



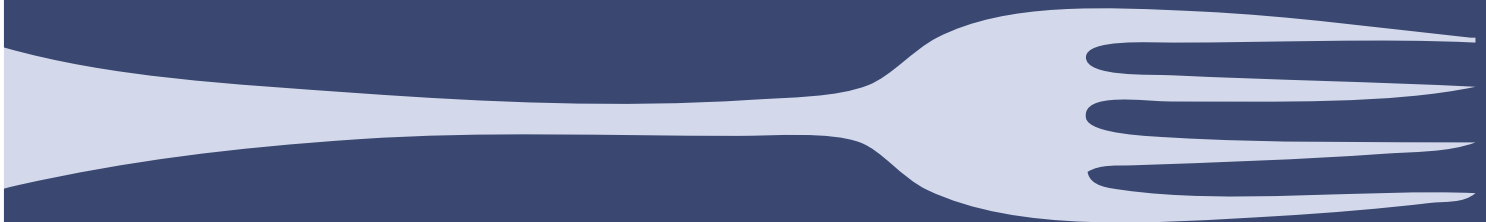
Fairfield County  
Community Foundation

## HUNGER LIVES HERE:

A LOOK AT FOOD INSECURITY IN  
FAIRFIELD COUNTY, CONNECTICUT



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Although nationally the average cost of a meal is \$2.52, Fairfield County meals cost \$3.17 on average in 2011. This is up from \$2.95 in 2010, forcing families to budget more for food.<sup>8</sup>

## Hunger and Food Insecurity

In Fairfield County more than one in ten families has struggled to find their next meal – and that rate is even higher among our children.<sup>1</sup> Experts refer to this situation as *food insecurity*. If budgeting is a juggling act, then food insecurity is a situation “where sometimes the food ball gets dropped” in order to pay for other expenses.<sup>2</sup>

Although food insecurity includes hunger, it is not limited to it. Everyone has felt hungry, and hunger can be solved simply by eating food. *Food insecurity* evokes the obstacles that many Connecticut residents face in order to feed themselves and their families.

Eliminating food insecurity means not only addressing the problems of immediate hunger, but also confronting the ongoing issues of food access and affordability. In addition to supporting food pantries and feeding programs donors should consider support of programs and activities that address the root causes of poverty such as employment programs, affordable housing, and advocacy for programs that build income security and economic opportunity.

# Urban and Suburban Poverty

**Fairfield County is home to the wealthiest metropolitan area in the country.**<sup>3</sup> Yet despite this wealth, people across the county struggle to make ends meet. Poverty forces residents to make tough choices between food, rent, and other essentials. Often, this leads to food insecurity.

**In Fairfield County cities almost one in five residents lives in poverty.**<sup>4</sup> However, poverty is no longer just an urban problem, and this leads to food insecurity in our suburbs as well. Between 2000 and 2011 the number of poor residents in our suburbs has increased by almost forty percent.<sup>5</sup>

Unemployment pushes many urban families into poverty, particularly as middle class blue collar jobs are replaced with service sector positions.<sup>6</sup> Unemployment also drives poverty in suburban areas, with a more than one hundred percent increase in the unemployed population in a three year period.<sup>7</sup> The suburban unemployed may particularly struggle to access jobs; less than one third of jobs can be reached via public transportation in the Bridgeport-Stamford metro area within an hour and a half.<sup>9</sup>

While our cities often struggle with stretching resources to manage a higher need, the suburbs face a lack of access to or awareness of food assistance programs. Although more urban residents *qualify* for federal food programs, fewer qualified suburban residents *participate* in federal food programs. In Darien less than 5% of families living below the poverty line are receiving SNAP (food stamps), while that number is closer to 50% in Bridgeport.<sup>10</sup>

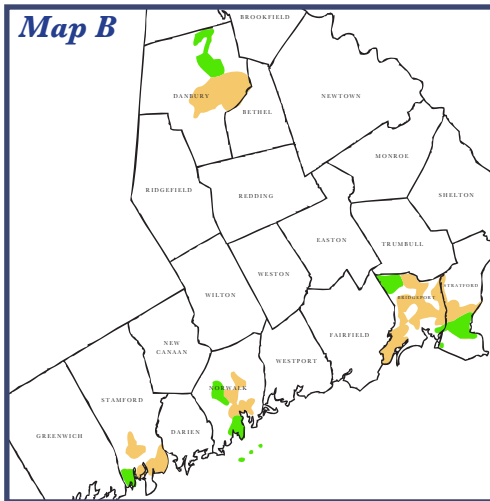
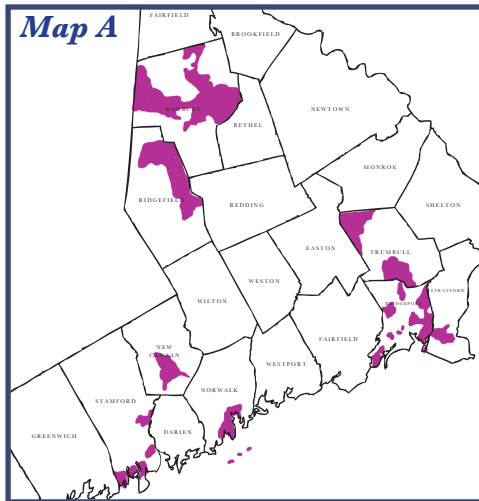
Cities are also more likely to offer summer meal sites and school breakfast programs, and to have multiple food pantries and soup kitchens. Yet faced with severe need in cities, these programs are ill-equipped to reach out to suburban residents, as well.

*When thinking about food insecurity in Fairfield County, it is essential to consider how differences between our cities and our suburbs create different challenges to ensuring everyone has enough to eat.*

## Donors Can:

- Support food pantries and feeding programs in suburban areas.
- Support food programs that are using innovative methods, such as mobile pantries and feeding programs to get food to those who need it.

# Fairfield County Food Access Maps



## Donors can:

- Help improve access to healthy foods by supporting urban farms and farmers' markets located within food deserts, as well as advocacy to support community development efforts that improve food access.

The **purple** on Map A highlights areas where many residents do not have access to a car.<sup>11</sup> Having to walk a mile or even half a mile from a supermarket, with groceries, is a serious obstacle to food access. Map B shows the food deserts of Fairfield County. The **green** areas have many low income residents and are at least a mile from the nearest supermarket, while **orange** areas are at least half a mile away from the nearest supermarket.<sup>12</sup>

## Food Access

Fairfield County families do not just struggle to pay for food; many also have trouble accessing food. The USDA classifies several areas in our county as *food deserts*: low income areas without a nearby supermarket.

*Map A* illustrates that in Fairfield County cities, many residents do not have access to a car and rely on walking or public transportation in order to get around.

*Map B* illustrates that in Fairfield County, most food deserts are actually in urban areas. Sections of Bridgeport, Norwalk, Stamford, and Danbury are particularly noticeable. Parts of these food deserts overlap with areas on the *Map A*, revealing that many people in low income areas do not have access to a car *and* live far from a grocery store.

Food deserts may have some food available for purchase at corner stores or bodegas. However, while there may be corner stores or bodegas in food deserts, these stores rarely sell nutritious food and are usually more expensive than supermarkets. Thus, living in food deserts can be particularly challenging for people who have special nutritional needs, such as children or the elderly. In the Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk metro area, 9% of families with children have trouble finding affordable fresh fruits and vegetables.<sup>13</sup>

*Improving access to nutritious, affordable food would reduce food insecurity and make our communities healthier.*

## Maximum Income to Qualify for Federal Aid

Household Size	Monthly Income	Yearly Income
1	\$1,671	\$20,036
2	\$2,248	\$26,955
3	\$2,828	\$33,874
4	\$3,400	\$40,793
5	\$3,976	\$47,712
6	\$4,553	\$54,631
7	\$5,129	\$61,550
8	\$5,706	\$68,469

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In the state of Connecticut, individuals under 185% of the federal poverty line qualify for SNAP, WIC, and reduced priced school meals. This table shows the maximum income for individuals to qualify for these benefits. All income is before taxes.

## What's being done?

### *Federal Programs*

There are several federal programs that help people in Fairfield County to get food. These include:

- **SNAP** or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly known as the Food Stamps program). SNAP participants receive an EBT card, which allows them to purchase specific food items.<sup>14</sup> Unlike the paper “stamps” from the previous program, the EBT card looks like a standard debit card and is not easily identifiable as federal aid.<sup>15</sup>

- **WIC** or the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, provides pregnant women and the mothers of young children with checks to purchase nutritious food for themselves and their families.<sup>16</sup>

- **School Lunch and Breakfast Programs** subsidize the cost of providing free or reduced price meals to low income students.<sup>17</sup> Individual schools decide whether or not to participate.

- **Seamless Summer Food Programs** (SSFP) serve food at designated meal sites to help feed students when school is not in session.<sup>18</sup> Some sites are open to all children in a low income community, while others require enrollment in a specific summer program.<sup>19</sup>

- **The Elderly Nutrition Program** establishes congregate meal sites (known in Connecticut as Senior Community Cafés) at senior centers, churches, and elderly congregate living sites.<sup>20</sup> Individuals over age sixty, and their spouses (regardless of age), or disabled people living at homes for the elderly qualify for these meals.<sup>21</sup> It also provides for Meals on Wheels, which delivers meals to homebound individuals over age sixty.<sup>22</sup>





### *Federal Programs (continued)*

- **The Child and Adult Care Food Program** subsidizes the cost of meals and snacks at day care centers and other group sites for children and the disabled.<sup>23</sup>

- **Nutrition Assistance Programs** (TEFAP) distribute food from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to soup kitchens, food pantries, and other food service providers.<sup>24</sup>

- **The Farmers' Market Nutrition Program** (FMNP) provides WIC participants and seniors with vouchers to purchase fruits and vegetables at approved farmer's markets.<sup>26</sup>

*As of November 1, 2013, the maximum SNAP benefit amounts for individuals and families were reduced due to the expiration of a temporary increase in maximum SNAP benefits that was enacted in 2009 as part of "The American Recovery & Reinvestment Act," or ARRA. According to End Hunger CT, the average decrease is \$11 for one person and \$36 for a family of four. Food pantries, soup kitchens, and other feeding programs are likely to see increased demand for assistance, as families struggle to fill the gap created by this benefit reduction, and their need for food donations and private funding is likely to spike in the coming months.*

**Food pantries, soup kitchens, and other feeding programs are likely to see increased demand for assistance in the coming months.**



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## CT SNAPshot!

End Hunger CT is collecting stories of how SNAP benefits families.

Go to:

<http://www.endhunger-ct.org/ct-snapshot>

### *Outreach and Advocacy Organizations*

Today, 78% of eligible individuals in Connecticut participate in SNAP.<sup>27</sup> This would not have been possible without the work of outreach organizations (such as the Connecticut Association for Human Services), which proactively inform their clients about publicly funded benefits. Some nonprofit organizations, such as the members of the Community Health Center Association of Connecticut, even screen individuals for eligibility and help them to complete their applications.

In order to assist the outreach effort, the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS) recently implemented Access Benefits Online, a web-based program that allows case managers to screen clients for twelve benefits at once.<sup>28</sup> This helps outreach organizations to ensure that clients receive all the benefits for which they are eligible, including SNAP and WIC.

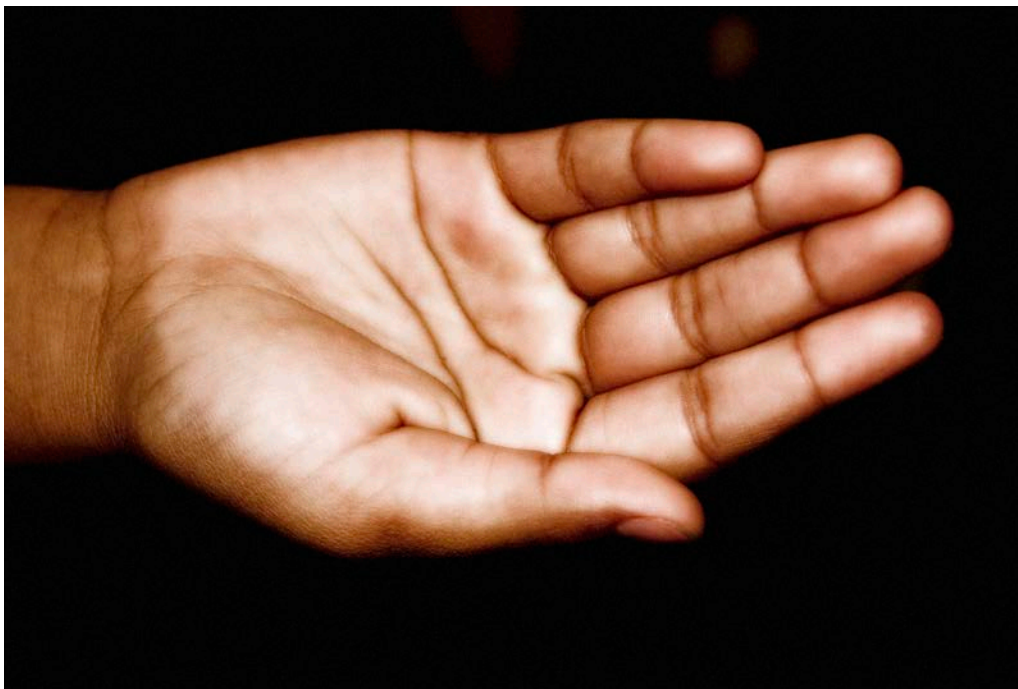
Some advocacy groups work to encourage more schools to implement a breakfast program.<sup>29</sup> For instance,

the **No Kid Hungry Campaign** (a partnership between End Hunger Connecticut, Share our Strength, and Connecticut Governor Dan Malloy) has been active in informing schools about the value of school breakfast.

Student participation in existing breakfast programs has also improved, in part because of efforts to publicize effective alternative models for breakfast such as “grab and go” carts in school hallways.<sup>30</sup> Between 2011 and 2012, participation in the school breakfast program increased by 14% statewide.<sup>31</sup>

The No Kid Hungry Campaign has recently begun a new initiative to increase the number of summer food programs and the number of children who participate in such programs. In addition to airing television ads and distributing pamphlets, the campaign has an online summer food location finder. Currently, Connecticut has the fifth best participation rate in these programs nationally.<sup>32</sup>





## *Local Charities*

There are a number of local charities and not-for-profit organizations that target immediate hunger in Fairfield County by providing groceries or hot meals for food insecure people. Food pantries and soup kitchens are particularly important for families and individuals who do not meet the income thresholds for federal aid programs. **Half of the food insecure people in Fairfield County do not qualify for federal aid.**<sup>33</sup> The high cost of living in Fairfield County means that people must earn more in order to be food secure than in other parts of the country.

Many local soup kitchens and food pantries are run by local churches with limited ability to store food and a growing population to feed. A 2010 Feeding America study found that “for the majority of people seeking food assistance, pantries are a part of households’ longer-term strategies to supplement monthly shortfalls in food.”<sup>34</sup> **Yet food pantries, which are designed to meet temporary food shortages, are rarely equipped to handle this level of ongoing community need.**

### **Donors can:**

- Support food pantries that connect clients to wrap-around services and case management, in addition to food.
- Support food pantries that allow clients to select the food they receive, acknowledging the culture and special dietary needs of clients.





### *United Way 211 Infoline*

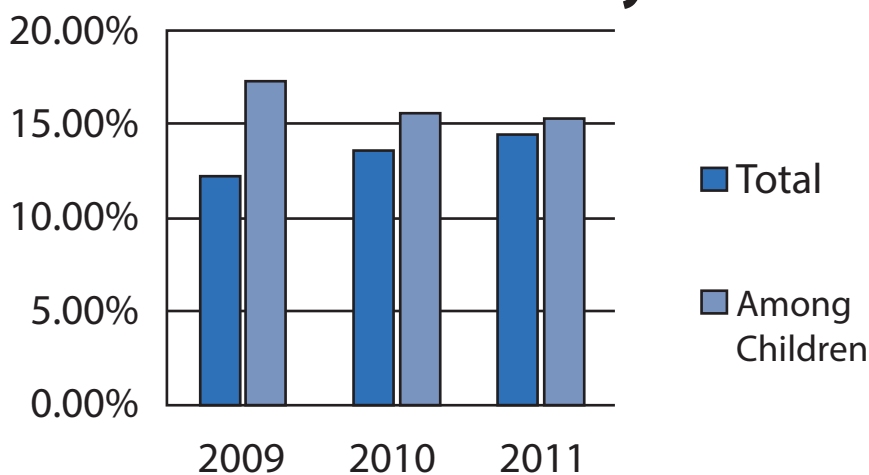
211 is a 24 hour hotline and online directory that connects callers to a variety of services in their area, including information on local food pantries and soup kitchens. 211 staff search for new service providers year round and regularly contact listed groups to verify their listings.

Many service providers use 211 to refer clients to other services they need, especially when the client is not eligible for assistance from the provider. For instance, a town social service director might direct a caller from another town to 211 in order to find a food pantry that serves the caller's area, or a counseling agency might use 211 to locate a nearby food pantry for a food insecure client.

Providers are sometimes reluctant to suggest more than one food pantry or soup kitchen to clients, fearing that they will hoard food or that they will strain already limited food resources by “double dipping”. Yet there is no evidence that these resources are widely used by people who are not in need.

**There is no evidence that food pantries or soup kitchens are widely used by people who are not in need.**

## Food Insecurity Rates in Fairfield County



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## Underserved Populations in Fairfield County

In spite of federal programs, charities and outreach organizations, several groups in Fairfield County are underserved by existing efforts to wipe out food insecurity. **Children, the working poor, and the elderly are particularly at risk for not having enough to eat.**

### Children

Both in Fairfield County and nationwide, food insecurity is much more common among children. **In Fairfield County alone there are about 34,890 children living in a food insecure household.**<sup>35</sup> Although other food programs reach children indirectly, free and reduced price school lunch and breakfast are the main programs that specifically target childhood food insecurity.

More Connecticut schools are opting in to the school breakfast program.<sup>36</sup>

**However, Connecticut is still last in the nation for the percentage of schools that participate in the lunch program that also participate in the breakfast program.**

Low student participation in existing programs is also a problem.<sup>37</sup> Bridgeport is the only community in Fairfield County where more than half of free or reduced price lunch students receive breakfast.<sup>38</sup> School breakfast programs not only decrease food insecurity, but also help children to concentrate in class and to improve their standardized test scores.<sup>39</sup> There are even fewer discipline issues in schools that participate in the breakfast program.<sup>41</sup>

*Improving participation in breakfast programs is critical to fighting child food insecurity.*



### *Children (continued)*

For families with children who receive free or reduced priced meals at school, the time of year and the day of the week have a huge impact on their ability to provide nutritious meals. Since school lunch and breakfast programs only operate when school is in session, the summer months put new financial stress on families that depend on these programs to keep their kids fed.

As a way to address this gap the federal **Seamless Summer Food Program provides free meals to youth 18 and under at sites throughout the Connecticut.** Still, only about one fourth of students that receive reduced price lunch also receive food from a summer program, suggesting that many families may not have enough to eat during the summer months.<sup>42</sup>

*The efforts of outreach organizations are crucial in increasing participation in the summer food program.*

Even during the school year, weekends can be stressful for children who rely on school meals during the week. **The Connecticut Food Bank's Backpack Program partners with local schools to provide food insecure students with food for the weekend.** Every Friday, nutritious food is placed in the child's own backpack or in one provided at school. During the 2012-2013 school year, about 2,500 students received food through the backpack program statewide.<sup>43</sup>

However, because the program requires cooperation between the Connecticut Food Bank and individual public schools, encouraging more schools to participate in the program is an ongoing challenge. And like the school meal programs, the Connecticut Food Bank's Backpack Program is only available during the school year.

### **Did you know?**

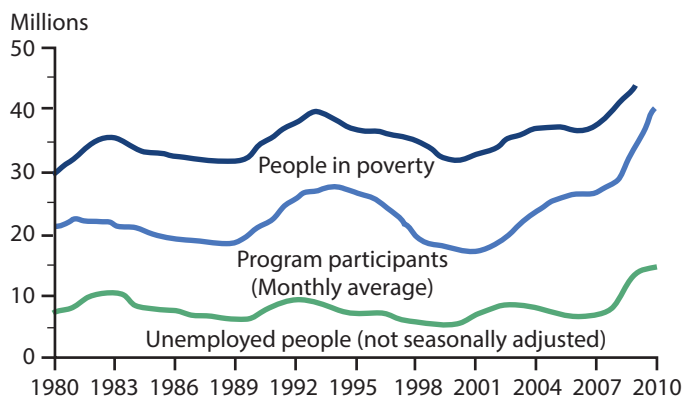
Food pantries often see a decline in food donations during the summer months – right when they experience an increasing demand for additional food from families whose children are out of school and don't have access to school breakfast and lunch programs.

### **Donors can:**

- Target the summer for food and financial donations.
- Support outreach efforts that promote participation in summer feeding programs.
- Support feeding programs at summer camp/learning programs.

### SNAP/FSP participants, people in poverty, and unemployed people, 1980-2010

*Poverty and participation levels continue to rise even as unemployment levels off*



Note: Data as of February 2011 are preliminary and subject to revision. Data refer to the average monthly number of participants during the fiscal year.

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## Working Poor

Historically, unemployment has gone hand in hand with increases in SNAP participation, suggesting that food insecurity rises in times of unemployment.<sup>44</sup> **However, today food insecurity is common even among working people.**

21% of Connecticut's working families are low-income, earning less than 200% of the federal poverty level.<sup>45</sup> Connecticut's high cost of living makes it difficult for these working families to make ends meet. For instance, while Connecticut's minimum wage is \$8.25, a family must earn \$23.22 an hour to be able to afford to rent a two bedroom apartment.<sup>46</sup> The average meal cost is also significantly higher in Fairfield County than the national and state averages.<sup>47</sup>

Nonetheless, 38% of the eligible working poor do not participate in the SNAP program.<sup>48</sup> Over the past decade the number of families with at least one employed family member that receive

SNAP benefits has been on the rise – from about 2 million in 2000 to 6.4 million Americans in 2011.<sup>49</sup> In Connecticut, about one third of SNAP participants are in working families.<sup>50</sup>

Many who could benefit from the assistance of SNAP or WIC incorrectly believe their wages disqualify them from federal benefits. Instead, they often rely on food pantries for groceries to feed their families.<sup>51</sup>

*Further outreach for federal programs is essential in order to improve food security among the working poor.*

### Donors can:

- Provide support to expand the efforts of organizations conducting outreach and benefits enrollment.





Nearly two-thirds of Americans age sixty and older who are eligible for SNAP are not receiving benefits.<sup>57</sup>

## Seniors and Older Adults

Like the working poor, many senior citizens are not aware that they qualify for federal aid. While the gap between the eligible population and the population receiving SNAP benefits is large across demographics, this gap is even greater among senior citizens.<sup>53</sup>

Even older adults who are aware that they qualify for publicly funded benefits may not apply because of misinformation about these benefits. For instance, although today SNAP benefits are redeemed using an EBT card, many seniors recall the stigma of using the physical sheets of paper to purchase groceries that were distributed under the old food stamps program.<sup>54</sup>

Another problem for seniors is that many live on a fixed income. Paying for medications and other medical expenses can reduce the amount left for food. Many seniors also develop health problems such as diabetes that require specific diets. This may increase the cost of their groceries and make it unhealthy for them to eat at soup kitchens.<sup>55</sup>

The Elderly Nutrition Program specifically addresses food insecurity among seniors, and Social Security and Medicare help seniors to cover other expenses that might cut into their food budgets. Yet increasingly, older adults who do not qualify for these age-specific programs are also struggling with food insecurity. **About one third of 50-59 year olds living below 200% of the poverty line in Connecticut are food insecure**, putting Connecticut in the top ten for this measure nationwide.<sup>56</sup>

Following the recession, many older adults became newly unemployed. Before losing their jobs, they may never have struggled to afford food; thus, they may be unfamiliar with the resources available. For instance, they may not know how to apply for SNAP, or where local food pantries are located.

*Focused outreach is necessary for this group in order to raise awareness of SNAP for those who are eligible and 2-1-1 for those who are not.*

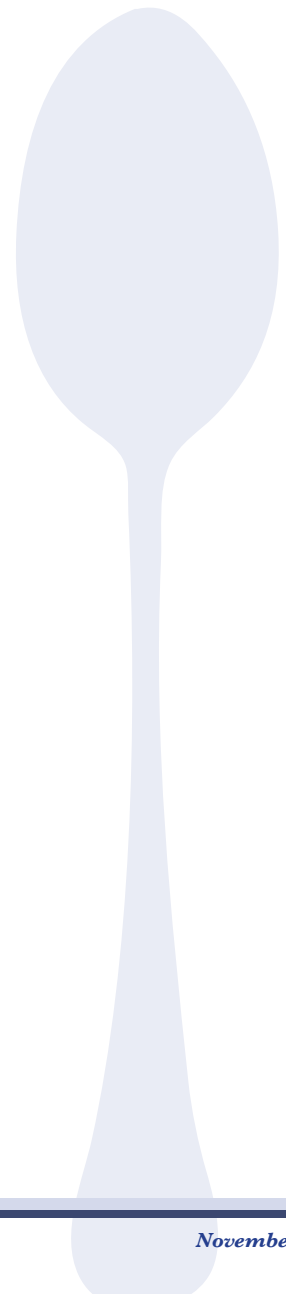
### Donors can:

- Support feeding programs at senior centers and outreach efforts that seek to connect seniors to feeding programs and benefits.

## Recommendations for Donors

There are many high-performing nonprofit organizations in Fairfield County and Connecticut addressing food insecurity. If you are a donor and would like a list of these organizations, please contact the Fairfield County Community Foundation. This research highlights the following potential action steps for donors – individual donors, foundations, and corporations/businesses:

- Support nonprofits with programs and services that are addressing the root causes of poverty, which is what leads to food insecurity.
- Support nonprofits that provide outreach to connect low-income families with benefits and programs that can help meet their food needs.
- Support nonprofit advocacy efforts that highlight the need for programs, services and systems to ensure that all Fairfield County families have access to healthy foods.
- Support food banks in suburban towns. As this report indicates, food banks/pantries located in suburban towns serve an important purpose and are almost all run by nonprofit organizations. Cash gifts are perhaps the most valuable. Also, gifts during the summer months are also strategically timed.
- Target funding to food pantries that are using the “choice model” of allowing clients to choose their food packages. Many state-of-the-art food pantries operated by local nonprofits have moved to a supermarket-style food pantry model, allowing clients to select their own food packages. This model acknowledges the cultural and special dietary needs of clients.
- Support food programs that are getting their products to clients in innovative ways. Some nonprofits are innovating with mobile food pantries and feeding programs that operate out of specially equipped vans.
- Support nonprofit community development corporations working to bring supermarkets to low-income neighborhoods. This is complex economic development work, and is often led by community development corporations in partnership with municipal government.
- Support nonprofit organizations that connect with farmers’ markets in urban areas. There are several local nonprofits which work hand-in-hand with farmers’ markets, enabling low-income residents to shop there with special subsidies. Donors can provide incentive funding that makes the publicly funded subsidies go even further.
- Support summer food programs at nonprofit summer camps/learning programs. If you fund a local summer camp in Fairfield County, ask about the summer food program. Extra funding from private donors can make summer food programs stronger with better nutritional content, etc.
- Support community gardens and urban farms. Fairfield County is lucky to have many nonprofits building community gardens in urban communities.
- Support feeding programs run by nonprofit senior centers.



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### About Fairfield County Community Foundation

We advance the growth of  
the community and regional  
philanthropy to improve the quality  
of life for all throughout Fairfield  
County.

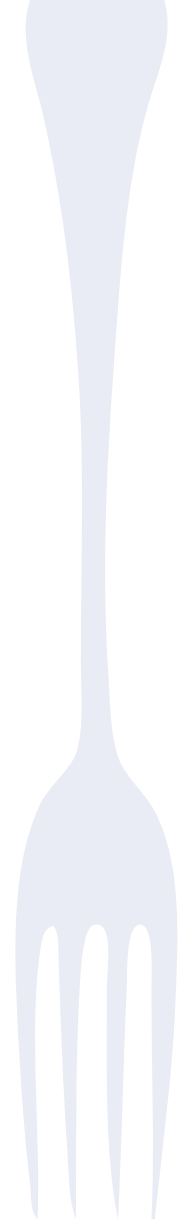
Individuals, families, corporations,  
and organizations can establish  
charitable funds, or contribute to  
existing funds focused on specific  
areas of need or communities in  
Fairfield County.

The Foundation provides  
philanthropic advisory services,  
brings to the table community leaders  
to tackle critical community issues,  
and leads regional initiatives.

It is in compliance with the Council  
on Foundations' 41 national  
standards for community foundations.

The Foundation has awarded over  
\$151 million in grants to nonprofits  
in Fairfield County and beyond.

Please visit [www.fccfoundation.org](http://www.fccfoundation.org)





# Fairfield County Community Foundation

