

Food Security Strategic Plan

2024 – 2025



RAMSEY COUNTY

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SETTING THE CONTEXT

Ramsey County's food security work centers equity to improve health and wellbeing by advancing food sovereignty*, access, and justice to create a sustainable and resilient future that allows communities to thrive.

Food Insecurity is a condition of limited access to healthy, culturally connected, and medically appropriate food to support an active and healthy lifestyle. Food insecurity can contribute to chronic diseases, mental health issues, and social, behavioral, and educational challenges.

Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap data set estimates in 2021 that 17% of Ramsey County children and 11% of adults were food insecure. However, increased demand from local food shelves and food assistance programs show that food insecurity rates are rising.

Ramsey County's racially and ethnically diverse communities experience the highest food insecurity rates, especially among elders, young adults and children under five. For a more detailed data breakdown, please visit the Ramsey County Food Security webpage at www.ramseycounty.us/food-security.

RAMSEY COUNTY'S ALIGNED EFFORTS TO IMPROVE FOOD SECURITY INCLUDE:

- Invested nearly \$800,000 to support Food Security in 2022/23. This funding supported local food shelves, food banks, and food rescue programs to provide more than 5 million pounds of food to our community in 2023.
- Appointed the first Food Security Coordinator to oversee the Food Security Team, collecting current data, observing trends, and building internal capacity and external partnerships.
- Support strategic alignment of Priority "Advancing a Holistic Approach to Strengthen Families," as well as the Urban Institute's Upward Mobility efforts and Climate Action Framework.

* Food sovereignty is the right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and taking ownership within the food and agricultural system.

CREATING OUR STRATEGIC PLAN

"WHAT IS RAMSEY COUNTY'S ROLE IN SUPPORTING GREATER FOOD SECURITY?"

The Food Security Assessment reviewed internal Ramsey County data and other measures to reveal the extent of food insecurity and its impact within the Ramsey County community. Geographic Informations Systems (GIS) mapping helped to identify how historical policies and practices still impact food insecurity rates today. Additionally, more than 400 interviews and surveys were used to engage community on the strategic direction of the County's response. Through this broad community and stakeholder engagement, the following strategic priorities have been defined:

RAMSEY COUNTY FOOD SECURITY KEY PRIORITIES OVERVIEW:

PRIORITY 1: Supporting the Food Safety Net System

PRIORITY 2: Increasing Access to Public Benefits

PRIORITY 3: Building Urban Agriculture

PRIORITY 4: Expanding Food Availability and Affordability

Ramsey County will undertake food security work through these foundational strategies to achieve greater food security:

- **STREAMLINING COMMUNICATIONS** to make sure food resources, information and outreach is resident focused and helps navigate complicated government systems.
- **ADVOCATING LOCALLY AND FEDERALLY FOR HUNGER RELIEF** working through a systems and policy lens to help enhance the food system and support those who struggle to meet their basic food needs.



PRIORITY 1: SUPPORTING THE FOOD SAFETY NET SYSTEM*



1.1 INCREASE CULTURAL, FRESH, AND HEALTHY FOOD OPTIONS

- Increase funding to food shelves for culturally appropriate, fresh, healthy foods.
- Advocate within legislative priorities to encourage state funding for food shelves.
- Encourage the donation of culturally appropriate foods to food shelves.

1.2 SUPPORT FLEXIBILITY TO ADDRESS IMMEDIATE COMMUNITY NEEDS

- Build partnerships within the safety-net system to fill system gaps.
- Build and sustain Food Rescue** system to reduce effects on climate health, reduce food waste and address food insecurity.
- Close transportation gaps that limit access to food resources by building and enhancing partnerships.
- Reduce documentation burden for accessing food at food shelves and other distribution locations.

* Food Safety Net system includes food shelves, food banks, meal programs and other low cost or free food distribution points.

** Food Rescue system collects fresh foods from stores and brings them to food shelves for immediate distribution to the community.

PRIORITY 1: SUPPORTING THE FOOD SAFETY NET SYSTEM

KEY METRICS FOR PRIORITY 1 MAY INCLUDE:

- Amount of grant funding awarded to food safety net organizations.
- Pounds of food distributed to those in need.
- Number of individuals receiving food assistance.
- Pounds of food rescued by safety net system.
- Reviewing food shelf survey data, and total food insecurity rates



"This food shelf has changed my life. I've volunteered at food shelves, driven clients to them... I never thought I would need to utilize one. But everybody there made me feel like there was nothing to feel ashamed about... I'm not embarrassed anymore that utilizing a food shelf is part of my new normal."

*– Community Member feedback
shared by Food Shelf Partner*

PRIORITY 2: INCREASING ACCESS TO PUBLIC BENEFITS *



2.1 INCREASE ACCESS AND EASE OF APPLYING FOR PUBLIC BENEFITS

- Align efforts to integrate new access points to apply for public benefits.
- Increasing co-enrollment and referral of benefits like Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Medical Assistance, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).
- Launch a marketing campaign on public benefits and food resources for priority populations like elderly, young adults, and low wealth residents.

2.2 ENHANCE FOOD INSECURITY SCREENING AND REFERRAL PROCESSES

- Build better systems as a County to assess food insecurity and provide resources.
- Align with community partners to promote referrals to WIC and SNAP benefits.

* Public Benefits like SNAP and WIC provide food-related benefits. But any public benefit, like housing or medical assistance, can stretch the family budget.

PRIORITY 2: INCREASING ACCESS TO PUBLIC BENEFITS

KEY METRICS FOR PRIORITY 2 MAY INCLUDE:

- Percent of eligible residents enrolled in food-related public benefits like SNAP and WIC.
- Number of residents receiving outreach materials to promote their participation in food-focused public benefits.
- Number of partner organizations collaborating with Ramsey County to refer residents to food-focused public benefits.
- Number of residents being internally referred and enrolled in WIC.



PRIORITY 3: BUILDING URBAN AGRICULTURE



3.1 PROMOTE URBAN AGRICULTURE LAND USE IN URBAN PLANNING

- Support policy to expand land availability for long-term agricultural efforts.
- Aligning agriculture-related policies and planning documents into internal department plans.
- Partner with municipalities to encourage policies that promote urban agriculture.
- Educate policy makers on the benefits and needed enhancements to promote effective urban agriculture spaces.

3.2 IMPROVE COMMUNITY ACCESS TO URBAN AGRICULTURE LAND

- Work with partners and community to identify key recommendations to ease land access for long-term use.
- Connect community to urban agriculture resources such as growing education, soil remediation, and food rescue connections.

3.3 INCREASE WEALTH CREATION OPPORTUNITIES

- Create connection points for wealth creation trainings for those growing food.
- Encourage community to join garden-to-retail activities, like farmers markets, small grocers and restaurants.

PRIORITY 3: BUILDING URBAN AGRICULTURE

KEY METRICS FOR PRIORITY 3 MAY INCLUDE:

- Percent of Ramsey County owned land used for urban agriculture.
- Number of municipalities supported by Ramsey County to update zoning and policies to ease urban agriculture access.
- Number of urban growing activities.
- Asset map created with community partners of all points in the urban agriculture landscape, such as education, soil, training, and food rescue resources.



PRIORITY 4: EXPANDING FOOD AVAILABILITY AND AFFORDABILITY



4.1 EXPAND SUBSIDY PROGRAMS

- Expand usage of Market Bucks and Fare for All through streamlined communications and benefit redemption.
- Align legislative priorities to encourage state funding for expanded access to subsidized programs, like Market Bucks to make food more affordable.

4.2 MAINTAIN STABLE, CONSISTENT FOOD ACCESS FOR ALL RESIDENTS

- Maintain an updated map of all food access points in the county, including farmers markets, food shelves, and grocery stores to promote food access in areas with limited food availability.
- Expand food rescue opportunities to ensure food affordability.
- Continue to build partnerships so that areas of low food access points can be addressed.

PRIORITY 4: EXPANDING FOOD AVAILABILITY AND AFFORDABILITY

KEY METRICS FOR PRIORITY 4 MAY INCLUDE:

- Percent of increase in use of subsidized food programs.
- Continued updates of food resource maps with partnership input.



Acknowledgements

THANK YOU TO ALL THE INDIVIDUALS AND TEAMS WHO CONTRIBUTE TO OUR WORK.

Internal Ramsey County department leaders and staff who support food security through an intersectional approach, including: Government Relations, Policy and Planning, Communications, Recycling and Energy, Public Health, Financial Assistance Services, Environmental Health, Community and Economic Development, Libraries, Housing Stability, Property Tax, Records and Election Services, Research and Evaluation, Climate Health, Veterans Services, Community Corrections, Mental Health and Enterprise Services, among others.

External Partners' Network is vast, essential, and made up of representatives from community organizations, health care entities, municipalities, local food shelves, food banks, and advocacy and cultural organizations. We appreciate and thank you for your partnership.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Ramsey County is led by a Board of County Commissioners who are elected representatives of our seven districts. Please reach out to your city, county, state, or federal representatives to share your thoughts on shifting the food system and prioritizing food security.

CONTACT

Carissa Dillon, Food Security Coordinator

carissa.dillon@ramseycounty.us

www.ramseycounty.us/foodsecurity

