

OREGON HUNGER TASK FORCE

Creating Policies for a Hunger-Free Oregon



Oregon's Food Assistance System

A report by the Oregon Hunger Task Force
for the office of Governor Tina Kotek

November 2025

The Oregon Hunger Task Force is a legislatively mandated body, created in 1989, to act as a resource within government and as a statewide advocate for Oregonians who are hungry or at risk of hunger. Composed of legislators, state agency officials, nonprofit leaders, and individuals with lived experience, the Task Force researches and analyzes the intersecting issues that influence food insecurity, coordinates food and nutrition services, and issues policy recommendations to alleviate food insecurity across the state.

Lead Authors:

Teresa Fortanel Nuñez, OHTF Intern, Graduate Student, OHSU-PSU School of Public Health
Mark Edwards, Professor of Sociology and Director of Oregon State University Policy Analysis Laboratory

Contributors:

Alex Aghdaei, SNAP Policy Analyst, Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon
Amy Gilroy, Trade Development Manager, Oregon Department of Agriculture
Andrea Williams, President, Oregon Food Bank
Chris Baker, Administrator, Oregon Hunger Task Force
Danny Faccinetti, Vice President, Oregon Food Bank
Heather Miles, Policy and Program Manager, SNAP, CSFP, and TEFAP, Oregon Department of Human Services
Jackie Leung, Executive Director, Micronesian Islander Community
Jeff Gilbert, Regional Emergency Coordinator, Emergency Management Unit, Oregon Department of Human Services
Jessica Morris, Chief People & Strategy Officer, Meals on Wheels People
John Burt, Executive Director, Farmers Ending Hunger
Kristin Chatfield, Senior Research Analyst at Oregon Health Authority
Lora Dexheimer, Executive Director, North Plains Food Bank
Manawin Or, OHTF Intern, Graduate Student, OHSU-PSU School of Public Health
Morgan Joyner, Data & Systems Manager, Partnerships & Programs, Oregon Food Bank
Rick Gaupo, President and Chief Executive Officer, Marion-Polk Food Share

For questions or more information, please contact Chris Baker, Administrator, Oregon Hunger Task Force chris@oregonhunger.org

Key Findings

- **Oregon’s food “system” is Decentralized and Fragmented**
The state’s food access network spans hundreds of independent suppliers operating with limited coordination, fragile funding, and uneven infrastructure.
- **Food suppliers outside of the Oregon Food Bank Network are systemically excluded but essential**
Community-based food providers operating outside the Oregon Food Bank Network are essential to Oregon’s food assistance landscape yet remain largely invisible and are often excluded from state-level planning. Their exclusion stems from a variety of complex factors, not from the food bank network itself. To build an equitable and resilient food assistance system, Oregon must ensure that these non-network providers are included in planning, coordination, and sustainable funding efforts.
- **Access to Food Supply is Uneven and Vulnerable**
Rural and frontier communities face fragile supply chains, long delivery routes, and limited grocery options. Even minor disruptions, such as winter storms or power outages, can halt food access for days.
- **The entire “system” is struggling with rising costs**
Operating costs for food, fuel, transportation, and storage continue to climb, straining already thin budgets. Many providers are depleting reserves or cutting services to stay afloat, while rising demand outpaces available supply across every region.
- **Philanthropy cannot fill the growing gap left by state and federal disinvestment**
Foundation grants have plateaued and become competitive with a large number of organizations competing for funding. Donor fatigue, inflation, and reduced giving capacity limit what communities can raise on their own.
- **Federal Cuts Compound Strain**
Recent changes under H.R. 1 have deepened the crisis by reducing SNAP benefits, increasing state costs, and eliminating vital supports like SNAP-Ed. These cuts shift the burden onto an already overextended network of providers, pushing Oregon’s food system toward collapse.
- **Oregon is at a Crossroads**
Both this report and the *Feeding Cities Group* assessment point to the same urgent conclusion: Oregon’s food system is overstretched and unsustainable without reliable, multi-year funding. Strategic, coordinated investment is essential to ensure stability, equity, and resilience statewide.

Recommendations for State Action

Immediate Policy Responses

- **Reduce SNAP Payment Error Rate**

The state should focus on targeted investments that directly lower the error rate and streamline access to benefits.

- Preserve SNAP eligibility at current levels (Maintain BBCE at 200% FPL)
- Align SNAP and Medicaid work requirements
- SNAP technical training and assistance support for SNAP outreach partners to reduce enrollment error
- Enable client self-scheduling for SNAP Interviews via the ONE System
- Improve data tracking and verification for self-employed and gig workers

Long-Term Resilience

- **Oregon's Food System must be recognized as an essential infrastructure**

To maintain and strengthen food security across the state, Oregon must recognize its food system as essential infrastructure, a system that requires ongoing, reliable investment to function effectively. Oregon must move beyond one-time appropriations and emergency stopgaps.

- The state should commit to growing the Oregon Hunger Response Fund (OHRF) annually in line with inflation to preserve its impact and ensure that food providers can continue meeting the rising need.
- Oregon must treat food security as a cross-cutting policy area, deeply tied to health outcomes, educational achievement, and workforce stability. A comprehensive approach that embeds nutrition support into the state's broader health and workforce strategies will reduce long-term costs and strengthen resilience for Oregon families.

- **Create community funds that braid state and philanthropic resources**

Expanding community funds that braid philanthropic and public resources can help stabilize mutual aid, grassroots organizations, and pantries outside of the Oregon Food Bank network. The Oregon Worker's Relief Fund, and the Reproductive Equity Fund serve as strong examples of this kind of partnership model.

- **Advance Local Food System Resilience**

Survey respondents emphasized that Oregon’s food access challenges cannot be solved through emergency response alone. Strengthening local and regional food systems is key to long-term food security. Coordinated investment in food hubs, small producers, and equitable retail access will improve efficiency, expand consumer choice, and build resilience across urban, rural, and tribal communities.

- **Invest in Regional Food Hubs**

Fund coordinated local food system management efforts — such as food hubs — to strengthen regional supply chains, improve distribution efficiency, and connect small producers with consumers and institutions.

- **Incentivize Rural Grocery Development**

Create incentives to attract and sustain grocery stores in rural and frontier areas where limited retail options create persistent food deserts.

- **Support Cooperative and Community Food Models**

Provide funding and technical support for cooperative food markets that source locally, accept EBT, and serve as community hubs for food distribution, donation, and engagement.

- **Expand Access for Small and Beginning Farmers**

Establish incentives for land-sharing agreements and ensure water usage policies support, rather than restrict, small-scale and local food producers.

- **Integrate Food Access into Housing Policy**

Require new low-income housing developments to be located within walking distance or accessible by public transportation to affordable food retailers, recognizing food access

Executive Summary

Rising hunger and persistent budgetary challenges are heightening pressures on Oregon's food assistance system. This comprehensive food mapping project documents the extensive assistance network of food providers in Oregon, including food banks, mutual aid groups, meal programs, community kitchens, producers, and tribal services that serve both urban and rural communities. These providers support diverse populations, such as children, seniors, veterans, immigrants, and individuals experiencing homelessness or disability. Despite their fundamental role, many food assistance providers face ongoing funding shortages, operational limitations, and gaps in access to culturally appropriate food. Their reliance on short-term grants, private donations, and volunteer efforts reveals a fragile system struggling to meet increasing demand.

Recent federal legislative changes, particularly under H.R. 1, the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025," 119th Congress (2025–2026), introduce stricter Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) work requirements and increase state cost-sharing obligations that will increase Oregon's financial burden. Simultaneously, reductions in key social services linked to food security, such as housing support, early childhood programs, health insurance, and legal aid, have further heightened the need for food assistance providers to fill these gaps.

A 2025 food system resilience assessment by the Feeding Cities Group found that Oregon's food system is already stretched thin. Even small-scale events, like ice storms or power outages, could disrupt food access for days or weeks. Rural towns, in particular, are at risk due to long supply chains, limited grocery access, and a lack of infrastructure like backup power. These vulnerabilities show up across the state and reveal a deeper issue: the current system is not built to absorb shocks, much less recover from them.

That report approached Oregon's food system through an emergency management lens, focusing on preparedness, vulnerabilities, and gaps in planning. By contrast, this report also examines the food assistance system, documenting food providers (pantries, mutual aid groups, tribal programs, growers, and other community organizations), but

focuses on their central role in the food assistance system, and their ability to continue serving their communities despite mounting pressures.

Both reports converge on the same urgent message: Oregon's food system cannot be sustained without reliable, multi-year funding. The evidence is clear and consistent: Oregon stands at a critical decision point. Without thoughtful investment, our food assistance system is dangerously vulnerable and without support will not be able to continue to meet the growing needs and effectively feed our communities. To ensure stability and equity, urgent action is required.

Introduction

In this report, the “food assistance system” is understood as part of the broader food system, encompassing the people, processes, and infrastructure that grow, move, and deliver food to communities (13). This system depends on critical, interdependent infrastructure such as transportation networks, power, telecommunications, and fuel, and it spans public, private, and nonprofit sectors. From an emergency management perspective, resilience means ensuring local food distribution and access can withstand disruptions, recover quickly, and serve all communities equitably (13).

The passage of the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act” (H.R. 1) in July 2025 (17), along with other proposed federal budget cuts, is poised to upend core food assistance programs. Oregon is expected to take on between \$650 million and \$810 million in new biennial SNAP-related costs from benefits cost-sharing, administrative obligations, and the elimination of SNAP-Ed, with total state fiscal exposure projected to exceed \$1 billion beginning in 2025-2027 (19). These changes will slash federal reimbursements for case management, eliminate SNAP-Ed and wraparound supports, and cut off thousands of legally present immigrants from eligibility altogether. Meanwhile, state dollars have not kept up. Pandemic-era funding boosts have expired, wildfire disaster support has not been renewed at scale, and inflation is squeezing already tight budgets. All of this is putting enormous pressure on food banks, community kitchens, producers, pantries, mutual aid groups, tribal food sovereignty programs, and smaller community providers that were already operating on thin margins.

These cuts are not happening in a vacuum; they are landing during a time of growing need. Food insecurity rates in Oregon were already increasing before the 2024 election. Grocery prices continue to climb. Rent is still outpacing wages. Housing instability, medical debt, and other cost-of-living pressures are forcing more people to make impossible choices. Moreover, the data show what providers have been saying for a long time: food insecurity is hitting hardest among families with kids, rural communities, people of color, and those who are just barely above the income limits to qualify for help. We are seeing more people fall through the cracks, and fewer safety nets to catch them.

This report was developed in response to the urgent realities of hunger in Oregon. Our goal was to better understand the state's food assistance system, not only federally funded programs like SNAP, but the broader network of providers that sustain communities. This includes regional food banks and their local partners, tribal and community-based organizations, unaffiliated pantries, mutual aid collectives, neighborhood fridges, meal sites run by volunteers or churches, and regional producers such as BIPOC farmers. Many of these providers are not listed by the state or supported by state and/or federal dollars, yet they remain critical. They fill the gaps where official systems fall short, often doing so without pay, predictable funding, or basic infrastructure.

We approached this mapping project through a mixed-methods lens. We combined administrative data, survey responses, and interviews with direct service providers, grounding the analysis in lived experiences gathered through listening sessions and our statewide storybank. This was not just about identifying gaps; it was about listening to people who are navigating them every day. We wanted to understand better what works, what does not, and what is needed to build something more sustainable and more just.

This work does not offer easy fixes, but it does make clear that our food system cannot keep limping along on underfunded programs and unpaid labor. If we want a food assistance network that is resilient, equitable, and responsive to community needs, we need policies and funding that reflect that reality.

Mapping Oregon's Food Assistance Network

System overview

Oregon's food assistance system is a vast, decentralized network that forms the backbone of community-based food access statewide. It includes federally funded programs like SNAP, WIC, Summer EBT, and school meals; state-managed supports through ODHS and the Department of Education; regionally organized food banks and charitable programs such as Meals on Wheels; unaffiliated pantries and faith-based distribution sites; and local initiatives like mutual aid groups, tribal food sovereignty programs, neighborhood fridges, volunteer delivery networks, and community farms (11, 14, 20, 21).

However, unlike water, transportation, or public utilities, food is not managed as a cohesive, coordinated system in Oregon (11, 21). These components operate primarily in silos. As a result, the network lacks the long-term funding, coordination, and infrastructure investment that sustain other essential services (12, 22).

While some of these providers operate within formal structures, like regional food banks with warehousing infrastructure and USDA redistribution contracts, many others function informally. These challenges are compounded by long-standing inequities such as systemic racism, chronic poverty, and underinvestment in rural and tribal communities, where transportation barriers, food deserts, and farmworker exclusion from federal supports intensify the strain (5, 11, 25).

Additional pressures include declining volunteer bases, rising food and housing costs that limit affordability, and increasing threats to agricultural stability, all of which erode the system's already fragile capacity to meet need (20, 25). Immigrant and farmworker populations are among the most impacted, often excluded from federal safety nets despite being essential to the food economy (5).

While urban centers often benefit from a dense mix of retailers and providers, rural grocery stores have been under greater stress in the past couple of decades, with limited grocery access, greater transportation barriers, and fragile supply chains (18). In many of these communities, smaller pantries, churches, and volunteer-run networks are the primary

sources of food access, making them both indispensable and under-resourced (13). This report intentionally avoids calling any of this “emergency food.” That framing does not reflect what is happening on the ground. This is not a short-term crisis response but a long-standing system of people feeding people in the absence of reliable, durable support (12).

Even as need continues to grow, the network is being stretched beyond its limits. ODHS data show a 30 percent increase in visits to food providers in FFY24 data, accompanied by only a 5 percent increase in food availability, highlighting how sharply demand is outpacing supply (20).

Many mutual aid groups, small community organizations, and grassroots food providers operate outside of larger formal systems because they were created to meet needs that existing institutions failed to address, particularly in BIPOC, immigrant, rural, and other marginalized communities. Historically, these communities built their own support networks in response to exclusion, distrust, or harm within governmental and nonprofit systems, and many continue to choose models that prioritize autonomy, cultural relevance, and rapid responsiveness. At the same time, systemic funding streams often require administrative capacity, certification, safety and liability structures, and compliance with federal and state regulations that small organizations, especially volunteer-run efforts, may not be resourced to meet. These realities do not diminish their importance; in fact, these groups are often the first and most trusted responders in moments of crisis, filling gaps where formal systems cannot reach. Their work is essential, longstanding, and deserving of recognition and equitable investment as part of Oregon’s broader food assistance ecosystem. (14).

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Being in a rural area means we have to think outside the box when it comes to sourcing food and resources. Large-scale donations do not always make it out here, and transportation costs can quickly eat into our budget. As a community-based food bank, we do not have access to a broad reach of resources and funding. We rely on creative partnerships with local farmers and grocery stores, often making multiple small pickups from different locations in a single day. Every trip has to be done safely, with careful handling of perishable items, but it has to be done, because if we do not, those resources will be lost and our community will go without.

Lora Dexheimer, Executive Director,
North Plains Food Bank

Government-Funded Programs

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) administers 15 domestic food and nutrition assistance programs. The three largest are Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

SNAP, formerly the Food Stamp Program, provides monthly benefits to eligible low-income households to purchase food items at SNAP-authorized retailers. Over 750,000 Oregonians benefit from this program each month. While this means 17 percent of Oregonians access food from SNAP each month, in some rural Oregon counties, over 20 percent of residents rely on SNAP (26). The overall impact on the state of reduced SNAP benefits will be widely felt, since it is well-established that for every billion dollars of SNAP benefit spent, there is a half-billion-dollars increase in gross domestic product (27). This multiplier effect at the national and state level is felt locally as well. Thus, rural areas will especially feel the loss of this multiplier impact on local economies.

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a federally funded preventive nutrition program that provides supplemental foods, referrals to

health and social services, breastfeeding support, and nutrition education for eligible families. WIC serves low-income pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women, as well as infants and children under the age of five. In Oregon, the program's reach is significant: last year, one in three babies was born to a mother enrolled in WIC during pregnancy. To meet the specific nutritional needs of participants at each life stage, WIC offers tailored food packages. In 2024, Oregon families redeemed \$64.8 million in WIC food benefits, supporting both household nutrition and the state's food economy.

National School Lunch Program

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP), established in 1946, operates in public and nonprofit private schools and residential childcare facilities. All children attending participating schools are eligible to receive lunch, with lunches available to low-income children at free or reduced-price. Schools are reimbursed by USDA for all meals served under the program on a sliding scale based on whether meals are offered as free, reduced-price or full price.

USDA Local Food for Schools Program

In the last biennium, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) administered USDA's Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement Program (LFS) alongside its long-standing Farm to School Reimbursement Program, which invests roughly \$6 million every biennium. While the state-funded program already provided reimbursements for Oregon-sourced products, the federal LFS grant allowed Oregon to expand into areas excluded by state rules, such as fluid milk purchases and procurement from vendors located within 400 miles of the state's borders.

Through this program, ODE directed \$1.73 million in purchases to 47 agricultural producers, strengthening regional markets and creating a reliable pipeline for local foods into school meal programs. However, the second round of funding, the 2025–2028 Local Food for Schools and Child Care Program (LFSCC), was terminated in March 2025, cutting off more than \$6 million that would have supported Oregon schools, childcare facilities, and local producers.

The loss of this investment extends beyond the school system. Local food sales generate broader economic benefits, producing a dozen jobs per \$1 million in sales (10). Ending this program represents not only a direct loss for producers but also a missed opportunity for economic resilience across Oregon’s agricultural and food economy.

USDA Local Food Purchase Assistance Program

The USDA’s Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program (LFPA) was designed to build regional food system resiliency by funding the procurement and distribution of local and culturally relevant foods to underserved communities. The Oregon Food Bank served as the recipient and administrator of the program for Oregon. Since its launch in 2022, OFB selected and passed through \$6.4 million to 268 socially disadvantaged farmers across 19 Oregon Counties. The vast majority of farmers reported annual sales under \$150,000 and faced structural barriers in the broader agricultural economy.

Through LFPA, products were distributed across more than 100 community channels, ranging from mobile and stationary food pantries to libraries, culturally specific meal sites, tribal ceremonies, longhouses, senior centers, health clinics, and even free fridges. This approach strengthened community-based networks while ensuring that families could access healthy, locally produced foods.

Oregon had been approved for an additional \$4.4 million in LFPA funds for 2025–2027, but this allocation was terminated in March 2025. The cancellation disproportionately impacts small-scale and BIPOC producers who relied on LFPA to develop markets, as well as the low-income and rural communities that benefitted from its distribution reach.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

With the TEFAP program, the USDA “purchases a variety of nutritious, high-quality USDA foods and makes those foods available to state distributing agencies” (28). In Oregon,

TEFAP is distributed through the Oregon Food Bank network. Deliveries from TEFAP have been reduced by the federal government since early 2025, substantially decreasing the available food and funds to be distributed statewide. The quantity of TEFAP food available to states fluctuates with funding thus it can be impacted by politics. Similarly, the foods chosen

for distribution can be impacted by politics as agricultural sectors across the country lobby for USDA support.

Agricultural Sector

Many of Oregon's small, family-owned farms rely on institutional buyers and incentive programs to survive amid rising production costs, climate pressures, and unstable markets. Federal cuts threaten these critical relationships, reducing demand at the very moment production costs are climbing. Because the farm-to-food-bank ecosystem—spanning gleaners, U-pick farms, farmers markets, and grocery stores—is so tightly interconnected, disruptions in one part of the system quickly reverberate across the whole.

These funding losses will reduce capacity while increasing demand, undermining both the stability of the farming sector and the food security of communities. Without consistent institutional purchasing and incentive programs, many small producers risk being pushed out of the market, further consolidating Oregon's food system in the hands of larger operations and diminishing the diversity of local production.

Much of what Oregon produces leaves the state, roughly 80 percent of commodities are exported, while only 20 percent are sold in local market channels such as farmers markets or schools. At the same time, 58 percent of Oregon farmers work off-farm jobs to supplement household income, particularly in rural areas where agricultural revenues are declining. The disparity is stark, while counties like Polk average more than \$1,600 per acre in sales, rural counties such as Wheeler generate just \$18 per acre.

Small, family-owned farms largely sustain Oregon's agricultural economy. According to the 2022 USDA Agricultural Census, 82 percent of the state's 35,547 farms are family operations, and 67 percent of farms are under 49 acres (14). Average farm income was just over \$26,000 annually, well below the federal poverty level for a family of four, highlighting the precariousness of farming as a livelihood.

Producers of color face even greater barriers. The Agricultural Census found that 78 percent of Black, Indigenous, Hispanic, or other Producers of Color reported less than \$50,000 in annual sales (14). Federal programs like LFS and LFPA were designed to address these inequities by directing funds toward socially disadvantaged producers. Still, their elimination

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After speaking with students on campus, it is clear just how vital the food pantry is to their well-being and academic success. With SNAP benefits being reduced, demand for the pantry has increased significantly. Unfortunately, due to a lack of immediate funding, we were forced to close the pantry for the summer term while we worked to secure support from donors. Thanks to their generosity, we are now able to reopen and continue providing this essential resource to our students, but it is only a short-term solution.

Briana Smith, Benefits Navigator / Foundation Specialist, Clatsop Community College

removes one of the few systemic supports that prioritized equity in agriculture. Cuts not only worsen disparities but also erode the resilience of Oregon's broader food economy.

Charitable and Community-Based Supports

Charitable and community-based organizations are a core part of Oregon's food assistance system. They include food pantries, Meals on Wheels providers, mutual aid networks, gleaners, and faith-based groups, many of which operate with little or no public funding (21). Many mutual aid groups emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic and/or the 2020 wildfires, stepping in where formal systems fell short. While their agility is a strength, years of responding to growing need without adequate support have led to widespread burnout from the sheer volume of requests, the strain of operating without stable funding or infrastructure, and the challenges of maintaining a volunteer base (14).

Survey responses and regional planning documents note that state and local governments sometimes assume these organizations can indefinitely manage the needs of those falling through the cracks, leading to complacency in formal emergency planning (13). In reality, these points of service are overextended and under-resourced, and without sustained investment, their ability to meet both chronic and crisis-driven needs is at risk.

As legislation like H.R. 1 shifts costs to states and cuts core supports like SNAP and SNAP-Ed, community-based providers are absorbing more of the burden with limited infrastructure, staffing, or stable funding (17). While some larger organizations are

integrated into emergency preparedness frameworks, many smaller or culturally specific groups remain outside formal planning and lack the resources needed to respond at scale (13). However, during wildfires, power outages, and winter storms, both formal and informal providers often serve as first responders, delivering food where other systems cannot. Although private donations help meet urgent needs, they cannot match the scale or stability of public funding. Oregon Food Bank notes that filling these gaps through philanthropy alone would require donors to (1) sustain current giving levels, (2) increase commitments to backfill federal cuts, and (3) increase again to meet new demand, a scale of generosity historically seen only during the pandemic's peak, and even then only for a limited period (Addendum A, p. 5). Given current donor trends, reduced disposable income, and shrinking tax incentives for charitable giving, this level of sustained private support is unlikely to materialize. As a result, philanthropic donations will not be sufficient or sustainable to address the structural funding gaps that already exist, let alone the much larger shortfalls expected under H.R. 1, which will simultaneously increase demand on the food system and erode the federal safety net. Without substantial and ongoing public investment, the burden on community-based providers will continue to grow beyond their capacity to respond.

This section examines how these organizations operate, the scale of their community impact, the gaps and barriers they face, and the successes that demonstrate their resilience and value. By documenting both their contributions and vulnerabilities, this section highlights why any statewide food security strategy must treat them not as stopgap charities, but as essential partners in building an equitable, adaptive food system.

Oregon Food Bank and Regional Model

Through decades of community outreach and consistent collective effort, the Oregon Food Bank Network has developed and sustained a distribution system that provides service across Oregon and Southwest Washington (7, 8, 21). Food is sourced through national and local partners, including Feeding America and the USDA, Feeding the Northwest, Farmers Ending Hunger, and many other food industries and hundreds of retail partners. It is distributed through 21 regional food banks to over 1,200

community-based sites, such as pantries, meal programs, and mutual aid groups (7, 8 24).

This model is designed for high-volume movement and centralized coordination, particularly useful during emergency response. As of 2025, OFB was distributing between 4.5 and 5 million pounds of food each month, with about 30 percent of it being fresh produce. These efforts are supported by significant investments in cold storage, warehouse space, and transportation capacity (7, 23). During FY24 (July 2023 to June 2024), the network moved over 109 million pounds of food, a 5 percent increase from the prior year. It's critical to note that about half of those pounds were sourced locally by regional food banks and partner agencies from across the OFB network. During that same time period, community food distribution sites within the OFB network recorded more than 2.5 million visits across the region, a 31 percent year-over-year increase (8, 9).

Still, this level of coordination brings tradeoffs. Centralized decision-making and formula-driven allocation processes (required by the USDA and based on unemployment and poverty data) have raised equity concerns. Distribution formulas based on population or regional catchment can obscure deeper challenges, including the cost of rural delivery, the need for culturally relevant foods, and the impacts of historic underinvestment in specific communities (7, 9).

Community providers have also voiced concerns that the system often favors large, formal partners, making it harder for grassroots or culturally specific organizations to access funding or shape strategy (25). Oregon Food Bank must follow federal and state compliance standards related to food safety, civil rights, and other regulations, requirements that can be difficult for smaller organizations to meet in order to officially partner with OFB under its contracts with Feeding America and the USDA. This limits their ability to partner with groups unable, or choosing not to, meet these standards. Where OFB does have flexibility within its government grant contracts, the organization implements creative solutions to address some of the inequities described above.

Decision-making regarding the distribution of food and funds from the Oregon Hunger Response Fund (OHRF) is democratically determined by the network of regional food banks in meetings held three times per year, and OHRF resources are intentionally

directed toward rural areas and smaller regional food banks serving hard-to-reach communities across the state.

Long term planning and additional government and private funds would allow the Oregon Food Bank Network to work with more partners and get more food into the community. The system is also financially fragile. OFB and its partners rely heavily on short-term grants, private donors, and federal commodity programs. Federal proposals like H.R. 1 would reduce funding and shift costs to states, introducing further uncertainty into an already strained system (9,17). Several regional food banks have already begun drawing down reserves or reducing services due to budget limitations (8, 9). Meanwhile, organizations outside of OFB's formal structure, including some immigrant-led efforts, tribal food sovereignty programs, and mutual aid networks, continue to face barriers such as limited access to cold storage or equitable vendor pricing (8, 24). The power of the Oregon Food Bank network lies in its ability to support a largely decentralized network of partners with expertise, resources, compliance support and food. Decentralized providers often serve the communities most impacted by systemic barriers, relying on informal supply chains, donated goods, and volunteer labor to meet needs (7, 9). In some cases these decentralized efforts are operating outside of any formal efforts. In some cases they step in where centralized models fall short, particularly during disasters like wildfires or power outages. However, they are rarely included in official government-led emergency response planning or resourcing strategies (13).

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Funding cuts at the federal and state level... This is a systemic failure of a food assistance model that relies on a fragile supply chain.

Fiona Conneely, Systems, Data & Impact Specialist, Lift Up

Faith-Based and Friends & Family Networks

Faith-based organizations and informal friends-and-family networks are vital components of Oregon's food assistance system, especially in communities where formal programs are limited or absent. Survey responses show that these providers are

deeply embedded in their communities, offering low-barrier, culturally aware access to food built on relationships of trust. The faith-based providers that operate outside the food bank network rely entirely on private donations, tithes, and volunteer labor, often with budgets ranging from only a few hundred to a few thousand dollars per month. While some receive occasional allocations from regional food banks, most rely heavily on community giving. Several respondents reported sharp increases in demand over the past year, with some doubling or tripling the number of households served. In many cases, these groups serve between 100 and 500 households monthly, though some reported peaks of over 1,000 households during seasonal or economic stress periods. The most requested items include fresh produce, protein, and culturally specific staples, yet providers often face shortages due to limited purchasing power and storage capacity.

Friends-and-family networks, including mutual aid collectives, free fridge projects, and neighborhood sharing tables, play a similarly critical role. These groups are designed to meet immediate needs, offering flexible distribution models that bypass barriers related to transportation, scheduling, or stigma. Food turnover is rapid; in some cases, shelves are emptied within minutes during high-need periods, such as the last three weeks of the month when SNAP benefits run low. Operating without formal funding streams, they depend on gleaned produce, donated staples, and personal contributions from organizers.

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Money to pay for food and staff is our greatest need. We have partnerships with over 12 grocery stores in town. We need staff to pick up food, distribute food, refrigeration to keep the food safe. We have families that travel over 10 miles to come to our drive up pantry to get the food they ordered on line. The parking lot became so unsafe from the number of cars in it that we had to open a 3rd drive up day to accommodate the numbers. The need is huge and with the cuts to SNAP we anticipate the need to grow even bigger. Families are looking for healthy food for their children and we are very committed to providing them with the healthy food they need to thrive and compete in school and at work.

Betty Brown, Executive Director,
Portland Open Bible Pantry / Nourish Oregon

Survey responses revealed distinct geographic patterns. In remote communities such as Harney and Wallowa counties, providers often serve as the only consistent food access point, with long travel distances to regional food banks increasing transportation costs and reducing delivery frequency. Seasonal challenges, snow and ice in Klamath County, wildfire smoke in Jackson and Josephine counties, and flooding along the North Coast further isolate these areas and disrupt supply. Urban providers in Portland, Salem, and Eugene reported consistently high demand, particularly in neighborhoods with large low-income or unhoused populations, where food is often gone within minutes of distribution. Coastal providers in Clatsop and Lincoln counties described sharp demand spikes during off-season months when tourism-related jobs decline. Respondents serving tribal communities in Umatilla County and Warm Springs cited limited vendor access, inconsistent cold storage, and exclusion from mainstream funding streams. Networks working in agricultural hubs like Hood River and Malheur counties noted fluctuating demand tied to harvest cycles, with increased needs in the off-season when farm work is scarce. In several rural and coastal locations, respondents emphasized that their service area has no overlapping providers; if they close for any reason, there is no backup source of food for residents.

Across both faith-based and informal networks, common operational challenges emerged: infrastructure constraints such as lack of cold storage, inadequate shelving, and limited space; supply instability tied to donations and surplus availability; and volunteer and staff burnout as demand increasingly outpaces capacity. Despite being nimble, deeply rooted in their communities, and often the first to respond during wildfires, extreme weather events, and power outages, these providers are rarely included in formal emergency preparedness or food system planning.

Respondents consistently emphasized that while these networks are resourceful and community-driven, they cannot absorb the rising demand caused by cuts to federal programs without sustained investment. Stable, multi-year funding, infrastructure improvements, and intentional inclusion in policy and preparedness planning are essential to ensure these frontline providers remain a cornerstone of Oregon's food safety net.

Meals on Wheels

The Meals on Wheels network in Oregon is a vital lifeline for seniors and individuals with disabilities, delivering nutritious meals, friendly visits, and safety checks. Local providers, such as Meals on Wheels People and Marion Polk Share, ensure that individuals who are homebound due to illness, disability, or lack of support receive meals directly to their door. In some communities, dining centers also offer opportunities for social connection and shared meals. These services not only address hunger but also combat isolation and support older adults in maintaining independence in their own homes.

In Oregon, 127,378 seniors are experiencing low to very low food security, and 102,741 senior households receive SNAP. 31.2 percent of seniors in Oregon live with a disability. 47 percent of single seniors and 21.5 percent of couples lack the income to pay for basic living needs. The ability of the Meals on Wheels network to meet growing needs is increasingly under threat. According to Meals on Wheels America, 1 in 3 providers across the country now has a waiting list. Providers are facing rising demand, declining federal funding, and historic lows in volunteerism. Nationally, current federal funding covers only 37 percent of program costs, and only 1 percent of philanthropic giving supports aging services.

When federal supports such as SNAP, Medicaid, and Medicare are cut, the entire food system feels the impact. Community-based organizations, such as Meals on Wheels are critical to our State's food-security safety net. Funding reductions increase demand, forcing Meals on Wheels organizations to face longer waitlists, start new ones, and manage resource shortages..

In Oregon, these challenges are intensified by employee and volunteer burnout as community-based organizations are expected to do more with fewer resources. Adding to this pressure is the assumption by State leadership that nonprofit community-based organizations can absorb the impact of recent SNAP reductions. This expectation is unrealistic and unsustainable. These organizations were never resourced to replace federal programs. Without immediate investment and policy support, they cannot be expected to fill the widening gap in food security for Oregon's food-insecure population.

Cuts to Medicaid and Medicare also indirectly strain food systems, as individuals forced to choose between paying for healthcare and groceries often turn to local community-based support organizations. The erosion of federal and state support shifts the burden of basic human needs onto underfunded local organizations, threatening their sustainability and increasing food insecurity across already vulnerable populations

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In effect, these policy decisions weaken the resilience of the entire food system and disproportionately harm those who can least afford it – we need the State to step up to support all Oregonians and community-based organizations.

Jessica Morris, Chief People and Strategy Officer
Meals on Wheels

Supply Chain Supports

Oregon’s food assistance system relies on retail rescue programs, volunteer transport, local purchasing, and significant agricultural donations. Fragmented supply chains with insufficient cold storage and high transport costs increase waste and inefficiency (1). In Oregon, these challenges are offset in part by Farmers Ending Hunger. This Oregon nonprofit provides an avenue for farmers, ranchers, and processors to donate high-quality food to the Oregon Food Bank Network. Since 2006, it has delivered over 35 million pounds of food, including more than 1 million pounds of potatoes and onions annually, 100,000 pounds of cherries, 120,000 pounds of baking mix, and 73,400 pounds of hamburger, a contribution valued at about \$465,000 annually. For the one year time period ending August 12, 2025, The Oregon Food Bank received nearly 8 million pounds in produce from Oregon donors. 2.7 million of these produce pounds were from Farmers Ending Hunger partners. Additionally, the Oregon Food Bank received over 3.8 million pounds in non-produce agricultural products from donors in Western states. These donations reduce waste and emissions, aligning with research showing that supply chain integration strengthens both efficiency and sustainability (3).

However, long-term donations depend on farm profitability. While overtime pay, housing improvements, and fertilizer reporting requirements are essential for protecting workers and environmental health, they also increase operating costs for agricultural producers.

Without complementary support, these changes may reduce farms' capacity to donate to the food assistance network. When combined with tariffs, federal cuts to SNAP, Medicaid, and USDA hunger programs, and the failure to pass "Food for All," these pressures increase demand on food banks while limiting donor capacity. Integration research reinforces that sustainability is achieved when policies and systems support, rather than erode, productive capacity (3).

The shortage of USDA-certified meat processors is another structural barrier, preventing many ranchers from donating protein even when supply exists. This mirrors findings that under-resourced supply chains magnify losses in perishable systems (1). Oregon's State Meat Inspection and Meat Processing Grant Program has invested over \$11 million since 2020 to expand rural capacity, including 11 projects funded in 2024 across Burns, Hermiston, La Grande, Lakeview, and Klamath Falls. These facilities will allow ranchers to process livestock at a scale consistent with their operations, expand markets, and increase donations to food banks and schools, an example of how integration across producers, processors, and buyers improves resilience (3).

Similarly, water policy is a decisive factor. Even small increases in irrigation allocations along the Columbia River could significantly expand yields and contributions to the charitable food system. Resilient supply chains depend not only on infrastructure but also on sustainable resource access (3).

Oregon's supply chain supports illustrate both strength and fragility. Farmers, ranchers, processors, and volunteers provide extraordinary value, but the system's stability depends on policies and investments that strengthen integration, reduce fragmentation, and ensure long-term sustainability (1, 3).

Changes in Federal Funding

The signing of the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" (H.R. 1) into law on July 4, 2025, marks the most sweeping rollback of federal food assistance in decades and presents a direct threat to Oregon's hunger relief infrastructure. The legislation drastically reduces federal investment in SNAP while shifting billions in new costs onto states. These changes will reduce benefits, erect new barriers to access, and destabilize the broader anti-hunger system that has long relied on federal-state partnership.

Beginning in FFY2027, Oregon must cover 75 percent of SNAP administrative costs, shifting an estimated \$95 million in the 2025-27 biennium and up to \$250 million per biennium thereafter, onto the state. This change reduces federal reimbursements for staffing, IT systems, and outreach, forcing Oregon to absorb the majority of ongoing administrative expenses. Starting in FFY2028, if Oregon's SNAP payment error rate remains above 6 percent, the state must cover 15 percent of SNAP benefit costs, equating to \$438 million in 2027-29 and \$500 million in 2029-31 (19).

Oregon's FFY2024 error rate of about 13 percent, down from 16 percent in 2023 and 22 percent in 2022, remains far above the federal 6 percent threshold. If Oregon cannot reduce it below 6 percent by FFY2028, the state will be required to cover 15 percent of SNAP benefits, adding \$438 million in costs in 2027–29 and \$500 million in 2029–31 (19).

Other provisions compound these financial and operational burdens. H.R. 1 eliminates SNAP-Ed funding after September 30, 2025, removing approximately \$20 million per biennium in federal support that currently sustains nutrition education and outreach across Oregon. The end of SNAP-Ed jeopardizes over \$9.5 million annually, nearly three-fourths of OSU Extension's Family and Community Health budget, and OSU has confirmed the program will sunset on September 30, 2025. While exact staffing impacts are not yet announced, advocates warn that more than 95 positions could be at risk (16,18). These staff deliver vital health education programs that help families maximize limited food budgets and improve long-term nutrition outcomes. Other programs indirectly rely on SNAP-Ed as a trusted resource for their participants.

These changes will lower benefits for tens of thousands of working families, particularly in rural areas that rely on broadband for employment, healthcare, and education access. Eligibility changes will exclude many legally present immigrants from SNAP, including refugees, asylees, trafficking survivors, and others with humanitarian protections. The Oregon Department of Human Services estimates that 2,957 lawfully present Oregonians will lose benefits under this rule (16). Additionally, new federal rules extend SNAP work requirements to adults ages 18 to 65 without children under 14, including veterans and former foster youth, placing an estimated 310,000 Oregonians at risk of benefit loss if they cannot meet the 80-hour-per-month mandate(16; 19). H.R. 1

also eliminates the “Heat & Eat” utility allowance for most households, cutting benefits by about \$58 per month for 17,000 Oregon households, roughly \$65 million in lost benefits per biennium statewide (16; 19).

Altogether, these provisions restructure SNAP in ways that erode its function as a reliable, federally funded safety net. According to the Department of Administrative Services (DAS), Oregon is projected to lose \$540 million in SNAP funding in 2025–27, rising to \$1.2 billion per biennium by 2027–29. This includes \$438–500 million in new state obligations for SNAP benefit cost-sharing if error rates remain above federal thresholds, \$95 million in 2025–27 rising to \$250 million thereafter in added administrative expenses, and \$20 million from the elimination of SNAP-Ed, with additional state costs likely from compliance, staffing, and emergency food response (19). When combined with Medicaid changes under H.R. 1, Oregon’s total fiscal exposure is projected at \$1.035 billion in 2025–27, \$5.717 billion in 2027–29, and \$8.366 billion in 2029–31 (19).

These cuts are hitting just as food insecurity remains elevated, tariffs drive up grocery costs, and local food systems face strain. In FY23–24, the Oregon Food Bank recorded 2.5 million food assistance visits—a 31% increase over the prior year – while federal and state food resources have simultaneously declined (Addendum B, p. 1). Without significant new investments from the Oregon Legislature and a reversal of federal disinvestment, the state risks widespread hunger, increased hardship, and breakdowns across its food assistance infrastructure.

Additional Impacts Across Programs

Oregon receives over \$2.1 billion annually across federal food programs. While cornerstone supports like SNAP, WIC, TEFAP, and school meals remain active, targeted programs that support local food systems, school procurement, and nutrition education have already seen significant cuts.

The Local Food for Schools program was terminated in FFY2025, halting new awards and ending federal support for local procurement in schools. Similarly, USDA canceled over \$6.6 million in new Food Bank Network funding statewide in March 2025. These cuts come at a time when demand for food remains high, and local food systems are

increasingly seen as critical to long-term resilience. Meanwhile, programs like SNAP Employment & Training (SNAP E&T) and the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program continue to provide targeted support. However, their long-term funding remains uncertain amid shifting federal priorities.

USDA's child nutrition programs, including the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs, provided nearly \$195 million in reimbursements to Oregon schools last year. These programs are expected to continue under current law, but their future is tied to the next round of federal budget negotiations. Summer EBT remains active for now, delivering more than \$38 million in 2024 to help families offset the loss of school meals, but future appropriations are unclear.

Looking ahead, many of these programs may be indirectly harmed by federal changes to SNAP. Eligibility for school meals, Summer EBT, and other nutrition supports is often conferred through SNAP participation. As H.R. 1 restricts SNAP eligibility, especially for older adults, immigrant families, and caregivers – it will likely reduce automatic eligibility for school meal programs and other benefits, forcing more families to complete burdensome applications or fall through the cracks entirely.

How is the Food Net Funded?

Oregon's food assistance and hunger relief infrastructure is sustained through a braided system of federal, state, local, and philanthropic funding. This network supports more than 750,000 Oregonians who receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and undergirds a broader emergency food system that serves hundreds of thousands more.

At the federal level, SNAP is the cornerstone of Oregon's hunger relief strategy. In 2023, over \$1.8 billion in SNAP benefits were redeemed at 3,484 retailers across the state, including grocery stores, corner stores, and farmers' markets. These dollars not only reduce hunger but also generate up to \$1.80 in local economic activity for every \$1 spent. For small, independent retailers, especially those in rural areas where alternatives are limited, SNAP sales often represent a significant portion of their revenue. A reduction in SNAP funding doesn't just cut into household support; it directly impacts local businesses, threatening reduced hours, layoffs, or even closures. Such

losses would worsen food access inequities by expanding “food deserts” and eroding local economic resilience.

Protecting and strengthening SNAP is therefore more than a hunger relief strategy, it is an essential investment in rural and small-town economies across Oregon.

Safeguarding SNAP helps sustain businesses and maintain the food access infrastructure that vulnerable communities rely on every day.

In addition to SNAP, Oregon receives significant support from the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), which provides USDA-purchased food and administrative funding for storage and distribution. In federal fiscal year 2025 (FFY2024), TEFAP delivered \$17 million in food and \$2.5 million in administrative support to Oregon’s emergency food network.

Federal USDA grant programs further reinforce this landscape. The SNAP Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention Grant Program (SNAP-Ed) brings in over \$9.5 million annually to fund public health education, gardening, cooking, and physical activity classes in all 36 Oregon counties. The Local Food for Schools program awarded \$1.3 million to help Oregon schools purchase unprocessed food from local producers, while other USDA initiatives, including the Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) program, Summer EBT, and the WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Programs, provide essential seasonal and supplemental support to low-income families, children, and seniors.

Philanthropy

Philanthropy plays an important role in Oregon’s food system, but it is often misunderstood or overstated as a long-term solution to structural hunger. Oregon’s philanthropic landscape includes family foundations, community funds, corporate giving programs, and individual donors. These entities regularly contribute to food banks, community-based organizations, advocacy campaigns, and special initiatives. While philanthropy can catalyze innovation and support grassroots organizations, its scope and scale are inherently limited.

Philanthropy tends to fund discrete projects, pilot initiatives, and community-led efforts that align with a foundation’s mission and values. Grants often target advocacy,

culturally specific food access programs, or time-limited projects and initiatives. Philanthropy rarely covers core operating expenses, long-term staffing, or the infrastructure required to sustain large-scale food distribution. Priorities are determined well in advance through foundation boards and strategic plans, meaning philanthropy cannot easily pivot to meet sudden crises or surges in need.

While Oregon's nonprofit sector has been creative in leveraging every available philanthropic dollar, the funding landscape remains fragmented and small compared to the magnitude of the problem. Many organizations rely on short-term grants that create uncertainty and administrative burden, with philanthropic dollars spread thin across hundreds of organizations. At the same time, philanthropic giving is influenced by donor trends and economic cycles, making it inherently unstable. With food insecurity in Oregon reaching historic highs and pantry visits surging year after year, philanthropy is neither sustainable nor sufficient. The level of unmet need represents a structural reality, not a temporary emergency. Addressing it requires hundreds of millions of dollars far beyond the capacity of private philanthropy.

Data Snapshot

In preparation for this report the Oregon Hunger Task Force solicited input from hundreds of food pantries, local producers, and other community based organizations that seek to address the food needs of low-income Oregonians. The 75 respondents who responded immediately to our request represent organizations from all corners of the state, with strong representation from rural as well as urban communities. They provided information on the populations they serve, their sources of funding, and the unique challenges they face in accomplishing their goals, assisting Oregonians in their region or community. Statements provided by them appear within this report and are summarized here.

Among the 75 organizations that responded, it is clear that they serve families and individuals in a diverse array of circumstances. Almost half of the organizations specify unique age groups, and a third highlight services to people struggling with housing insecurity, and a fourth highlight services to veterans, low income households, and others emphasize a focus on other social identities (immigrant, LGBTQ+, etc.) or those

with health and ability challenges. This sample of respondents is not perfectly representative of all organizations serving food-insecure households, but it represents the wide variety of people and the circumstances they are in. Other data sources confirm that food insecurity rates in Oregon among BIPOC, or Spanish-speaking, or single-parent households have been consistently higher, around twice the rate of the general population (15).

While these data do not allow us to thoroughly describe the full landscape of need by region, the answers provided by organizations resonate with other known characteristics of various places. For example, in communities with larger numbers of immigrants, or non-English speakers, such as Polk or Clackamas Counties, there are greater needs for culturally-informed services, and organizations (BIPOC producers, food pantries, etc.) in those places are uniquely attentive to those needs.

The services these organizations provide are impressive, going well beyond only delivering emergency food or growing fresh fruits and vegetables. This list shows the long list of services rendered by these organizations.

Food pantries	Mutual aid	Meal sites
Direct services	Meal Delivery	Community fridge
Gardens or farms	Gleaning	Community food table

These services provide not only nutrition, but belonging, social cohesion, and cultural celebration, all of which are vulnerable if these community based organizations and producers are unable to survive under anticipated economic and social stresses.

The organizations who shared information with us report that they rely on a wide variety of income sources to stay in business. Over half of the responding organizations rely on one-time funding of various sources, while about one-fifth rely on more stable multi-year funding. Some indicate that their funding streams are “braided”, with a mix of long-standing multi-year grants, supplemented by donors. The sources of funds vary from individual donors to larger philanthropic entities, to occasional government grants.

These organizations often rely on volunteers, but most also have paid staff. In some instances, a single person runs a service making prepared meals, funding it herself,

growing the food and making the dishes to deliver. Other groups focus on just serving 35 low income households in their county. About one-tenth of the responding organizations, who indicated their service load, serve fewer than a dozen households or individuals. Another fourth serves 11-50 people, and another fourth serves between 51 and 200 persons, and around 40 percent are large, serving 200+ people. The challenges for many of these individuals and organizations are likely to be the growing need around them, and their limited capacity to rise to that need. Yet, we know that under more prosperous times, in recent history, Oregon has had over 500,000 food insecure people per year, a number that far exceeds the capacity of this current array of organizations' capacity. It is hard to imagine how individuals and tiny organizations will be able to back-fill the anticipated dramatic growth in the number of food insecure people. However, they are an important resource, and with assistance from state and local government, and from larger existing service providers, this array of mutual aid groups could be encouraged to grow.

Respondents to this survey were asked to identify the biggest issue or barrier they face trying to serve their community. These open ended questions provided rich insight into existing barriers that can help predict future barriers under conditions of a less generous federal safety net. The three most common barriers mentioned were (a) lack of food supply for distribution [50%], (b) lack of funding [50%], and (c) rising demands for assistance in their communities. Among the briefest responses to this question two respondents indicated, *"So much need, so many requests"*, and *"People keep coming up asking if there's anything left."*

Respondents also were asked what they needed to keep their work going, or what kind of support they needed. Not surprisingly, given the barriers and needs already identified, the most common answers, in order of frequency mentioned, were:

1. Funding
2. Food supply
3. Access to a wider array of foods to distribute
4. General resources/help
5. Government programs (SNAP, WIC)
6. Staffing/volunteers/community support

Taken together this snapshot of data from our survey reveals that the food assistance network, apart from federal and state direct support programs (e.g., SNAP) is already facing important challenges, but is widespread and willing to assist if resources are available (funding, food access, etc.). When respondents were asked what else they wanted to share, one respondent declared:

“The cuts in SNAP and Medicaid will prove devastating to thousands of Oregonians that are working hard to make it. We need to pull together as a community to get through these times. Funding for food is essential to keep families from getting desperate.”

Recommendations for State Action (Addendum C)

Immediate Policy Responses

Identify and mobilize state funding to backfill the most critical federal losses.

While philanthropy and charitable giving have provided temporary relief, these resources are not nearly sufficient to meet the scale of the challenge. Without state action, emergency food providers will continue to bear an unsustainable burden, straining their capacity to respond. This requires dedicating flexible revenue sources whether through general fund allocations, targeted appropriations, or the creation of a stabilization fund to guarantee the stability of core nutrition programs. Direct support should be routed to food banks, pantries, and community partners that are already absorbing the loss of federal funding. Such interventions cannot rely solely on one-time appropriations or emergency reserves, which leave providers in a constant state of uncertainty. Instead, **the state must create durable, predictable funding streams that communities can depend on year after year.**

Oregon should invest in the infrastructure that allows food security programs to function effectively. Food banks, pantries, and meal sites require reliable storage facilities, refrigeration, and transportation networks to move food efficiently and equitably across the state. These needs are especially acute in rural and tribal areas, where distribution chains are fragile and transportation costs are higher. Targeted capital investments would strengthen the resilience of Oregon’s food system and reduce disparities in access. Infrastructure support must also extend to community-based organizations that serve culturally specific populations, as these partners are uniquely positioned to bridge linguistic, cultural, and geographic barriers to food access. By

prioritizing infrastructure and partnerships, the state ensures that food assistance does not simply exist on paper but reaches families where and when it is needed.

In the face of H.R. 1's drastic restructuring of the SNAP program, the instinctive state-level response may be to cut back on programmatic spending in order to conserve funds. However, such retrenchment would be both short-sighted and fiscally irresponsible. Reductions in ODHS staffing, eligibility systems, or casework capacity would have the immediate effect of worsening administrative backlogs and further inflating Oregon's already high SNAP error rate. Because federal law requires states to share in the cost of overpayments, these actions would expose Oregon to hundreds of millions of dollars in additional liability. Rather than attempting to save money in the short term through program cuts, **the state should focus on targeted investments that directly lower the error rate and streamline access to benefits.** These investments will not only protect families from unnecessary churn but also shield Oregon from the escalating financial penalties that will accompany new federal cost-sharing requirements in 2027.

Preserving eligibility standards is a cornerstone of this strategy. Oregon must maintain Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility (BBCE) at 200 percent of the federal poverty level, which is the threshold that ensures food assistance remains available to working families, seniors on fixed incomes, and other vulnerable groups. Narrowing eligibility standards would remove tens of thousands of Oregonians from SNAP at precisely the moment when food insecurity is at historic highs. Such a change would push additional pressure onto food banks and emergency providers that are already stretched beyond capacity. Sudden eligibility shifts create confusion for both clients and caseworkers, leading to higher rates of administrative error and incomplete applications. Preserving eligibility both protects households and strengthens the state's ability to meet federal accuracy standards.

Lowering Oregon's SNAP error rate should be considered as a central policy objective. Currently, the state's error rate sits at 14.01 percent, which will incur a multi-hundred-million dollar price tag in the coming years. A realistic but ambitious target would be to **reduce the SNAP error rate to below six percent** in the near term. Doing so requires a deliberate set of state investments: hiring and retaining sufficient

ODHS staff to process cases promptly, expanding training programs to ensure staff can navigate increasingly complex eligibility requirements, and building out the role of SNAP outreach contractors. These nonprofit partners are already trusted in their communities and are uniquely well-positioned to provide application assistance, troubleshoot documentation issues, and help families navigate the recertification process. Even if Oregon is unable to reduce its error rate in time to avoid federal penalties, even a small reduction will reduce the cost of administering the SNAP program and improve the service provided. By leveraging these partnerships more effectively, Oregon can reduce incomplete or inaccurate filings while simultaneously expanding access to hard-to-reach populations.

Equally important are administrative reforms designed to reduce barriers for eligible families. Relatively small, low-cost policy changes can yield significant improvements in both participation rates and program integrity. Standardizing work requirements means testing across SNAP and Medicaid would reduce confusion and paperwork for families who rely on both programs. Continuing to **integrate application processes through the ONE portal** will reduce duplicative reporting and streamline eligibility determinations. Expanding digital client tools, such as enabling families to schedule eligibility interviews through the ONE portal app, can reduce the high number of denials that occur for procedural reasons rather than financial ineligibility. Finally, **investments in automated verification systems for income and benefits**, particularly for individuals already enrolled in Social Security, SSI, or Medicaid, can minimize paperwork burdens, reduce caseworker workloads, and improve the accuracy of eligibility determinations.

Taken together, these steps represent a shift from reactive crisis management to proactive, systems-level planning. By stabilizing funding, reinforcing infrastructure, preserving eligibility, and modernizing administration, Oregon can protect families from the worst impacts of federal retrenchment while also positioning the state to meet future requirements with lower error rates and stronger program performance.

Long-Term Resilience

To maintain and strengthen food security across the state, Oregon must recognize its food system as essential infrastructure, a system that requires ongoing, reliable

investment to function effectively. The state should **commit to growing the Oregon Hunger Response Fund (OHRF) annually** in line with inflation to preserve its impact and ensure that food providers can continue meeting the rising need.

Oregon must move beyond one-time appropriations and emergency stopgaps. If the state wishes to keep food insecurity rates down, it must treat the food system as a system, one that deserves the same long-term, structural investment as housing, health care, and education. **Food security must be treated as a cross-cutting policy area**, deeply tied to health outcomes, educational achievement, and workforce stability. A comprehensive approach that embeds nutrition support into the state's broader health and workforce strategies will reduce long-term costs and strengthen resilience for Oregon families.

Policy Recommendations Involving Philanthropy

Philanthropy can be a valuable partner in addressing food insecurity, but it cannot replace government responsibility. **Decisionmakers should encourage philanthropy to continue supporting community-driven innovation** while recognizing that such efforts are complementary to, not a substitute for, robust public funding. **Expanding community funds that braid philanthropic and public resources** can help stabilize grassroots organizations. The Oregon Worker's Relief Fund, and the Reproductive Equity Fund (see "seedingjustice.org") serve as strong examples of this kind of partnership model. Policymakers can also **leverage philanthropic support to launch pilot projects** that the state and federal government can later scale, while urging foundations to provide more unrestricted and multi-year grants that strengthen the long-term stability of Oregon's nonprofit sector.

Philanthropists in Oregon are already engaged in supporting food justice, but their contributions remain small relative to need. There is "no pocket we haven't reached into." The persistence of widespread food insecurity demonstrates that philanthropy alone cannot fix the holes in our federal and state safety nets. Public policy, not charitable giving, must provide the foundation for an equitable and resilient food system.

Policy Recommendations from Community Voices

In addition to quantitative data and system analysis, the Food Systems survey captured direct recommendations from community-based organizations and frontline providers. These respondents, those closest to the daily realities of food insecurity, offered practical, locally grounded policy solutions that reflect both urgent needs and long-term opportunities. Their insights underscore the importance of centering lived experience in designing state policy responses.

Survey respondents emphasized the need for **funding coordinated efforts for local food system management, such as food hubs**, which can strengthen regional supply chains, improve efficiency, and connect small producers with consumers. They also called for **incentives to bring grocery stores to rural areas**, where limited retail options create persistent food deserts, and for support of cooperative models that source local food, accept EBT, and serve as multipurpose community hubs, including donation drop-off and distribution points.

Recognizing the barriers small growers face, respondents recommended **incentives for land-sharing arrangements to make farmland more accessible and water usage exceptions for local food growers and suppliers**, ensuring that regulatory frameworks do not undermine local food production. Finally, respondents urged policymakers to address the intersection of food access and housing policy by **mandating that all new low-income housing projects be located within walking distance or accessible by public transportation to an adequate food retailer**.

These recommendations reflect a clear call from communities: food access must be embedded in broader systems of housing, infrastructure, and economic development. By translating these frontline insights into policy, Oregon can move toward a more equitable, resilient, and community-driven food system.

Conclusion

The food assistance network in Oregon has a long history of addressing food insecurity in Oregon. When the state once had one of the highest food insecurity rates among all states (in the late 1990s), state agencies and non-profit organizations rallied in terms of

improving access to and enrollment in SNAP, embracing many opportunities to expand access to federal food assistance programs for children, expanding its network of emergency food distributors, investing in local production of healthy foods while expanding farmers markets, and coordinating efforts between organizations (such as the Oregon Hunger Task Force). Yet we have not faced a setback such as the current federal retraction, reduction, and disparagement of services for low income households which will make many more Oregonians vulnerable to food insecurity.

While it is difficult to conceive of back-filling the dramatic anticipated declines in SNAP and other federal benefits, there are state-policy opportunities to both reduce the harm that would otherwise be done to the current system, while encouraging the expansion and strengthening of the informal private network of food assistance organizations. The policy recommendations offered here reflect the considered opinion of the writing team, in light of reflections on the state of the current food assistance system in Oregon, informed by input from leaders of dozens of community based organizations attending to the needs of struggling Oregon households. From the very small to the not-so-small organizations providing mutual aid, neighborly assistance, food delivery and feeding sites, the existing network is substantial. Yet it is also already exhausted, understaffed, underfunded, and not well coordinated. Rural places face unique challenges in comparison to urban areas, calling for attentive place-based strategies and nimble policies that take local context seriously. Policy suggestions in this report focus on both efforts to sustain as much as possible the funding available through federal programs, while searching for innovative ways to strengthen the informal and semi-formal safety net of organizations that will attempt to respond to the anticipated wave of need triggered by the current changes in federal policy.

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Addenda

- Addendum A: [OFB Memo: Hunger, Philanthropy & Government's Role](#)
- Addendum B: [OFB Memo: The Current State of Food Assistance Resources in the OFB Network](#)
- Addendum C: [Oregon Hunger Task Force Policy Recommendations](#)

OREGON HUNGER TASK FORCE

Creating Policies for a Hunger-Free Oregon