



Colorado Food Bank Association Digest

"Building a well nourished Colorado through education, advocacy and resource development"

Volume 2 - Issue 6 - March 7, 2008

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State Perspective—CFBA, GIS Mapping: A Tool for Improving Decision-making in Community Food Access & Distribution

What is the Food Security GIS Map? It is an interactive website that spatially depicts layers of information that describe the interface between populations in need of food resources and the geographic location and availability of those food resources. Specific data layers might include: demographic characteristics of populations in need and the locations of soup kitchens and pantries; Food Stamp offices; school boundaries; roads and streets. Users can show the locations of programs and other assistance providers with respect to certain variables such as the proportion of limited-resource audiences (children under 5 years of age in homes with incomes < 185% of poverty or locations of elderly Hispanics who are low income).

How could the Food Security GIS website be used? By combining different layers of information, users of the GIS map can ask questions to clarify relevant issues related to food insecurity in their communities. Examples of query types include: distance-based (retrieve the locations of all federal assistance program offices relative to specified areas with higher levels of poverty); population-based (retrieve the areas with a relatively high proportion of children in poverty, overlay with free/reduced breakfast or lunch participation to determine the proportion of children not benefiting from federal programs); transportation-based, local (locate the emergency and other food program resources, community gardens, etc., within a 5/10/20 mile radius of a location, overlay with public transportation routes to determine accessibility for those without a vehicle); transportation-based, regional (identify member agencies supplied by each food bank, overlay all known food distribution sites to determine if there are sites whose food supplies could be improved by service through existing distribution networks) comparative (profile county with surrounding counties for percent in poverty, availability of locally/regionally produced food, percent eligible for Food Stamps)

Who might find the GIS website useful? Community leaders or those interested in policy issues can use the maps to help justify the need for more resources, a change in resource distribution, additional services (food pantries, soup kitchens, satellite office for a food assistance program) or a change in policy. Data from the maps could be used to support funding applications. The maps could be used as an education tool to inform community leaders and the public about food insecurity in "your" community. The largest expenses are typically associated with the original set up. Another important resource is a sound working relationship with food banks, pantries and other assistance providers to help update the information to keep the data layers current.

Local Perspective—Food Bank of the Rockies, Denver

A third grade teacher noticed a bag of pretzels missing from her desk. When she saw the empty wrapper tucked beneath one of her student's books, she wondered why this well-behaved child would steal. "Anna, did you eat my pretzels?" She asked. "Yes," Anna replied, looking down, ashamed. "Don't you have food at home?" "Not today," Anna said, "but I'll have some Friday when I get my backpack from the food bank."

Anna is not alone. A Colorado Department of Public Health Study estimates more than one-fourth of our children (28.4%) live in households where their caretakers relied on only a few kinds of low-cost food because they couldn't afford healthier alternatives. New USDA statistics estimate 12% of Colorado families to be food insecure. There's no doubt many of our children are not getting the nutrition they desperately need to succeed in school and in life.



According to non-profit Action for Healthy Kids, children lacking adequate nutrition have lower test scores, increased absenteeism, difficulty concentrating and lower energy levels. Extra staff time is required for students with low academic performance or behavior problems caused by poor nutrition. In addition, rising healthcare costs, absenteeism, and lower productivity can all be linked to the affects of an inadequate diet.

Food banks in Colorado are working to alleviate that problem. Backpack programs, such as Food Bank of the Rockies' Totes of Hope – Children™, provide nutritious food over the weekends when other feeding programs are not available. Hot meal sites provide after school meals to thousands of children in low-income neighborhoods. Additional sites have been requested, but more funding is needed. After school snack programs originated as a less expensive alternative to provide nutrition for children in need. Through Food Bank of the Rockies, over 50 sites provide healthy treats such as 100% fruit juice, milk, fruit and granola bars for 1,500 children each week during school year.

Food banks and community donors are striving to alleviate childhood hunger. But numbers show we need to do more to reach every hungry child. Well-fed children perform better in school; they're healthier and they have a better chance to grow up to be successful citizens. Together, in our abundant state, we can find ways to feed Anna, and other children like her, so they can thrive.



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