

OVERVIEW NYC Hunger Experience 2011: Sacrifice and Support

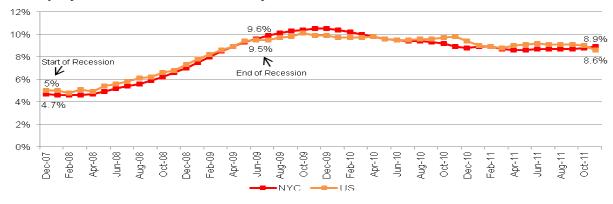
The recession that began in December 2007 officially ended in June 2009, and the number of New York City residents reporting difficulty affording needed food subsequently declined. However, as reported in *NYC Hunger Experience 2010: Less Food on the Table*, even in the post-recession era many New Yorkers were managing to avoid difficulty affording food only by reducing its quantity and quality and relying on savings to get by. In 2011, the number of New York City residents reporting difficulty affording food declined even further, but a substantial number of New Yorkers continued to have to reduce the quantity and quality of their food and rely on savings in order to feed themselves or their families. In addition, groups among which food affordability issues had not been traditionally prominent (e.g., better educated residents, higher income residents) saw increases in percentages reporting difficulty affording food and increases in percentages expressing concern about needing food assistance (such as food stamps, soup kitchens, and food pantries) in the future.

This year's edition of the Food Bank For New York City's Hunger Experience report series analyzes data from an annual opinion poll conducted in collaboration with the Marist Institute for Public Opinion. It examines the most recent general decline in the number of New Yorkers having difficulty affording food, identifies those groups experiencing increases in these numbers, and provides updated, comprehensive trend data on what a loss of household income would mean to residents' ability to afford food and how concern is being expressed about needing food assistance in the future. The report also includes never before published data on the specific kinds of quantity and quality sacrifices and financial trade-offs New York City residents are making to ensure that food remains on the table.

THE POST-RECESSION PICTURE

Although the recession was declared over in June 2009, its end did not put more money in everyone's pockets. Unemployment declined as the recession ended, but as of 2011, the unemployment rate had yet to reach pre-recession levels in New York City or the nation, as illustrated in Figure I.

Figure I
Unemployment Rate in New York City and United States, December 2007 to Present¹



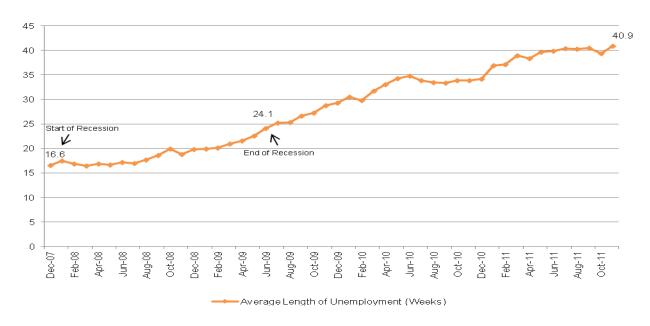
¹ Analysis of unemployment data as reported by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Also, the length of time that workers who had lost their jobs stayed unemployed rose. According to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, during the recession, the average length of time an American worker remained unemployed increased to 24.1 weeks in June 2009, up from 16.6 weeks in December 2007. Even after the recession ended, length of unemployment continued to rise, hitting 40.9 weeks in October 2011. This is the highest level recorded in more than sixty years of official recordkeeping, as illustrated in Figure II.²

Figure II

Average Length of Unemployment (Weeks) in the United States,

December 2007 to Present³



Longer periods of unemployment mean that an ever-increasing portion of the unemployed are no longer receiving unemployment benefits, thereby increasing need. According to the Department of Labor, in early 2010, 75 percent of unemployed residents were receiving benefits; by November, 2011, that figure was down to just 48 percent.⁴

Wages stayed ahead of inflation during the recession, but this pattern did not continue post-recession, as many people who had lost their jobs during the recession returned to work at lower wages.⁵ Indeed, household income decreased more in the two years immediately following the end of the recession than it did during the recession itself.⁶

DIFFICULTY AFFORDING FOOD

At the height of the recession, the percentage of New York City residents having difficulty affording needed food rose to 48 percent, the highest level since the start of the poll in 2003. As the economy began to recover, and relief measures kicked in, the percentage of New York City residents reporting difficulty decreased to 40 percent in 2009, 37 percent in 2010, and 35 percent (approximately 2.9 million people) in 2011.

 $^{^2}$ Ibid.

³ Th: d

Ibid

⁴ Analysis of unemployment benefits as reported by the United States Department of Labor.

⁵ (1) Consumer Price Index (2011). United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2) Farber, Henry S. (2011). Job Loss in the Great Recession: Historical Perspective from the Displaced Workers Survey, 1984-2010. National Bureau of Economic Research.

⁶ Household Income Trends During the Recession and Economic Recovery. (October 2011). Sentier Research.

Data for 2011 therefore show that the overall number of New York City residents having difficulty affording needed food decreased by five percent between 2010 and 2011. Currently, the percentage of residents having difficulty is lower than its pre-recession level of 38 percent in 2007, but higher than it was in 2003 (25 percent). As noted, approximately 2.9 million people are still reporting difficulty. (See Table I.)

Table I

Difficulty Affording Food - NYC Residents, 2007 to 2011

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
38%	48%	40%	37%	35%
3.1 million	3.9 million	3.3 million	3.1 million	2.9 million

WHO ARE THE 2.9 MILLION NEW YORKERS? NEW FACES

2011 data indicate that food affordability is increasingly becoming an issue for some surprising groups:

- The percentage of New York City residents with annual household incomes between \$50,000 to \$74,999, and annual household incomes of \$75,000 or more, who reported difficulty affording food increased from 26 percent to 32 percent, and from 13 percent to 16 percent, respectively, between 2010 and 2011. Moreover, these same groups saw extremely large increases if our "look back" extends to 2003. For instance, New York City residents in the \$75,000 or more income bracket recorded an increase of 300 percent (from 4 percent to 16 percent) between 2003 and 2011.
- The percentage of employed New York City residents who reported difficulty affording food increased slightly – from 33 percent to 34 percent between 2010 and 2011.
- The percentage of *male* New York City residents who reported difficulty affording food increased slightly from 31 percent to 32 percent between 2010 and 2011.
- While the percentage of New York City residents in the youngest and oldest age groups (ages 18 to 35 and ages 65 or older) having difficulty affording food declined, the percentage of New York City residents in the *middle age categories* (ages 36 to 49 and ages 50 to 64) reporting difficulty increased (from 37 percent to 38 percent, and from 39 percent to 40 percent, respectively, between 2010 and 2011).
- While the percentage of New York City residents at lower educational levels (high school or below, or some college or Associate's degree) reporting difficulty affording food declined, the percentage of New York City residents at higher educational levels (college degree or graduate/professional degree) increased. The percentage of residents with a college degree rose from 24 percent to 30 percent; and for those with a graduate/professional degree, from 19 percent to 21 percent.

Not only are better educated and higher income groups reporting more difficulty affording food, they are also expressing increasing concern about their future and a possible need for food assistance (like food stamps, soup kitchens, or food pantries) in the next 12 months:

• The percentage of New York City residents with an annual household income of \$50,000 to \$74,999, and an annual household income of \$75,000 or more, who expressed concern about needing food assistance in the next 12 months increased from 24 percent to 27 percent, and from 9 percent to 11 percent, respectively, between 2010 and 2011. (The percentage of New York City residents with an annual household income of \$25,000 to \$49,999 who expressed concern also increased – from 34 percent to 45 percent.)

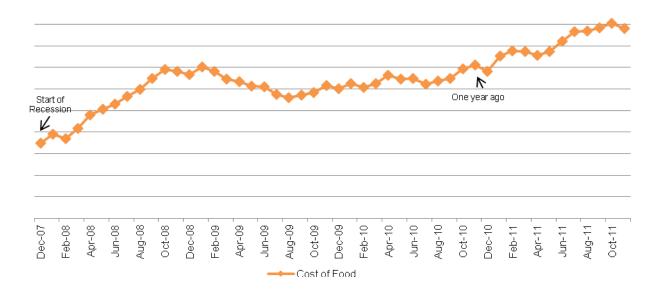
- The percentage of employed New York City residents who expressed concern about needing food assistance in the next 12 months increased from 25 percent to 27 percent between 2010 and 2011.
- The percentage of *male* residents who expressed concern about needing food assistance in the next 12 months increased from 27 percent to 32 percent between 2010 and 2011.
- While the percentage of New York City residents in the youngest age group (ages 18 to 35) expressing concern about needing food assistance in the next 12 months declined, the percentage of New York City residents in the *middle age categories* (ages 36 to 49 and ages 50 to 64) expressing concern increased (from 29 percent to 30 percent, and from 32 percent to 38 percent, respectively, between 2010 and 2011. (The percentage of New York City residents ages 65 and older also increased, from 26 percent to 32 percent.)
- While the percentage of New York City residents at lower educational levels (high school or below, or some college or Associate's degree) expressing concern about needing food assistance in the next 12 months remained stable or declined, the percentage of New York City residents with a college degree expressing concern increased from 23 percent to 30 percent.

New York City residents with higher household incomes are not eligible for food stamps or the other nutrition assistance programs that help keep lower-income households afloat, and they are probably less likely to avail themselves of emergency food programs (or they may find themselves ineligible for these as well), even though the anecdotal evidence is that some "middle class" families have been knocking on program doors. Meanwhile, as illustrated in Figure IV, the cost of groceries increased by 4 percent between November 2010 and November 2011, and by 13 percent between December 2007 and November 2011.

Figure IV

Cost of Food in New York City Metropolitan Statistical Area,

December 2007 to November 20118



⁷ Consumer Price Index. (2011). United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. Figures are calculated for the New York City Metropolitan Statistical Area.

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⁸ Ibid.

As noted earlier, unemployment rates have been slow to fall, and the length of time it has been taking workers who lose jobs to find new ones has been lengthening. In the event of a job loss, previously high-income households might have to bear high fixed costs (like mortgages or rents) for a significant period of time while remaining ineligible for (or unaware of) subsidies and supports available to lower-income households.

Middle-aged New Yorkers are also reporting more difficulty affording food, and expressing more concern about needing food assistance in the future, than older or younger New Yorkers. Residents in their middle years who have been unemployed for significant lengths of time may feel that they cannot dip into savings to pay food or other bills, given that their retirement years are right around the corner. Also, although "aging boomers" are less likely to lose their jobs than younger workers, they have a harder time finding comparable new ones. A recent study found that 40 percent of unemployed workers older than 55 had been out of work a year or longer.⁹

WHO ARE THE 2.9 MILLION NEW YORKERS? FAMILIAR FACES

Consistent with previous findings from the poll, the data indicate that low-income residents, households with children, unemployed residents, women, and New Yorkers without a college degree are more likely to experience difficulty affording needed food than other groups:

- Half of New York City residents (50 percent) with annual household incomes of less than \$25,000 had difficulty affording needed food.
- More than two in five New York City households with children (43 percent) had difficulty affording needed food.
- More than two in five unemployed New York City residents (41 percent) had difficulty affording needed food.
- Almost two in five female New York City residents (38 percent) had difficulty affording needed food.
- More than two in five New York City residents with a high school degree or below (43 percent) had difficulty affording needed food.

All of these percentages are unacceptably high, and much higher than they were at the start of the poll in 2003, but all have also decreased since 2010, consistent with the decline in the general New York City population:

- The percentage of New York City residents with annual household incomes of less than \$25,000 who reported difficulty affording needed food decreased from 62 percent to 50 percent between 2010 and 2011, but increased from 49 percent to 50 percent between 2003 and 2011.
- The percentage of New York City households with children who reported difficulty affording needed food decreased from 44 percent to 43 percent between 2010 and 2011, but increased from 32 percent to 43 percent between 2003 and 2011.
- The percentage of unemployed New York City residents who reported difficulty affording needed food decreased from 54 percent to 41 percent between 2010 and 2011. (Earlier data is unavailable.)
- The percentage of female New York City residents who reported difficulty affording needed food decreased from 42 percent to 38 percent between 2010 and 2011, but increased from 28 percent to 38 percent between 2003 and 2011.
- The percentage of New York City residents with a high school degree or below who
 reported difficulty affording needed food decreased from 52 percent to 43 percent

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⁹ Addendum. A Year or More: The High Cost of Long-Term Unemployment. (2011). The Pew Charitable Trusts.

between 2010 and 2011, but increased from 39 percent to 43 percent between 2003 and 2011.

MAKING SACRIFICES TO AFFORD FOOD: CUTTING BACK

As noted, the percentage of New York City residents reporting difficulty affording food declined in 2011 to 35 percent of the city's population (or 2.9 million people). It is likely that this decline can be attributed, in part, to increased participation in the food stamp program (also known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP) and other nutrition assistance programs and to the attempts of emergency food programs to meet unmet food needs. Unfortunately, it can also be attributed to sacrifices being made by households experiencing difficulty affording needed food, including cutbacks to the quantity and quality of food being consumed.

In 2011, almost two in five New York City residents (38 percent) purchased less food in order to save food or money. More than one in three residents (35 percent) reported buying less meat. poultry, or fish; more than one in four (27 percent) reported buying less dairy; and more than one in four (27 percent) reported buying less fresh fruits and vegetables.

These figures are of immediate concern, because the protein contained in meat, poultry, and fish provides amino acids that assist in building and preserving body muscle and tissues. Dairy is also a source of protein. Current USDA recommendations call for Americans to eat more, not less, fruits and vegetables, because fruits and vegetables contain several nutrients (including folate, magnesium, potassium, dietary fiber, and vitamins A, C, and K) that are under-consumed in the United States. Fruits and vegetables are relatively low in calories and can help both adults and children maintain a healthy weight. Also, eating fruits and vegetables is associated with reduced risk of many chronic diseases. For instance, eating two cups of fruits and vegetables per day can prevent cardiovascular disease, including heart attack and stroke; some fruits and vegetables may even offer protection against certain types of cancer. 10

Food affordability problems that require New York City residents to cut back on the amount of protein and fresh fruits and vegetables they consume may result in an inadequate diet that leaves a significant portion of the city's population at risk for disease and poor health.

MAKING SACRIFICES TO AFFORD FOOD: IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Approximately one in five households with children (41 percent) bought less food to save food or money. More than one in three (35 percent) bought less meat, poultry, or fish. Even greater sacrifices were made by New York City households with children with annual incomes of less than \$25,000 - almost half (48 percent) reported that they had purchased less food in order to save food or money. More than two in five of these households (41 percent) reported that they had purchased less meat, poultry, or fish; 38 percent reported that they had purchased less dairy; and 36 percent reported that they had purchased less fresh fruits and vegetables.

These sorts of sacrifices on the part of low-income households with children can have severe long-term consequences. Research has shown that children living in households that are "food insecure" are 90 percent more likely to have fair/poor health than excellent/good health. They are even more vulnerable than adults to the long-term consequences of an inadequate diet and are therefore a special concern when food affordability issues are reported by such a large proportion of low-income households.

11 Ibid.

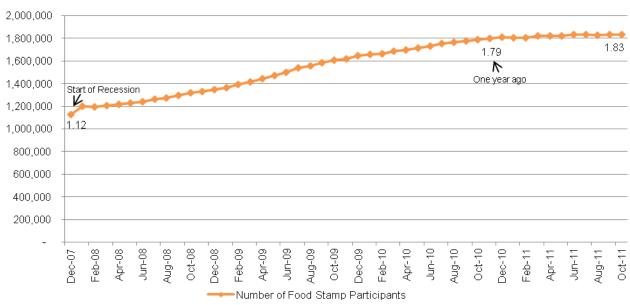
Food Bank For New York City

¹⁰ Cook, John and Frank, Deborah. Department of Pediatrics, Boston, University School of Medicine. Food Security, Poverty, and Human Development in the United States. (2008). New York Academy of Sciences.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FOOD STAMPS

As noted, it is likely that the continued decline in the percentage of New York City residents having difficulty affording food, reported here for 2011, can be attributed, in part, to an expansion of the food stamp program. As of October 2011, there were 1.83 million New York City residents receiving food stamps, up 62 percent from 1.12 million at the start of the recession in December 2007, and up 2 percent from 1.79 million one year ago in October 2010. (See Figure III.)¹² Increases in food stamp participation rates also occurred nationwide. As of September 2011, there were 46.3 million United States residents receiving food stamps, up 69 percent from 27.4 million at the start of the recession in December 2007, and up 8 percent from 42.9 million one year ago in September 2010.¹³





As need has increased, the federal government, the agencies that administer the food stamp program at local levels, and anti-hunger advocates have increased their efforts to reach eligible households with information about food stamps and improve the application process.

THE IMPORTANCE OF OTHER NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

A range of other nutrition assistance programs, such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), school breakfast programs, the National School Lunch program (NSLP), and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), have also played a role in keeping needy New York City households afloat food-wise. Since 2007, participation in the National School Lunch Program has risen in all fifty states. ¹⁵ Across the state, the number of students receiving free or low-cost lunches rose from 1,063,344 during the

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¹² Analysis of SNAP data as reported by the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA).

¹³ Analysis of SNAP data as reported by the United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (FNS).

¹⁴ Analysis of SNAP data as reported by the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA).

¹⁵ Analysis of National School Lunch Program participation rates as reported by the United States Department of Agriculture.

2008-2009 school year to 1,099,893 during the 2009-2010 school year. ¹⁶ In 2010, New York State managed to enroll almost 30 percent of low-income children receiving free or reduced-price lunches during the school year in its summer food service program, out-performing almost all other states in this effort. ¹⁷

THE IMPORTANCE OF EMERGENCY FOOD

Food stamps benefit levels have not increased since 2008, when they rose by 13.6%.¹⁸ In 2010, the average monthly food stamp benefit was \$287.¹⁹ When food stamps are not available, or run out, households with low incomes need an opportunity to turn somewhere for immediately available food. Sometimes emergency food becomes a frequently utilized resource, as households have trouble making ends meet on a regular basis. Emergency food has therefore played an important role in some households' efforts to address food affordability issues, as directors of several well-known food pantries and soup kitchens in the City of New York can attest, having observed increased demand in 2011.²⁰ Unfortunately, increased demand has stretched some food pantries and soup kitchens to their limits and led them to turn away potential participants or temporarily close their doors.²¹

THE ROAD AHEAD

In 2011, the number of New York City residents reporting difficulty affording food declined, as it had in 2009 and 2010. This decline was likely due, in part, to an increase in the number of New Yorkers participating in the food stamp program, and the percentage of New Yorkers having difficulty affording food would probably have been higher were it not for the existence of other nutrition assistance programs (like school breakfast and lunch programs) and the continued efforts made by emergency food programs to provide for New Yorkers in need. Still, a substantial number of New Yorkers continued to reduce the quantity and quality of their food and rely on savings in order to feed themselves or their families. Groups that had the most difficulty affording needed food in the past (e.g., less educated, lower-income residents, unemployed residents, and households with children) continued to have the most difficulty. In addition, groups among which food affordability issues had not been traditionally prominent (e.g., educated, higher-income residents) saw increases in percentages reporting difficulty affording food and increases in percentages expressing concern about needing food assistance (such as food stamps, soup kitchens, and food pantries) in the future.

As Congress continues to wrestle with the challenge of reducing the nation's deficit, and embarks on setting funding and policy frontiers for the hunger safety net in the 2012 Farm Bill reauthorization, any suggestions that food stamps or other anti-hunger programs be cut are insupportable, both in the face of the rising need that increased use of food stamps among New Yorkers indicates and the evidence presented here that New Yorkers are continuing to make sacrifices to afford food. Cuts to food stamps or other anti-hunger programs could result in a substantial increase in the percentage of New York City residents reporting difficulty affording food. They could also increase pressure on the emergency food programs that are doing their own part to help households struggling with food affordability problems.

18 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)- Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLAS). (2011). United States Department of Agriculture.

¹⁶ Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report 2011. (2011). Food Research and Action Center (FRAC).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹ Analysis of SNAP data as reported by the United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Services (FNS).

²⁰ Souccar, Miriam Kreinin. (2011). *Number of needy New Yorkers growing at alarming rate*. Crain's New York Business.

²¹ (1) Food Bank For New York City's meals database. (2) Not Too Big to Fail: As New York City Hunger Soars, Feeding Programs Close Due to Government Cuts: New York City Coalition Against Hunger's Annual Hunger Survey (2011). New York City Coalition Against Hunger.

While recovery from the recent recession proceeds slowly, protecting and strengthening the nation's hunger safety net is of the utmost importance. Hungry New Yorkers will continue to rely on food stamps, other nutrition assistance programs, and emergency food programs to help address food affordability problems. Making these programs as responsive to demonstrated need as possible, and as accessible as possible, should continue to be key priorities for the federal government, the agencies that administer the food stamp program at local levels, and anti-hunger advocates.