

# **Covid19 Food Insecurity Summary Report**

Fall 2020

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## **Introduction**

This report includes information and data collected by community partners, Orange County DSS, Orange County Housing and Community Development, and people who have experienced food insecurity. The report is intended to be a summary of information collected about food insecurity during the first 8 months of the Covid19 pandemic. The Food Council Coordinator will continue working with partners to capture new information and build a deeper understanding of the experiences and lessons learned throughout the pandemic. Another summary report is planned for early in the 2nd quarter of 2021. The Food Council will be consulting with community members that have direct lived experience with food insecurity to build a food access think tank. The purpose of this community consulting effort will be to support a Food Policy Agenda process where community members are able to guide public policy and planning efforts. The process will be documented and reports will be shared regularly.

## **How Race and Place Influence Access and Security**

Systemic issues like racism and poverty have been exacerbated by the Covid19 pandemic, but these wicked problems existed before the current crisis. Poverty is a root cause of food insecurity and cannot be separated from systemic racism or the unique challenges that impact rural communities. Policies like redlining and segregation in housing and the workforce have kept people of color from owning homes, working in higher wage jobs, and having the economic access to basic needs like food, housing, and healthcare. People living in rural areas often experience some of the highest rates of food insecurity. Lower wages, limited transportation, and fewer food retailers all contribute to the lack of access. The legacy of these practices and policies continues to influence who has sufficient food and who is most exposed to the harms of this disease.

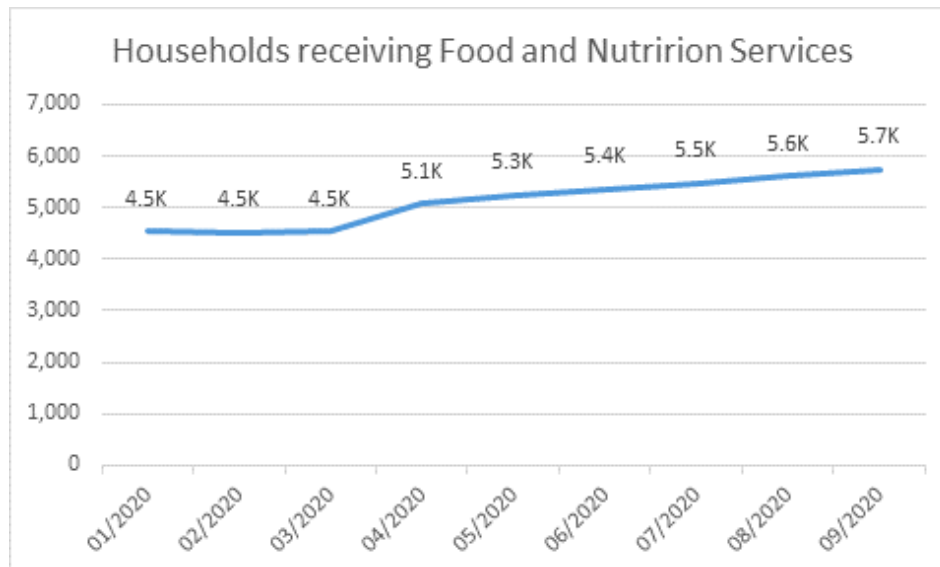
## **Data from Orange County DSS and Community Partners**

DSS saw a sharp increase in new Federal Nutrition Services (FNS) applications starting in early April. The increase in applications and participation in FNS has been steady (see images below). New FNS applications began to slow down in early summer and this slow down appeared to coincide with stimulus checks being distributed and some jobs returning. In October, DSS staff were preparing for another spike in new applications and expected an increase in demand starting in early winter. Participation in FNS and other services have remained higher than before the pandemic began. Feeding America's food insecurity database<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.feedingamericaaction.org/the-impact-of-coronavirus-on-food-insecurity/>

shows a current food insecurity rate for Orange County at around 10.8% but predicts this will rise closer to 14% due to the pandemic.



Month	People Served (Distributions)
Mar-20	1557
Apr-20	9238
May-20	12086
Jun-20	11580
Jul-20	9516
Aug-20	5978
Sep-20	7219
Oct-20	4747
<b>Total</b>	<b>61921</b>
Avg Persons served per Month	7740

The numbers captured in the table above include County food distributions, the Town of Chapel Hill's food distributions, and a number of community organizations and nonprofits. This does not include all food distributions in the County. For example, the table does not include food served through the school districts. Many school meals and food programs were distributed without counting the number of students/children/families served. A number of school food programs were administered by bus drop offs and various pick up options. The Food Council is working with those involved in school meals to begin documenting their experiences since March 2020.

## Experiences and Stories

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- Rent eats first. Individuals and families are focusing their limited resources on rent/housing costs and that often means less time and money available for food. Fair market rent<sup>2</sup> for a 3 bedroom home in Orange County is \$1,461/month. A family of 3 that is eligible for FNS programs like SNAP<sup>3</sup> will spend an average of 65% of their monthly income on rent. Many of these same families are now relying on increased support for housing and food due to the pandemic. Some cannot work, others are experiencing a decrease in wages, and so many families are without childcare
- Gift cards are needed, not just food. Gift cards give more flexibility and agency. Community members in a crisis can use cards to buy the kind of food they need when they need it. This is an easier way for foods to be chosen based on the person's culture, nutritional needs, and their capacity for food storage. Gift cards also enable people to buy other essential needs like toothpaste, toilet paper, etc.
- There remains a fear that participating in government programs may endanger a person/family's immigration status and eligibility.
- Misinformation has circulated about who is eligible for services and how resources are distributed.
- Nonprofits expect the number of people in need of support will remain higher than before the pandemic. In the past, organizations have seen a trend of economic recessions pushing people into increasingly precarious situations that they may never recover from. Some of the contributing factors that can push people over the edge when a recession hits are things like high cost of living, limited access to other support services, disabilities, health care costs, and low wages.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr/fmrs/FY2020\\_code/2020summary.odn](https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr/fmrs/FY2020_code/2020summary.odn)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/policy-basics-the-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>