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Closing the Food Gap in Adams County: A Proposal for Comprehensive Solutions through Community Action

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Closing the Food Gap in Adams County: A Proposal for Comprehensive Solutions through Community Action

Abstract

Today, in Adams County, we have two food systems. The 20% who live in poverty survive on food stamps, the food pantry, church donations, and trips to discount food vendors. Those with more financial stability could choose from an abundance of healthy, sustainably produced, local and international foods. We have come to accept these two food systems as the norm without critically analyzing how it is affecting individuals and the health of our communities.

In addition to reducing the disparity and closing the food gap, this initiative is focused on building our local economy and educating our community about nutrition and the benefit of local foods in order to promote a more sustainable social, environmental and economic future.

This paper begins an investigation of community food security in Adams County and makes recommendations to start the process of finding stronger community solutions. The data represented here is drawn from community discussions and programmatic statistics. It is an initial assessment to be followed up by a more comprehensive study and analysis.

Keywords

food policy, food gap, food security, poverty, community development, Adams County, Pennsylvania

Disciplines

Community Health and Preventive Medicine | Environmental Public Health | Public Health

Comments

A working document of the Adams County Food Policy Initiative. See the [Adams County Food Policy Council](#) website for more.

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CLOSING THE FOOD GAP IN ADAMS COUNTY:
A Proposal for Comprehensive Solutions through Community Action
A Working Document of the Adams County Food Policy Initiative

*Compiled by Adams County Food Policy Initiative Members
Adams County, Pennsylvania
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OVERVIEW & MISSION

The Adams County Food Policy Initiative aims to enhance food security through community solutions and policy. **Community food security** (CFS) is a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice (http://www.foodsecurity.org/views_cfs_faq.html, accessed 13 February, 2009).

The Adams County Food Policy Initiative is a movement that seeks strategies to promote community food security and community development simultaneously. We aim to draw on a range of community food system resources, invite the participation of many individuals and sectors, and promote solutions that reduce food insecurity and build the health and economy of the wider community.

INTRODUCTION

Today, in Adams County, we have two food systems. The 20% who live in poverty survive on food stamps, the food pantry, church donations, and trips to discount food vendors. Those with more financial stability could choose from an abundance of healthy, sustainably produced, local and international foods. We have come to accept these two food systems as the norm without critically analyzing how it is affecting individuals and the health of our communities.

In addition to reducing the disparity and closing the food gap, this initiative is focused on building our local economy and educating our community about nutrition and the benefit of local foods in order to promote a more sustainable social, environmental and economic future.

This paper begins an investigation of community food security in Adams County and makes recommendations to start the process of finding stronger community solutions. The data represented here is drawn from community discussions and programmatic statistics. It is an initial assessment to be followed up by a more comprehensive study and analysis.

COMMUNITY FOOD ASSESSMENT: CHALLENGES

CURRENT FEDERAL POVERTY INCOME GUIDELINES ARE INSUFFICIENT

- ◆ To **access food stamps**, a family of three earns less than **\$22,880**. In other words, once the family wage-earner brings home even a dollar more, they become solely responsible for the food budget in the family.
- ◆ Consider that a **living/self-sufficiency annual income** for a family of three (a parent with two children) in Adams County is estimated to be **\$39,432** to cover housing, child care, food, transportation and health care (only bare necessities, with no extras such as a cell phone, children’s sports involvement, etc.) (self-sufficiency figures estimated by SCCAP, Inc., 2008).
- ◆ This is a **\$16,552 annual gap in a family’s basic living budget**.

SUPPORTING DATA: ADAMS COUNTY HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2006 Census (www.census.gov, accessed 13 February, 2009) illustrate the distribution of household income in the county. The reported income categories cover pre-tax and include all sources of income (wages/salaries, Social Security, public assistance, etc.).

	Total	Percentage
Total households	37,131	100%
Less than \$10,000	1,591	4.3%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	1,863	5.0%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	3,580	9.6%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	4,338	11.7%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	6,170	16.6%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	8,894	24.0%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	5,467	14.7%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	3,953	10.6%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	878	2.4%
\$200,000 or more	397	1.1%

SUPPORTING DATA: FOOD ASSISTANCE ELIGIBILITY

Federal food assistance programs are available in Adams County for those that meet the Federal Poverty Income Guideline Eligibility. Those with incomes below the following percentage of Poverty Income are eligible to receive services (information provided by the respective food assistance programs):

<i>Program Eligibility</i>	<i>FPIG%</i>	<i>Notes</i>
<i>Food Stamps</i>	130%	
<i>Free School Lunch</i>		
<i>Food Pantries</i>	150%	in Abbottstown, Fairfield, Gettysburg, Littlestown, New Oxford, ROI and York Springs, serving 4000 unduplicated individuals per year. (approximately 2300 per month)
<i>Women, Infant & Children</i>	185%	
<i>Reduced School Lunches</i>	185%	

SUPPORTING DATA: POVERTY THRESHOLDS

The U.S. Census Bureau determines the poverty status of the non-institutionalized population based on family size and income level. If a family's total annual income is below the Federal Poverty Income Guideline (FPIG) level appropriate for that family size, every member of the family is considered poor. At right are current federal poverty guidelines (<http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/08Poverty.shtml>, accessed 13 February, 2009).

Family Size	100%	130%	150%	185%
1	\$10,400	\$13,520	\$15,600	\$19,240
2	\$14,000	\$18,200	\$21,000	\$25,900
3	\$17,600	\$22,880	\$26,400	\$32,560
4	\$21,200	\$27,560	\$31,800	\$39,220
5	\$24,800	\$32,240	\$37,200	\$45,880
6	\$28,400	\$36,920	\$42,600	\$52,540

THE IMPACT OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS IN ADAMS COUNTY IS IMMEDIATE

Downward trends in County residents' food security were apparent before the current crisis.

- ◆ **1 in 4 children** in Adams County are enrolled in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program, according to 2007 statistics (most recent available). This is a **4.67% increase** in the county average in a **4 year period** (since 2003). **Individual school districts** all saw a rise in enrollment in this program – with **some seeing as much as a 4% - 8% increase**.
- ◆ These Free and Reduced Lunch Program figures correspond with **food insecurity** figures for Adams County: Approximately **10% of the total Adams County households** are food insecure. **26% of families with children** are food insecure.
- ◆ **In November 2003, 3.3%** of Adams County individuals were **eligible for food stamps**. This rose to **4.0% in November 2008**, with the **monthly value of food stamp coupons increasing 61.8%** (\$250,247 to \$404,844).
- ◆ Since the end of 2008, several local factories have laid-off 25 -40% of their workforce, with other individuals having their hours cut by 25% or more.
- ◆ Unemployment figures from the PA Center for Workforce Information & Analysis are sobering. In **September 2008**, our county unemployment rate was estimated at **4.2%**. In **January 2009**, that figure rose to **6.7%** -- an **increase of 2.5% in just four months**.
- ◆ A **survey of emergency food services shows a marked increase in demand** during this same time period of **September 2008 – January 2009**. The Gettysburg Community Soup Kitchen saw a 30% increase in number of meals served. In the last year, emergency food services indicate an increase of 45-58% of individuals/families accessing services.

SUPPORTING DATA: EMPLOYMENT

The unemployment rate is the percentage of the civilian labor force unemployed. The labor force in an area consists of all persons aged 16 or older who are currently employed or are actively seeking work. In Adams County statistics are as follows (<http://www.paworkstats.state.pa.us/>, accessed 11 March, 2009):

September 2008	January 2009
4.2%	6.7%

SUPPORTING DATA: FOOD ASSISTANCE IN ADAMS COUNTY

Approximately 10% of Adams County families are food insecure and 26% of families with children are food insecure.

FOOD STAMP ELIGIBILITY

November 2003	May 2008	November 2008
3,132 individuals (3.3% of the population)	3,701 individuals (3.7% of the population)	4,043 individuals (4.0% of the population)

MONTHLY VALUE OF FOOD STAMP COUPONS

November 2003	November 2008
\$250,247	\$404,844

2008 WIC (WOMEN, INFANTS AND CHILDREN) PARTICIPANTS

OF ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS
2180 (approximately 1400 families)

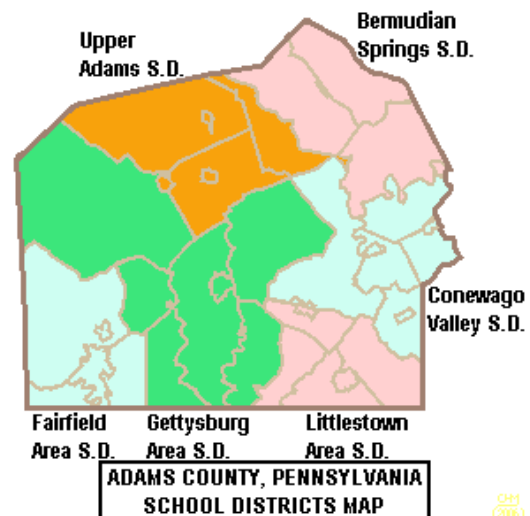
FARMERS’ MARKET NUTRITION PROGRAM VOUCHERS (FMNP) ISSUED AND REDEEMED (also available for Seniors, but statistics not yet available)

	# ISSUED	REDEMPTION RATE	VALUE OF REDEEMED VOUCHERS
WIC 2007	5,000	68.48%	\$17,120

FREE AND REDUCED LUNCHES

The total number of children enrolled in Adams County Schools in 2007 was 14,648. 3,833 children (26.17% or 1 in 4) are receiving Free and Reduced lunches. Below is the breakdown by school district.

School District	2003 Percent	2008 Percent
<i>Upper Adams Area SD</i>	30.58%	38.00% Elementary Schools average 44%
<i>Gettysburg Area SD</i>	28.10%	33.42%
<i>Conewago Valley SD</i>	24.36%	28.49%
<i>Littlestown Area SD</i>	18.57%	23.11%
<i>Bermudian Springs SD</i>	18.23%	22.12%
<i>County Average</i>	23.17%	27.84%



FOOD-RELATED HEALTH STATUS INDICATORS DEMONSTRATE A GROWING FOOD GAP

The 2008 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) Survey, conducted by Holleran Consulting with 608 Adams County residents, provided Healthy Adams County with a Secondary Data Profile. In addition, three focus groups with Key Informants, Behavioral Health Specialists and Latino residents' in the county were implemented

A few noteworthy areas of this assessment are:

- ◆ Within female householder homes, the poverty rate in Adams County is higher than for PA and the US
- ◆ The poverty rate was also higher for female householder homes with children under 18 years of age.
- ◆ The age-adjusted mortality rate per 100,000 inhabitants for Heart Disease is 322.0, which is higher than PA (302.7) and the United States (217.0).
- ◆ The number of people who reported exercising in the past 30 days and the number of respondents who reported having gestational diabetes is less healthy and worse than PA and the nation.

SUPPORTING DATA: OBESITY

OBESITY IN ADULTS:

In 2003 the PA Department of Health listed 26% of Adams County as obese; in 2008 the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) survey shows an increase to 29.9% in the level of obesity.

ADULT OBESITY LEVELS BY AGE

<i>Age</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
18-24	24.1%
25-34	26.1%
35-44	29.4%
45-64	34.7%
65+	28.0%

OBESITY BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME

<i>Income</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Less than \$10,000	31.1%
\$10,000- \$14,999	33.7%
\$15,000- \$19,999	33.1%
\$20,000- \$24,999	20.5%
\$25,000- \$34,999	22.9%
\$35,000- \$49,999	32.0%
\$50,000- \$74,999	30.9%
More than \$75,000	28.7%

OBESITY IN CHILDREN:

During the 2006-2007 school year Body Mass Index (BMI) was measured for 8,371 Adams County children in grades kindergarten through six. The statistics are as follows:

UNDERWEIGHT	HEALTHY WEIGHT	OVERWEIGHT	OBESE
1.76%	58.69%	20.55%	19.01%

SUPPORTING DATA: DIABETES

Nationally, the percentage of the population with diabetes is about 8%, with similar ranges reported by the PA Department of Health for Adams, Franklin and Fulton counties between 2005 and 2007. The 2008 BRFSS for Adams County revealed that 6.7% of the residents surveyed had been told within the past year that they had diabetes. 7 to 8,000 people (7.5% of the population) in Adams County have diabetes, 400 to 800 of those are Type I Diabetics.

DIABETES LEVELS BY AGE

<i>Age</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
18-24	0
25-34	0
35-44	1.9%
45-54	6.8%
54-64	13.4%
65+	18.2%

DIABETES BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME

<i>Income</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Less than \$10,000	11.6%
\$10,000- \$14,999	8.5%
\$15,000- \$19,999	8.0%
\$20,000- \$24,999	0%
\$25,000- \$34,999	5.8%
\$35,000- \$49,999	9.0%
\$50,000- \$74,999	1.9%
More than \$75,000	4.2%

COMMUNITY FOOD ASSESSMENT: STRENGTHS

AGRICULTURE CONTINUES TO THRIVE IN ADAMS COUNTY

- ◆ There are approximately **1265 farms in Adams County**, according to the USDA Census of Agriculture (http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Online_Highlights/County_Profiles/Pennsylvania/cp42001.pdf, accessed 11 March 2009).
- ◆ According to the USDA 2007 Census of Agriculture, the **market value of production increased by 55% in the five years** since 2002 (\$216,994,000, up from \$139,808,000).
- ◆ The **majority of farms in Adams County are relatively small, averaging 135 acres**. The largest number of farms (over 500) fall in the 10-49 acre range, with just over 400 farms reporting a 50-179 acre size.
- ◆ There was some loss of land in farms – 4% in 5 years (174,595 acres, down from 181,081 acres in 2002).
- ◆ What is not yet clear is amount of food produced in Adams County that stays in Adams County for local use. How much is “exported”?

THERE IS A GROWING LOCAL FOODS MOVEMENT

- ◆ **Sales at Adams County farmers’ markets increased 20%** in three years (source: Adams County Farmers’ Market Association).
- ◆ **The Adams County Local Foods Network was established in March 2008**. Since that time, over **60 individuals** have been involved in discussions and activities (source: Adams County Local Foods Network).
- ◆ Community gardening opportunities (at schools, community institutions, etc.) continue to grow. An example is the establishment of an outdoor gardening program at the Adams County Adult Correctional Facility. They are also investigating the implementation of a larger scale greenhouse project.
- ◆ Limited conversations with restaurants indicate interest in buying produce and other food products from local sources.

SHORT-TERM CREATIVE SOLUTIONS ARE BEING IMPLEMENTED

- ◆ The Farmer’s Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) for families and seniors (food stamps redeemable at farmer’s markets) has been instituted. The WIC FMNP value of redeemed vouchers was \$17,120 in 2007.
- ◆ Nutrition classes are being implemented through the Adams County Circles Initiative and the Children’s Health Task Force.
- ◆ The Adams County Local Foods Network raised funds for the Gettysburg Community Soup Kitchen to support the purchase of fresh produce for daily meals.
- ◆ Community groups are sponsoring targeted drives for local food pantries, requesting healthier foods (avoiding high sodium, high carbohydrate items).
- ◆ The Gettysburg Farmer’s Market donates end-of-market surplus to the Campus Kitchen at Gettysburg College. CKGC then distributes the produce to Circles families to supplement weekly food supply.
- ◆ Focused gleaning projects are underway, with volunteers visiting fields and orchards after harvest to reclaim produce left behind. This effort, combined with the farmer’s market donations, has brought in over a ton of fresh produce in the span of 5 months to be used by community food programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE

MORE CLOSELY EXAMINE THE ADAMS COUNTY FOOD GAP

Examples of remaining questions/areas for research include:

- ◆ The impact of the public transportation system on food access
- ◆ The location of food distribution outlets and who shops where
- ◆ Assessment of policy needs for land use, purchasing power, collective marketing, economic development implications and more
- ◆ More accurately understand the impact of local foods on the local economy and its potential for growth.

ESTABLISH A FOOD POLICY COUNCIL (FPC)

The Adams County Food Policy Initiative recommends the creation of a **Food Policy Council (FPC)**. A Food Policy Council is a diverse group of stakeholders who would advise the county government on policies related to agriculture, food distribution, hunger and nutrition (http://www.foodsecurity.org/views_cfs_faq.html, accessed 13 February, 2009).

The FPC would:

- ◆ focus on addressing the needs of low-income and marginalized communities by researching food production and access issues;
- ◆ make recommendations and assist with designing and implementing projects and policies to address those issues;
- ◆ provide an effective forum for diverse stakeholders to work together to create integrated approaches and positive changes in our food system; and
- ◆ promote Community Food Security through the six basic principles explored below.

SIX BASIC PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY

Community food security represents a comprehensive strategy to address many of the ills affecting our society and environment due to an unsustainable and unjust food system. Following are six basic principles of community food security (http://www.foodsecurity.org/views_cfs_faq.html, accessed 13 February, 2009):

Low Income Food Needs

Like the anti-hunger movement, CFS is focused on meeting the food needs of low income communities, reducing hunger and improving individual health.

Broad Goals

CFS addresses a broad range of problems affecting the food system, community development, and the environment such as increasing poverty and hunger, disappearing farmland and family farms, inner city supermarket redlining, rural community disintegration, rampant suburban sprawl, and air and water pollution from unsustainable food production and distribution patterns.

Community focus

A CFS approach seeks to build up a community's food resources to meet its own needs. These resources may include supermarkets, farmers' markets, gardens, transportation, community-based food processing ventures, and urban farms, to name a few.

Self-reliance/empowerment

Community food security projects emphasize the need to build individuals' abilities to provide for their food needs. Community food security seeks to build upon community and individual assets, rather than focus on their deficiencies. CFS projects seek to engage community residents in all phases of project planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Local agriculture

A stable local agricultural base is key to a community responsive food system. Farmers need increased access to markets that pay them a decent wage for their labor, and farmland needs planning protection from suburban development. By building stronger ties between farmers and consumers, consumers gain a greater knowledge and appreciation for their food source.

Systems-oriented

CFS projects typically are "inter-disciplinary," crossing many boundaries and incorporating collaborations with multiple agencies.

CONCLUSION

CHANGE IS POSSIBLE THROUGH COMMUNITY AND POLICY ACTION

The Adams County Food Policy Initiative is inspired by the strength of our community, the work already going on and the possibilities demonstrated by other US communities. We seek your help in achieving our goals:

- ◆ supporting local food sources;
- ◆ ensuring healthy food options for all;
- ◆ creating systems of equitable access and distribution for all; and
- ◆ addressing the systemic nature of the current food systems through local solutions, community education, advocacy and legislative action.

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