

Who Uses Maine's Food Pantries?

Recent changes in government food assistance programs may impact food pantry use and resources

Background

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the country's largest food assistance program. In addition to monthly benefits to purchase food, enrolled households are eligible to access Maine Harvest Bucks, an incentive program to purchase additional produce at participating farmers' markets.

In 2025, SNAP has had multiple changes including changes in eligibility for some households as implemented under provisions of Public Law 119-21 (also known as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act), which became law in July. More recently, timely access to SNAP benefits have been impacted by the government shutdown in October and November 2025, which delayed full SNAP benefit payments in November. At the same time, grocery costs have increased 30% in the past five years, putting new financial pressure on Maine households¹.

As a result of these changes, there is potential for food insecure households to utilize other food assistance programs and supports, including Maine's food pantries. **But who uses SNAP and food pantries and how might these changes impact the charitable food system?**

This analysis is based on survey data collected in Maine using an online sample from Qualtrics (a professional survey company) between May and July 2024, with a total population of 720 adults. The survey respondents are representative of racial and ethnic diversity in the state, but because the survey oversampled low-income households, the following statistics are weighted by income to be representative of state income levels from the 2024 American Community Survey.

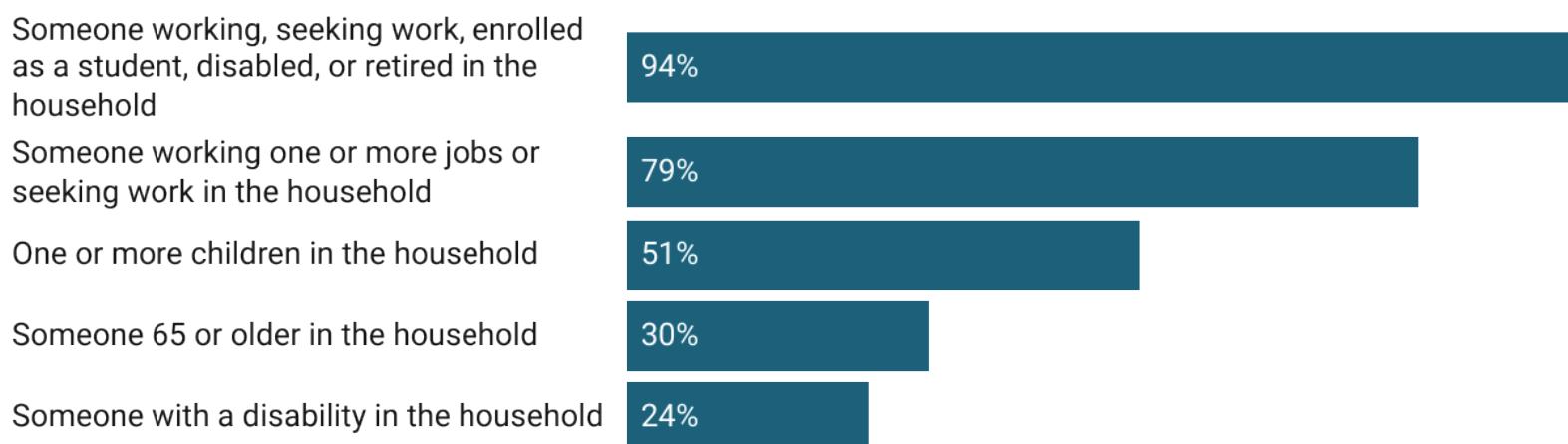


Figure 1. Household characteristics of respondents who had utilized a food pantry/ shelf in past 12 months.

1. Horsley, S. (2025, September 19). Grocery prices have jumped up, and there's no relief in sight. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2025/09/19/nx-s1-5539547/grocery-prices-tariffs-food-inflation>

Food Insecure Households Employ Multiple Food Access Strategies

Among food insecure households, over half (58%) were enrolled in SNAP. Yet nearly all households (93%) who participate in SNAP also reported that they would need additional benefits to meet their food needs. Perhaps as a result of this, many food insecure households utilize multiple strategies for food access.

Half (50%) of food insecure households are seeking support from two or more food access supports including from SNAP, WIC, food pantries or shelves, school meal programs, free farmstands or community fridges, Meals on Wheels, and community meal sites. Importantly, over a quarter (26%) of food insecure households did not access any form of food assistance.

Over two-thirds (69%) of respondents who reported utilizing food pantries in Maine are also enrolled in SNAP

Who Utilizes Maine Food Pantries and Shelves?

The majority (94%) of individuals who visited a food pantry in the past year have someone in their household who was working one or more jobs, seeking work, enrolled as a student, disabled, or retired. Approximately half (51%) have children in the household. Twenty-four percent have someone with a disability in their household, and 30% have someone 65 years of age or older in the household (Figure 1).

Most food pantry clients (80%) use some additional form of food assistance, though 20% only rely on food pantries for food assistance. Approximately

two-thirds (69%) of respondents who reported utilizing food pantries in Maine are also enrolled in SNAP.

Summary and Implications

The government shutdown has delayed the disbursement of November SNAP benefits, impacting Maine residents who rely on the program to meet their household food needs. Additionally, forthcoming changes to SNAP will impact eligibility requirements for certain populations and how certain household costs, particularly internet and utilities, are weighed to calculate benefit levels².

These impacts may have multiple potential effects on Maine food pantries and Good Shepherd Food Bank including:

- Given that 69% of food pantry visitors rely on SNAP benefits, food pantries could expect a significant increase in demand among clients as SNAP benefits are delayed, reduced, or cut off
- Additionally, since 13% of food insecure households rely solely on SNAP to support their food security needs, food pantries could expect to see new clients from this population as well

“Food is becoming too expensive to eat properly for every meal, so we have to pick and choose what we buy.”
Female respondent in Piscataquis County

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2. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2025, September 4). Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program provisions of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025: Information memorandum [Information memorandum]. U.S. Department of Agriculture.
<https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/OBBB-SNAP-Provisions-Implementation-Memo.pdf>