



FOOD INSECURITY IN ROCKLAND COUNTY: THE CHALLENGE AND NEEDED ACTION STEPS

TOUCH and our Rockland Community Against Hunger (RCAH) partners are committed to the proposition that nobody should go without food in Rockland County and that all children, families and individuals should have access to the nutritious food they need to survive and thrive.

Food is the most essential material human need of all. We literally can't live without it. This report describes the challenge of food insecurity in Rockland County and key steps needed to mobilize effective and efficient action to address it.

This report addresses:

- 1) The Threat of Food Insecurity in Rockland County**
- 2) Food Security, Inflation and the Affordability Crisis**
- 3) Impact on Children**
- 4) Federal Budget Cuts and Food Insecurity in Rockland**
- 5) Rockland Community Against Hunger (RCAH)'s Response**
- 6) Needed Action Steps**

1. The Threat of Food Insecurity in Rockland County

Rockland County is a beautiful community with many assets, opportunities and advantages for its residents. At the same time, food insecurity in Rockland County is a severe and persistent problem for thousands of families. The number of individuals going to local food pantries in Rockland County increased from 37,147 in June 2019 -- prior to COVID -- to 83,018 in April 2026, an increase of 120% over that time period (see Chart 1).

(Note that the COVID public health emergency began in March 2020 and officially ended in May 2023.)

Unfortunately, food insecurity has persisted at unacceptable levels in the post-COVID era due to major food price inflation and rising costs for housing, health care and other necessary costs putting severe pressure on family budgets.

Research by Feeding America and the Regional Food Bank finds that 1 in 6 children in Rockland County is growing up without secure access to food: <https://regionalfoodbank.net/food-insecurity-by-county/>

Note: Feeding America defines food insecurity as occurring “when a household cannot access enough food due to a lack of money and other essential resources...These factors can be related to household income, expenses, access to affordable health care, the surrounding social and physical environment and barriers to opportunity.”

2. Food Insecurity, Inflation and the Affordability Crisis

The United Way’s ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) Report highlights the strains on low- and middle-income families across New York and in Rockland County that make it difficult to afford nutritious food and other expenses. Median household income in Rockland of \$103,847 is well above the New York State average of \$85,820, but the share of families struggling to make ends meet (below the ALICE threshold) is higher than the New York State average – 54% in Rockland, compared to 48% statewide. 56,276 households in Rockland out of 104,597 have incomes below the ALICE threshold. Twelve percent of Rocklanders live below the poverty line. Another 42% are in families with low- and middle-income wage earners who make enough to live above the poverty line but are below the ALICE threshold. This suggests that the cost of household basics, particularly rent and housing, is much higher in Rockland than the State average. More than half of all Rockland families are struggling to make ends due to the high cost of living here despite higher than average household incomes.

<https://www.unitedforalice.org/county-reports/new-york>

Note: The ALICE Household Survival Budget is the bare-minimum estimated cost of household basics needed to live and work in the current economy, including housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and technology, plus taxes and a contingency fund equal to 10% of the household budget.

<https://www.unitedforalice.org/introducing-ALICE/new-york>

On top of the high cost of these necessities, too many Rockland families have been hammered by surging food prices (see Chart 2).

<https://apnews.com/article/grocery-shopping-prices-food-affordability-8468c1d6532ca762bbcfa17e3c7707d1>

As difficult as inflation has been overall, it has hit even harder when it comes to food prices that have risen faster than the general rate of inflation since 2020. (CPI Inflation calculator, https://www.in2013dollars.com/us/inflation/2020?amount=1&future_pct=0.02)

Action is urgently needed to help close the widening gap between the rising cost of our most basic needs and Rockland families’ ability to pay for them.

3. Impact of food insecurity on Children

In Rockland County, 26% of all children aged 0-17 live in families with income below the Federal poverty level. <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/05000US36087-rockland-county-ny/>

Food insecurity is difficult for anyone but can be especially problematic for children who are still developing. Even a short period of childhood hunger can have a lifelong impact. Food insecurity has negative effects prior to birth. Iron deficiencies in pregnant women are linked to developmental delays and can impact memory and ability to reason in their children (Casey & Winsler). Food-insecure children tend to have weaker immune systems and worse overall health, including a higher prevalence of adverse health outcomes such as asthma, obesity, cardiovascular disease, and cancer (Casey & Winsler; *Child Food Insecurity*). Nutritional deficiencies can stunt growth and contribute to iron-deficiency anemia, rickets, and osteoporosis. As serious as these risks are for children, it's important to recognize that they can be overcome.

Beyond physical health, food insecurity can have a major negative impact on a child's emotional and social well-being. Food insecurity can lead to higher levels of irritability and aggression, especially in younger children who have a harder time regulating their emotions when experiencing physical discomfort (*Food Insecurity*). The stress surrounding food insecurity can lead to anxiety and depression and children may develop food hoarding behaviors or disordered eating (*Food Insecurity*).

Food insecurity disproportionately affects children in families of color. Nearly two in five children in Black families, 37% of children in Latino households, and 31% of children in Asian households experience food insecurity, compared to 21% of children in white households (*Child Food Insecurity*). Children of single mothers, foreign-born parents, or parents with disabilities are also at increased risk of food insecurity (*Child Food Insecurity*). Extensive developmental research demonstrates that household food insecurity impedes children from reaching their full physical, cognitive, and psychosocial potential.

A comprehensive review of relevant research, *Food Insecurity and Child Development: A State-of-the-Art Review*, examines a decade of research from 2011-2021 to describe the impact of food insecurity on child development. The search was limited to high-income countries and children aged from birth to 12 years, including 17 studies. Food insecurity was identified as a powerful stressor for families, with significant negative implications for child health and development. The researchers emphasized the urgent need to recognize the impact of food insecurity on child development, to inform strategies that minimize and alleviate its risks. (Gallegos, Eivers, Sondergeld, and Pattinson, International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 2021). This research is obviously very salient in Rockland County, where 16% of children are food insecure. The sooner we act to address these problems the better the chances will be that more children will overcome the risks associated with childhood food insecurity.

4. Impact of Federal Budget Cuts on Food Insecurity in Rockland

Local demand for nutrition security programs will inevitably increase as the Federal government reduces SNAP benefits and other nutrition programs. This hardship is likely to get worse due to changes to Federal nutrition programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). The reductions in TEFAP funding

by the USDA in 2025 meant that the amount of food available to local pantries was sharply reduced. We know from state-level pilot programs that the harsh provisions in legislation recently approved by Congress are likely to take SNAP benefits away from thousands of eligible families due to overly burdensome reporting requirements and stricter eligibility rules.

Fewer People Will Receive Needed Benefits: H.R. 1, passed by Congress and signed into law in July 2025, cuts SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) by \$186 billion nationwide over 10 years and shifts \$1.2 billion in SNAP costs to New York State. About 300,000 households in New York are expected to lose SNAP benefits in New York as new eligibility requirements are phased in. Over 50,000 Rocklanders receive SNAP benefits as of June 2026. Over 60% of SNAP recipients in our area are children or seniors.
(<https://otda.ny.gov/resources/caseload/2026/2026-06-stats.pdf>)

Work Requirements Have Not Been Effective: Veterans, unhoused people, parents with children over age 14, and people aged 55-64 are no longer exempt from SNAP work requirements under the new law. In addition, administrative hurdles and errors in processing applications impose greater burdens on applicants and cause a significant number of eligible people to lose benefits. Multiple studies of SNAP work requirements have shown them to be ineffective. In *A primer on SNAP work requirements*, researchers Laren Bauer and Chloe East summed up as follows:

“Our conclusion from a review of the literature on work requirements is that the best evidence shows they do not increase employment. Moreover, this research finds work requirements cause a large decrease in participation in SNAP. This is concerning because many SNAP recipients, especially those subject to the ABAWD work requirements, have little safety net to rely on besides SNAP.”

Added Administrative Costs Will Be Imposed on Rockland: The law cuts the Federal share of SNAP administrative costs in half as of October 1, 2026. According to a report by the New York Association of Counties, this will shift \$168 million in SNAP administrative costs to County governments in New York, including \$2.187 million in additional costs for to Rockland.
<https://www.nysac.org/media/rmtfbk53/snap-administrative-cost-shift.pdf>

Federal Benefit Levels Are Inadequate: As essential as SNAP and WIC are, they are insufficient to prevent hunger in our community. The average SNAP benefit is less than \$6 per day per person (\$177 per month) and there are often delays in enrolling people.

The law also caps future SNAP benefits by requiring that the USDA link them to “cost-neutral” adjustments to their Thrifty Food Plan and changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rather than specific food-cost adjustments, which have risen faster than the CPI. As a result of these changes, SNAP benefits are projected to fall further behind the rising cost of food.
<https://hungersolutionsny.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/HR1-impacts-NYS-4-18-26.pdf>

Negative Economic Impact: Food manufacturers and grocery stores will also feel the impact of lower spending. SNAP cuts impact the overall economy - households that use SNAP benefits add \$1.54 to the economy for every dollar spent on food purchases (USDA Economic Research Service: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap/key-statistics-and-research>).

5. Rockland Community Against Hunger (RCAH)’s Response

The Rockland Community Against Hunger (RCAH) coalition was founded by TOUCH and our partner agencies in 2011 to help fill gaps in the local food system and do all we can to ensure that every Rockland family has access to the nutritious food they need to survive and thrive.

Our positive impact is based on remarkable public and private sector partnerships; strong non-partisan support from Rockland County government; and a dedicated team of relentless professionals and amazing volunteers. Our RCAH Steering Committee members include TOUCH; BRIDGES; Catholic Charities Community Services of Rockland; Meals on Wheels of Rockland; The Martin Luther King Jr. Multi-Purpose Center and the Community Food Pantry.

RCAH funding and resources have come from the Rockland County Department of Social Services; The Regional Food Bank of the Hudson Valley, The Rockland County Office of Community Development; Rockland County Department of Health; Rockland Green; Nourish New York; and more than a dozen retail stores such as Stop & Shop; Costco; Target; ShopRite; and Aldi’s that donate their overstocked food to our Food Recovery Program so we can distribute it to 40+ local food pantries that serve Rockland families.

With TOUCH as the lead agency, here are some of RCAH’s accomplishments since 2011:

Get Fresh Food Distributions – since 2011

- Distributed over 5 million pounds of fresh produce and other nutritious food, from the Regional Food Bank to dozens of local food pantries through mass distributions at Clover Stadium and other local venues
- Created Drive-thru weekly distribution model in 2020 in response to COVID pandemic – 1 million pounds in 2020 alone!
- Coordinated by TOUCH and Rockland Conservation & Service Corps

Support for Local Pantries & Meal Programs - Supported by TOUCH & Volunteers

- www.rocklandhunger.org website – pantry hours and availability, volunteer opportunities
- Distribution of pantry hour sheets to all agencies in Rockland
- Provide Need Food cards to help people find food pantries near home
- Organizes regular “Lunch & Learn” informational presentations for local food pantries and meal programs on issues like food safety and volunteer management to help them serve the community better.

Food Recovery & Distribution Program

- Recovered and distributed over seven million pounds of food since 2018, including 6 straight years (2021-2026) distributing over a million pounds of food annually (see Chart 3)
- Picks up food from over 20 different food sources weekly, distributing to over 40 pantries & meal programs
- Coordinated by TOUCH with drivers and vans from TOUCH, BRIDGES, Meals on Wheels & Catholic Charities.

The Food Recovery program is successful due to several key factors:

- Support from the Rockland County Executive, the Rockland County Legislature; Rockland County DSS, Rockland DOH, the Regional Food Bank and our retail food store partners
- A powerful partnership between local government, private retail food donors, Rockland-based non-profit agencies, and an extensive network of volunteers. Each of these components is an essential part of the program
- Detailed partnership agreements between TOUCH, The Regional Food Bank and more than 15 local food retailers, farms and wholesale donors that facilitate consistent food donations 6 days week, 52 weeks of the year
- A dedicated team of pickup and delivery van and truck drivers employed by TOUCH, BRIDGES, Catholic Charities and Meals on Wheels of Rockland, and coordinated by TOUCH's Food Recovery Program Manager and as well as other RCAH Steering Committee members
- A network of 40+ food pantries and hundreds of volunteers that receive and distribute the food rescued by the program
- Key infrastructure including delivery vehicles, cooling units (walk-in freezer and walk-in refrigerator) for storing recovered food and keeping it fresh, scales for weighing food, apps for tracking and reporting pickups
- Delivery to partner pantries timed to coincide with their distribution schedules
- Organizational capacity, expertise and relationships that have steadily increased the program's efficiency for seven years.

6. Needed Action Steps in Rockland

Help from the Federal government and New York State is needed to address the urgent challenges documented in this report. At the same time, our County government has the capacity to build on proven effective measures to alleviate Rockland's ongoing nutrition security crisis.

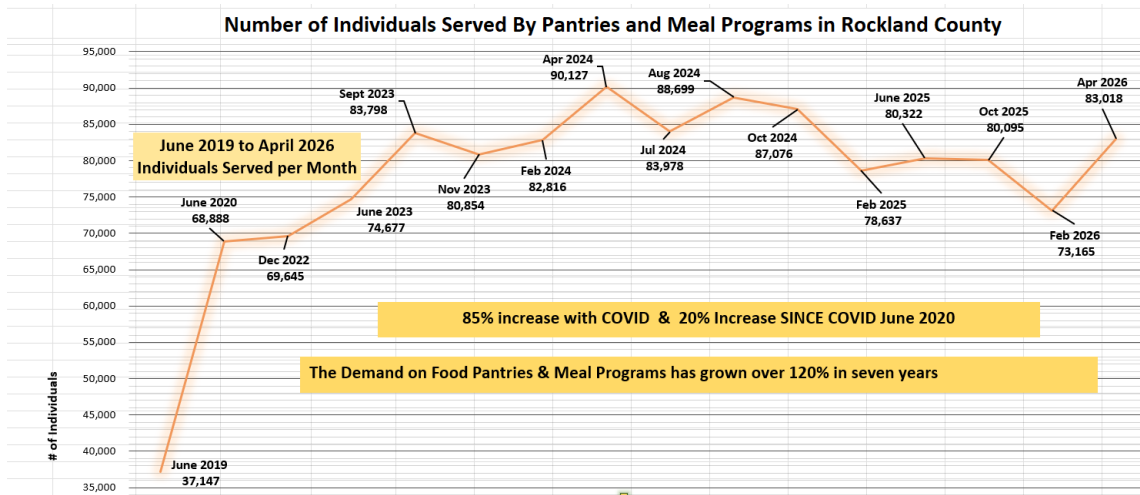
Rockland's response to food insecurity is now at a critical juncture due to the expiration of a \$445,116 in CARES Act CDBG-CV grant that supported the RCAH Food Recovery program from 2022-2025, as well as the expiration of ARPA funds. These funds have been an essential part of our ability to expand the Food Recovery Program to meet the tremendous increased need in Rockland initially caused by COVID, and now continuing due to inflation, particularly much higher food prices. Many of us thought the demand for emergency food would subside when the COVID public health emergency ended in 2023. Unfortunately, the need has not abated and is still more than double what it was prior to the pandemic.

TOUCH is well-prepared to continue coordination of our network of outstanding partners and doing all that we can to ensure that each partner (TOUCH, BRIDGES, Catholic Charities Community Services of Rockland, and Meals on Wheels of Rockland) has the resources they need to sustain the success of this program. This program is remarkably efficient and impactful use of funds to meet urgent human needs in our community.

The overall in-kind value of the food that the RCAH team recovers and distributes through food recovery and Get Fresh mass distributions is over \$3 million annually, more than 10 times the dollar amount of County funding it takes to sustain this program.

Thank you to the County Legislature for your support of this report and your continued partnership in action to alleviate hunger and food Insecurity in Rockland.

CHART 1: The Number of People Served By Rockland Food Pantries Continues to Rise

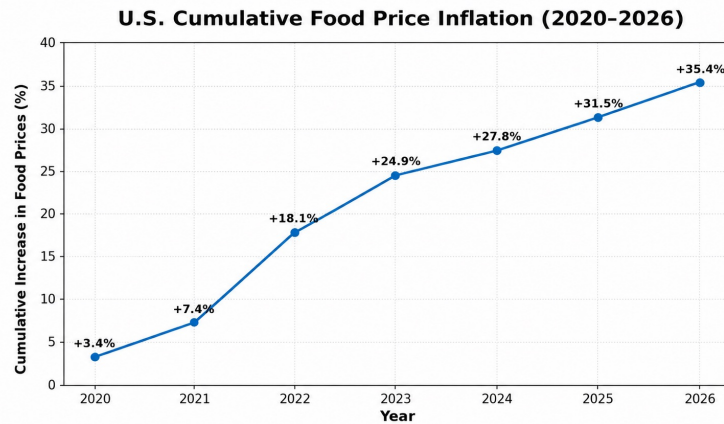


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Rockland Community Against Hunger

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Chart 2: Food Price Inflation

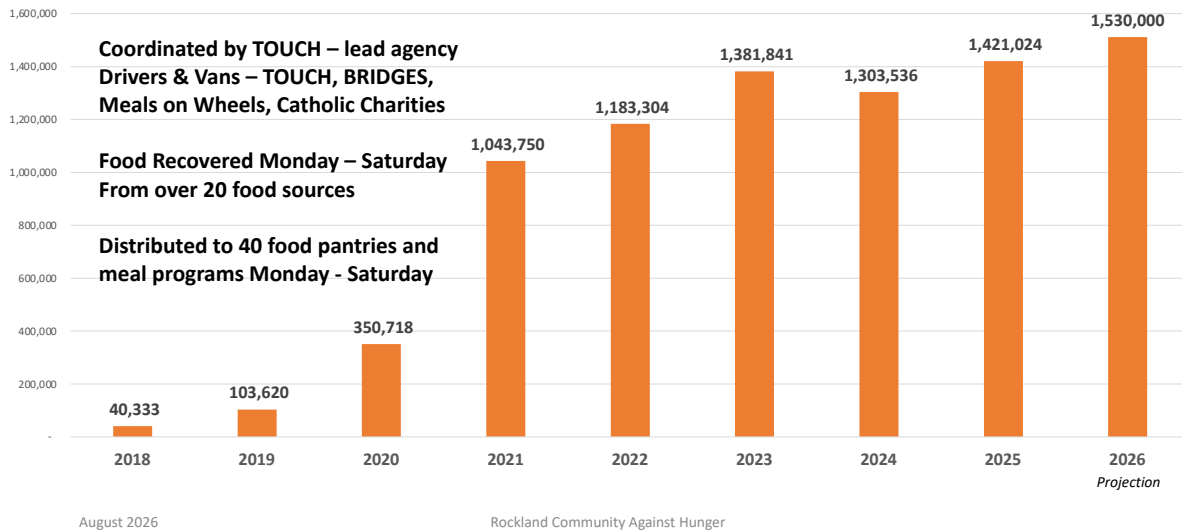


Source: USDA Economic Research Service, Food Price Outlook. Annual average CPI for all food; 2026 is the August 2026 forecast.

August 2026



**CHART 3: RCAH Food Recovery Program -
Number of Pounds Distributed per Year**



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