, volunteers, and supporters whose commitment makes this work possible, and who are an essential part of Maine's Ending Hunger Initiative.



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LaJoie farm in Van Buren, ME Photo provided by Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry.

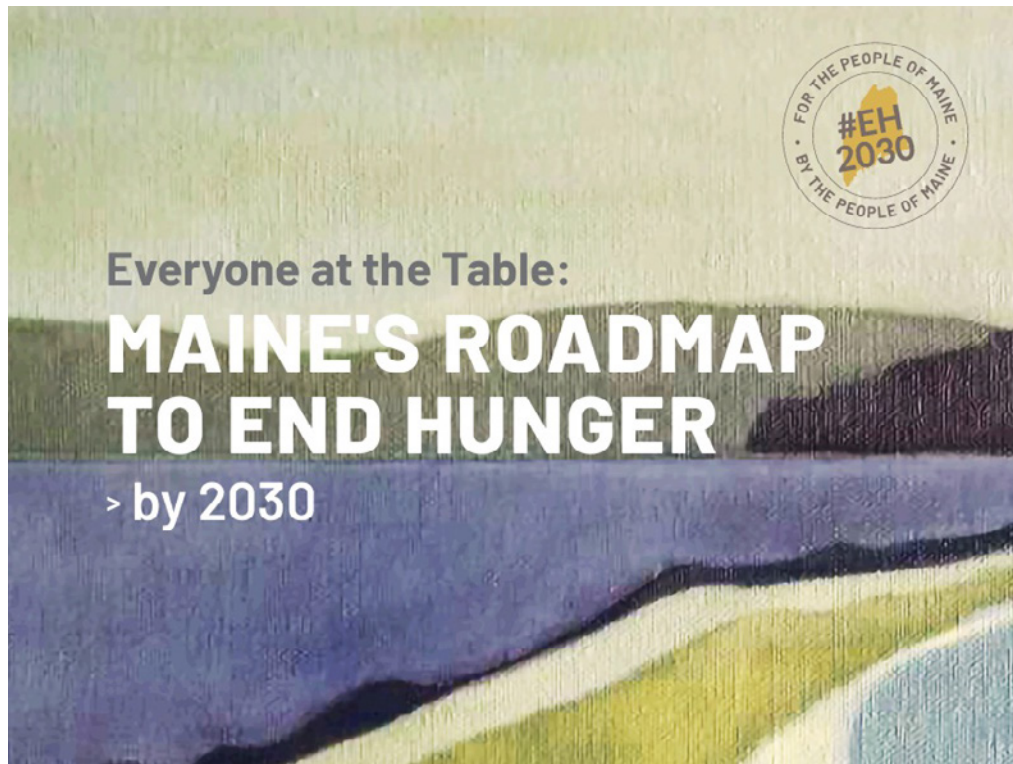
## INTRODUCTION

### About the Ending Hunger in Maine Initiative

The mission of the Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) is to foster collaboration across state government to help solve Maine’s most important long-term challenges utilizing data-driven, innovative policy solutions. Now home to the Ending Hunger in Maine initiative, GOPIF serves as a convener, bringing stakeholders together across and beyond state government to create a Maine free from hunger with Maine’s Roadmap to End Hunger as its guide. This work is facilitated by GOPIF’s Anti-Hunger Policy Coordinator, including:

- Facilitating coordination of key policy initiatives and recommendations outlined in Maine’s Roadmap to End Hunger by 2030
- Spearheading collaboration and coordination of anti-hunger and anti-poverty strategies and policies across state agencies and with external stakeholders
- Convening the statewide Ending Hunger Advisory Committee charged with guiding the implementation of key strategies within Maine’s Roadmap
- Tracking data to inform anti-hunger strategies, measuring progress, and monitoring the impact of key anti-hunger policies and programs





## BACKGROUND

Maine's Roadmap to End Hunger by 2030 was born out of the 129th Maine State Legislature. Citing the significant social and economic threats that household food insecurity poses to Maine today and to Maine's future, the state made a historic commitment with the passage of LD 1159 Resolve to End Hunger in Maine by 2030. Authored by then-Rep. Craig Hickman and signed by Governor Mills, this bi-partisan legislation directed the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry (DACF) to coordinate a cross-sector effort to develop a strategic plan to achieve this bold goal.

Over 200 Mainers engaged in a two-year, multi-phase process to inform the final product, beginning with the development of the Interim Report, delivered to Maine's 129th Legislature in 2020, followed by the Impacted Community Recommendations & Review on the Interim Report on Ending Hunger in Maine by 2030, submitted to DACF in 2021. The result is Everyone at the Table: Maine's Roadmap to End Hunger 2030, a plan finalized in January 2022, which is rooted in evidence-based solutions to hunger, the unique nature of the problem in Maine, the priorities of Maine people, and the lived expertise of Mainers impacted by poverty and hunger.

In 2022, with the passage of LD 174 An Act to Implement Maine's Roadmap to End Hunger by 2030, Maine's 130th State Legislature directed the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) to provide staffing services to the commissioner of DACF, to coordinate implementation of Maine's Roadmap. Guidance on implementation is provided by an advisory committee, established by the DACF commissioner, composed of members with lived expertise and content expertise relevant to the goals and strategies included in the plan.

## WORKING GROUP PROCESS

Maine's Roadmap suggests a two-pronged approach to ending hunger: improve our response to hunger and food insecurity today and go upstream to prevent food insecurity tomorrow, with strategies aimed at the root cause of the problem. As a result, the recommendations are wide-ranging and comprehensive, from food assistance to poverty-reduction and housing stability. In 2024, a working group process was developed with the goal of identifying areas of focus for coordinating implementation of the plan in the short-term, while maintaining the plan's core theory of change.





Five working groups were formed, based on the five goals of Maine's Roadmap, with the task of identifying priorities for aligned action across our diverse network of Ending Hunger partners in 2025-2027: Capacity Building, Food Access, Economic Security, Narrative Change, and an Equity Subcommittee.

Priority areas identified by the 2024 working group process are not recommendations from one sector to another. Instead, they represent shared goals for aligned action across sectors, leveraging the unique strengths of individual partners in the Ending Hunger in Maine network and the impact that can only come from collaboration.



Photo provided by Farm to Neighbor

# Ending Hunger in Maine

## Priority Areas for 2025–27

Shared Overarching Goal: Reduce the prevalence and severity of food insecurity in Maine. Priority Areas for Aligned Action:

### 1. Maximize Federal Nutrition Programs & Improve Access to Public Benefit Programs through Cross-Sector Collaboration, Administrative Streamlining, and Outreach & Application Assistance

- Streamline administration and improve access to public benefit programs to make it easier to apply for, maintain, and use public benefits
- Include people accessing the public benefits system or impacted by poverty in efforts to identify barriers and solutions to benefits access to ensure programs gain from the expertise of lived experience and meet community needs
  - To be implemented, in part, through the Ending Hunger in Maine Advisory Committee's engagement with the State Cross-Agency Staff Group
- Expand outreach & application assistance to populations that face barriers to federal nutrition programs & public benefit programs
- Expand access & build capacity of out-of-school time Child Nutrition programs (SUN Meals & SUN Meals To-Go and the Child and Adult Care Food Program, CACFP), WIC, and Older Americans Act Nutrition programs

### 2. Expand Access and Impact of Food Assistance Programs

- Improve access for disproportionately impacted communities who are underserved by charitable and public food assistance programs
  - Build, expand, and strengthen relationships with individuals, organizations and community groups that are embedded in impacted communities and emphasize relationships that will improve access
  - Develop better data sharing models to measure the extent to which programs are meeting the needs of all populations
- Integrate complementary services and supports with food assistance programs (e.g. connections to public assistance programs) and co-locate food access points at locations providing other community and public services
- Continue to invest financially in charitable and community-based food assistance programs to bolster capacity to provide high value, barrier-free, and culturally responsive access to food and ensure the system can meet the need

### **3. Leverage Local Food & Nutrition Incentive and Intervention Programs that Increase Low-Income Purchasing Power, Increase Agency and Choice, and/or Increase Access to Nutritious, Local, or Culturally Important Foods**

- Maximize programs, policies, and funding streams which increase low-income purchasing power, agency and choice, and/or access to nutritious, local, or culturally important foods; these may include local food for food assistance programs, nutrition incentive programs (e.g., Maine Harvest Bucks), farm to institution/school, and Food is Medicine initiatives
- Support efforts to develop a Maine Food Plan (as recommended in the Maine Climate Plan update) and coordinate alignment with Maine's Roadmap to End Hunger by 2030
  - Emphasize investment in socially disadvantaged producers
  - Emphasize the intersection of increasing low-income food access and strengthening Maine's local food system

### **4. Invest in the Leadership & Inclusion of Impacted People in Ending Hunger in Maine Efforts**

- Ensure that funding is available to compensate people with lived experience for their participation and expertise on the Ending Hunger in Maine Advisory Committee
- Partner with community-based organizations that provide leadership and advocacy training and support to people with low-income and lived experience of food insecurity and poverty, to support the engagement on the EHM Advisory Committee
- Provide support with fundraising, coordination of efforts, and highlight the impact and importance of existing on-the-ground, community-based efforts to empower and invest in the leadership and inclusion of impacted people

### **5. Develop Shared Ending Hunger Narrative Change Messaging**

- Develop core narrative change messaging and tools about the causes and solutions to hunger in Maine that can be utilized and adapted by different groups; build on the work of Davey Strategies for Ending Hunger Maine, narrative efforts of partner organizations, and the key elements developed by the Narrative Change Work Group, including:
  - Strength-based, unifying narrative
  - Emphasizing hunger as a systemic issue, not one caused by individual failings
  - Center voices of people with lived experience in developing Ending Hunger in Maine narratives

### **6. Support Efforts of Others to Reduce Transportation Barriers & Housing Instability, Emphasizing the Relationship with Food Insecurity**

- Support efforts to reduce transportation barriers to food, resources, jobs, and opportunity
- Support efforts to reduce housing instability
- Connect to narrative change messaging: Emphasize the interconnection of transportation access, housing stability, and food security

# ENDING HUNGER INITIATIVE UPDATES

In 2025, the Ending Hunger Initiative took several steps to better support implementation of key priorities outlined in Maine’s Roadmap:

- The Ending Hunger Advisory Committee transitioned from a larger cohort into a more streamlined 20-member group.
- Staff from Maine DHHS, DOE, and DACF formed a new Cross-Agency Food Security Group to strengthen coordination across our federal nutrition programs.
- Full Plates launched the Ending Hunger Newsletter, creating a space for information-sharing and coordinated action among a larger cohort of interested organizations and individuals in support of the initiative’s priorities.
- GOPIF published the Ending Hunger in Maine data dashboard, designed to serve as a shared resource and to inform efforts to address food insecurity.

## GOVERNOR’S OFFICE OF POLICY INNOVATION AND THE FUTURE

The Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future serves as a convener and collaborator, bringing together key stakeholders inside and outside of state government to support and advance Maine’s Ending Hunger Initiative.

## ENDING HUNGER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Ending Hunger Advisory Committee, made up of individuals with lived experience and individuals representing organizations involved in anti-hunger work, is charged with guiding implementation of key priorities from Maine’s Roadmap to End Hunger. The committee is led by co-chairs Dan Coyne, President and CEO of United Way of Southern Maine, and Anna Korsen, Deputy Director of Full Plates Full Potential.

## CROSS AGENCY FOOD SECURITY WORK GROUP

The Cross Agency Food Security Staff Group launched in early 2025 to bring together staff from the three State of Maine agencies administering our federal nutrition programs, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Education (DOE) and Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry (DACF). Led by co-chairs Michael Downs, Senior Program Manager-SNAP with Office for Family Independence at DHHS and Gus Nelson, TEFAP Director at DACF, the group works to coordinate efforts across program areas, address barriers in accessing food assistance and leverage funding opportunities.

A graphic for the Ending Hunger Network. At the top, the text "Ending Hunger Network" is written in white on a blue background. Below this, a laptop is shown displaying a website with a heart-shaped logo containing the text "ENDING HUNGER in MAINE NETWORK" and various food items. Below the laptop, there is a paragraph of text in white on the blue background, and at the bottom, a white button with the text "LEARN MORE" in blue.

**Ending Hunger Network**

GOPIF, in partnership with Full Plates Full Potential, launched the Ending Hunger Network to bring together partners across the state who are connected to the Ending Hunger Initiative. The Network stays connected through the Ending Hunger newsletter, hosted by Full Plates, which mobilizes support for the Ending Hunger in Maine priorities, provide critical policy and milestone updates, and coordinate outreach efforts and action.

[LEARN MORE](#)

# ENDING HUNGER IN MAINE DATA DASHBOARD

The Ending Hunger in Maine Dashboard, housed at the Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future, provides shared food insecurity data for partners across the network and help inform efforts to address food insecurity. The dashboard provides insights into:

- **FOOD INSECURITY RATES IN MAINE** As defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), “food insecurity means that households were, at times, unable to acquire adequate food for one or more household members because they had insufficient money and other resources for food.” Until recently, the USDA measured household food insecurity each year, providing national and state-level estimates reported as three-year averages. Feeding America’s Map the Meal Gap supplemented this picture by using the USDA measure and additional data to produce more localized estimates, including annual county-level data and child food insecurity rates. The latest estimate from Feeding America found that 1 in 8 Mainers struggle with food insecurity.<sup>1</sup>
- **DISPARITIES IN HOUSEHOLD FOOD INSECURITY** In 2024, the Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future commissioned the Maine Office of the State Economist to assess food insecurity rates in Maine by race and ethnicity in addition to other relevant characteristics, including disability status and household composition, using microdata from the USDA’s annual report. The analysis found rates of food insecurity two to three times as high as the state average among single-parent households, households where the reference person reported having a disability, and among Black and Hispanic/Latinx households.
- **MEASURES OF ECONOMIC HARDSHIP** The cost of basic needs, such as food, housing, transportation, healthcare, and childcare, directly affects a household’s ability to afford enough food. Data on the incomes of food-insecure households in Maine shows that Mainers tend to experience food insecurity at higher income levels than the national average, suggesting a higher cost of living.
- **FOOD INSECURITY FACT SHEETS BY COUNTY** The county fact sheets are intended as a shareable resource for county-specific statistics including food insecurity rates, county demographics, and SNAP enrollment.

## Food Insecurity Rates in Maine



## Disparities in Household Food Insecurity



## Measures of Economic Hardship



## County Food Insecurity Fact Sheets



EXPLORE THE ENDING HUNGER IN MAINE DASHBOARD



# State of Maine

## 2025 Food Insecurity Fact Sheet

### Food Insecurity Rates

	Rate for All Individuals	Number of Food Insecure Individuals	Child Rate	Number of Food Insecure Children
Maine	13.8%	191,920	20.6%	50,610
United States	14.3%	13,829,000	19.2%	13,829,000

Source: Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap Report • Created with Datawrapper

### Economic Hardship: Households Below the ALICE Threshold

ALICE stands for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. ALICE households are those who earn above the federal poverty line but still struggle to afford basic necessities like housing, childcare, transportation, and healthcare.

Poverty ALICE



Source: United for ALICE, United Ways of Maine • Created with Datawrapper

### Average Cost Per Meal

Maine	\$3.76
United States	\$3.58

Source: Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap Report • Created with Datawrapper



### Demographics: Populations with Higher Food Insecurity Rates



Source: Food Insecurity Rates: Maine Office of the State Economist analysis of Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FSS), 2013-2022 data via IPUMS CPS. Share of Population: U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year (2019-2023) • Created with Datawrapper

### Share of Total Population Enrolled in SNAP

Maine	13%
United States	12%

Source: State of Maine • Created with Datawrapper



### Statewide Demographics: Share of Population by Food Insecurity Risk Factors

	Older Adults (65+) Living Alone	Households No Internet Access	Households No Vehicle Access	Share of Housing Occupied by Renters	Share of Renters that are Cost-Burdened
Maine	5%	8%	7%	26%	40%

Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year (2019-2023) • Created with Datawrapper

# A CHANGING FEDERAL LANDSCAPE

## USDA Cancels Household Food Insecurity Report

For nearly three decades, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has published a Household Food Insecurity Report annually. The report uses data collected in the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FSS) to measure both the prevalence and severity of household food insecurity at the national and state-level.

This September, following the largest SNAP cuts in history, the USDA announced it would terminate its annual survey and subsequent report calling it, “redundant, costly, politicized, and extraneous.”<sup>2</sup> The report served as a primary tool for tracking food insecurity trends and understanding the impacts of policy changes over time. It also provided a critical benchmark for measuring progress toward the goals outlined in Maine’s Roadmap<sup>3</sup>.

The last report, published in December 2025, found that 12.9% of households in Maine were food insecure in 2022-2024. Of these households, 36% (4.6% of households overall) experienced very low food security, the most severe form of food deprivation.<sup>4</sup> This report showed a 36% jump in food insecurity compared to the prior three-year period (2019-2021), in which 9.5% of households in Maine experienced food insecurity.<sup>5</sup>





## SNAP Faces Significant Cuts

In July 2025, Congress passed a reconciliation bill with significant and harmful impacts to key federal programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Medicaid. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that some 4 million people nationwide may lose some or all of their SNAP benefit as a result of the bill.<sup>6</sup> In a July blog post addressing the bill’s impact, the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) warned that “reduced benefits and access will strain local food pantries, retailers, and nonprofit partners and exacerbate food insecurity.”<sup>7</sup>

Some provisions have already taken effect including:

- **ELIMINATION OF SNAP-ED:** Funding was cut for Maine’s nutrition education program which provided programming for over 18,000 youth and nearly 3,000 adults in 2024.
- **EXPANSION OF WORK REQUIREMENTS:** More individuals are now subject to work requirements including individuals up to age 65 (previously 55) and parents of kids aged 14 and older. Certain individuals are no longer considered automatically exempt from work requirements including individuals experiencing homelessness, former foster youth, and veterans. There is also no longer a geographic exemption available for individuals living in areas with insufficient jobs.

- **CHANGES TO HEAT AND EAT PROGRAM:** The ‘Heat and Eat’ automatic deduction for households receiving a LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program) benefit is now limited to households with individuals over 60 years old or individuals with a disability, while everyone else will have to report heating or cooling expenses in order to claim the same utility deduction.

More cuts are on the horizon:

- **REMOVAL OF ELIGIBILITY FOR SOME LAWFULLY PRESENT IMMIGRANTS:** Individuals with certain ‘qualified’ immigration statuses including refugees, asylees and certain victims of domestic violence forms of trafficking are expected to lose eligibility for federal SNAP benefits in 2026. The bill has targeted immigrant communities in particular, restricting access to food assistance and other programs that have historically been available for individuals with a documented status.<sup>8</sup>
- **SHIFTS TO THE COST-SHARE OF SNAP:** Effective October 2026, Maine will have to cover 75% of administrative costs for SNAP (previously costs were shared 50/50 with the federal government) and beginning October 2027, the state may be responsible for funding part of the SNAP benefit amount for the first time ever based on the state’s payment error rate, potentially incurring a significant cost to the state.

See OFI’s update on pg. 28 for more information on SNAP policy changes.





## WHY SNAP MATTERS

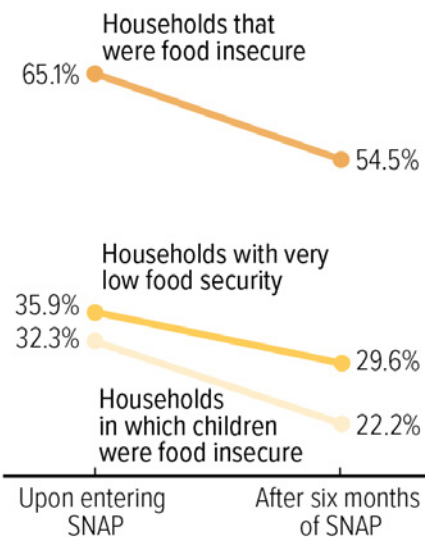
SNAP is widely considered the nation's most important anti-hunger program.<sup>9</sup> In Maine, 1 in 8 people receive SNAP benefits. More than 50% of SNAP participants in Maine are in families with children. More than 53% are in families with members who are older adults or have a disability.<sup>10</sup> Maximizing participation in SNAP is a core priority of the initiative and a challenge in light of recent cuts.

- **SNAP IS EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT.** SNAP directly assists households to buy the foods they need and has been found to reduce food insecurity by as much as 30%.<sup>11</sup> SNAP also reduces the burden on food pantries and the emergency food network. For every one meal provided by the charitable food network, SNAP provides nine.
- **SNAP REDUCES POVERTY.** On average, SNAP lifted 33,000 people above the poverty line in Maine, including 11,000 children, per year between 2015 and 2019.<sup>12</sup> Analysis by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) also found that economic security programs like SNAP reduce by half gaps in child poverty by race and ethnicity, though significant racial disparities in food insecurity persist.<sup>13</sup> See the Ending Hunger in Maine Dashboard for more information on state-level racial disparities for people experiencing food insecurity.
- **SNAP IMPROVES HEALTH OUTCOMES.** SNAP participation is linked to improved health outcomes and well-being by reducing food insecurity and the associated stress that contributes to adverse health conditions.<sup>14</sup> It can also reduce the need to make difficult trade-offs between food and other essentials like healthcare.
- **SNAP SUPPORTS THE LOCAL ECONOMY.** Every SNAP dollar spent generates around \$1.50-\$1.80 in economic activity.<sup>15</sup> Around \$356 million in SNAP benefits are issued annually in Maine, resulting in nearly \$548 million in estimated economic activity for local stores, growers, and producers.<sup>16</sup>



Photo courtesy of Full Plates Full Potential

### SNAP Helps Families Afford Adequate Food



Note: "Food insecure" = household lacks consistent access to nutritious food at some point during the year because of limited resources. "Very low food security" = one or more household members have to skip meals or otherwise eat less at some point during the year because they lack money.

Source: Agriculture Department, "Measuring the Effect of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation on Food Security," August 2013

CENTER ON BUDGET AND POLICY PRIORITIES | CBPP.ORG

## WORK REQUIREMENTS ADD BARRIERS

An estimated 30,000 Mainers will be subject to SNAP work requirements for the first time as a result of the reconciliation bill.<sup>19</sup> Unless individuals can demonstrate that they qualify for an exemption—such as earning at least \$217.50 a week, being unable to work, or being pregnant—they will have to complete a certain number of hours of work, volunteering or workforce training each month. Those who cannot meet or verify these requirements are limited to three months of SNAP within a three-year period, often referred to as the “time limit.”

Research has shown that work requirements, rather than increasing employment or earnings, often result in people losing access to benefits.<sup>20</sup> Even individuals who are working or qualify for an exemption may still lose SNAP due to reporting challenges, administrative barriers, or documentation issues.<sup>21</sup>

In reality, most SNAP participants who are able to work already do so. According to analysis by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), 91% of SNAP households with working-age non-disabled adults and children had earnings.<sup>22</sup> Many households rely on SNAP to supplement low wages or to bridge gaps between jobs. And when an adult loses SNAP eligibility, the household’s overall benefit drops, impacting food assistance for the entire household.

### State Mobilizes in Response to Potential SNAP Delay

In October 2025, SNAP faced an additional threat during the government shutdown. When the Trump administration announced November SNAP benefits would be withheld, people across the country began to sound the alarm. In Maine, nearly 180,000 people rely on SNAP. With \$30 million going directly to Maine households each month, SNAP is an irreplaceable source of food and financial support.

Statewide there was an outpouring of support as state leaders, businesses, nonprofits, and community members mobilized to respond. Governor Mills directed \$1.25 million (\$1 million from the Governor’s contingency account and \$250,000 from the John T. Gorman Foundation) to Good Shepherd Food Bank (\$650,000) and the state’s network of Area Agencies on Aging (\$600,000) to help bolster food pantries and meal programs facing rising demand. The state’s Area Agencies on Aging used this emergency nutrition funding to deliver prepared meals directly to older SNAP beneficiaries at risk of food insecurity, expand meal access and delivery in hard-to-reach

areas, and provide immediate relief to older adults who rely on SNAP but continue to face barriers to accessing enough food each month. As of January 1, the Agencies on Aging have provided over 26,000 meals to older adults and people with disabilities through this emergency nutrition funding.

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**“When the federal government fails, Maine will not. When challenges arise, Maine people step up.”**

—Governor Mills

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Good Shepherd Food Bank was able to rapidly redistribute \$400,000 in purchasing credits to pantry and meal site partners across the state, helping agencies to prepare as best they could for potential delays in November SNAP allotments and respond to increased need during a period of heightened uncertainty. The remaining \$250,000 supports the purchase of fresh produce for partners, including food sourced from local Maine farmers, helping to ensure continued access to nutritious food for neighbors.

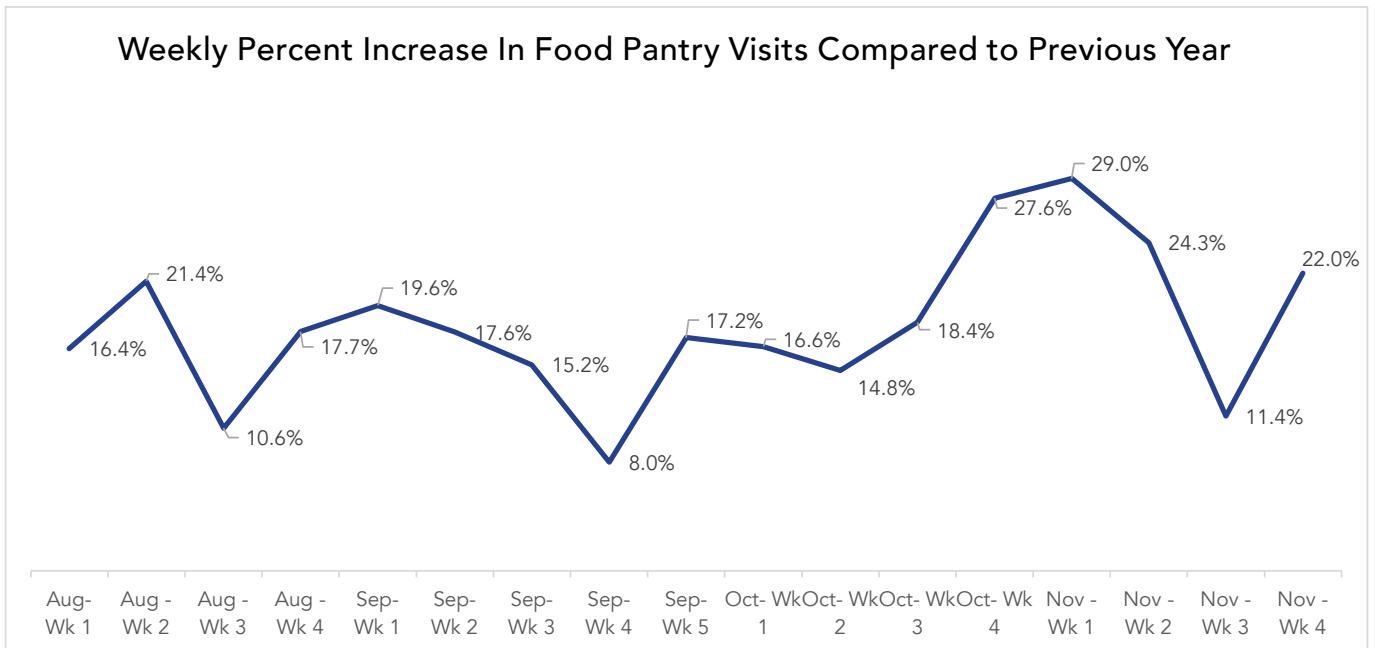
Many food pantries across Good Shepherd Food Bank’s network saw a spike in visits after the news of a potential delay. Amid the uncertainty, people turned to local food pantries and meal programs for support. Community-based organizations rushed to address gaps, recognizing that not everyone could reach their nearest food pantry. Some offered home delivery or mobile pantry service. Preble Street quickly scaled up their meal production, while Maine Federation of Farmers Markets launched an emergency Maine Harvest Bucks program. Resources for Organizing & Social Change

began coordinating with local restaurants to offer free meals and Boothbay’s Community Resource Council organized a gift card program. These are just a few of many examples.

Ultimately, SNAP benefits were issued on time in November following shifting guidance by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and efforts by the Office for Family Independence to process benefits on time. But the period underscored the critical role SNAP plays in helping thousands of Mainers put food on the table, and the strain that even the threat of an interruption places on our emergency food system.

**“I am on disability so most of my check goes to bills and the leftover money goes to household stuff. I rely on the food stamps to make sure there is enough to make ends meet. It also doesn’t help that the food prices are going up too.”**

—SNAP participant in Waterville



Source: Good Shepherd Food Bank. Data was collected from a subset of pantries on the household visit rates for corresponding weeks in 2024 and 2025. Comparing visits between August – October 2024 and August – October 2025, there was a 19% increase in weekly visits to these pantries (average of weeks). Between Week 3 of October 2025 (when potential SNAP disruption news broke) and Week 2 of November 2025 (when SNAP benefits were disbursed), there was an average increase in visits of 25% compared to the same weeks in 2024.

## FARM TO NEIGHBOR CAMPAIGN RESPONDS TO PROGRAM CUT

In March 2025, the USDA ended the Local Food Purchase Assistance Program (LFPA), which had allocated \$1.25 million for Maine from June 2025 to June 2028. This funding helped LFPA recipients buy from 75 Maine producers and distribute directly to over 200 hunger relief organizations. To respond to this urgent situation, seven LFPA recipients in Maine—Cultivating Community, Daybreak Growers Alliance, Healthy Acadia, Jordan’s Farm (Farms for Food Equity), Mi’kmaq Farms, New Roots Cooperative Farm, and Somali Bantu Maine (Liberation Farms)—with support from Peak Season Maine and Full Plates Full Potential, created Farm to Neighbor Maine, a campaign and collaborative program to continue to advance shared efforts to increase access to locally grown foods.

Farm to Neighbor Maine’s mission is to expand local food access to vulnerable people, support underserved and BIPOC farmers, and contribute to a resilient agricultural economy and community. Distribution partners represent diverse farming community stakeholders that are committed to working collaboratively to inform a statewide lens on equitable and culturally important local food access in Maine. As of December 2025, Farm to Neighbor has raised 35% toward its goal of raising \$750,000 before the 2026 growing season to replace a portion of the LFPA funds and distributed food from farm partners to over 30 hunger relief initiatives statewide.



Content provided by Farm to Neighbor



## INDICATORS OF FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

### More Households Turn to Food Pantries in 2025

Data from a sample of 23 food pantries in Good Shepherd Food Bank’s partner agency network showed a 12.6% increase in the total number of households served from 2024 to 2025.

Many food pantries are experiencing growing demand at the same time as food supply has waned because of rising costs, cuts to programs like the USDA Local Food Purchasing Assistance Program, and fluctuations in TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program). Reductions in SNAP and other supports further strain the emergency food system, as individuals losing benefits often turn to pantries for additional assistance.

“Since the spring of 2025, these cuts have already meant a loss of more than 2.3 million meals for Mainers, and more reductions are on the horizon,” shared Good Shepherd Food Bank president, Heather Paquette. “No single organization can address the growing need in our state, and with the strength of our food security ecosystem we will continue to work toward a future where everyone in Maine is food secure.”

## 40% of Maine Households Face Financial Hardship

Val Franks, ALICE State Lead at United Way of Southern Maine, explains what Maine can learn from the 2025 ALICE report:

### What is ALICE and what do we learn through ALICE data and stories?

Across our state, 40% of households (*that's 245,098 households!*) struggle to make ends meet. Among these are ALICE® (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) households with income that sits above the poverty level but falls short of covering basic, daily needs. The cost of living outpaces what they earn, leaving many with little to no savings for emergencies or their future. They often do the work that keeps our communities going every single day. They keep businesses running, care for children and aging parents, and contribute in so many ways that often go unseen.

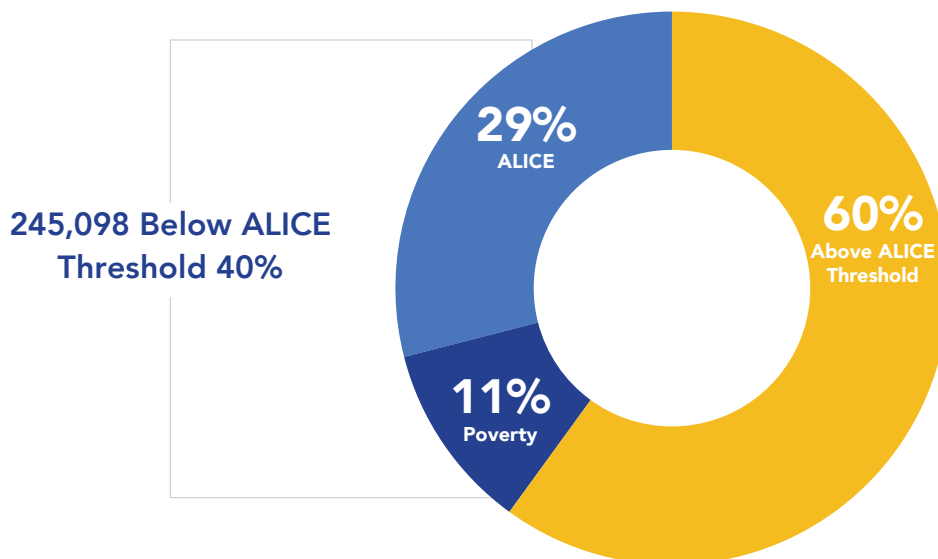
At United Way of Southern Maine and the other United Ways in Maine we are focused on helping ALICE households find a real path to financial security, which ultimately helps build stronger, more resilient communities for all of us.

### What does the 2025 ALICE report reveal about financial hardship in Maine?

The 2025 United Way ALICE data show that financial hardship in Maine is far more widespread than traditional poverty measures suggest. The Federal Poverty Level significantly underestimates what it actually costs to meet basic needs, including food, and therefore misses many households experiencing real economic strain.

The data also reveal that while all races, genders, and ages can be ALICE, financial hardship doesn't land equally. Financial hardship is especially high among households led by single mothers and older adults—in Maine, 53% of older adult households and 74% of single-mother households fall below the ALICE threshold. Rates of financial hardship also differed substantially by race and ethnicity. 58% of Black households and 50% of American Indian/Alaska Native households fall below the ALICE threshold compared to 40% of white households. The report also found that 44% of Asian households and 41% of Hispanic households fall below the ALICE

## 40% of Maine Households Faced Financial Instability in 2023



Sources: ALICE Threshold, 2010–2023; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2023

threshold. These findings underscore that ending hunger requires addressing the broader barriers and uneven economic pressures that leave many households without enough to eat.

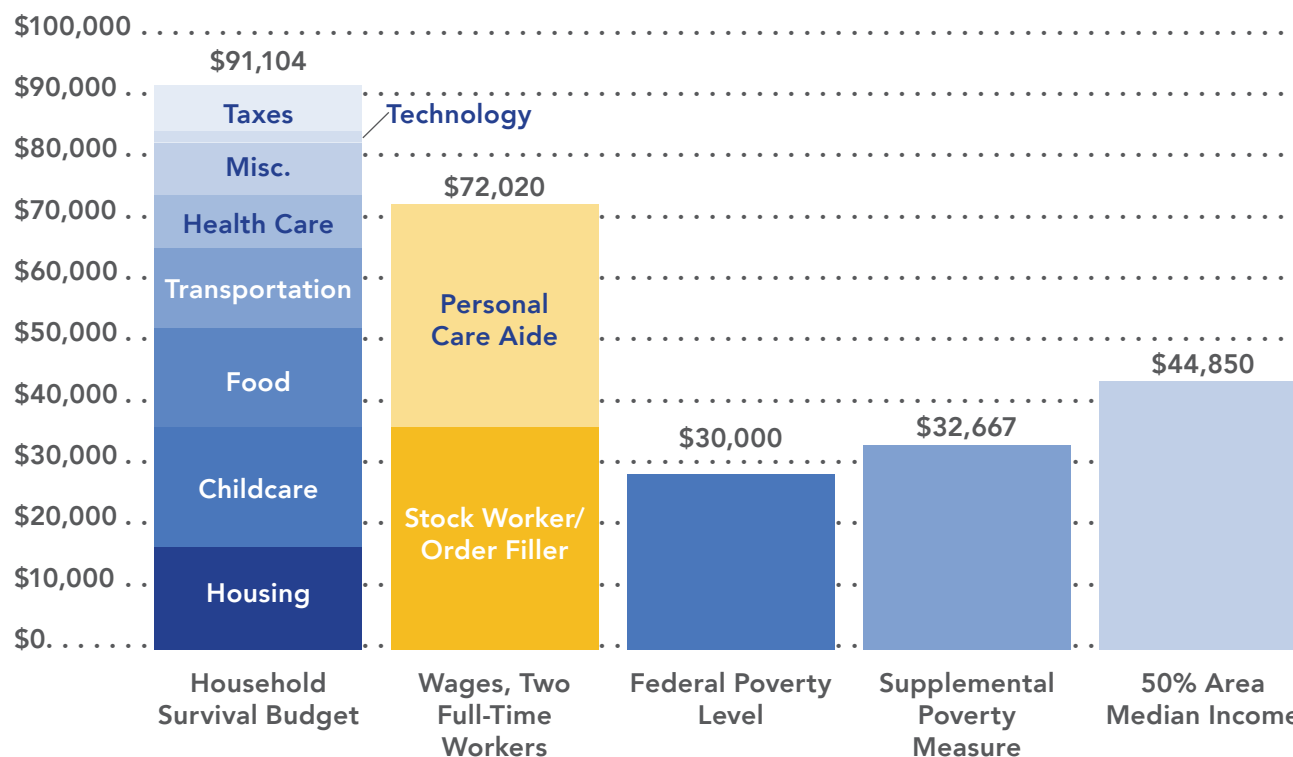
**What does the 2025 ALICE report tell us about cost of living in Maine and how it's changed over time?**

The 2025 United Way ALICE report shows that the cost of living in Maine has increased steadily over time, with housing, childcare, health care, transportation, and food consuming a growing share of

household budgets while wages lag behind. As basic expenses rise, more working households—many earning above the Federal Poverty Level—are unable to make ends meet. These pressures force difficult trade-offs, and food is often the most flexible expense, making it one of the first needs households cut back on to cover rent, utilities, or medical bills. The data make clear that food insecurity in Maine is driven not only by income, but by the widening gap between what households earn and what it actually costs to live.

**Basic Costs Exceeded Wages of Common Jobs and Official Measures of Hardship**

Annual Budget, Wages, and Official Measures of Financial Hardship, Family of Four, Maine, 2023



Credit: 2025 State of Alice in Maine Report

Sources: ALICE Household Survival Budget, 2023; Bureau of Labor Statistics–Occupational Employment Statistics, 2023; U.S. Census Bureau, Supplemental Poverty Measure, 2023; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Area Median Income (State Income Limits), 2023

## Housing and Utilities Assistance Top 211 Maine Requests in 2025

Known as the ‘place to go when you don’t know where else to go’, 211 Maine is a free, confidential resource that helps people find local resources, from food pantries and heating assistance to mental health services, recovery resources and more. The program is an initiative of the United Ways of Maine, in collaboration with the State of Maine and The Opportunity Alliance.

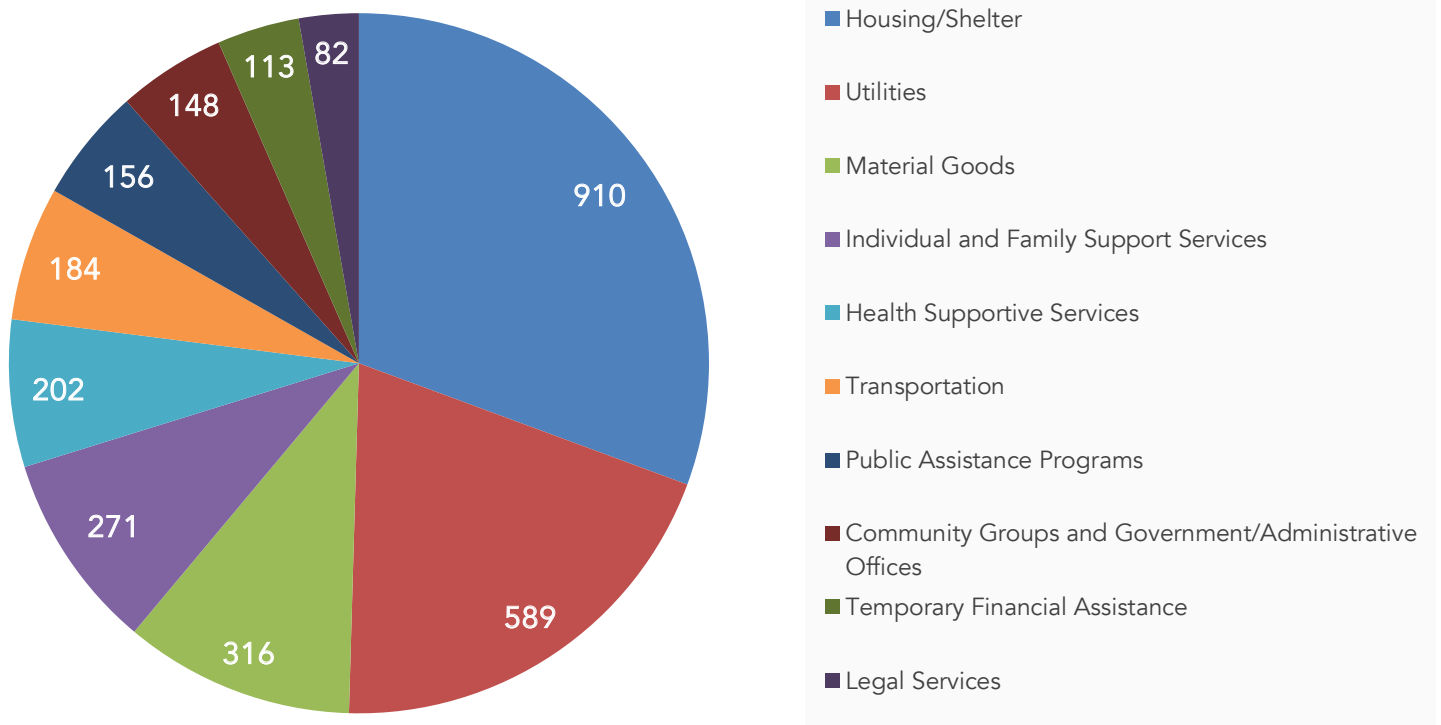
With thousands of requests coming in every month, 211 Maine data offer a snapshot of the most urgent needs affecting Maine households. In 2025, housing

and utilities assistance were the most requested needs, accounting for 37% of call requests to 211 Maine statewide.

People who contact 211 Maine often have multiple, overlapping requests. 48% of callers seeking food assistance also asked about additional resources beyond food such as rent assistance, utility assistance and transportation, reflecting how interconnected these supports are.



### Top 10 Additional 211 Call Needs with Calls for Food Assistance, CY2025



Source: 211 Maine. Most common additional requests by 211 Maine callers looking for food assistance.



## 2025 SPOTLIGHTS

Maine organizations, state agencies and nonprofits share in their own words how they are responding to the changing federal landscape and advancing food security efforts across the state.



Photo Courtesy of Maine Federation of Farmers Markets



## MAINE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION—CHILD NUTRITION

*Content provided by Maine Department of Education*

### **Universal School Meals Reduce Stigma and Increase Participation**

A total of 30,310,088 school meals were served in Maine during the 2024-2025 academic year—representing a year-over-year increase in breakfast and lunch participation counts since the pandemic. The Maine Department of Education (DOE) credits this continued success in large part to its program that provides no-charge meals to all students, effectively reducing stigma around participation in school meals. Maine continues to be one of only nine states in the nation to offer such a program, as part of the Ending Hunger in Maine initiative.

### **Cross-Agency Coordination Streamlines Eligibility and Leverages Federal Funds**

In the 2023-2024 academic year, the Maine DOE Child Nutrition team worked closely with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) around direct certification with Medicaid. This partnership allows DHHS to directly certify students through Medicaid, enabling eligible children to receive school meals at no cost. Additionally, it allows the state agency to use benefit rates to qualify students for free or reduced-price meals, leveraging additional federal funds. The benefits are already apparent; since

the start of the 2025-2026 academic year, this change has resulted in a 5% cost savings.

An additional collaboration with DHHS in 2025 has returned SUN Bucks (also known as Summer EBT) for a second summer in Maine. This program provides families with school-aged children a summer benefit of \$120 per child, helping to ensure continued access to nutritious food even when school is not in session.

### **Universal School Meals Make a Difference**

A new study found that providing school meals for all kids free of cost is associated with lower rates of household food insecurity.<sup>27</sup> Households in states that provide universal school meals, like Maine, had a 12% lower prevalence of food insecurity compared to states without these policies. For households with lower incomes, below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level, the association was even more significant, with a 19% lower prevalence of food insecurity.<sup>28</sup>

[LEARN MORE](#)

### Local Food in Schools Initiative Grows

Maine’s Farm and Sea to School program has continued to grow, thanks to the support of the Maine Legislature. In the 2024-2025 academic year, schools received an increase in their Local Foods Fund allocations from \$5,000 to \$10,000 annually. Additionally, the reimbursement rate was adjusted from \$1 for every \$3 spent to \$1 for every \$2 spent. As a result, schools have already been reimbursed \$236,264.26 for their local food purchases within just the first five months of these changes, investing nearly half a million dollars into Maine’s local foods economy.

### USDA Grants Support Local Food Coordinators and Culinary Skills Training Program

The USDA State Agency Formula Grant is now in its final year. Through this funding, the Child Nutrition

team is supporting all nine superintendent regions in Maine with part-time coordinators who help to connect schools with local farmers and fishers and establish long-lasting relationships. This year, coordinators have expanded their efforts by offering more meet-up opportunities, training sessions, and taste-testing events across the state, with the goal of strengthening the long-term impact of the Maine DOE’s Farm and Sea to School initiatives.

The Culinary Skills for School Meals program—now in its third year—had 98 participants from 32 school administrative units (SAUs) in 2025. The Maine DOE Child Nutrition team utilizes another USDA grant to help support these ongoing training efforts, which provide child nutrition professionals with a weeklong opportunity to engage in hands-on learning in the summer months.



# MAINE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

*Content provided by Maine Department of Health and Human Services*

## Maine's WIC Program Sees Highest Participation in Years

Maine's Women Infants and Children Nutrition Program (WIC) provides nutritious foods, nutrition education, lactation support, and referrals to eligible pregnant, breastfeeding, and postpartum individuals, infants, and children up to age five.

2025 WIC highlights include:

- Current participation in WIC is the highest in years reaching over 19,000 people each month.
- Through the Maine WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), shoppers redeemed a total of \$116,405 on local fruits and vegetables at farmers markets.
- Maine WIC is preparing to switch to a new eWIC provider, a major transition for the program.

## SUN Bucks Returns for Second Summer Reaching Over 90,000 Kids

SUN Bucks is a summer nutrition benefit for children to help meet their needs during the summer when school meals are not available. In 2025, Maine issued \$10,955,880 in SUN Bucks benefits, with \$7,859,084.76 redeemed by eligible children and the remaining funds expunged, primarily in October 2025. The program strengthened its operations through major system enhancements, including partial integration of SUN Bucks into the Office for Family Independence's (OFI) statewide benefit processing system and establishing a data bridge between



OFI and the Maine Department of Education. Maine also updated the manual application to improve the experience for families not picked up by automatic enrollment.

## OFI Navigates Federal Funding Challenges and Policy Changes

Through shifts in federal funding, eligibility policy, and call center operations, the Office for Family Independence (OFI) has remained focused on ensuring timely access to SNAP benefits for eligible households while maintaining program integrity and accuracy.

In August 2025, OFI focused on improving service for SNAP participants through changes to our call center. The call center menu was updated to streamline call routing and support a “one-touch” service model. In addition, a “First in Line” callback feature was enabled across all call center lines, allowing callers to opt into an immediate callback or a scheduled callback (when available) after two minutes on hold. Since implementation, more than 50 percent of callers have used the callback option, nearly three times the usage observed in July 2025.

During the final quarter of calendar year 2025, SNAP faced three major Federal funding challenges. The first two stem from the Federal Budget Reconciliation Law which passed in July 2025.



1. Beginning in October 2026, the Federal share of SNAP administrative funding will be reduced by half, requiring states to assume responsibility for approximately 75 percent of the costs associated with administering the program, including staffing, facilities, and technology.
2. Beginning in October 2027, states may also become responsible for a portion of Federally mandated SNAP benefits. While Maine has made significant improvements in payment accuracy in recent years, these changes could require the state to fund up to \$4.4 million per month in Federal SNAP benefits (over \$50 million annually).
3. The third challenge resulted from a lapse in Federal appropriations from the USDA between Oct. 1 and Nov. 12, 2025, which led to the potential suspension of November SNAP benefits, followed by a temporary proration of benefits. Amid rapidly changing guidance from the United States Department of Agriculture and Federal courts, OFI staff and contractors worked intensively during the week preceding the regular issuance cycle. As a result, Maine was one of only five states able to issue full SNAP benefits on schedule in November.

## Changes to SNAP Rules

### WORK REQUIREMENTS

Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs) are SNAP participants who must meet work requirements to maintain eligibility. In December 2024, Maine exhausted its remaining discretionary exemptions that had allowed all ABAWD cases to remain open, and full ABAWD work requirements were in effect throughout 2025. In July 2025, the Reconciliation Act implemented substantial policy changes, including increasing the maximum age subject to ABAWD work requirements from 55 to 65, lowering the age threshold for child-based exemptions from under 18 to under 14, eliminating several exemptions (including those for individuals experiencing homelessness, former foster youth, and veterans), and adding a new exemption for members

of Indigenous nations. The Act also raised the threshold for geographic areas to qualify for ABAWD exemptions. After careful analysis, it was determined that implementing a partial geographic waiver for Federal fiscal year 2026 would create disproportionate confusion relative to the limited benefit it would provide to fewer than 100 households.

### STANDARD UTILITY ALLOWANCES AND BUDGETING

SNAP budgeting methodology also underwent significant changes during the past year. Early in the year, Federal regulations permitted states to include internet expenses as a shelter cost and required states to establish a new baseline for Standard Utility Allowances (SUAs) every five years. Shortly thereafter, the Reconciliation Act prohibited the inclusion of internet as a shelter expense, requiring all states to collect and analyze new data and establish revised baselines within a compressed timeframe. The Food and Nutrition Service offered states the option to apply a standardized percentage increase for Federal fiscal year 2026; however, this increase was substantially lower than both Maine's prior calculation and the newly developed baseline.

The Reconciliation Act also changed the treatment of Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) eligibility. Previously, any household deemed eligible for LIHEAP qualified for the highest SUA. Under the new policy, this benefit applies only to households with a member over age 60 or with a qualifying disability. Maine was the only state to decline the reduced SUAs, a decision made to minimize the impact on households transitioning from the highest allowance to a lower one due to LIHEAP-related changes. The state received assurances that the revised SUAs would be approved by the end of October to ensure accurate benefit issuance. However, due in part to the 43-day Federal shutdown, approval had not been granted as of February 2026. Additionally, Maine has implemented a policy excluding stipends and other payments related to participation in advisory committees for OFI programs from countable income for both TANF and SNAP.

## Full Plates Full Potential Shares New Outreach Tools

*Content provided by Full Plates Full Potential*

In early 2025, Full Plates Full Potential became an official contractor for SNAP outreach, recognizing the essential role SNAP plays as an effective public health intervention. This initiative aims to connect more individuals to available benefits. Since then, Full Plates has created various outreach materials, including:

- An online application assistance guide for community-based organizations that support clients through the SNAP process
- A SNAP in Schools toolkit designed to raise awareness about SNAP in the school community

Full Plates is working to develop clear, accessible resources to address the changes to SNAP, including a comprehensive guide breaking down changes in work reporting requirements. This guide will be supported by training sessions and community education, equipping contractors and partners with various tools for effective outreach. By providing materials in multiple languages and formats, and collaborating with numerous community organizations, Full Plates is broadening reach and awareness across the state.

Full Plates is focusing on SNAP outreach in schools because schools are reliable spaces, with trusted messengers working with children and families almost daily. SNAP enrollment reduces paperwork for school nutrition, making kids automatically eligible for programs like afterschool and summer meals and ensuring seamless access to nutrition kids need. By empowering schools to assist families in accessing SNAP, Full Plates help guarantee that students receive the necessary nutrition to thrive inside and outside the classroom.

A graphic for a SNAP outreach toolkit. It features a photograph of a woman and a young girl in a kitchen, smiling and looking at each other. The woman is holding a tomato. In the top right corner, there is a logo for the USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) with the tagline "Putting Healthy Food Within Reach". The main text reads "Need help putting Food on Your Table?" followed by "So do 1 in 8 Mainers. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) can help:". Below this, there are three bullet points with checkmarks: "Your family buy nutritious foods", "Your school receive more funding", and "Boost your grocery budget". At the bottom, it says "Learn more at www.mymaineconnection.gov".

Need help putting  
**Food on Your Table?**

So do 1 in 8 Mainers. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) can help:

- ✓ Your family buy nutritious foods
- ✓ Your school receive more funding
- ✓ Boost your grocery budget

Learn more at [www.mymaineconnection.gov](http://www.mymaineconnection.gov)

View the full toolkit at <https://www.fullplates.org/snap-outreach>



**NON-CITIZEN ELIGIBILITY** Non-citizen SNAP participants are also affected by provisions in the Federal Reconciliation Law that narrow eligibility categories for Federal benefits. As of February 2026, Maine had not yet implemented these changes while awaiting further Federal guidance and the resolution of multiple legal challenges, in order to ensure accurate, consistent, and lawful application of the new requirements.

### **SNAP-Ed Transitions Community Projects in Wake of Funding Cut**

Maine SNAP-Ed is a statewide nutrition education program that has been administered by OFI through a contract with the University of New England and 16 sub-recipient agencies. Due to Federal changes in the July 2025 Budget Reconciliation, funding for SNAP-Ed was defunded as of October 1, 2025. Maine SNAP-Ed has been sunset as of October 1, and

currently the program is using carry-forward funds to transfer community projects such as story walks, community garden work, and healthy retail projects to community partners, which will leave a SNAP-Ed legacy of work in our Maine communities of promoting healthy shopping, cooking, and eating on a budget.

### **SNAP E&T Provides Workforce Training to SNAP Recipients**

SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) is a voluntary training program for SNAP recipients who want to gain skills and education that will help them attain and retain self-sufficient jobs. It is also one important pathway for individuals to meet the SNAP work requirements. In FY' 2025, SNAP E&T served 289 participants. There are no costs to participants, and the program also helps remove barriers such as assisting with costs of transportation and childcare, books, tools, work clothing, and equipment needed



Donavon Palmieri participated in the SNAP E&T program through Goodwill Northern New England and received his CDL license as part of a new job as a heavy equipment operator. Credit: Goodwill Northern New England

for training. Maine’s SNAP E&T is administered by DHHS OFI, and delivered by contractors including Goodwill NNE, Strengthen Lewiston/Auburn, Sunrise County Economic Council (Family Futures Downeast and Start Up Downeast programs). A highlight this year is that two new SNAP E&T providers have joined E&T including Maine Immigrant and Refugee Services (MEIRS) and New Ventures Maine. Almost 50% of participants are enrolled in post-secondary degree and certificate programs at community colleges and State universities.

### **SNAP Outreach Launches Statewide**

SNAP Outreach grew in leaps and bounds this year, adding 10 new community-based organizations as contractors to its plan to conduct SNAP Outreach statewide.

Outreach plays a critical role in raising awareness of SNAP and communicating policy changes, while also assisting individuals who face barriers to accessing benefits—an important priority of the Ending Hunger Initiative.

This year, OFI submitted an annual plan to federal funders at USDA Food and Nutrition Services for \$1.6 million, which will bring 50% of that total (\$800,000) back to the contractors who conduct or support SNAP Outreach in Maine communities. Changes in the Federal Budget Reconciliation Law will decrease the 50% reimbursement model to 25% on October 1, 2026. OFI and its contractors are assessing feasibility to renew contracts for the next fiscal year.

### **Maine Office of Aging and Disability Services: Grab and Go Meals Expand Options for Older Adults**

In the 2025 Amendment of the Maine State Plan on Aging, which was approved in late September 2025, OADS expanded Congregate Dining services to include Grab-and-Go options such as shelf-stable, pick-up, carry-out, and drive-through meals. This flexibility enables the Area Agencies on Aging to reach older adults who cannot easily participate in on-site dining and ensures more consistent access to nutritious food. Overall, this expansion strengthens the state’s overall strategy to reduce hunger by meeting people where they are and expanding safe, reliable meal pathways.



## Area Agencies on Aging Serve Food and Connection

*Content provided by AgeWise Maine (Association of the state's Agencies on Aging)*

Across the state, Area Agencies on Aging deliver a full continuum of nutrition services that meet people where they are — through Meals on Wheels, congregate and social dining sites, and innovative partnerships with local restaurants that provide both healthy meals and meaningful opportunities for social connection. These programs not only ensure that older adults have access to healthy food, but also help reduce loneliness, strengthen community ties, and promote overall wellbeing. In SFY2025, the Agencies on Aging delivered over 891,000 meals to more than 6,000 Mainers through these vital programs.

Beyond meals, the Agencies on Aging continue to show up for older Mainers through comprehensive case management and care coordination services. Staff and volunteers conduct wellness checks, assess older adults' overall needs, and connect them with benefits, community resources, and long-term supports. This combination of nutrition programs, information and assistance, and relationship-centered care reflects Maine's commitment to ensuring that every older adult can remain healthy, independent, and connected in their own community. Together AgeWise Maine and the network of hundreds of community partners are building a statewide network that responds not only to hunger, but to the broader wellbeing of the people we serve.



Volunteers with the Southern Maine Agency on Aging provide nutritious home-delivered meals and wellness checks to homebound older adults in Cumberland and York counties. Credit: Southern Maine Agency on Aging

# MAINE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

*Content provided by the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry*

## Maine Senior FarmShare Provides Local Produce and Referrals for Older Adults

Through the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, the Maine Senior FarmShare Program (MSFP)<sup>17</sup> provides fresh, unprocessed, locally grown produce directly to income-eligible older adults to address food insecurity. Each participant receives a \$50 share during the growing season to purchase fruits, vegetables, culinary herbs and honey at farms and farmers' markets.

MSFP enrolled 14,996 participants in the 2025 program. These participants received produce from 80 farms that directly participated in the program and another 160 farms that participated through 22 farmers' markets in 12 counties. The farmers' market program is made possible through a valuable partnership with the Maine Federation of Farmers' Markets.

MSFP provides cross-referrals to other public benefit programs including the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, Good Shepherd Food Bank, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Farm Fresh Rewards and Maine Harvest Bucks. In 2025, MSFP also partnered with community-based organizations including five Area Agencies on Aging, Healthy Acadia and Heathy Lincoln County to support farmers and participants. These agencies supported MSFP through program outreach, referrals and nutrition education to participants.

## Commodity Supplemental Food Program Receives Boost in Federal Funding

The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) is a USDA program that aims to improve the health of low-income older adults at least 60 years of age by providing nutritious foods. DACF staff collaborate with organizations statewide to distribute boxes of food monthly to over 5,000 participants across the state. The Continuing Resolution signed on Nov.

12, 2025, included a \$36 million increase for CSFP nationally and is one of several full-year appropriations. Maine's caseload for next year will increase by 52 to a total of 5,136 individuals.

## Hunters for the Hungry Program Sees Record Year

The Maine Hunters for the Hungry Program, a state initiative run by DACF and Inland Fisheries & Wildlife (DIFW), lets hunters donate deer, moose, and bear meat to pantries and shelters, covering processing costs. The year saw record numbers with over 15,000 pounds of game meat distributed throughout the Maine charitable food network.



## Mainers Feeding Mainers

*Content provided by Good Shepherd Food Bank*

In FY25, Good Shepherd Food Bank distributed 3.6 million pounds of food through the Mainers Feeding Mainers program, investing \$2.7 million directly into Maine's agricultural economy. These purchases supported 90 Maine farm partners, providing a stable market for small and mid-sized farms while increasing access to fresh, nutritious, Maine-grown food for pantry and meal site partners statewide.

### Ending Hunger Corps VISTA Program Builds Capacity for Ending Hunger Initiatives

Ending Hunger Corps is an AmeriCorps VISTA program sponsored by DACF, with the goal of building capacity to fulfill Maine's historic commitment to create a Maine free from hunger.

As of Dec. 15, 2025, Ending Hunger Corps VISTA Members reported:

- **1,834** organizations received capacity building services
- **\$1,021,199** cash and in-kind resources were leveraged
- **1,322,534** pounds of food were provided
- **5,063** organizations increased their efficiency, effectiveness, and/or program reach
- **153,213** Mainers have self-reported increased food security due to Ending Hunger Corps VISTAs.

### Ending Hunger Corps Launches New Maine Food Access Map

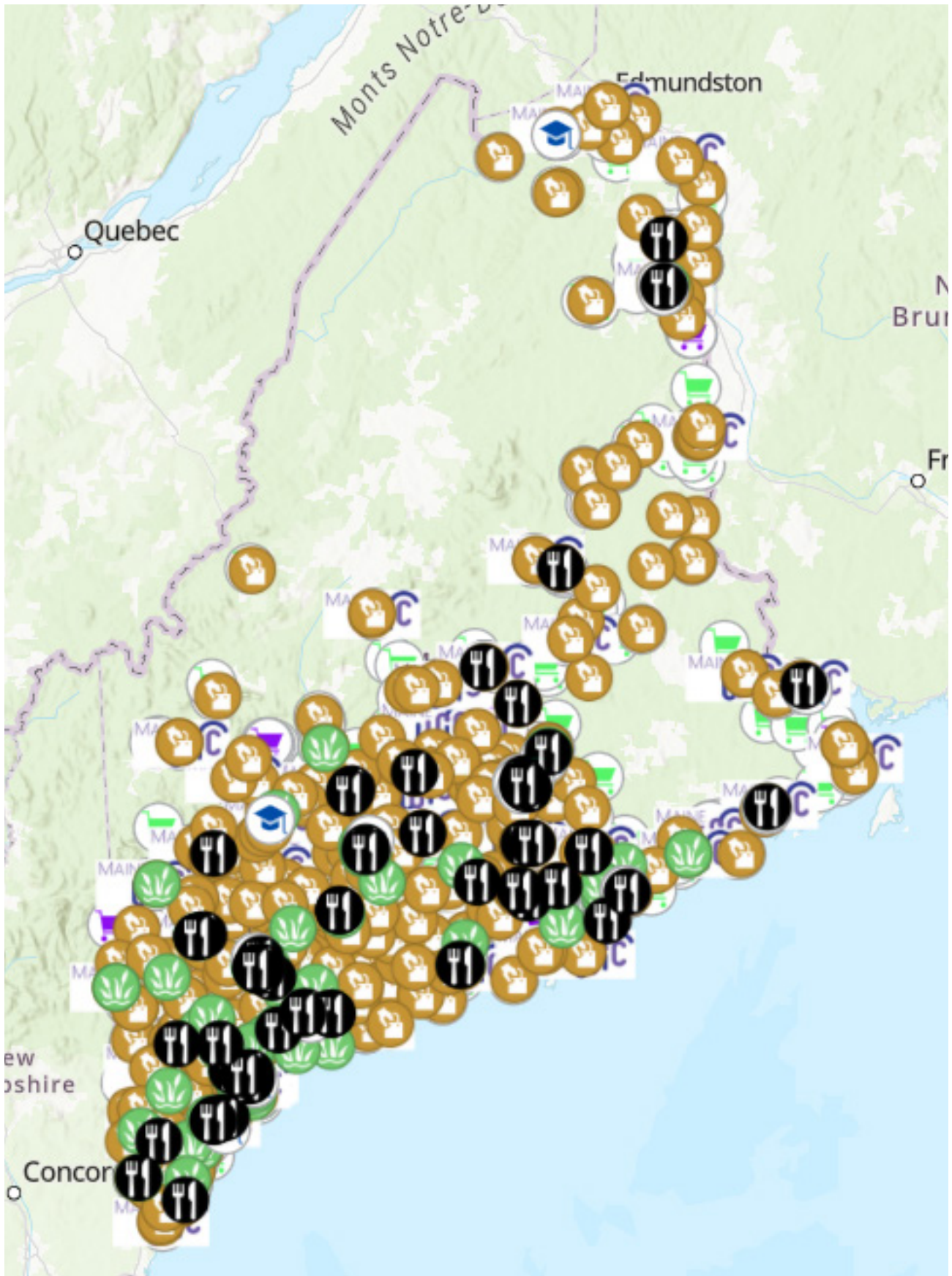
Through the collaboration between partner Food Security Organizations and other DACF programs, two Ending Hunger Corps Members, Taylor Sacco and Greg Murray, worked with Patrick Emery, DACF Agency GIS Technology Coordinator, to create the

Maine Food Access Map (MeFAM). The Map contains nearly 3,000 locations providing either free or by donation food programs and community gardens, DHHS and WIC locations where people can register for benefits, vendors that accept Maine Harvest Bucks and Farm Fresh Rewards, and community meals. Available both on computer or cellular device, MeFAM provides a single, accessible, source to find food and access to food assistance available to every resident of Maine.

Ending Hunger Corps is exploring additional uses of the Map, including organization of trainings, recruitment focus areas and partnerships, and greater collaboration of resource sharing between programs. Ending Hunger Corps MeFAM team is also exploring ways to include resources for each of the five goals within Maine's Roadmap to End Hunger, by introducing housing resources, workforce development opportunities, transportation resources, and other designated resources to MeFAM to increase accessibility of all resources necessary to achieve the goal of a hunger-free Maine.



## Maine Food Access Map





Tiny Acres Farm at the Portland Farmers' Market. Photo courtesy of Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry.

## MAINE FEDERATION OF FARMERS MARKETS

*Content provided by Maine Federation of Farmers Markets*

### **Strengthening Local Food Access Despite Federal Funding Challenges**

Maine Federation of Farmers Markets (MFFM) has long supported SNAP outreach at farmers' markets and working in partnership with the Office for Family Independence (OFI) as an authorized SNAP outreach provider has strengthened and expanded this work. This collaboration has created new opportunities to bring greater intention, consistency, and coordination to direct outreach at market information booths. Together, OFI and MFFM support trained staff, and develop clear messaging and strong compliance practices to help SNAP shoppers better understand and use their benefits while increasing participation in nutrition incentive programs that support Maine farmers and local food systems.

In addition to SNAP outreach, MFFM continued to support the implementation of key nutrition incentive and food access programs at farmers' markets, including Maine Harvest Bucks (MHB) and Maine Senior FarmShare. Federal funding uncertainties for Maine Harvest Bucks led MFFM to make the difficult but necessary decision to reduce their program benefit to a 50% match, down from 100%, starting in

September 2025. Therefore, since September, shoppers are earning 50% back in bonus Maine Harvest Bucks for whatever they spend in SNAP at the farmers' markets. Despite this reduction in the bonus bucks distribution, Maine Harvest Bucks still saw a year of 10% growth in both SNAP sales and Maine Harvest Bucks redemption totaling to \$925,000 in local food accessed by shoppers using SNAP and MHB. This growth is attributed to both new site expansion and the SNAP Outreach and the Senior FarmShare Program partnerships which helped bring new SNAP shoppers to markets.

Building on its role as an authorized SNAP outreach provider, MFFM used this season to strengthen systems that support consistent, compliant, and effective outreach across markets. This included expanded staff training, standardized messaging at information booths, and improved coordination around data tracking and reporting. These efforts helped reinforce farmers' markets as reliable access points for SNAP shoppers and related programs while creating a stronger foundation for future outreach.

## MAINE HEALTH'S FOOD PANTRIES

*Content provided by MaineHealth*

### Wrap-Around Services Supporting Health and Well-Being

MaineHealth partners with Good Shepherd Food Bank and Mid Coast Hunger Prevention Program to operate hospital-based food pantries located in Brunswick, Farmington, Norway and Portland. These hospital-based food pantries help improve food insecurity in local communities, while also making the connection between health and hunger. These pantries offer healthy fresh, frozen, and shelf-stable foods for free, with a focus on local Maine produce when available. The spaces are welcoming, dignified, confidential, and staffed by care team members at MaineHealth's local health systems. The goal is to be an extra source for healthy, culturally relevant foods for individuals and families. Additionally, these spaces serve as connections to other wrap-around services and programs.

The MaineHealth Food Pantry Portland is located in the former Greyhound station near Maine Medical Center in Portland. The pantry employs cultural brokers to serve patients and community members new to Maine, as well as a Community Health Worker to connect patrons to resources such as housing, diapers, and employment opportunities.

The MaineHealth Food Pantry Franklin is located on the Franklin hospital campus. In addition to healthy food, the pantry is home to a free, year-long Food is

Medicine program which includes access to hands-on cooking classes, community support, as well as tools and guidance to better manage chronic health conditions. The MaineHealth Food Pantry Stephens, located near the hospital campus, provides a weekly, free "Coffee Connect" group for community members to meet and access local resources. Informal conversations with food pantry patrons indicated struggles felt by many due to social isolation in rural Oxford County. The group has learned about a range of topics from how to read nutrition labels to avoiding computer scams.

The MaineHealth Food Pantry Brunswick, located at the Parkview campus, serves patients experiencing food insecurity – particularly those managing chronic disease, cardiac rehab patients, and others who may face transportation or financial barriers. Across the hall from the pantry is MaineHealth's Access to Care program which supports patients in need of financial assistance, health insurance, and/or with other social drivers of health.

Between October-September 2025, MaineHealth food pantries provided approximately 1,074,000 pounds of food to patients and community members in-need, of which more than 459,300 was fresh produce. Combined, the pantries served 25,131 households, comprised of 76,136 individuals.



The MaineHealth Food Pantry in Norway coordinates a weekly "Coffee Connect" group. Photo provided by MaineHealth.

## SOUTHERN MAINE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

*Content provided by SMCC Captain's Cupboard Staff*

### Fighting Food Insecurity on Campus

Southern Maine Community College's campus food pantry, the Captain's Cupboard, sees around 300 check ins per month on both its South Portland and Midcoast campuses. In 2024, the Government Accountability Office reported that college students are twice as likely to be food insecure.<sup>18</sup> At SMCC, students face significant barriers to access food, including financial barriers and transportation issues. The Cupboard aims to break down these barriers by providing access to free food on campus for all its students in a nonjudgemental environment.

Many students on both campuses are SNAP recipients, and the college partners with social services to increase access to this benefit, which students rely on while on reduced incomes in college. In anticipation of the lapse in SNAP benefits this fall, the Cupboard started several new pilot programs. One new initiative,

spearheaded by Ending Hunger Corps VISTA Lauren Boettcher, strengthens the Cupboard's partnership with Mid Coast Hunger Prevention Program by placing MCHPP's well-trained community volunteers into the Midcoast Captain's Cupboard. One outstanding volunteer is Crystal Pietrowicz, a retired SMCC professor who taught Biological Sciences for 20 years and now stays involved by tutoring on campus and volunteering at the Cupboard. When asked about what volunteering on campus meant to her, she stated, "I had no idea the extent of need in the student population" and emphasized that her volunteer work has strengthened her connection to the students she tutors. These pilot programs have been crucial for maximizing food access during a time of uncertainty and provide a snapshot into the work college food pantries are doing to build infrastructure and partnerships that fight food insecurity on campuses statewide.



GOPIF's Anti-Hunger Policy Coordinator, Tobey Solomon-Auger (second from left) meets with the team at SMCC's food pantry, the Captain's Cupboard. Photo provided by SMCC.

## Ensuring Equitable Access to School Meals and Groceries

*Content provided by Food for All Services*

Food for All is working to ensure access to Halal, vegan, and vegetarian options for households that are often overlooked by traditional food systems. Centered on wellness, equity, and dignity, Food for All's programs remove barriers while affirming the cultures and traditions of the communities they serve.

One of those programs is the Halal School Meals Network. Partnering with Portland, South Portland, and Westbrook school districts, Food for All is working to ensure third-party certified halal breakfasts and lunches are available at schools across all three districts.



Beyond school meals, Food for All also operates a community pantry called Nymbani, meaning 'home', and a community distribution program, reaching families where they are, such as places of worship and community-based organizations, with familiar, culturally meaningful groceries.







## PREBLE STREET

*Content provided by Preble Street*

### **Expanding Capacity and Reach with New Food Security Hub**

The Food Security Hub’s construction was completed in November and Preble Street hosted a Grand Opening to celebrate the vision that Maine can decrease food insecurity, create strong and effective community partnerships, and bolster local agriculture and environmental sustainability. Over 150 people came to see the new 5,000 square foot state-of-the-art commercial production and food preservation kitchen in action. Congresswoman Chellie Pingree, a speaker at the event, shared that “the Food Security Hub embodies that if you have a way to process it, you can deal with a lot more fresh and healthy food. You can accept more and different kinds of donations, packaging it right into a meal, or getting it in a freezer.”

With an industrial kitchen and a 2,500 square foot freezer, the Food Security Hub has the capacity to produce 10,000 meals a day and store 50,000 frozen fully prepared meals.

State-of-the-art equipment allows trained staff and volunteers to prep, cook and pack food at volumes that were previously impossible. Hundreds of gallons

of chicken stock for a soup can easily be made and pallets of donated summer tomatoes are cooked into sauces and salsas. Using blanchers, blast chillers, and a dehydrator to preserve produce during Maine’s short growing season that otherwise would’ve gone to waste increases access to nutritious fruits and vegetables year-round.





Three professionally trained chefs were brought on to ensure restaurant-quality operations and from-scratch cooking. The chefs have a shared commitment to bring dignity and quality to every meal served. The Food Security Hub has the capacity and flexibility to respond to whatever the emerging or emergency needs are—different populations, new organizations to partner with, changing demographics in Maine, natural disasters, or economic downturns.

The Food Security Hub also has the potential to support Food Is Medicine interventions. In December 2025, Preble Street in partnership with MaineHealth was accepted into the national Food Is Medicine Coalition (FIMC) Accelerator Program. A multi-disciplinary team of MaineHealth and Preble Street staff will participate in a 6-month intensive curriculum training program that will bring knowledge and ability to produce Medically Tailored Meals out of the Food Security Hub for food insecure MaineHealth patients with severe, complex and chronic illnesses.



Congresswoman Chellie Pingree speaks at the Grand Opening of Preble Street's Food Security Hub. Photos provided by Preble Street

## COMMUNITY CARING COLLABORATIVE

*Content provided by Community Caring Collaborative*

### **Flexible Funds Address Barriers and Help Families Thrive**

Community Caring Collaborative (CCC) flexible support funds help children and parents overcome obstacles, achieve goals, and reach their potential. They are lifelines for Washington County and Passamaquoddy families that can be accessed by CCC partners working on their behalf. These supports build family and partner capacity, reflecting the two-part priority of the CCC to simultaneously support its partners and the community members they serve. With CCC flexible support funds, families can navigate overwhelming challenges and children can experience safety, belonging, and joy.

The Hope Fund provides one-time financial assistance for expenses that threaten a family's ability to care for their children (ages 0–8) and are not covered by other sources. Examples of support have included auto repairs, security deposits, safety equipment, essential household items (furniture, appliances), educational

supplies, and more. The Dream Fund, established in 2016 to honor CCC founder Marjorie Withers, provides financial support for children and youth (ages 5–18) to pursue their passions through activities that build resilience, confidence, and connection. Examples include summer camps, music and art lessons, driver's education, bicycles, and outdoor equipment.

CCC also helps with flexible support funds for participants in Family Futures Downeast, a two-generational education and training program that helps families find pathways to living wages. The combined strategies of supporting essential needs, providing family-centered coaching, and offering adult and child educational programming are creating upward mobility and hope in Washington County.

Together in 2025, nearly \$100,000 supported over 400 flexible support fund requests across these programs.



Dressed as famous chefs, Community Caring Collaborative staff and volunteers served over 600 meals at their 7th annual Family Harvest Meal, held on Halloween in Machias. Photo provided by Community Caring Collaborative.

## SHIFTING THE NARRATIVE ON FOOD SECURITY

*Content provided the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Tribal Populations*

The Permanent Commission, in partnership with the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation & the Future, launched a mini-award program to support community-led efforts to shift the narrative around food insecurity. The grants were aimed at supporting projects with one or more of the following goals:

1. Shifting the narrative from one that focuses on individual blame and stereotypes to one that focuses on the collective benefits and responsibilities of ending hunger in Maine - emphasizing a positive, forward-looking message centered on a future where no one in Maine faces food insecurity.
2. Lifting up positive stories about community-driven solutions to food insecurity led by disproportionately impacted communities.
3. Reducing stigma or address misconceptions that create barriers to accessing food resources and assistance.
4. Centering the voices of communities disproportionately impacted by food insecurity and people with lived experience.
5. Elevating information about available resources or best practices in reference to specific marginalized communities to increase accessibility for both those working to address food insecurity and those directly impacted by food insecurity.

Congratulations to the following organizations on their impactful narrative change projects:

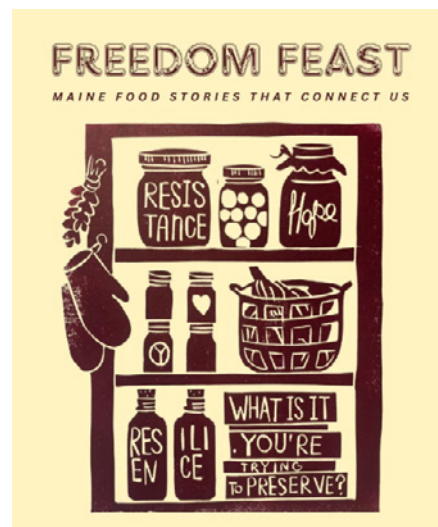
**Cumberland County Public Health Department** created a map of retail outlets where people can access and use state and federal food benefits that are not traditional grocery stores, helping people to shop according to their nutrition priorities.

**Healthy Acadia** expanded access to healthy, culturally appropriate produce in partnership with Mano en Mano and Folklore Farm through a farm share credit program for Latine and other migrant/immigrant families.

Housed at the **Maine Food Convergence Project**, the Maine Food Narratives Work Group created a food sovereignty zine that centers community stories, art, and lived experiences while addressing the root causes of hunger and lifting up pathways toward food sovereignty.

**IFKA Community Services** created a multicultural video amplifying personal stories of resilience and community-driven solutions to food assistance in Lewiston, and hosting a community meal to foster connection and belonging.

**Northeast Federation of Cooperatives** highlighted the Maine rancher cooperative through storytelling about Black ranchers and farmers in Maine, using social media and newsletters to spotlight the role of Maine cooperative economics in advancing food access.



Cover of Maine Food Narrative's Work Group's Food Sovereignty Zine

## LOOKING FORWARD

Maine's Ending Hunger Initiative is guided by its North Star: a Maine free from hunger.

The road ahead will be challenging, as the impacts of policy changes and funding cuts at the federal level continue to unfold. Fortunately, the work here is underway, and Maine's Ending Hunger Initiative will continue to respond and work collaboratively across sectors to advance priorities outlined in the Roadmap to End Hunger. We're glad you're here with us—achieving this vision will require collective action as we forge a future where all Mainers have access to the resources they need to thrive.



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