

Central Rivers Farmshed 2022 Food For All Report



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Contributions from:
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Thank you to our major operational sponsors. Their contributions make all Farmshed programs possible.



Table of Contents and Authors

p. 2- Introduction

p. 3- Terminology

p. 4,5- Food Insecurity in Portage County and its Health Impact

p. 6-8- Sib Pab (Helping Hands), a Cultural Food Security Program

p. 9- Rural Health and the Mobile Pantry

p. 10- Badger State Boxes, Hunger Task Force Partnership

p. 11- Senior Stock Boxes

p. 12- Conclusion

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Ann Vang is the Sib Pab lead for Central Rivers Farmshed. She has greatly led Farmshed into becoming more culturally responsive in our programs for the community.

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Trevor Drake is the executive director of Central Rivers Farmshed. He is nearing three years with the organization, starting out as kitchen manager in June 2020.



Introduction:

Central Rivers Farmshed's mission is to build a resilient local food economy. We work with local farmers and businesses in the Central Wisconsin region to support our local economy and improve community health.

Our goals include:

1. Ensuring everyone in our community can choose healthy and delicious food.
2. Provide fun ways to enjoy food grown in central Wisconsin year round.
3. Demonstrate growing practices that are good for our water and soil.
4. Launch new business and encourage all businesses to source ingredients locally.

In 2019, the Farmshed Board developed a strategic plan that led to Farmshed to become actively involved in advancing health equity and expanding food security efforts in Portage County in the year 2020. Central Rivers Farmshed fulfills a missing role in many food security programs: a relationship with local farmers to provide fresh, whole produce.

Food security is more than just relieving physical hunger. It is also ensuring that there is access to nutritious foods that help support an active lifestyle. Many of the food products in the U.S that are the cheapest lack high nutritional value to support growth and development of children and health maintenance in older adults. A [study](#) by Harvard found that diets consisting of fruits, vegetables, fish, nuts, cost an average of \$1.50 more per day (\$550 a year) than diets that make up of highly processed foods, meats, and refined grains. Established food policies play a large role in this cost difference, favoring production that is focused on “inexpensive, high volume” food output. Policies can be leveraged to support a food system infrastructure that is centered on sourcing from local producers and making nutritious foods inexpensive and accessible.

Central Rivers Farmshed has built partnerships with local food pantries, hospitals, schools, the Hunger Task Force of Milwaukee, and shelters to improve Portage County urban and rural residents' access to fresh, local produce and culturally appropriate meals. In early 2022, we were recognized as Healthy People 2030 Champions for our work aligning with the [2030 Healthy People Program Objectives](#) established by the U.S Department of Health and Human Services-Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Our prominent food security programs and partnerships include Sib Pab (Helping Hands), the Mobile Pantry of Portage County, Badger State Boxes, and Senior Stockboxes.



Terminology:

- **ALICE**- an acronym for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, and Employed, individuals who make above the federal poverty level but have difficulty meeting basic living needs
- **Culture**- attitudes, values, beliefs, and customs often learned in our earliest experiences without deliberate teaching done by anyone
- **Cultural Food Insecurity**- unreliable access to availability, utilization, food preparation, sharing and consumption of traditional foods
- **Equality**- making sure everyone has access to the same things to be healthy
- **Foodways**- preparing, sharing, and consuming foods
- **Food Insecure**- lack of consistent access to food to fulfill a healthy, active life
- **Food Secure**- consistent access to food to fulfill a healthy, active life
- **Health Disparities**- differences in health status (quality of life, rate of disease, rates of death) between different populations, particularly for socially disadvantaged groups
 - They describe the problem, *but not* how the problem arose
- **Health Equity**- everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. It requires removing obstacles to health, powerlessness, lack of access to care, discrimination, etc.
- **Health Inequities**- a health disparity that is unfair and reflects injustice. Must address and remove obstacles to health and their consequences.
- **Social Determinants of Health**- economic, environmental, and social conditions that impact a person's health status



Food Insecurity in Portage County & its Health Impact

In the state of Wisconsin, 415,400, or 7.2% of the total population are considered to be food insecure. (2020) In Portage County, 7.9%, or 5,560 of people are food insecure. As of 2019, seniors have been the fastest growing age group experiencing food insecurities. Many older adults do not work and may be living on a fixed income that doesn't fluctuate with the rising costs of living we've experienced in 2022. Quality nutrition for older adults is vital to help prevent falls, chronic disease prevention, and living independently.

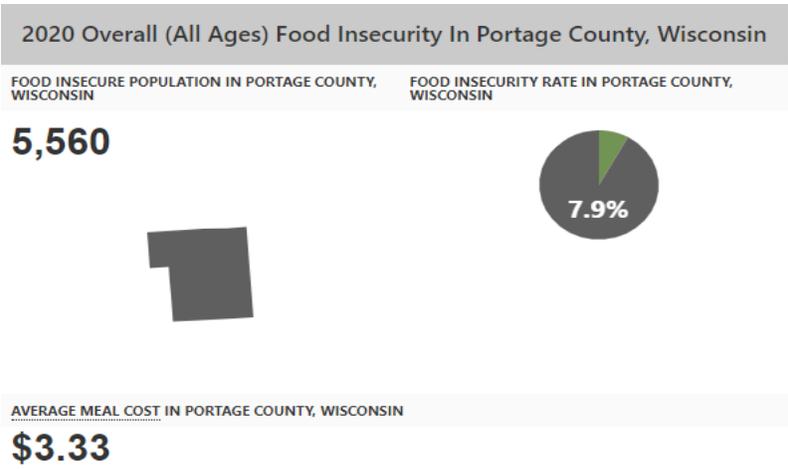
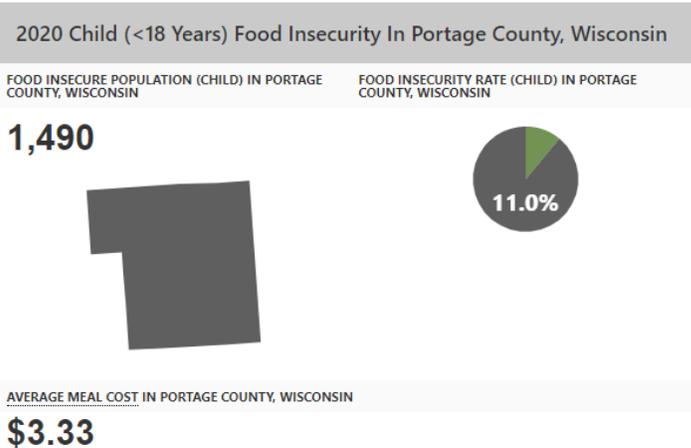


Table 1 [Via Feeding America](#)

Table 2 [Via Feeding America](#)

Child food insecurity (younger than 18) stands at 160,890 children in Wisconsin, 12.6%. In Portage County, 11%, or 1,490 children are food insecure. Nutritional foods are vital for the growth and development of children. Children that experience food insecurity are more likely to have higher healthcare expenses in the future, increase risk of poverty later in life, lower wages, and lower educational achievement. These children heavily rely on school lunches to provide them with their hunger and nutritional needs. However, many school districts are no longer serving free lunches to students due to lack of funding after the COVID-19 pandemic. School lunches in Stevens Point Area School District range from \$10 a week

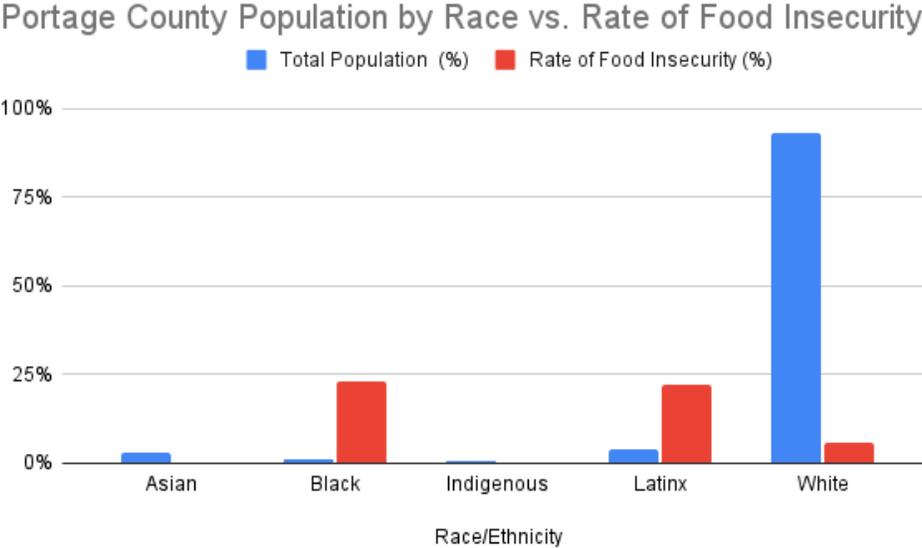




to \$12 a week depending on age. For families considered to be in the ALICE group, this adds an additional stressor in food access for children.

Portage County has racial disparities when it comes to food access. Black and Latinx populations each make up less than 10% of the total Portage County population, yet each experience food insecurity at four times the rate as Portage County’s white population. There is presently no data on food insecurity for Asian and Indigenous populations.

Table 3



Social determinants of health that influence disparities in access to nutritional foods include income, education, age, geographic location, racism, transportation, and housing. Central Rivers Farmshed is specifically working with populations in lower income brackets, the young and aging populations, those living in rural areas, and those from ethnic diverse backgrounds. Through support of Community Health Improvement Plan funding, the Community Foundation, Monogram Loves Kids, The Beloved Community Church, and the Hunger Task Force of Milwaukee, Farmshed has been able to lend a helping hand in local efforts to mitigate hunger in Portage County, increase access to produce, and economically support local farmers. This report documents the work done 2022 and our intentions to bring Food For All in the years to come.



Sib Pab (Helping Hands), a Cultural Food Security Program

Cultural food security programs are defined in our context as programs that authentically cater foods for specific cultural groups. Sib Pab (SHEE-PAH) is the only cultural specific meal program of its kind in Portage County, serving the Hmong population. [Portage County](#) residents largely identify as white followed by Latinx, Asian, Black, and Indigenous. As previously mentioned, non-white racial groups make up less than 10% of the Portage County's total population, yet experience the highest rates of food insecurity (Table 3), with little to no cultural food resources available to them. Individuals can be considered food secure, but culturally food insecure. Having access to foods that reflect one's cultural background helps them maintain a sense of [identity, emotional well-being, belonging, and safety](#). In all food security programming, culture is an essential component to best serve the population you are working with.

Sib Pab, which translates to 'Helping Hands' in Hmong, is a unique and powerful program in Stevens Point. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the disparity in food access for Hmong elders and disabled residents became apparent to the Client Assistance Program (CAP) Services Hmong UPLIFT program. The individuals who built this program are from the Hmong community. Their cultural knowledge, trust, and communication abilities with elders were incredibly important to Farmshed and the growth of this program. They helped us establish trust with the elders and Hmong farmers, allowing us to continuously source as many ingredients as possible from Hmong farmers, including seeds and plants for Farmshed's garden. Involving community members in community health projects is essential to best serve your participants and ensure a sustainable, yet expanding program. The Aging and Disability Resource Center of Portage County (ADRC) continues to help us sustain the elder program as one of the original partners by reimbursing up to 60 meals a month.

Sib Pab in the schools **has expanded by 60% this year**. We started the 2021-2022 school year lunch with 30 students and are currently in the 2022-2023 school year serving 50. Our long term goal is to grow in capacity and resources to serve more students and cater meals from Latinx, Black, and Indigenous cultures made by contracted chefs from those cultures. Students reported these lunches bring representation of various cultures, increase feelings of belonging, overall mood improvement, and increase access to a variety of fruits and vegetables. Students have directly stated that they "devour (their) veggies," from the Sib Pab program, but don't take the vegetables offered by regular school lunch. Thus showing that cultural foods play an essential role in both social and physical well-being.



The students who receive Sib Pab lunches are vocal advocates for themselves, their younger siblings, and their peers from other cultural backgrounds to continue and expand the Sib Pab program. Testimonials from students can be read below.

“This program lets Hmong people express themselves through food.”

“Having access to this program has given me the opportunity to experience my culture in a space where it can be hard to be Hmong.”

“The program is a wonderful way to have Hmong food at school instead of just at home.”

“When I get food, it makes me feel like I am at home.”

“I feel less ashamed to have my cultural foods now that it is provided by a school partnership.”

“I feel a greater sense of belonging with people from other backgrounds.”

“I look forward to school more knowing that Tuesdays I get a Sib Pab lunch.”

“Having this program makes me excited that we, diverse students, can have our traditional food for lunch!”

“This program makes me want to come to school.”

“Sib Pab was an amazing opportunity for the seniors and juniors to share a meal and some laughs. Thank you for the food and the memories!”

“I enjoy this program because it makes me feel good to be myself in an accepting community program.”

“This program helps me come to school more and it makes Tuesdays better.”

“Having this program allows for other people to experience something new.”

“Sib Pab helps show people that food is an important part of culture.”

“I see it as an opening to bring other cultural programs to the school.”

Sib Pab has received continuous support from the general public as well. Regular volunteers come in to help prepare meals with our Sib Pab lead, Ann. She offers the opportunity to learn about Hmong culture, food preparation, and taste the meals. This program supports building cultural humility among the community to better understand why culture is an important part of food and health.



Sib Pab participants, volunteers, and meals



Rural Food Access and Mobile Pantry

Most Portage County residents live in an urban area, but 36% live in rural areas. Both settings experience their own hardships when it comes to food access. Having reliable transportation, money for gas and food pose barriers for rural residents. Many utilize gas stations or convenience stores for groceries, which don't offer a variety of nutritious options such as fruits and vegetables. Many towns in Portage County such as Almond-Bancroft, Junction City, Rosholt, Amherst, Amherst-Junction only have one or no grocery stores and have to travel to more urban areas such as Stevens Point and Plover for affordable groceries, which exceeds 20 minutes in travel times in some towns. Their rural geographic location is why the Mobile Pantry of Portage County serves them.

The Mobile Pantry is a non-profit organization that is run by volunteers who work to “enrich lives through the delivery of food to individuals and families with limited resources to access transportation to a food pantry.” Their work out of the Beloved Community Church involves sorting food, checking expiration dates, and packaging deliveries to be driven to homes twice a month. Central Rivers Farmshed partnered with the Mobile Pantry to enhance their contributions with locally grown, fresh produce. The Mobile Pantry receives donations of food and money for their deliveries, and our partnership best ensures that fresh produce is a part of that delivery. A representative from Mobile Pantry has stated, *"I wish we could keep our families fed with more healthy food options like Farmshed has been providing. Without Farmshed we end up focusing on keeping bellies full and that means a lot of inexpensive and convenient options are provided."* Our partnership is built on the shared value and knowledge that access to nourishing foods in food security programs are essential for the overall health of the recipient, and that relieving physical hunger is not the only goal of food security efforts.

[About 95% of Mobile Pantry recipients](#) state that these deliveries “have or are currently preventing hunger in the home.” Farmshed donates a total of 336 paper grocery bags of produce a year to all recipients of the Mobile Pantry, not only to prevent hunger but give them greater opportunity to access nourishing foods. Farmshed follows food through its season, so recipients receive a variety of different vegetables depending on the time of year. Continuous monetary support from the general public and donors allow us to source produce directly from local farmers. We intend on continuing this partnership and exercising our goals to make local food a choice for all.



Badger State Boxes, Hunger Task Force Partnership

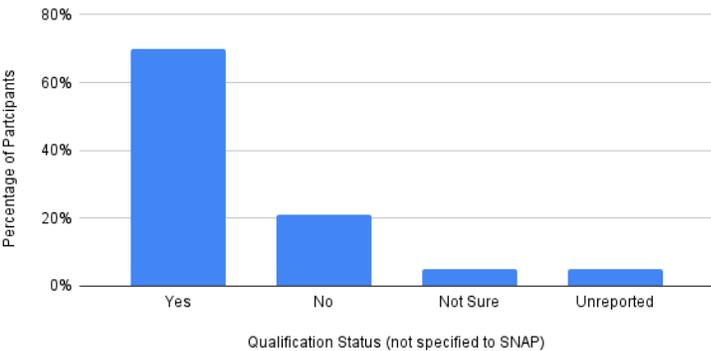
In June of 2022, Central Rivers Farmshed held its first public distribution of Badger State Boxes. Badger State Boxes is a monthly supplemental nutrition program through the Hunger Task Force supported by American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. This is a unique program for multiple reasons: all the products are sourced from Wisconsin farms, its a self-determined income eligibility program, and the income eligibility bracket is considerably higher than similar federally funded programs. For example, a household of four making less than \$83,250 a year qualifies for a Badger Box. This program directly caters to people who are in the ALICE group, individuals who are working but still not earning enough to meet all their basic needs. A Badger Box is meant to bring relief for participants from purchasing food during the month and help them with their other necessities. Farmshed has partnered with Central City Market to distribute boxes.

Badger State Boxes are also unique in that the quality of food given is considered to be much higher than compared to food pantries, as told by participants of the program. Farmshed has received multiple messages from participants after distribution about the quality of food including, *“The Badger Box food was simply stunning. I picked up a box for my daughter this morning (she is disabled physically and unable to walk long distances or carry heavy things), so she asked if I'd go in and get a box for her. It could not have been easier, and the foods contained in the box were wonderful. What a great assortment! Thank you for coordinating this distribution to the community. It is very much appreciated!”* At Farmshed’s distribution site, we also have given users the opportunity to choose from a variety of locally grown vegetables donated from farmers and Farmshed’s garden. We harvested a total of 125 pounds of produce from our garden this summer and donated all of it to the general public through our offices’ ‘Pop Up Produce’ stand and Badger State Box distribution.

Table 4

During our August distribution we surveyed our participants to see how many users didn’t qualify for other federal assistance programs: 21% of users did not qualify and 5% were unsure. Having food programs that aren’t as restrictive in qualifications or have intensive sign up processes allow more people needing these services to be able to access and use them. Farmshed is grateful to continue serving the city of Stevens Point in 2023.

Qualification Status of Badger Box Participants to Other Government Assistance Programs



Senior Stock Boxes

Starting in May of 2022, Central Rivers Farmshed received generous support from Marshfield Clinic Health System to add locally sourced products, such as eggs, fresh and frozen vegetables to the Senior Stock Box program. These boxes are also provided through The Hunger Task Force to support seniors experiencing hunger. As mentioned, seniors are the fastest growing segment of the population who are experiencing [food insecurity](#) due to not working, living on fixed incomes, living alone, or restricted mobility. About 7.4 million seniors live below the poverty line and *before* the pandemic 9.7 million were at risk of facing hunger. Nutrition needs are especially important for older adults to continue living active lifestyles. Staying hydrated, having enough protein, and needing to consume foods high in certain vitamins and minerals are important components of an older adult's [diet](#). Progression of chronic diseases, increased risk of falling, and muscle degradation are all potential outcomes of not having adequate nutrition.

Stock Boxes is a monthly distribution that provides staples of a balanced diet. Distribution from the Aging and Disability Resource Center of Portage County (ADRC) and deliveries through Curbwise LLC helps seniors access these boxes with ease. An average of 42 seniors are served each month. [In the first three months](#) of Farmshed donating local products, seniors have received more than 240 pounds of fresh vegetables, 150 pounds of frozen vegetables, and 90 dozen local eggs. From May to September, thanks to a monetary donation from Marshfield Clinic Health System, that number totaled to 905 pounds of vegetables.



The ability for Farmshed to directly serve older adults is in large part through the support of Marshfield Clinic Health System and the partnerships with community entities, such as the ADRC and Curbwise LLC. The connection with the ADRC allows us to extend our services to more people who may not already know about our organization, but are familiar with services provided by ADRC. Curbwise LLC provides an essential service that neither we or the ADRC provide, the ability to bring the boxes directly to the user. The Stock Box program is an example of the importance for partnerships between organizations to best serve the intended population.



Conclusion:

Achieving health equity and food security for all people must involve policy changes that support an infrastructure and system that reinforces equitable access to cultural, affordable, and high quality foods. This means addressing multiple social determinants of health including housing, employment, environment, and education. These are changes that are not made quickly or easily, and involve many partnerships and collaborations with government workers, nonprofit organizations, schools, and community members. In the meantime, Central Rivers Farmshed remains working with our existing partners and as Healthy People 2030 Champions to help mitigate the impacts felt by the existing food security conditions. We commit to continue *and expand* our work to:

1. Serve culturally appropriate meals and sourcing ingredients from local ethnic farmers and stores as much as possible.
2. Continue to support local growers economically and infrastructurally so they can continue producing local food for the community.
3. Purchase from local farmers to help bring greater access to local food to more community members.
4. Provide fresh, whole, local produce to community partners to increase their participants' access to produce.

The support we have received from the Aspirus Community Health Improvement Plan fund, the Community Foundation, Marshfield Clinic Health System, Monogram Loves Kids, the Beloved Community Church, and the Hunger Task Force of Milwaukee has been essential to our start, sustainability, and expansion of our work in health equity. Moreso, the support we have received from the community, through memberships, donations, volunteering, and even buying our weekly soups continues to drive our work. Community members and organizations play an essential role in the establishment and success of community health programs. Through collaboration of ideas and resources, we can together create an inclusive, equitable, respectful, and empowering community for all. Central Rivers Farmshed has and always will promote buying from your local farms and businesses, eating seasonally, and practicing growing practices that are good for land and soil. Moving forward, we want to engage our community further in providing support so everyone can **make the choice** to have fresh, locally grown produce.