

CHAPTER 7 FOOD SECURITY AND ACCESS INDICATORS

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OVERVIEW

Food security can be thought about at a variety of different levels -- from the individual to the global. In this chapter, we focus on the individual, household, and to a lesser extent, the community level.

Food security is measured by a number of important indicators, such as government food program participation, food pantry usage, gleaning programs, and community gardens. Among these indicators were a number of salient findings.

It is imperative to recognize the impact of the Personal Responsibility Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act or PRWORA, the welfare reform act of 1996, on the trends describing participation in government food and nutrition programs and use of emergency food sources. Policy changes have created barriers to women's participation in the WIC program in Missoula County. In addition, the Farmer's Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) has experienced serious funding setbacks. Only 30% of the Missoula County students who are eligible for the Free and Reduced School Lunch Program actually participated during 1999 through 2002. The average monthly number of food stamp recipients steadily began to decrease after 1996 due to significant changes in eligibility; however, since 2000 Missoula County has been experiencing an increase in the number of participants.

As a result of cutbacks in funding and changes in eligibility and requirements for participants in government food programs, people are becoming more dependent on emergency food programs, such as food banks or soup kitchens. Over the last few years, most of these places in Missoula County have experienced significant increases in the number of people who use their services. In addition, community gardens are an important source of fresh produce for those in need.

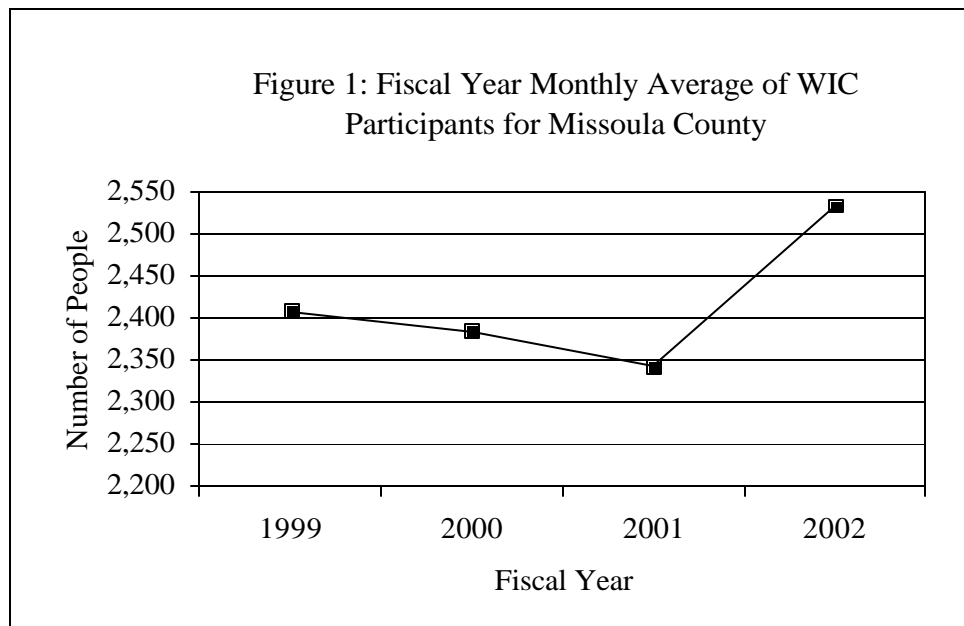
The food security and access indicators suggest that many people living in Missoula County are experiencing food insecurity. Further research will aid in our understanding of what can be done to prevent an increase in the number of people facing this problem.

GOVERNMENT FOOD PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

The trends.

Government food program participation statistics are useful indicators of a community's food security. Below are descriptions of four government food programs used in Missoula County, including the WIC program, Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, School Lunch Program, and Food Stamps.

The WIC Program (Women, Infants and Children) supplements family income with coupons for food items. These coupons are for food items that are high in calcium, which is necessary to meet the nutritional needs of children and pregnant women.¹ Allotments are based on family income and size, and the WIC program supports families that are pregnant and/or have children under the age of five.² The WIC Program is federally funded. A downward trend from 2,420 to 2,357 average monthly participants occurred between 1999 to 2001 (see Figure 1), but there was a rebound to 2,533 in 2002. Mary Pittaway, Missoula County WIC Coordinator, estimates the total number of WIC participants in the county to be about 30% higher than the monthly average because WIC clients do not necessarily participate consistently throughout the year.³

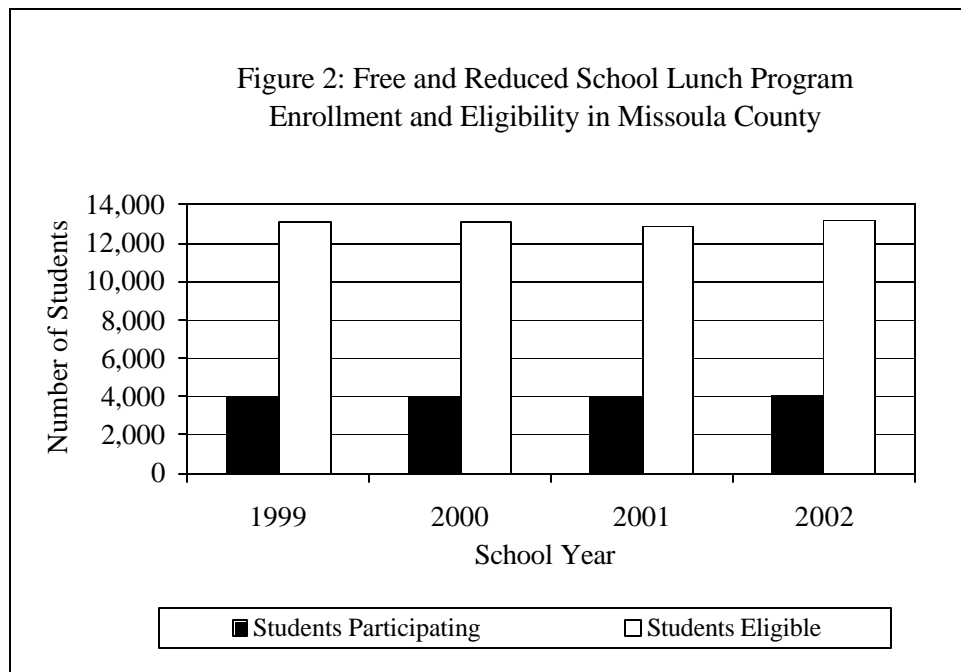


The Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) is administered through the WIC Program. The FMNP gives families that are participating in the WIC program access to fresh, local, and nutritious produce during the months of May through October (when Missoula's Farmers' Market is operational). This program is funded through federal and state matching monies. There is only one FMNP in Missoula County. The program started in 1992 with only \$1000.⁴ From 1993-2001, the WIC program received no matching state money to run the program. Between 1993-2001, the FMNP was funded through private donations and grants applied for by Missoula County.⁵ However, beginning in 2002, Missoula County received money from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and matching funds from the Department of Public Health and

Human Services, for a total of \$30,000. In 2003 however, the state decided against matching the federal funds and only provided funding to bring it to \$15,000 for the program's total budget.⁶

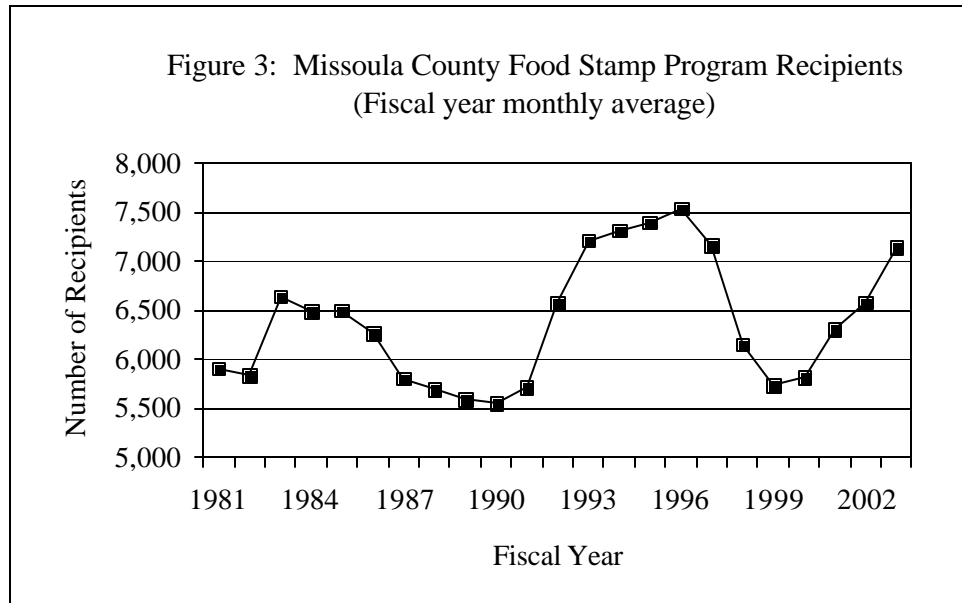
The Free and Reduced School Lunch Program is a federally funded program that provides free or reduced school lunches to students from low income families.⁷ To qualify for the Free School Lunch Program, the student's household income must be at or below 125 percent of the poverty line.⁸ For a student to qualify for the Reduced School Lunch Program the household income must be at or below 185 percent of the poverty line.⁹

The number of *eligible* students for the Free and Reduced School Lunch Program dropped slightly between 1999 to 2001, dropping from 13,140 to 12,882. However, between 2001 to 2002, the number of *eligible* students increased slightly from 12,882 to 13,164 (see Figure 2). The number of students *actually participating* in the program has slightly increased since 1999; rising from 4010 in 1999 to 4083 in 2002 (see Figure 2). The gap between those students eligible for the program and those who are actually participating has consistently been between 69-70% for the years 1999 through 2002.



The number of people receiving food stamps in Missoula County has fluctuated over time (see Figure 3). From 1993 through 1996, an average of about 7,350 people per month received food stamps in Missoula County, which is roughly 3,100 households.¹⁰ After 1996 there was a dramatic decrease in the number of people in the Food Stamps program until 2000, and then the numbers began to climb once again. At the time of the last Census of Population in 2000, 14.8% of the population lived below the poverty line but only about 6% of the County's population (5,820 monthly average) received food stamps

monthly. This suggests that many people who are eligible for food stamps do not receive them, a problem recognized by anti-hunger advocates in Missoula County. Although food stamp participation increased to a monthly average of 7,144 in 2003, it is clear that the program is not reaching many people in need.



Why are these trends occurring?

The Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 was a major turning point for government food programs. Welfare became welfare-to-work, and each of the states developed its own version within the broad parameters of the federal legislation. Montana first created FAIM (Families Achieving Independence in Montana), and in 2002 Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) was approved at the federal level.

Welfare reform has been portrayed as a success because the caseloads dropped 50% nationally between 1996-2000. However, according to WEEL (Working for Equality and Economic Liberation), a welfare advocacy group in Missoula:

Families have been disappearing off the radar screen and moving into deeper poverty than this country has seen since the depression. Montana reduced welfare caseloads 60% by 1999, primarily through sanctioning families off of assistance. Meanwhile, Montana has the highest number of people working more than one job to make ends meet, the fastest growing poverty rate in the country, and the third highest child poverty rate in the country.¹¹

Around half of those who are eligible for the WIC Program know about the services and use them.¹² Fluctuations in the number of WIC participants can be due to PRWORA requirements. Since 1996, PRWORA requires mothers enrolled in the WIC Program to attend one-hour appointments every other month, in order to receive WIC benefits. This poses a difficulty for many working mothers.¹³

The FMNP in Missoula County has been forced to run its operations on a very small budget. This past year the legislative funding to food and nutrition programs such as FMNP was cut due to a budget crisis, thereby affecting the state's ability to sustain or improve existing programs.¹⁴

The fact that only 30-31% of those who are eligible for the School Lunch Program are actually participating may be due to a number of factors. Children coming into the school district in the middle of the school year may not be enrolling in the program. Most children are enrolled in the program at the beginning of the school year, although it is possible to apply at any time throughout the school year.¹⁵ Families also may not be enrolling because change in household income levels could happen after the start of school. Another barrier for families applying to the Free and Reduced School Lunch Program may be "perceived income confidentiality issues."¹⁶

Eligibility for food stamps is now a complex process, determined by both financial and non-financial criteria established by the federal government. The gap between participation rates and poverty rates may be due in part to this complexity. Staff from the Missoula Food Bank and other agencies report that their clients often feel the food stamp application process is too cumbersome. National participation rates for food stamps have fallen considerably more than rates of poverty, suggesting that millions of families eligible for these benefits are not receiving them.¹⁷

More research is needed on the barriers to participation in food-related government programs.

Why is this important?

The Center on Hunger and Poverty at Brandeis University has documented levels of food insecurity and hunger among specific at-risk populations in the United States, such as children, the elderly, immigrants, emergency food assistance recipients, and welfare recipients.¹⁸ The national data shows that Montana had the ninth highest level of food insecurity (13%) in the United States, and it ranked second in the states whose relative hunger status worsened most (i.e., moved up more than 10 places in the rankings) during the comparative time periods (1996-1998 versus 1998-2000).

A lack of food and/or poor nutrition can lead to a variety of problems. For example, if a pregnant woman does not gain enough weight, her infant is at a significant risk of being low birth weight. If a student goes to school hungry and does not participate in the School Lunch Program, her academic performance and health will suffer. Low participation in government nutrition programs (combined with changes in the economy, welfare policy, etc.) means more people become dependent on emergency food sources, as discussed below.

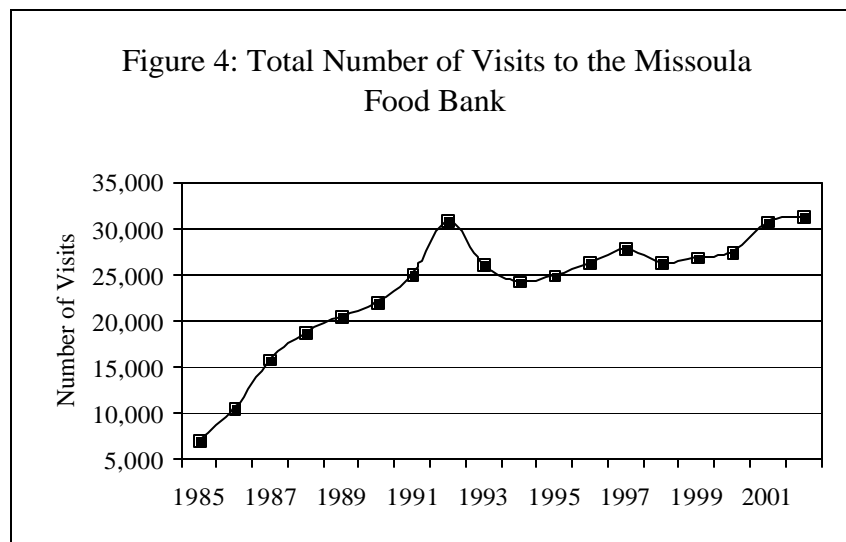
FOOD BANKS AND PANTRIES IN MISSOULA COUNTY

The trends.

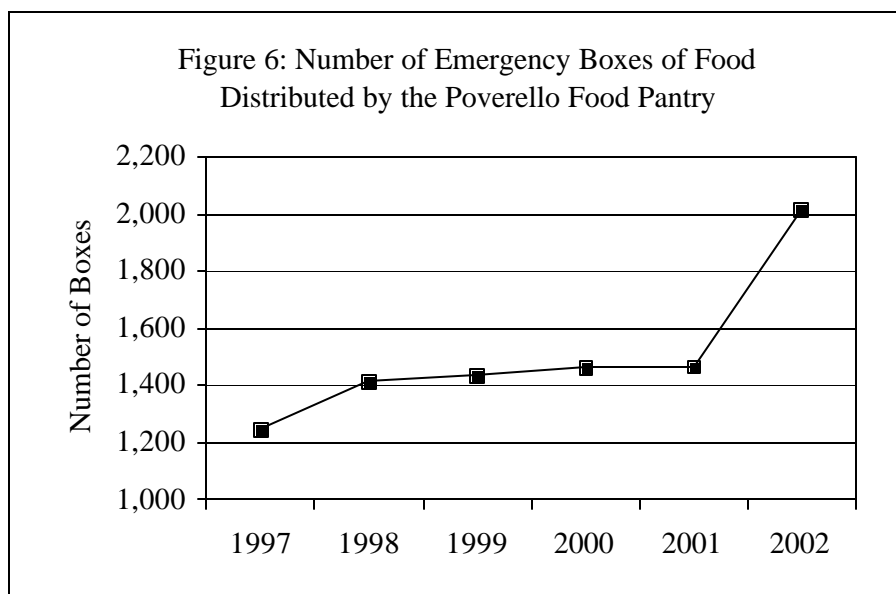
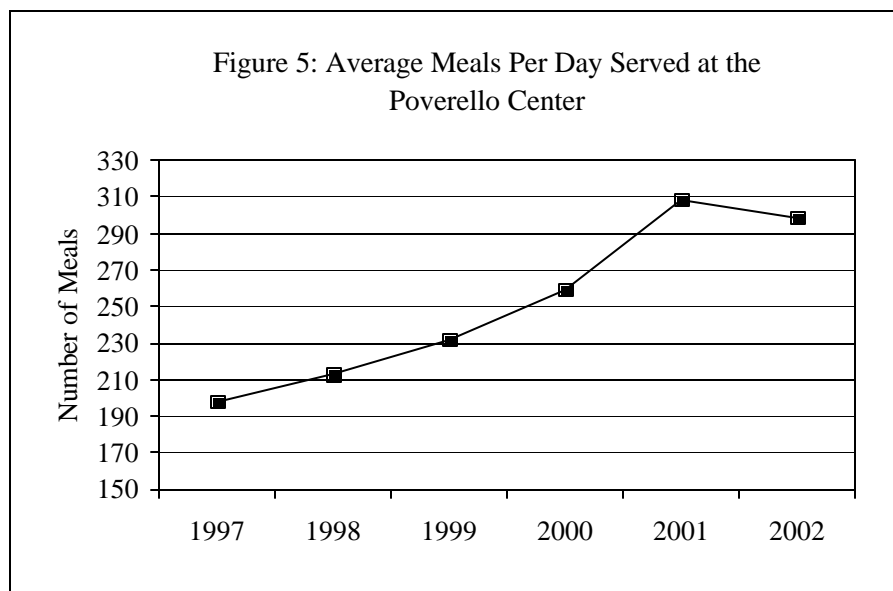
There are several places in Missoula County where people can access free food. These places are commonly referred to as “emergency food” agencies or programs. According to the Montana Food Bank Network (MFBN), their affiliates are likely to be the predominant places in Missoula County where people can go to get food or be served a meal. The MFBN’s affiliates in the county are Clark Fork City Church, Christian Life Center, Seeley-Swan Food Pantry, Missoula 3:16, the Salvation Army, the Poverello Center and Food Pantry, and the Missoula Food Bank. Many affiliates of the MFBN (for example, Clark Fork City Church and the Seeley-Swan food pantry) receive a good portion, if not all of their food supplies, from the MFBN, while others use a variety of sources.

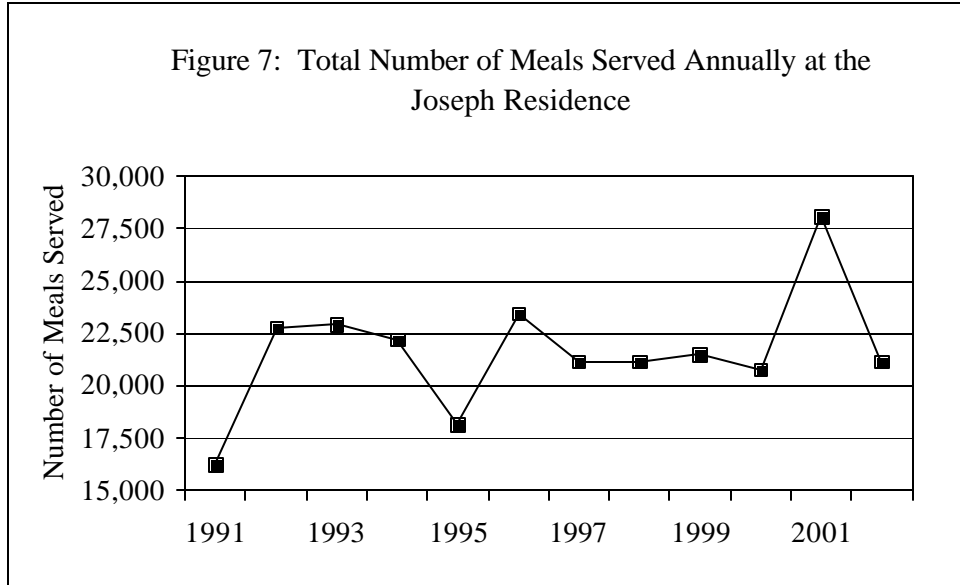
Available statistical data for five of these emergency food agencies suggests that most of these facilities are seeing an increased usage of their services. It is important to point out that not every emergency food distribution agency in the county is discussed here. There are at least half a dozen more emergency food distribution agencies in Missoula County that have no recorded statistical data, meaning it is difficult to know exactly how many more people are being served by emergency food agencies.

The Missoula Food Bank (MFB), established in 1982, provides both perishable and non-perishable food for thousands of people in Missoula County. People either go directly to their location in Missoula, where they can pick out from a list (which is dependent upon supply and how many people are in the family) what food they would like to take home with them. The MFB also donates to other emergency food agencies such as the Missoula Indian Center or Missoula 3:16. The MFB has been experiencing a steady increase in the number of people it serves in a year (see Figure 4).¹⁹ For example, from 1998 to 2002, the MFB experienced a 19% increase in the total number of visits (this figure includes those clients that needed to use the MFB’s services more than one time in a year).²⁰

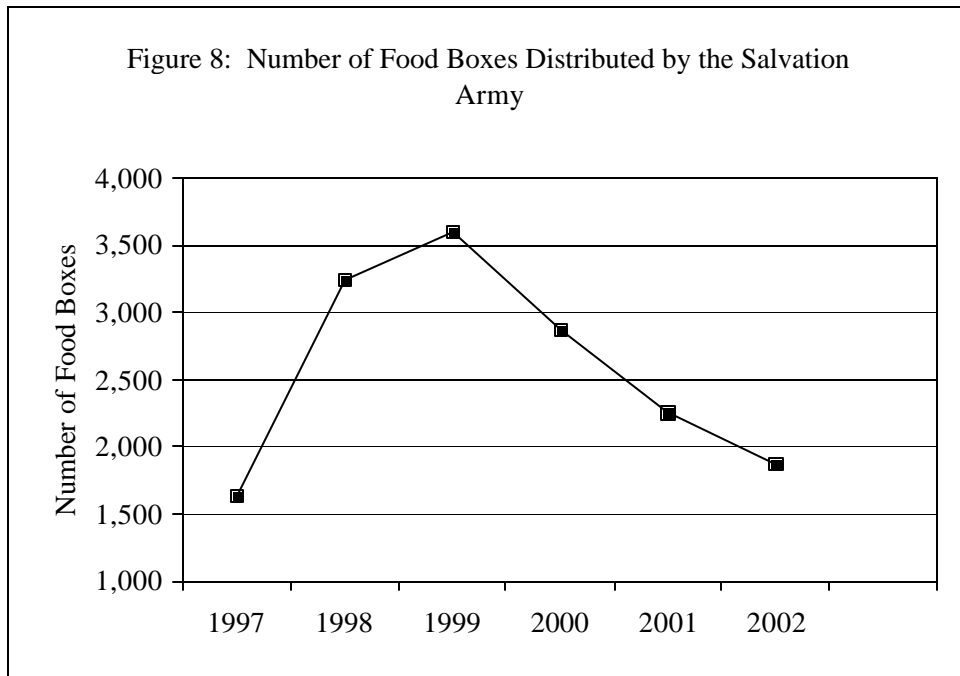


Another leading food agency in Missoula is the Poverello Center and food pantry. The Poverello Center, which was established in 1974, serves three meals daily and also distributes food boxes. From 1997 to 2002, the average number of meals the Poverello Center served increased by 51% and the number of food boxes they distributed has increased by 61% (see Figures 5 and 6).²¹ The Joseph Residence, a transitional living center for homeless families run by the Poverello Center, has a set number of families it can serve. In 1996, the Joseph Residence increased its housing capacity since its opening in 1991 and subsequently experienced an increase in the number of meals it served each year (see Figure 7).²² In 2001, the Joseph Residence saw a jump in the number of meals they served during that year; however this is due to a group of travelers who used their facilities and services.²³





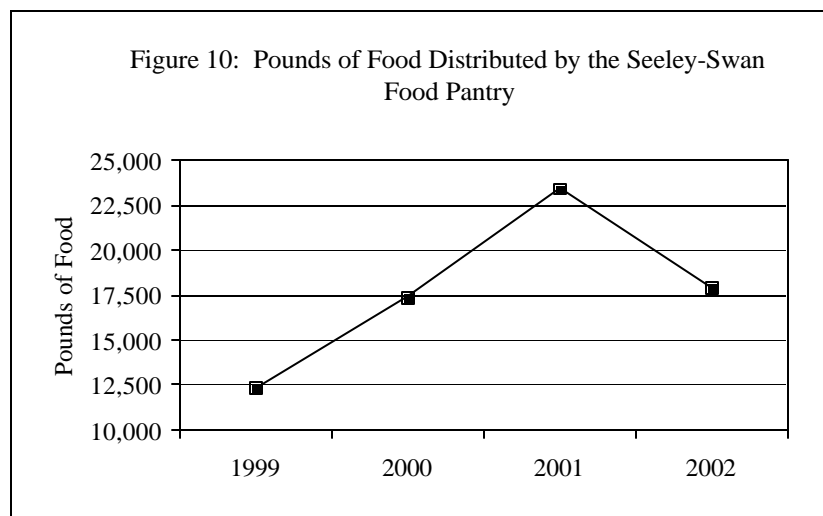
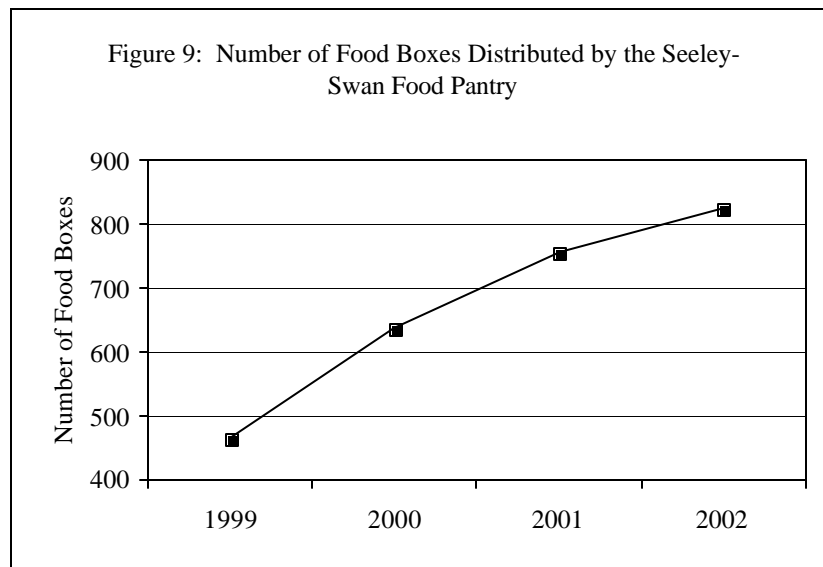
The Salvation Army of Missoula, which has been serving the Missoula community for over 100 years, is another agency that provides boxes of food to individuals and families. The type and amount of food clients receive is contingent upon the size of the family and their living situation (i.e., do they have access to a stove, oven, etc.). The total number of food boxes the Salvation Army distributed reached 3,601 in 1999, but has been steadily decreasing since then, resulting in a 48% decrease from 1999 to 2002 (see Figure 8).²⁴



Missoula 3:16, one of the newest feeding agencies in Missoula County, provides meals and food boxes to its clients. They were established in 2001, and in their first year of operation, they served 7,673 meals and distributed 1,372 food boxes.²⁵ In 2002, they

served 24,181 meals and distributed 1,501 food boxes.²⁶ The dramatic increase in numbers from 2001 to 2002 is due to the fact that they were not open for the entire year in 2001 and have since experienced an increase in donated supplies.

Finally, the Seeley-Swan food pantry, located in Seeley Lake, opened in 1999. The pantry distributes food boxes filled with non-perishable food items and personal care items. They also provide their clients with food vouchers which they can use to purchase perishable food items such as milk, cheese, bread, and meats at local grocery stores. The grocery stores are later reimbursed by the Seeley-Swan food pantry.²⁷ From 1999 to 2001, the Seeley-Swan food pantry distributed food boxes filled with a six-day supply of food. However, in 2002 they decreased the amount to a three-day supply of food. Since its opening, the number of food boxes the Seeley-Swan food pantry has distributed has gradually increased by 77% (see Figure 9). The amount of pounds of food the Seeley-Swan Food Pantry distributed from 1999 to 2001 increased by 90%, but they experienced a 24% decrease from 2001 to 2002 (see Figure 10).



Why are these trends occurring?

The Personal Responsibility Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), has often been cited as a leading cause behind the increase in food assistance programs such as food banks and soup kitchens (as well as an increase in usage).^{28,29,30} The Missoula Consolidated Plan summary of 1999 states, “Food banks, the Salvation Army Food Pantry, and other service providers are already experiencing an increased demand for repeated services that previously were provided on an emergency-only basis.”³¹ As a result of PRWORA, by 1999, welfare caseloads in Montana had dropped by 60%. However, Montana has the highest number of people working more than one job, has the fastest growing poverty rate, and is ranked as the third highest in child poverty in the country.³² This suggests that PRWORA has done little to alleviate poverty for low-income Montanans.

Those who are eligible for food stamps may not be receiving enough to make it through the month. Nationally, 30% of the people who visit food pantries also receive food stamps.³³ The prevalence of emergency food agencies in the United States “represents a fundamental failure of government to adequately feed its citizens.”³⁴ In 1997, the Missoula Food Bank reported that 32% of the total households that used their services reported receiving food stamps, 26% reported that they did not qualify for food stamps, and 16% indicated “out of food stamps” as the situation that influenced their visit to the MFB.³⁵ In 2002, 29% of the MFB’s total households received food stamps, 31% indicated that they do not qualify for food stamps and 13% claimed “out of food stamps” as the impetus for needing to use their services.³⁶ The percentages of families who must use the MFB’s services and also receive food stamps match nationwide statistics.

In addition to the significant changes implemented by PRWORA, the Poverello Center reports that a steady increase in the homeless population leads to a constant need for their services, and they affirm that their resources are never adequate to meet the demand.³⁷ The 2000 census indicates that Montana ranks fourth in the nation based on the percentage of the population living in poverty.³⁸ The unemployment rate for Missoula County in 2001 was 3.6% and is likely a contributing factor with regard to why people may need to use emergency food relief agencies such as the MFB, the Seeley-Swan food pantry, or the Salvation Army.³⁹ The MFB, for example, reported in 2002 that 32% of its clients indicated that they were unemployed. This percentage of MFB clients who were unemployed has decreased by only 4% since 1997.⁴⁰

Why is this important?

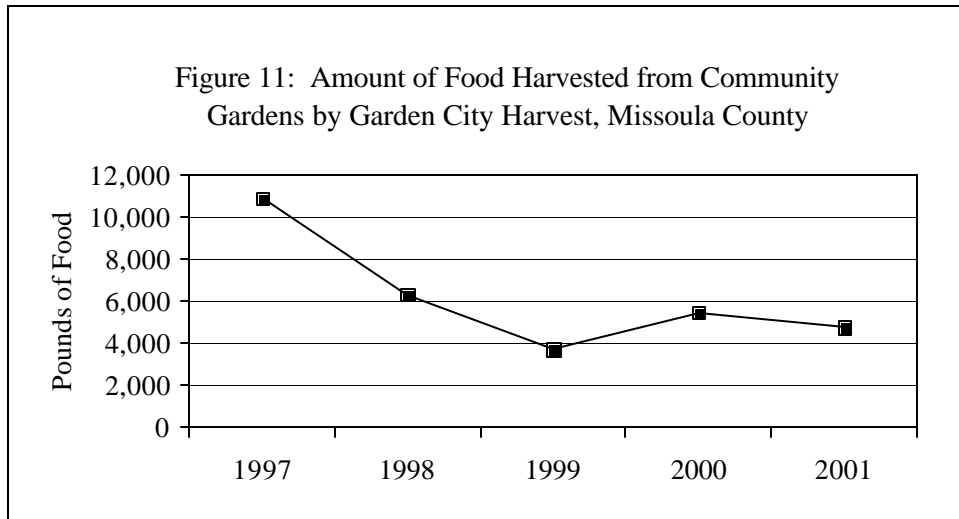
These measures are important because they show that there are thousands of people residing in or near Missoula County who are food insecure. Furthermore, it highlights the possibility that people on welfare are not receiving enough aid to sustain themselves for an entire month.

COMMUNITY GARDENS AND GLEANING

The trends.

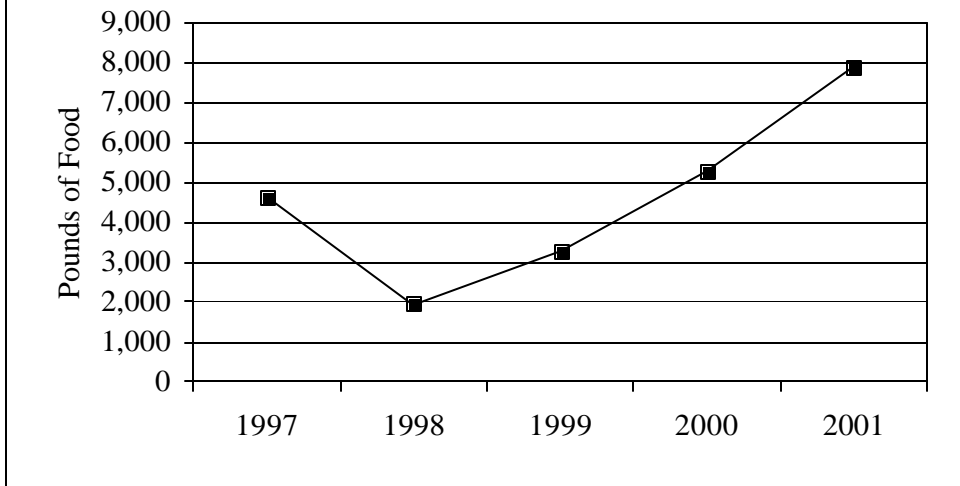
Garden City Harvest (GCH) is an organization that administers the community gardens in Missoula County. This organization has been managing community gardens since 1997. The total number of gardens that are in Missoula County is five: ASUM (Associated Students of the University of Montana) Garden, Mullan Road Garden, River Road Garden, East Missoula Garden, and the Northside Garden. Throughout the past seven years, GCH has been inconsistently running all five of the gardens, although they have been in production for most of the time.

The amount of food harvested (in pounds) from the Community Gardens (excludes PEAS Farm) by GCH and given to the Food Bank, Poverello Center, Joseph Residence, and the Missoula Indian Center (food drop sites) over the last five years has varied. In 1997 the highest amount of vegetables were harvested. The amount of harvested food given to the food drop sites decreased from 1997 to 1999 by 66% (see Figure 11). From 1999 to 2000 the amount increased by about 1500 pounds. In 2001, however, the poundage decreased again.



The Volunteer for Veggies Program is a program where volunteers help with the food aid plots at any of the community garden sites. They receive a portion of the vegetables from the plots in exchange for their labor. During the first year of the program, 4,620 pounds of food were harvested. This dropped in 1998 to 1,944 pounds of food. However, since 1998, the Volunteer for Veggies Program has increased the yields each year thereafter (see Figure 12). Since 1998 (the low), the Volunteer for Veggies Program has increased its pounds of food harvested by 306%.

Figure 12: Amount of Food Harvested Through the Volunteer for Veggies Program Administered by Garden City Harvest, Missoula County



Missoula County does not have an official gleaning program. In 1997, Garden City Harvest had an AmeriCorps volunteer who initiated a gleaning program. This program operated on a volunteer basis through Garden City Harvest for two summers.⁴¹ The amount of fruit gleaned (in pounds) was never specifically recorded at the Food Bank as "gleaned fruit." When the AmeriCorps volunteer moved over to work at the Food Bank, she took the program over as a Food Bank Program. It operated again on a volunteer basis, without recording the amount specifically as "gleaned fruit." During the summer of 2003, no gleaning activities by the Food Bank occurred due to the lack of volunteers and because the Food Bank did not have the proper insurance.⁴² However, Garden City Harvest does glean the community gardens (food aid plots and PEAS Farm) to provide food to the food drop sites, and that food is included in GCH totals presented above and in Figure 11.

Why are these trends occurring?

GCH has been running community gardens since 1997, however, certain community garden locations have changed, thus either smaller or larger sites have been used over the last 7 years. Therefore, the amount in pounds of food harvested yearly has varied. GCH has also been instrumental in helping to establish the Northside Community Garden. In 2002, however, the Missoula Demonstration Project took over the garden, therefore eliminating one community garden from GCH administration. But GCH is reassuming responsibility for the Northside Garden in 2004. The ASUM Community Garden was not administered through GCH until 2003.⁴³

Why is this important?

The services of GCH are important because the programs it administers empower Missoula County community members. The programs teach and allow people to grow their own food in order to provide fresh, nutritious food for their families. The Volunteer for Veggies Program also provides an opportunity for community members to volunteer

at various times and allows the volunteers to bring along their children (if needed) in order to get fresh and nutritious food. The gleaned and growing that GCH does throughout the summer in all of the gardens also provides fresh, nutritious food to many sites that distribute the food to members of the community who may otherwise not have access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

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