



## Community Needs Assessment: Greater Cleveland Food Bank (GCFB) Service Area

### Overview

More than 1.8 million people reside in the Greater Cleveland Food Bank’s 6-county service area, and **32% (more than 579,000 people) are eligible to receive food assistance**. All eligible people are not served, and everyone served is not food insecure. The following shows eligible, served, and food insecure for each of the county’s in the GCFB service area.

County	Population for Whom Poverty is Determined (ACS Estimates)	Eligible for Food Assistance (ACS Estimates)	% Eligible for Food Assistance	People Served (PantryTrak Partners)	People Gap - Eligible who Could be Served	% of Eligible Served	Food Insecure (Map the Meal Gap)	% Food Insecure	Food Insecure Children (Map the Meal Gap)	% Food Insecure Children
Ashland	50,519	16,557	33%	5,305	11,252	32%	5,860	11.1%	1,480	12.4%
Ashtabula	94,675	38,813	41%	16,872	21,941	43%	14,280	14.6%	3,740	17.2%
Cuyahoga	1,238,405	416,566	34%	266,904	149,662	64%	161,760	12.8%	54,750	20.8%
Geauga	94,375	17,168	18%	3,503	13,665	20%	7,140	7.5%	1,170	5.3%
Lake	229,106	49,631	22%	23,778	25,853	48%	22,740	9.8%	5,040	10.8%
Richland	117,021	40,665	35%	19,104	21,561	47%	15,760	12.7%	4,330	15.9%
<b>GCFB Service Area</b>	<b>1,824,101</b>	<b>579,400</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>335,466</b>	<b>243,934</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>227,540</b>	<b>12.2%</b>	<b>70,510</b>	<b>17.9%</b>

Note: More than 10,500 additional people who lived outside the 6-county service area were served by GCFB and its PantryTrak partners.  
Sources: ACS data are estimates from the 2017-2021 survey. Food insecure data are from the 2023 (2021 data) Map the Meal Gap release.

Table 1: Eligible, Served, and Food Insecure by GCFB County

The Greater Cleveland Food Bank and its PantryTrak partners served more than 335,000 people living in the service area in the last year (7/1/22 – 6/30/23), **providing assistance to more than half of the eligible people**. Across the service area, **nearly 244,000 eligible people were not served**.

The most recent food insecurity estimates from Feeding America’s Map the Meal Gap found that 1 in 8 people in the service area are food insecure, with rates higher for children (more than 1 in 6). Senior food insecurity rates are not available for areas smaller than metropolitan areas. For the Cleveland-Elyria-Mentor metro area, Feeding America estimates that 1 in 15 people age 60 and older are food insecure.

In addition to food insecurity varying by age, it also differs by race. For the service area, food insecurity among Black people is 26%, compared to 20% for Hispanic people, and 10% for White, non-Hispanic people. Within the 6-county service area, **Ashtabula County has the highest food insecurity rates for all racial populations**.



County	Food Insecurity Rate			
	Overall	Among Black People	Among Hispanic People	Among non-Hispanic White People
Ashland	11.1%	-	23%	10%
Ashtabula	14.6%	29%	24%	14%
Cuyahoga	12.8%	26%	21%	10%
Geauga	7.5%	12%	9%	6%
Lake	9.8%	21%	15%	9%
Richland	12.7%	28%	23%	11%
<b>GCFB Service Area</b>	<b>12.2%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>10%</b>

Table 2: Food Insecurity Rate by Race and GCFB County

Children under age 18 comprised 28% of those served, 23% of people served were seniors age 60 and over, and 49% were adults (age 18-59). People served and eligible by ages and county are below. In **Geauga County, GCFB and its partners are reaching the lowest percentages of eligible across all age groups.**

County	Children (under 18) for Whom Poverty is Determined (ACS Estimates)	Children Eligible for Food Assistance (ACS Estimates)	% of Children Eligible for Food Assistance	Children Served (PantryTrak Partners)	Child Gap - Eligible who Could be Served	% of Eligible Children Served
Ashland	11,584	5,578	48%	1,477	4,101	26%
Ashtabula	21,368	12,249	57%	4,328	7,921	35%
Cuyahoga	260,045	116,477	45%	74,499	41,978	64%
Geauga	21,532	5,080	24%	873	4,207	17%
Lake	45,689	13,093	29%	6,531	6,562	50%
Richland	26,316	12,542	48%	5,244	7,298	42%
<b>GCFB Service Area</b>	<b>386,534</b>	<b>165,019</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>92,952</b>	<b>72,067</b>	<b>56%</b>

Table 3: Children Eligible and Served by GCFB County

County	Adults (18-59) for Whom Poverty is Determined (ACS Estimates)	Adults Eligible for Food Assistance (ACS Estimates)	% of Adults Eligible for Food Assistance	Adults Served (PantryTrak Partners)	Adult Gap - Eligible who Could be Served	% of Eligible Adults Served
Ashland	29,558	8,507	29%	2,668	5,839	31%
Ashtabula	55,340	20,450	37%	8,186	12,264	40%
Cuyahoga	757,035	231,951	31%	131,324	100,627	57%
Geauga	53,815	8,491	16%	1,699	6,792	20%
Lake	138,131	25,807	19%	11,255	14,552	44%
Richland	67,491	21,599	32%	9,311	12,288	43%
<b>GCFB Service Area</b>	<b>1,101,370</b>	<b>316,805</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>164,443</b>	<b>152,362</b>	<b>52%</b>

Table 4: Adults Eligible and Served by GCFB County



County	Seniors (65+) for Whom Poverty is Determined (ACS Estimates)	Seniors Eligible for Food Assistance (ACS Estimates)	% of Seniors Eligible for Food Assistance	Seniors (60+) Served (PantryTrak Partners)	Senior Gap - Eligible who Could be Served	% of Eligible Seniors Served
Ashland	9,377	2,472	26%	1,160	1,312	47%
Ashtabula	17,967	6,114	34%	4,358	1,756	71%
Cuyahoga	221,325	68,138	31%	61,081	7,057	90%
Geauga	19,028	3,597	19%	931	2,666	26%
Lake	45,286	10,731	24%	5,992	4,739	56%
Richland	23,214	6,524	28%	4,549	1,975	70%
<b>GCFB Service Area</b>	<b>336,197</b>	<b>97,576</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>78,071</b>	<b>19,505</b>	<b>80%</b>

Table 5: Seniors Eligible and Served by GCFB County

Note that the percent of eligible seniors served needs to be considered in the context of people age 60-64 not being included in the eligible because data are not available by that age group and 200% of poverty. Similarly, the adults in PantryTrak are age 18 - 59, and they are age 18 - 64 in the ACS estimates.

Since the initial completion of this assessment, new data have been released about food insecurity and people eligible for food assistance. In addition, neighbors accessing food assistance changes on a monthly basis. Data for different time periods and geographies are available from the Greater Cleveland Food Bank upon request.

### Indices

Five different indices were used to further identify areas of need. Two indices, the Area Deprivation Index and the Social Vulnerability Index, were pre-existing. Two of the other indices were created based on American Community Survey data and Map the Meal Gap data; one of these was based on numbers and the other on percentages. The fifth index was a combination of various health indicators, such as diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, and life expectancy. For each index, the top 20% of values were identified, and the census tracts in the top 20% of values were further analyzed. More information about the indices can be found in the Community Needs Assessment Process Slides PowerPoint.

There are nearly 600 census tracts in the GCFB service area. **Twenty-two census tracts (4%) had values in the top 20% for all 5 indices.** These tracts were located throughout the service area as follows:

- Ashland County: 0 census tracts
- Ashtabula County: 3 census tracts in
  - Ashtabula city, Ashtabula township, Plymouth township, Saybrook township;
- Cuyahoga County: 13 census tracts in
  - Cleveland neighborhoods: Bellaire-Puritas, Buckeye-Woodhill, Central, Collinwood-Nottingham, Fairfax, Glenville, Hough, Jefferson, Mount Pleasant, North Shore Collinwood, University, and West Boulevard, and in the suburbs of Euclid, Garfield Heights, and Linndale;
- Geauga County: 1 census tract in
  - Middlefield township and Middlefield village;
- Lake County: 4 census tracts in
  - Madison township and Painesville city;



- Richland County: 1 census tract in
  - Mansfield city.

The racial/ethnic composition of the 22 tracts is 11 predominantly Black tracts, 2 predominantly White tracts, and 9 tracts with multiple races/ethnicities, based on typology definitions from The Brookings Institution.

### Partners

The Greater Cleveland Food Bank currently works with **over 1,000 partners** across its 6-county service area. The types of programs in each county, which are subject to change, are below. Needs assessments for each county provide more information about where partners are located within each county.

County	Children's Nutrition Initiatives	CSFP (senior boxes)	Food as Medicine (including hospital pantries)	Hot Meals	Mobile Pantries	Pantries	Senior Markets	Senior Nutrition Sites	Shelters	Other Partners	Total
Ashland	3	3	0	1	1	1	2	0	0	0	11
Ashtabula	1	0	0	5	20	9	1	0	2	1	39
Cuyahoga	318	39	26	61	98	163	39	21	8	80	853
Geauga	3	0	0	0	4	6	0	0	1	2	16
Lake	5	3	0	7	6	23	6	5	0	1	56
Richland	10	3	0	1	7	8	0	0	1	0	30
<b>GCFB Service Area</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>1,005</b>

Table 6: Program Types by GCFB County

The food bank and its partners distributed more than 50.1 million pounds between July 2022 and June 2023. Overall, **71% of product distributed was nutritious**, based on Feeding America’s guidelines for that calculation. For the service area, **56% of nutritious product was fresh produce**. In Lake County, nearly two-thirds of product distributed was nutritious, and in Ashtabula County, 85% of pounds distributed through GCFB were nutritious. Program types **distributing at least 90% of nutritious product were the various produce distributions – school markets (97%), food as medicine sites (96%), mobile pantries (94%), and senior markets (93%)**. Pantries, and their respective produce express distributions, accounted for nearly 50% of all pounds distributed in the last year. And, mobile pantries are responsible for more than 25% of total pounds. The remaining 23 types of programs, based on Ceres categories, account for the remaining 24% of pounds distributed in the service area.

### Service Data

Households served by PantryTrak partners made **more than 853,500 visits for assistance**, and an average of 5.9 visits in the last 12 months. Among the households served, more than one-third made 1 visit during the year, and more than one in 7 households made 12 or more visits during the year.

In the GCFB counties, the average visits per household were

- Ashland County: 5.1
- Ashtabula County: 4.6
- Cuyahoga County: 6.2
- Geauga County: 5.6
- Lake County: 6.7
- Richland County: 7.3



The average visits per county are based on complete addresses that had a good match; approximately 7% of visits did not have a complete address. The **median distance travelled** from where the household lived to the location of assistance **was 2.2 miles**.

The difference between people eligible for assistance (living below 200% of poverty) and people served (at PantryTrak partners) is also considered in the needs assessment. There are some census tracts in every GCFB county in the top 20% for the number of eligible people not served and in the percent of eligible not served. There are 42 census tracts in the service area that are in the top 20% for both of these measures. [Appendix 1](#) provides more information about these tracts and communities, and the distribution of census tracts by county is:

- Ashland County: 4 census tracts
- Ashtabula County: 4 census tracts
- Cuyahoga County: 17 census tracts
- Geauga County: 7 census tracts
- Lake County: 4 census tracts
- Richland County: 6 census tracts.

### **Neighbor Survey**

There were 4,088 returned neighbor surveys from households served at a PantryTrak pantry or produce distribution partner between March and June 2023.

Demographics of the respondents:

- Black or African American: 42%
- White: 41%
- Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish: 6%
  
- Age 18 – 49: 26%
- Age 50 – 59: 23%
- Age 60+: 48%

#### **How likely are you to recommend the site where you most often receive free pantry/produce items?**

- 86% were likely or very likely to recommend the site.
- 4% were not as likely to recommend the site.
  - *Rotten food, expired food, the same items, and long wait times were cited as some of the reasons for this response.*

66% of respondents rated the overall availability of nutritious food as **excellent (39%) or above average (27%)**. Nearly **75% of respondents felt safe and felt respected** when receiving free pantry/produce items. And, 65% said the days and hours were convenient. The most commonly cited dietary factors or concerns were **diabetes (34%), and heart-healthy (32%)**. 40% answered that they do not have any dietary factors or concerns.



**The free food that I received will (select all that apply):**

- Help my family have enough to eat: 70%
- Ease my budget: 70%
- Decrease my stress: 50%

**Did you or anyone in your household have to choose between paying for food and paying for other basic needs (select all that apply):**

- Utilities (49%)
- Transportation (42%)
- Rent or mortgage (40%)

**Why are you receiving free pantry or produce items (select all that apply)?**

- Higher food costs: 82%
- Higher housing/utility costs: 57%
- Higher transportation costs: 36%
- No longer receiving pandemic SNAP Emergency Allotment: 31%
- Higher health care costs: 25%
- Other food stamp or SNAP benefit decrease: 22%

**Based on responses to the 6-question food insecurity screener:**

- High Food Security: 8%
- Marginal Food Security: 7%
- Low Food Security: 30%
- Very Low Food Security: 50%
- Don't Know: 2%
- Blank: 2%

The neighbor survey asked people to base their responses on the site they visit most often. One of the first questions also asked people to note if they were basing answers on a pantry, produce distribution, or delivery experience. Combining survey responses with PantryTrak data, it was possible to look in-depth at responses based on the site(s) visited. In many instances, households are making more than 1 visit and are visiting multiple places for assistance. For example, total visits among households that returned a survey ranged from 1 to 173. And, site and types of service combinations varied from 1 to 23. This means that a household could visit site A for a pantry, site A for a mobile pantry, site B for CSFP, site C for a senior market, etc. Visits to the most commonly visited site were between 1 and 84.



Below are a variety of findings related to the analysis of these data.

- 563 households made 1 visit to 1 site in a year. 85% were likely or very likely to recommend the site. And, 84% of those recommending the site had low or very low food security. In this situation, **food security is low, satisfaction is high, and the number of assistance visits are 1.**
- 44% of survey responders visited only 1 site for assistance, making any where between 1 and 50 visits at the 1 site. With **more than half of respondents, visiting multiple sites**, it makes it more difficult to know with certainty which sites the survey responses correspond with.
- 45% of survey responders indicated they were answering based on their pantry experience. When this was compared to the type of site visited most often from the PantryTrak service events, in only 2 out of 3 instances was a pantry the most visited type of GCFB program for these households.
  - Among these 1,375 households that visited a pantry the most:
    - Between 1 and 51 total visits were made to any type of GCFB PantryTrak partner;
    - 63% rated the nutritious food offered as above average or excellent;
    - 179 different pantries were visited;
    - 39 pantries served at least 10 households, and for 21 of these 39 pantries, households were likely or very likely to recommend them.

A similar analysis could be done with households who said they were basing their survey responses on a produce distribution experience.

- 35% of responders said they were answering based on a produce distribution. When compared to PantryTrak service events, again it was found that in 2 out of 3 instances, a produce distribution was the most visited type of GCFB program.
  - Among these 970 households that visited a produce distribution the most:
    - Between 1 and 130 total visits were made to any type of GCFB PantryTrak partner,
    - 68% rated the nutritious food offered as above average or excellent;
    - 108 different produce sites were visited
      - 7 food as medicine
      - 74 mobile pantries
      - 27 senior markets
    - 10 produce distribution partners served at least 10 households, and for 6 of these 10, households were likely or very likely to recommend them.

Regardless of whether or not it was for a pantry or produce distribution, it would seem that about 1 out of 3 responders did not know the type of program they were visiting most often, as the PantryTrak service histories did not match neighbor survey responses. Households are making multiple visits at multiple sites. There were similarities in nutritious food ratings between pantry and produce distribution experiences.

Since the initial completion of this assessment, neighbors in Ashtabula County were surveyed. Between May and July 2024, 174 Ashtabula County neighbors completed the survey. The results specific to Ashtabula County are included in that county's specific assessment.



## **Partner Survey**

There were 217 survey responses from hot meal, pantry, mobile pantry, and selected senior market partners located in Ashland, Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, and Richland counties.

Responses from 95% of the partners indicated that they were likely or very likely to recommend partnering with the Greater Cleveland Food Bank to others.

**Two-thirds** of the programs indicated they had **no paid staff**, and 95% utilize volunteers. About 75% of the sites using volunteers, said they had enough. Annual budgets were across the spectrum of options – 29% had budgets less than \$500 and 26% had annual budgets of \$10,000 or more.

### **What else could the Food Bank do to better support your program?**

- Agency support grants: 65%
- More free food items: 61%
- Increase food variety available: 56%
- Removal of agency delivery fees: 39%
- Provide equipment: 35%

Nearly 25% of responding partners are interested in expanding the capacity of current programs. Another question asked about expanding services to include different GCFB initiatives. About half said they were not interested in expanding initiatives. The most common initiatives of interest were GCFB Outreach Staff visits (20%), provide food tailored to neighbors who have specific chronic health conditions (20%), and nutrition education programming (16%).

Since the initial completion of this assessment, Greater Cleveland Food Bank partners in Ashtabula County were surveyed. Seven partners (2 mobile pantries, 4 pantries, and 1 senior market) completed the survey. The results specific to Ashtabula County are included in that county's specific assessment.

## **Next Steps: Create Operational Response Plan**

The operational response plan should have a section for each county, and include plans to equitably:

- Expand outreach in places with larger gaps in service/areas of need
- Work with partners that indicated interest in expanding programming and services
- Offer additional trainings and workshops for partners that indicated interest
- Provide continued support to partners by offering grants, more free food items, and increasing food variety
- Continue communication with neighbors about GCFB program types and options for assistance
- Further analyze the relationship between sites visited, services received, and visits made to develop strategies to move people towards food security.



<b>Appendix 1. Census Tracts in the Top 20% for the Largest People Gaps and the Lowest Percentages of People Served</b>				
(sorted by County and Communities)				
<b>County</b>	<b>Census Tract</b>	<b>Communities</b>	<b>People Gap: Eligible - Served</b>	<b>% Eligible Served</b>
Ashland County	Census Tract 9702	Clear Creek Township, Orange Township, Ruggles Township, Sullivan Township, Troy Township	1,859	14%
Ashland County	Census Tract 9709	Green Township, Lake Township, Mohican Township, Montgomery Township, Perry Township, Vermillion Township	1,109	24%
Ashland County	Census Tract 9701.02	Jackson Township, Montgomery Township, Orange Township, Perry Township	1,334	16%
Ashland County	Census Tract 9707	Mifflin Township, Milton Township, Montgomery Township, Vermillion Township	1,307	17%
Ashtabula County	Census Tract 13.03	Andover Township, Cherry Valley Township, Dorset Township, Richmond Township	1,185	22%
Ashtabula County	Census Tract 10.02	Austinburg Township, Harpersfield Township, Morgan Township	898	18%
Ashtabula County	Census Tract 10.01	Hartsgrove Township, Morgan Township, Trumbull Township, Rome Township	1,302	24%
Ashtabula County	Census Tract 14.01	Hartsgrove Township, Orwell Township, Rome Township, Windsor Township	2,191	8%
Cuyahoga County	Census Tract 1342.04	Berea	1,121	26%
Cuyahoga County	Census Tract 1342.06	Berea	1,046	17%
Cuyahoga County	Census Tract 1361.04	Broadview Heights	735	22%
Cuyahoga County	Census Tract 1011.02	CLE: Edgewater	1,181	27%
Cuyahoga County	Census Tract 1188	CLE: University	1,019	20%
Cuyahoga County	Census Tract 1531.05	Fairview Park	1,045	19%
Cuyahoga County	Census Tract 1531.07	Fairview Park	1,026	10%
Cuyahoga County	Census Tract 1606.04	Lakewood	924	23%
Cuyahoga County	Census Tract 1722.02	Mayfield Heights	1,288	21%
Cuyahoga County	Census Tract 1742.06	North Olmsted	1,095	20%
Cuyahoga County	Census Tract 1752.02	North Royalton	817	11%
Cuyahoga County	Census Tract 1774.04	Parma	931	24%
Cuyahoga County	Census Tract 1812.01	Rocky River	1,197	12%
Cuyahoga County	Census Tract 1861.03	Strongsville	737	9%
Cuyahoga County	Census Tract 1861.06	Strongsville	1,110	17%
Cuyahoga County	Census Tract 1862.01	Strongsville	1,052	8%
Cuyahoga County	Census Tract 1891.11	Westlake	778	10%
Geauga County	Census Tract 3113	Burton Township	964	16%
Geauga County	Census Tract 3106	Chester Township	1,473	8%
Geauga County	Census Tract 3109	Claridon Township	832	25%
Geauga County	Census Tract 3110	Huntsburg Township	1,334	7%
Geauga County	Census Tract 3124	Middlefield Township	1,076	13%
Geauga County	Census Tract 3121	Parkman Township	1,071	13%
Geauga County	Census Tract 3115	Russell Township	864	9%
Lake County	Census Tract 2030	Mentor	917	22%
Lake County	Census Tract 2032	Mentor	881	25%
Lake County	Census Tract 2057.02	North Madison	1,015	23%
Lake County	Census Tract 2012	Willoughby	1,065	22%
Richland County	Census Tract 27	Franklin Township, Jackson Township	831	23%
Richland County	Census Tract 12	Mansfield	886	25%
Richland County	Census Tract 21.01	Mansfield	1,391	23%
Richland County	Census Tract 24	Ontario	908	25%
Richland County	Census Tract 22	Troy Township	1,342	16%
Richland County	Census Tract 21.02	Washington Township	760	23%