



State of Wisconsin  
**Department of Health Services**

Tony Evers, Governor  
Kirsten L. Johnson, Secretary

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April 8, 2025

Ms. Jill Underly  
State Superintendent  
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction  
125 South Webster Street  
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Superintendent Underly:

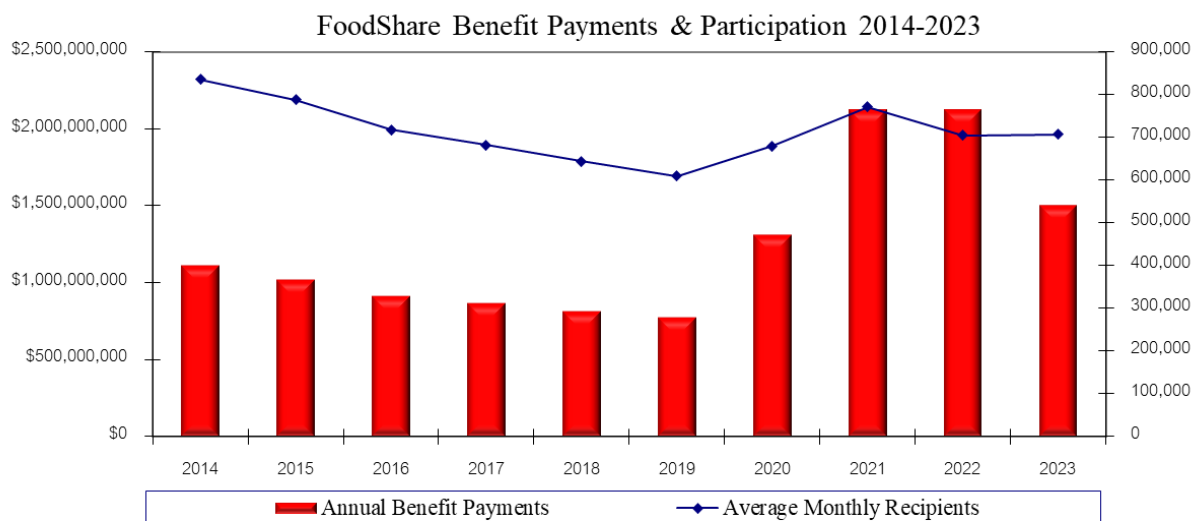
As required under [Wis. Stat. § 49.76](#), the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) provides this report on the participation of low-income households in DHS food programs during 2023. All programs are funded by USDA.

The USDA Economic Research Service Report states that, “Most U.S. households have consistent, dependable access to enough food for active, healthy living, meaning, they are food secure. However, some households experience food insecurity at times during the year, meaning their ability to acquire adequate food is limited by a lack of money and other resources. The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) food and nutrition assistance programs aim to increase food security by providing low-income households access to food for a healthful diet, as well as nutrition education.”

The Wisconsin’s USDA food and nutrition assistance programs aim to increase food security by providing low-income households access to healthy and nutritious foods. Access to healthy foods allows individuals and families to make healthy food choices. The goal is to provide all residents across the state access to a nutritious diet to help ensure long-term health outcomes for everyone.

### **The FoodShare Program**

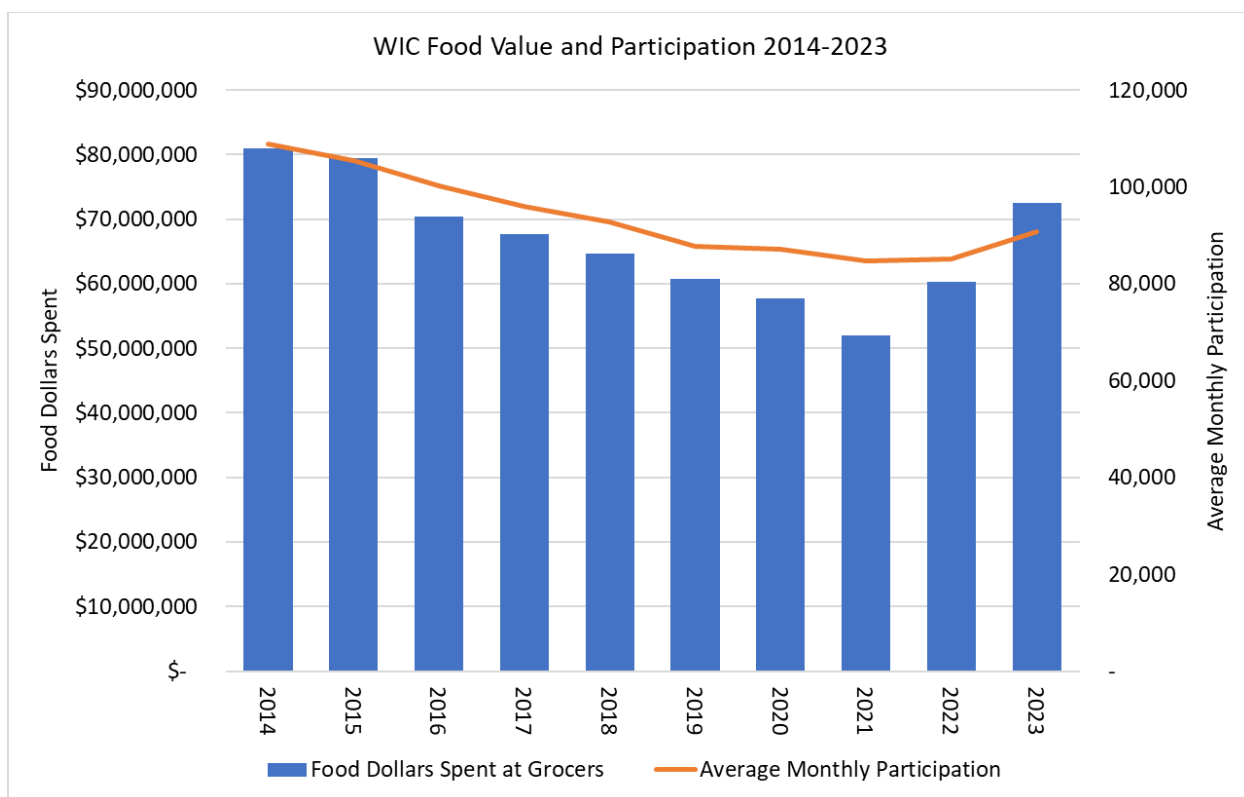
FoodShare is Wisconsin’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which provides monthly food allowances to qualified, low-income residents, and is the nation’s largest nutrition assistance program. In 2023, FoodShare provided benefits to a monthly average of 707,439 Wisconsin residents to purchase a total of \$1,497,926,181 in approved foods at grocery stores and farmers markets. 2023 participation raised nominally following a decrease in participation from 2021 to 2022. In December 2023 FoodShare reported 55% of members were female; 33.6% of assistance groups included minors; 46.8% had elderly, blind or a disabled member; the average monthly allotment was \$306 per household; the average household size was two persons; and the average monthly income of assistance groups with at least one person working was \$486.



## The Women, Infants, and Children Program

The WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children) is a discretionary program. WIC serves low-income participants who are pregnant, postpartum, or breastfeeding, as well as infants and children up to 5 years of age, who have a nutritional need. Though the WIC program uses the term of “women” in its program name and data summaries, WIC serves low-income participants who are pregnant, postpartum, or breastfeeding regardless of gender identity, including women, transgender men, and nonbinary-gendered individuals. The data is inclusive of all people who were participating in the program while pregnant, breastfeeding, or postpartum.

WIC provides breastfeeding support, nutrition education, referrals to health care, social supports, public health services, and access to supplemental nutritious foods. In 2023, the WIC program served 137,687 participants including 37,247 women, 24,210 infants, and 76,230 children. In 2023, annual WIC participation was 5% higher than in 2022. This was the first year-over-year increase in annual participation in over a decade. During 2023, monthly participation averaged 90,803 participants including 18,398 women, 19,102 infants, and 53,304 children who received WIC-approved foods. A total of \$72,500,955 was spent to purchase food at grocery stores. There was sufficient funding to serve all WIC applicants determined to be eligible.



## The Elderly Nutrition Program

The purpose of the Elder Nutrition Program is to reduce hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition; to promote socialization of older individuals; and to promote the health and well-being of older individuals by helping to gain access to nutrition and other disease prevention and health promotion services. The nutrition program consists of two meal programs, each with specific purposes. The congregate (senior dining) program provides meals in a community environment that promotes socialization and healthy aging. Home-delivered meals, also known as Meals on Wheels, provide meals and daily social contact to those who are determined to be homebound and therefore unable to prepare daily meals or attend a senior dining center. Some nutrition programs in Wisconsin also provide carryout meal services because of programmatic shifts that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. Carryout meals can help fill gaps in services for older individuals for whom congregate meals or home-delivered meals may not be appropriate or for programs that lack resources to deliver meals to everyone who might be eligible for services.

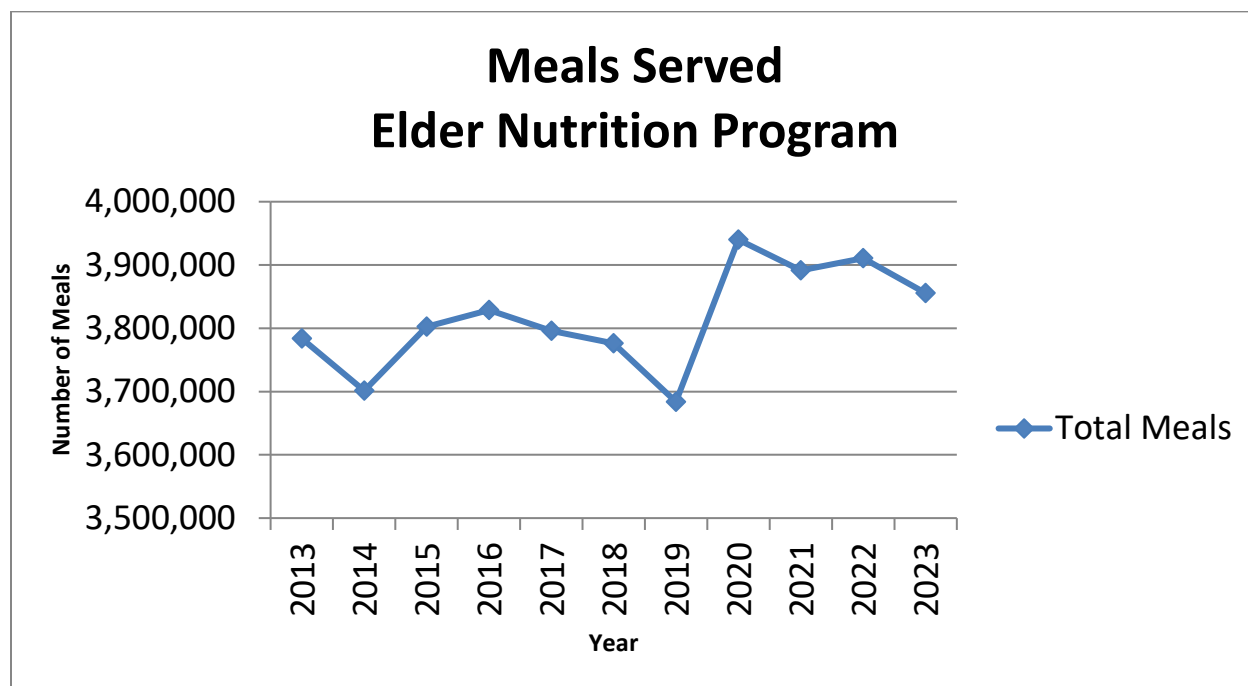
In calendar year (CY) 2023, Wisconsin's nutrition programs served 841,012 congregate meals to 35,916 older adults. Approximately 6500 older adults received 219,009 carryout meals, and 2,795,200 home-delivered meals were served to approximately 31,000 older adults. Approximately 18% of senior dining participants and 48% of home-delivered meal participants in Wisconsin are at high nutritional risk, and approximately 9% of congregate and 20% of home-delivered meal recipients are at risk for malnutrition. Approximately

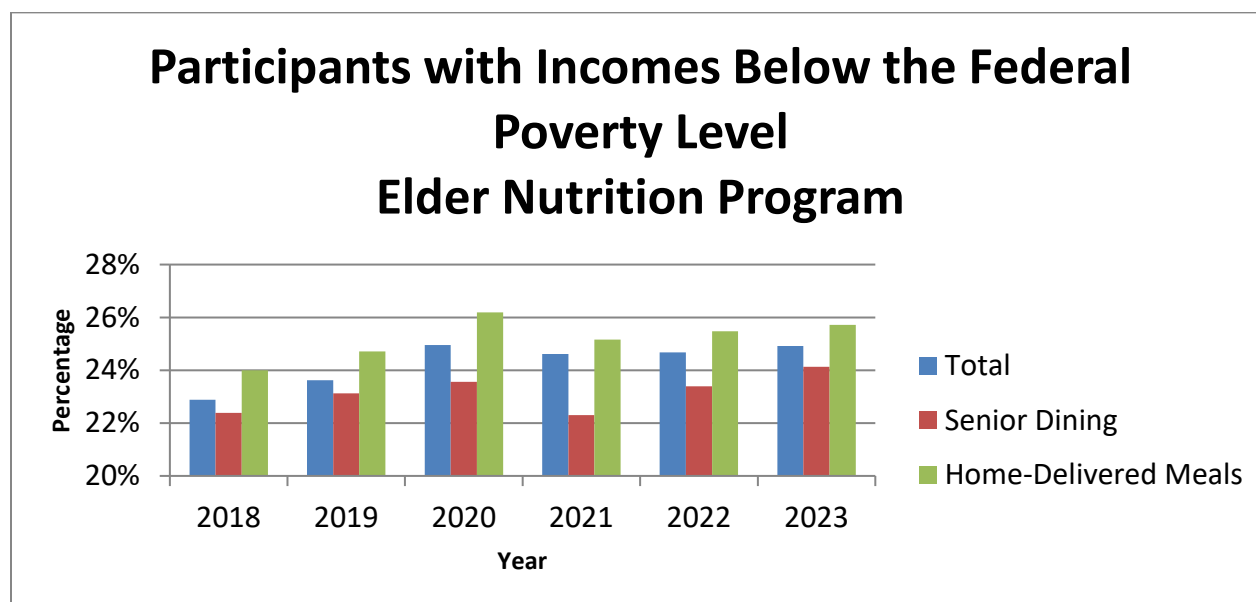
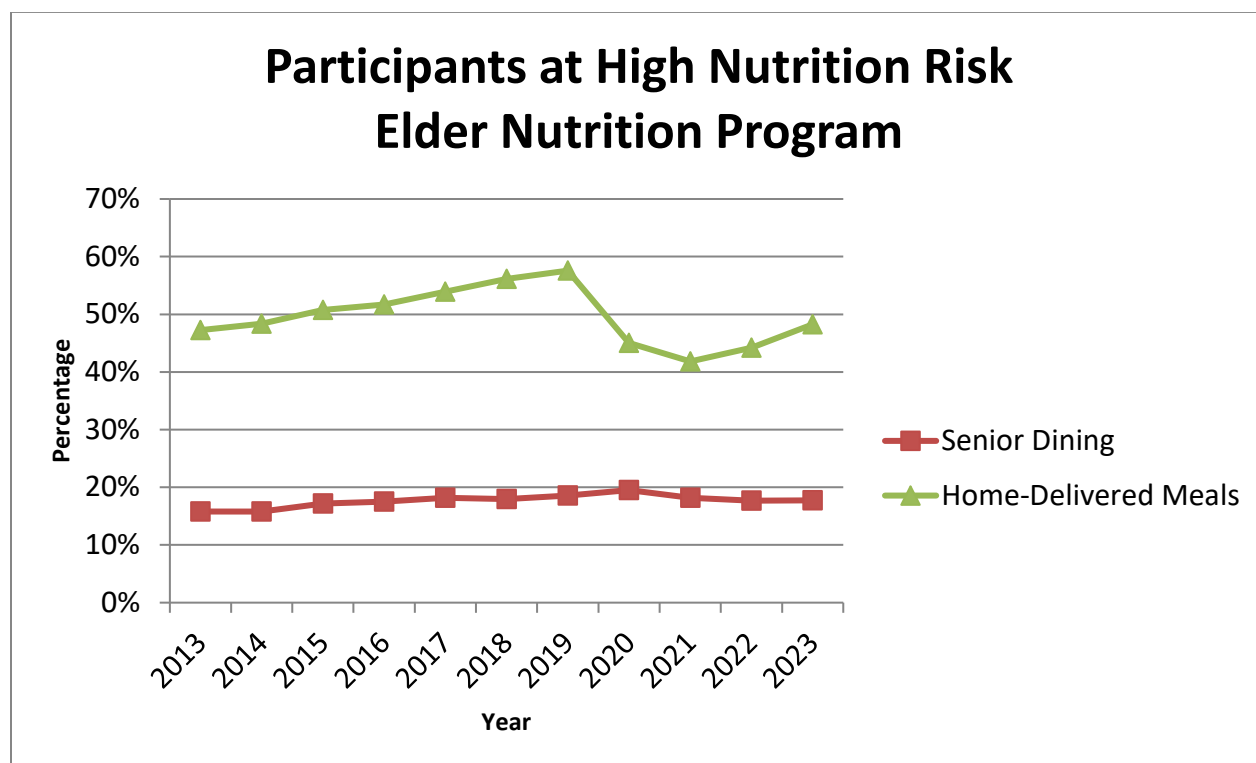
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25% of meal participants live at or below the Federal Poverty Limit; 10% of congregate participants and 17% of home-delivered participants were considered food insecure. In addition to meals, nutrition programs provided nutrition education to 45,689 older adults and nutrition counseling to 403 older adults in CY 2023.





## The Commodity Supplemental Food Program

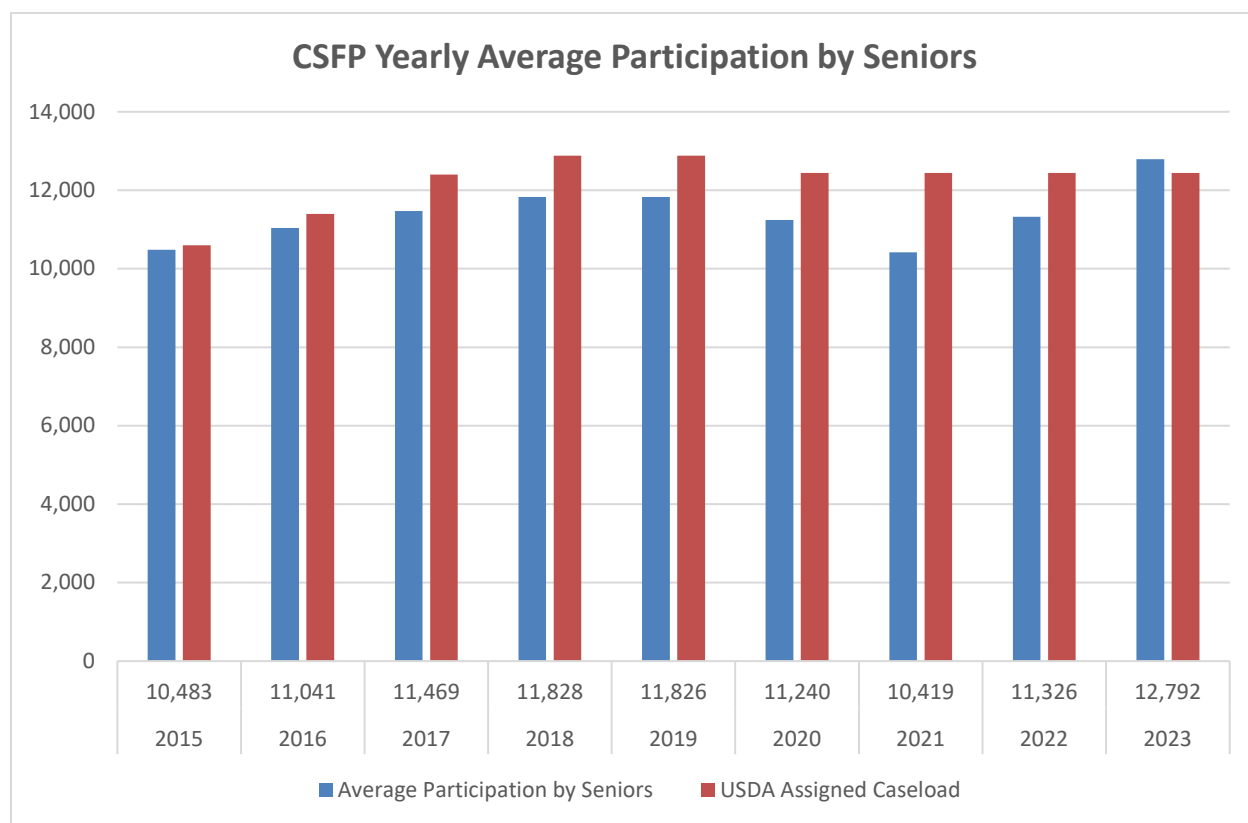
The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) works to improve the health of low-income persons at least 60 years of age by supplementing their diets with nutritious U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Foods. USDA distributes both food and administrative

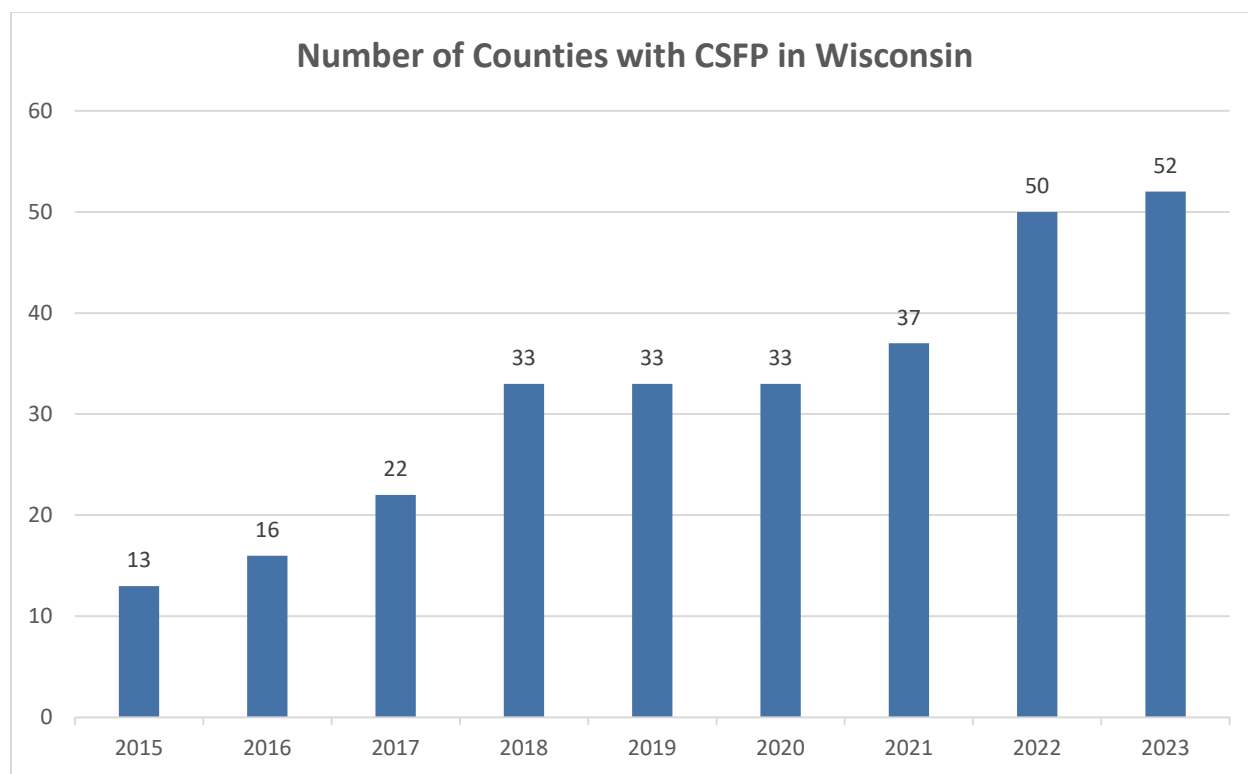
funds to participating states and Indian Tribal Organizations to operate CSFP. State agencies distribute CSFP food to public and nonprofit private local agencies. Local CSFP agencies determine the eligibility of applicants, distribute the foods, and provide nutrition education.

CSFP offers a monthly food package with a variety of nutritious foods, such as unsweetened or lightly sweetened canned fruits, low sodium or no salt added canned vegetables, low fat dairy products, whole grain cereals and pasta, and a variety of protein foods including lean meats, poultry, fish, and beans.

CSFP is administered at the Federal level by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). State agencies are responsible for administering the program at the state level and may select local agencies to administer the program in local areas of the state.

In 2023, Wisconsin CSFP was carried out in 52 counties, providing monthly food packages to seniors within income at or below 130% federal poverty level. In 2023, an average of 12,792 seniors each month received food from one of the 226 distribution sites.





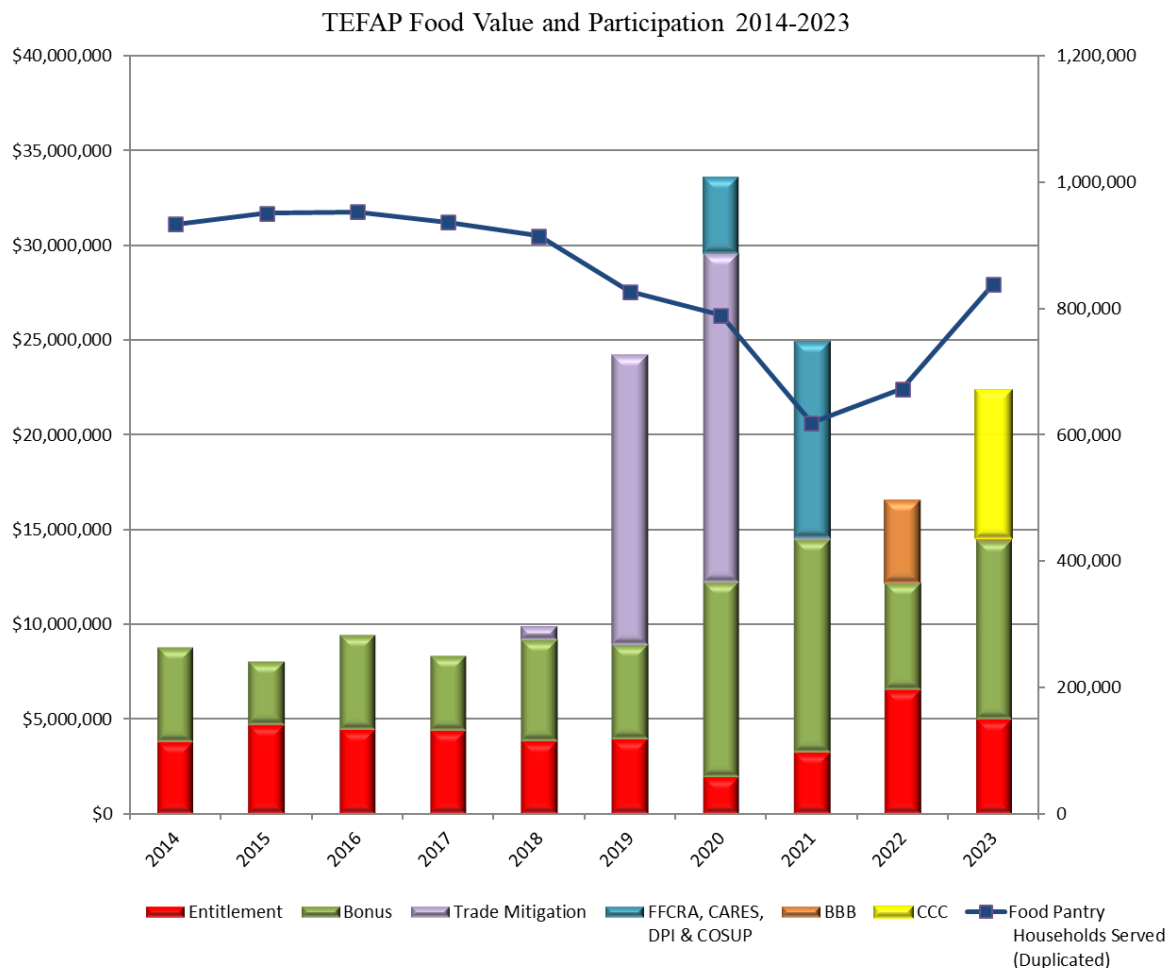
## The Emergency Food Assistance Program

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) provides USDA commodity foods to 344 participating food pantries, meal sites, and homeless shelters in Wisconsin for distribution to qualifying low-income households. Products include frozen and shelf-stable meats, fruits, vegetables, juices, grains, dairy, fresh produce, and fresh fluid milk. TEFAP foods supplement outlets' private sector inventories.

States purchase 'entitlement' foods from a diverse menu with funds the USDA allocates in accordance with each state's proportion of unemployed persons and persons living in poverty. Because TEFAP is also a price-support program for farmers, the USDA purchases surplus products from growers for distribution to states as additional 'bonus' foods. Following the initial efforts during the onset of COVID-19, in 2022 the USDA provided foods authorized by 'Build Back Better' (BBB) to support states' emergency food inventories. That program concluded in 2023 as the USDA authorized the use of 'Commodity Credit Corporation' (CCC) funding to support emergency food networks across the country.

In 2023, Wisconsin ordered 17.5 million pounds of TEFAP commodities worth \$22.3 million dollars for distribution to emergency food warehouses, food banks, and outlets. This food was distributed to 274 food pantries and mobile pantries who combined it with an additional 52.5 million pounds of locally donated, grown, and purchased foods for a total public and private distribution estimated at 70 million pounds. A portion of this food was additionally distributed to 70 meal sites and shelters who combined it with local foods to

provide 1,866,005 meals to food-insecure individuals, 16% more than the previous year. TEFAP food pantries reported serving 838,203 food-insecure households (duplicated), a 24.6% increase over 2022.



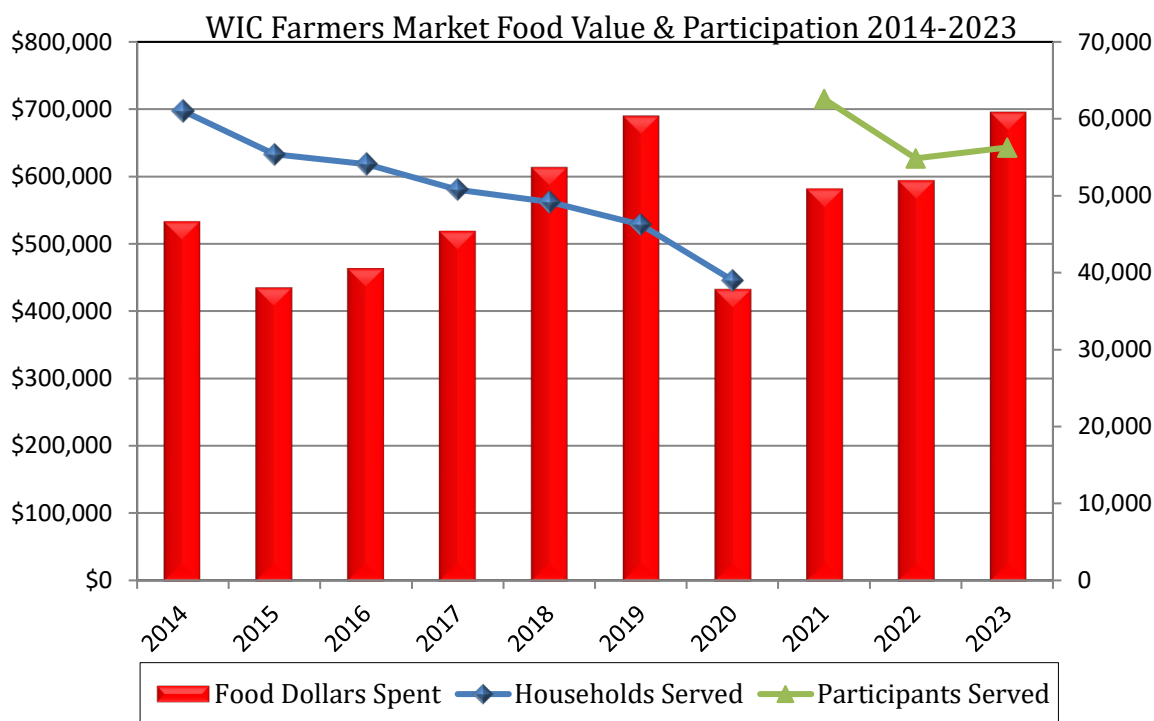
## The Senior Farmer Market Nutrition Program

From June through October, the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program provides a \$35 benefit to low-income senior households enabling them to purchase locally grown fruits, vegetables, and herbs from farmers markets and roadside stands. Seniors must have incomes at or below 185% of the federal poverty level (FPL) and be at least age 60 (Native Americans may participate at age 55). The program operates in 70 Wisconsin counties and in 2023 served 20,777 participants with redemptions totaling \$537,155. The 2023 participant redemption was higher by \$278,275 compared to 2022, which exhibits the great need and interest in this program.



## The WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program

The WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program also is available from June through October and provides WIC participants a \$30 benefit to purchase fresh produce directly from farmers. Surveys indicate these purchases increase interest in year-round consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables. In 2023, 1,006 local farmers redeemed \$695,766 from 56,283 WIC individuals who spent their benefit at Wisconsin farmers markets and farm/roadside stands. The 2023 food dollars spent was over \$100,000 higher than in 2022 and 2021. Participation increased slightly and those receiving benefits used them more readily in 2023.

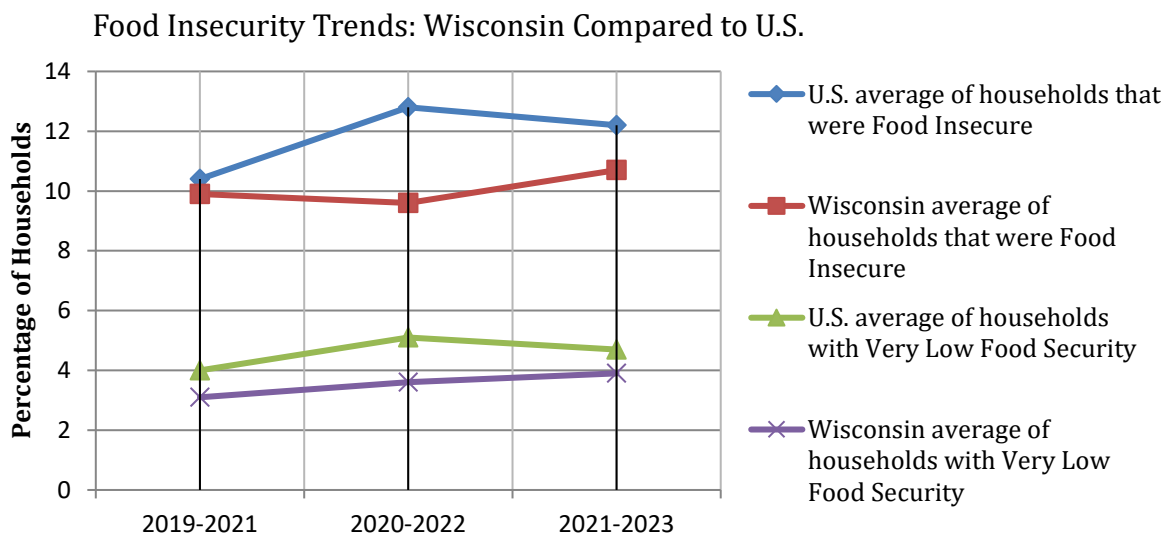


## Food Insecurity Trends in Wisconsin Compared to the U.S.

An important source of national food security data is the Economic Research Service (ERS) of the USDA, which surveys households about difficulties meeting basic food needs. Households are classified as “*food insecure*” if they reported three or more food-insecure conditions. A subset of “*food insecure*” households reports having “*very low food security*.” This means that, at times during the year, members reduced their food intake and disrupted their normal eating patterns because they lacked resources for food.

The most current ERS data available indicates Wisconsin’s food insecurity prevalence has declined slightly. From 2021 through 2023, Wisconsin’s average rate of food insecurity was 10.7%, compared to the higher national average of 12.2%. Wisconsin’s food insecurity rate

has increased .8% from 2019-2021. Wisconsin's average rate of households with "very low food security" in 2021-2023 was 3.9%, compared to the higher national average of 4.7%.



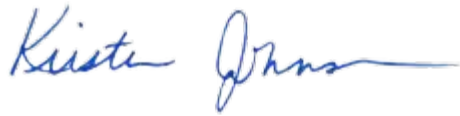
Food insecurity varies considerably by state. It is important to consider household information such as income, unemployment, and household structure. In addition, each State's cost of housing, unemployment, wages, and state policies that affect access to nutrition assistance programs, unemployment insurance, and State Earned Income Tax Credit all need to be taken into consideration when reviewing this data.

Where people live in Wisconsin impacts their food security. Food deserts are areas where it is difficult to buy affordable or good-quality fresh nutritious food. A common metric to identify food deserts is low-income low access areas (LILA). These areas are identified as having a substantial number of residents who are low income and who live more than one mile from a supermarket in urban areas, or more than 10 miles in rural areas. The most recent ERS data of State-Level Estimates of LILA populations shows that 10% of Wisconsin residents, over a half a million people, live in LILA census tracts. This is compared to 12.8% nationally. Living in a LILA, or food desert, can make it challenging to find fresh, nutritious, and affordable foods and can lead to poor nutrition and diet-related health issues. This reduced access to healthy foods disproportionately affects low-income communities which can worsen health inequities for those Wisconsinites.

Both nationally and in Wisconsin, food insecurity is highest among households with incomes near or below the poverty level; households with children that are headed by a single parent or guardian; households comprising of women and men living alone; and households headed by individuals who are Black, Hispanic, or Native American.

In conclusion, the effort and challenges represented by the data in this 2023 report indicate that although the national averages for both food-insecure and very low food security needs have gone down, Wisconsin's averages have gone up. This report shows the great need for a continued commitment by DHS to fight hunger in Wisconsin.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kirsten Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

Kirsten Johnson  
Secretary-designee