

Kent County Emergency Needs Task Force



Emergency Food Assistance Subcommittee

- **Purpose:** *Assessment of the Acquisition, Storage, and Distribution of Food and Related Support Services*

Mission

- **To ensure that all people of Kent County have access to safe, adequate, affordable, and nutritious food.**

Background

The Emergency Needs Task Force (ENTF) Food Assistance Subcommittee is a countywide body that plans a coordinated approach in addressing the food insecurity faced by many county residents. Established in 1982, the ENTF Food Assistance Subcommittee is composed of a wide range of public, nonprofit, for profit, faith-based, health care, and educational institutions.

The (ENTF) Food Assistance Subcommittee and its members are closely tied to cutting edge national anti-hunger strategies and actions. It recognizes that eliminating hunger requires advocacy for fair public policies and education for those who suffer from food insecurity (inadequate access to enough nutritionally adequate and safe food for an active and healthy life).

The Kent County food delivery system has evolved into a sophisticated entity where collaboration, innovation, and a desire for increasing effectiveness describe its performance. Because there is a community-based network of food providers who can provide food assistance on a nearly 24/7 basis, few county residents involuntarily go without food.

In its early stages, food delivery in Kent County was primarily concerned with meeting emergency food crises. Now, it is able to address longer-term and more complex issues such as the nutritional quality of distributed food, diet, food education, provision of culturally appropriate food, responding to food-related illnesses, and transport and distribution of healthy food to all food providers and consumers.

It was in this context that the ENTF Food Assistance Subcommittee embarked on the creation of a three-year strategic plan that contains targeted and comprehensive strategies to address hunger and food insecurity throughout Kent County.

Vision

Kent County will be a hunger-free zone. Food security for those who experience food shortages is closely tied to *economic security* – the ability to have access to jobs, fair wages, transportation, and health care. The Kent County emergency food system has matured to become a gateway to other vital safety net resources, and its ability to help resolve other economic needs frequently enhances the food security of its clients. The Food Assistance Subcommittee recognizes that achieving economic security will require active, collaborative efforts with such local, regional and national initiatives such as The Vision to End Homelessness, Delta Strategy and Call to Renewal.

In support of this vision, the ENTF Food Assistance Subcommittee shall:

- Promote the shared responsibility of making Kent County a hunger-free community.
- Increase residents' knowledge and ability to access food that maintains and improves their self-reliance while reducing the onset and impact of food-related health problems.
- Improve the nutritional quality of food distributed through all sources, including pantries, meal sites, and wholesale providers.
- Improve in responding to the needs of a diverse community by providing culturally appropriate food choices.

- Increase the use of locally grown and distributed food for meeting the needs of those with emergency food needs.
- Become a partner with emergency responders to acute needs.

Critical Issues / Strategic Goals

Participants identified five critical challenges that will impact the ability of the ENTTF Food Assistance Subcommittee to achieve its purposes. These include:

- 1. Transportation**
- 2. Long-Term Causes of Food Insecurity**
- 3. Health / Illness Trends**
- 4. Increased Costs/ Sufficient Resources**
- 5. Demand / Outreach (to new clients, to non-system users, to a diverse population with varying needs / requirements)**

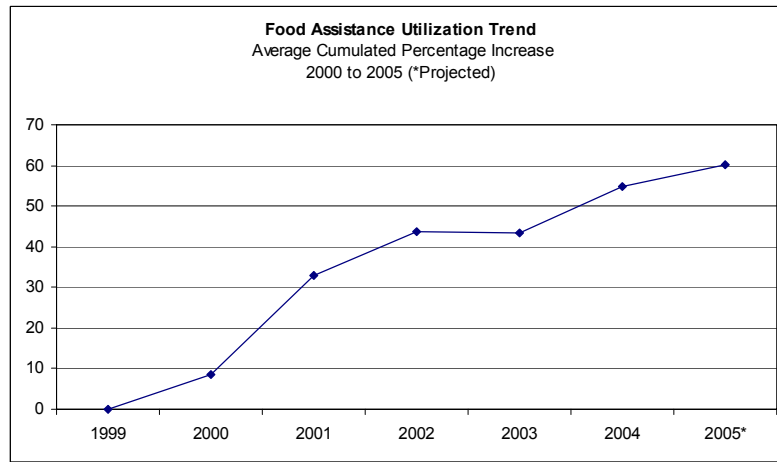
I. Introduction to the Emergency Food Assistance Subcommittee

2004 was a busy and exciting year for food assistance providers in Kent County. With the support of The Heart of West Michigan, United Way Emergency food providers and other community stake holders met to identify needs in the food system and map out a three year plan for improvement. We have clarified the goals and mission of the sub-committee and, established a detailed action plan. Improvement to the food transportation system increased self reliance and healthier choices for clients, greater outreach, creative programming, advocacy partnerships, community gardening and improving resources are now strategic goals which are being addressed. The outcomes we have already realized are new committee members, energy and a cache of fresh ideas to help us accomplish the goals of the sub-committee.

During the year we saw major increases in services in almost every sector which provides food assistance. Member agencies reported increased food need due in part to the persistent negative economic conditions which exist in our state. They have also noted increased community awareness of hunger issues and a willingness to strive to make Kent County a Hunger Free Zone.

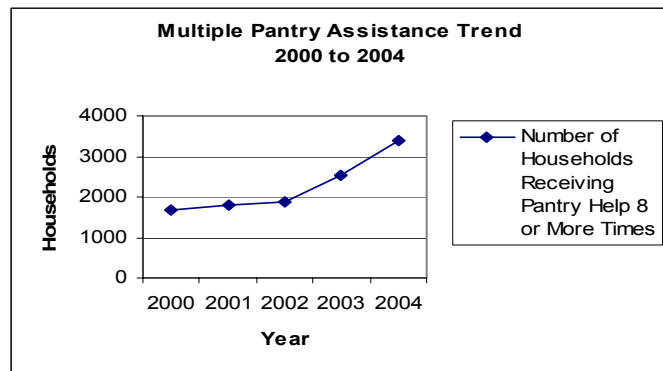
II. Trends in Needs

The following graph is a compilation to show the average cumulative percent change in service level for the last 5 years, as reported by survey to the subcommittee. The projected need for service is included for 2005. The actual increase shown on the graph for 2004 was 11.5%. Committee members are projecting the increase for 2005 to be slightly over 5 %.



Participating Agencies include ACCESS (pantry network), God’s Kitchen (Capitol Lunch and Meals on Wheels), Senior Meals and Senior Meals Food Pantries, United Way’s 211 (food assistance calls), ACSET (commodity programs), DHS (active food stamp cases), The Salvation Army Booth Family Services, Second Harvest Gleaners Food Bank (pounds distributed), Guiding Light, MSU Extension (EFNEP and FNP clients), Kids Food Basket and Spectrum Health’s NOW program.

The number of families who used the emergency food system multiple times in a year is increasing. Data from the ACCESS pantry network shows the number of families that received food assistance eight or more times during the year has increase by eighty-two percent from 2002 to 2004. Since 2000 the number of these households has more than doubled increasing from 1,656 in 2000 to 3,406 in 2004. The increase may be due to a number

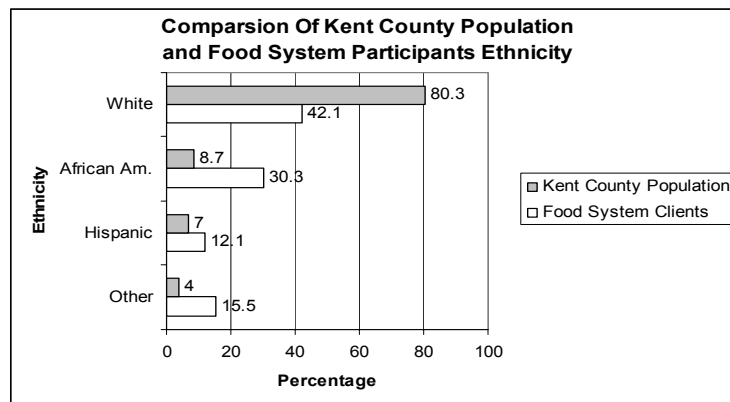


of factors including better marketing of services, clients and agencies embracing the “supplemental” approach to food assistance, more support pantries reporting their services and more flexible guidelines on number of visits allowed by pantries in response to the community need.

The senior pantry reported that services grew 40 percent, while delivered senior meals declined in 2004.

III. Trends in client demographics

The graph shows the ethnicity of clients using the emergency food assistance network compared to the general population in Kent County. In previous years this report has presented ethnicity of food pantry clients only. This year the data includes information from a variety of providers and gives a better cross section of the populations being served.



Whites made up the highest percentage of clients that used the food system in 2004. The data also shows that minorities in the county participate in the emergency food system at higher rates relative to their numbers in the general population. This is a significant and consistent trend, racial/ethnic minorities who are over represented in low-income populations are more likely to experience chronic health issues, and suffer greater disparities in health outcomes. Among low-income populations, lack of adequate nutrition negatively impacts disease maintenance and outcomes. For example, the prevalence of diabetes is 70% higher among African Americans, and nearly 100% higher among Hispanics than among whites.

IV. Trends in Resources

According to a U.S. Department of Agriculture report, Michigan leads the nation's large states in ensuring that needy families have access to food. It is estimated that more than 65 percent of Michigan residents who qualified for food assistance received it during fiscal year 2002. Michigan exceeds the national average, which stands at 54 percent. In Kent County the ACCESS food Stamp outreach program, in collaboration with DHS has been responsible for more than 300 families receiving benefits since 2002. This includes 123 families which were approved in 2004.

A majority of agencies reported an increased level of service in 2004. Limitations to expanding services were mainly financial and staffing related along with facility restrictions. Financial resources varied with individual agencies. Many reported that rising food costs have made the hunger relief program a challenge. Three programs experienced a cut in United Way funding, including Second Harvest Gleaners. Finances may become even more of a challenge as the food network moves toward assisting clients with more nutritious and healthy choices. These higher "front end" costs may provide substantial long term cost reduction in other areas for the community as fewer clients and their families suffer from food related health problems.

Food resources increased or were at the same level as in 2003. While no agencies reported a decrease in food resources some did fail to reach their service projections. ACSET (through their TFAP and CFSP programs) was able to distribute about one million more pounds of food than originally anticipated for 2004. This helped off set reductions by other agencies. All three major ACCESS food drives (Channel 13's Food for Families, the County Wide Food Drive and Care Week) exceeded their goals and broke all previous records for pounds of food collected in 2004.

Volunteer staffing remains the same or has increased slightly for most agencies.

V. Unmet Needs

United Way's 2-1-1 reported that there were 87 (1.55%) unmet food assistance requests of the 5,605 that they received in 2004. About a third of the unmet need was related to lack of transportation and about another third of the callers refused the referral that was provided by 2-1-1 staff.

As part of the strategic plan the Food Sub-committee is working closely with the transportation committee to address transportation needs in the food system at all levels.

The agencies surveyed reported that they could serve approximately 20% more clients if they had additional financial resources for food and staffing. This represents the system's current potential capacity without additional capital investment in facilities.

VI. Status of 2004 Recommendations:

The strategic planning process conducted by the committee last year accomplished several of the 2004 recommendations and laid the ground work for future improvement in the emergency food system. The new action plan incorporates and expands on the 2004 objectives.

VII. Recommendations for 2005

The planning process has expanded the membership of the committee but we will continue to emphasize the importance of committee diversity as a priority. The following are the specific action plan objectives.

- 1. Improve food distribution from the original source to the end user, by engaging the entire ENTFF in addressing transportation issues that affect meeting the community's emergency needs (Transportation).**
- 2. Increase the availability of healthy foods within neighborhoods by increasing the number of people growing their own food who have used food assistance resources, and by increasing residents' participation in programs that foster self-reliance (Long-Term Causes of Food Insecurity).**
- 3. Increase residents' knowledge and ability to obtain food that maintains and improve their self-reliance while reducing the onset and impact of food-related health problems, and improve the nutritional quality of food distributed through all sources, including pantries, meal sites and wholesalers (Health / Illness Trends).**
- 4. Increase institutional (foundations, businesses, churches, nonprofits, etc.) resources dedicated to the food assistance network, by increasing community, individual, and recipient support to the food assistance network (Increased Costs/ Sufficient Resources).**
- 5. Increase participation of eligible residents in community food programs, and increase community awareness, support, and partnerships to help meet increasing demand (Demand / Outreach).**

Emergency Food Assistance Subcommittee Roster

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Kent County Sheriff's Department,
Emergency Management
Paul Baumgartner
Grand Rapids Public Schools

Bridget Clark
Kids Food Basket

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Baxter Community Center

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Marsha DeHollander
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Support Services (ACCESS)

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Spectrum Health/ Healthier
Communities
Bernard Hoogland
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Gary Lemke
Family Network of Wyoming

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God's Kitchen

Gordon Moeller
Catholic Social Services

Glenn Noffsinger
Guiding Light Mission

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