

Emergency Food Capacity Study

Assessing the Need, Filling the Gaps

2007



UTAH
FOOD
BANK
SERVICES

Introduction

Historically, Utahns have benefited from a strong economy, a strong job market and a low rate of poverty. While most Utahns fair well and have resources to meet their basic needs, there are over 246,000 Utahns who live at, or below, the Federal Poverty Level. An additional 418,681 Utahns have income levels between 100% of poverty and 185% of poverty. These working families often struggle to make ends meet. Many Federal programs are out of reach because those services are income-driven.

Many low-income Utahns turn to available Federal resources for which they are eligible but depend on their communities for support with their most basic needs. One way in which communities respond to their neighbors' needs, is through emergency food pantries. There are approximately 70 emergency food pantries operating throughout the state of Utah. These pantries are operated by faith-based organizations, private non-profits and public non-profits supported by associations of Governments.

Emergency food pantries depend on food banks for food and their communities for volunteers, food and financial support in order to meet the needs of their neighbors in need. Utahns are generous with their time and food donations. Nearly 1,700 Utahns volunteer each month at an emergency food pantry. Yet, almost a third of the emergency food pantries interviewed reported the need for additional volunteers.

In an effort to better understand the needs of the emergency food network in Utah, Utah Food Bank Services and Utahns Against Hunger conducted a needs assessment across the emergency food pantry system.

The data collected will help inform emergency food providers, policy makers and the general public about the needs in the emergency food network in Utah. The study will also help identify where capacity building efforts are required to reach un-met Utah emergency food needs.

This needs-assessment consisted of an emergency network to determine the number of individuals and households served, the current capacity of Utah's food pantry system and what kind of support, equipment

and funding is needed to better serve low-income Utah households.

The survey included information on food sources, current funding sources, staffing and volunteers, facility information, specific food storage issues and equipment needs.

Poverty

According to the Utah Community Action Partnership Association's (UCAPA) Data Book on Poverty in Utah, the poverty rate for Utah in 2005 was 10.2%. Though this is below the national rate of 13.3%, nearly 250,000 Utahns live at, or below, the poverty level. For a family of four that is \$20,650 annually.

(See "Percentage of Poverty by County Chart" page 2.)

While Utah experiences lower poverty rates than the rest of the nation it is important to note the following:

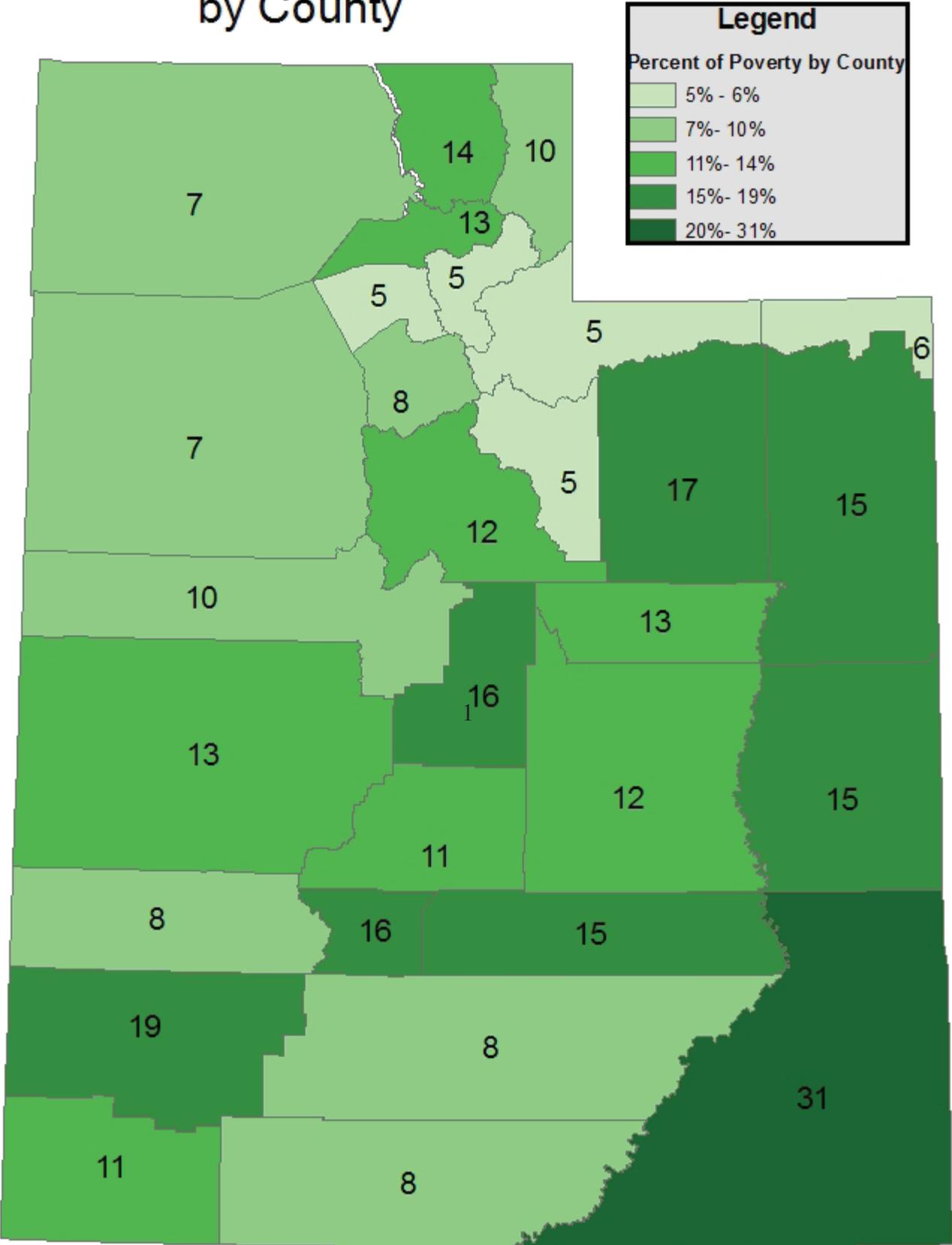
- **San Juan County is one of the nation's poorest counties with a poverty rate of 31.4%**
- **Eleven of Utah's 29 counties have poverty rates above the national average¹**

Food Insecurity

Food insecurity, the inability to afford enough food due to lack of resources is a growing problem in our country. Far too many families in the United States, 11%, struggle to meet their nutritional needs and are considered food-insecure. Working poor families are often stretched beyond their means because of low-wages, high housing costs, gas prices and child-care. Family food budgets are often squeezed to meet other needs.

Despite Utah's low poverty rate, according to the USDA, Utah has one of the highest rates of food insecurity in the country with a rate of 14.8%, and a very-low food security rate (previously referred to as hunger) of 5.1%. Food insecure households have difficulty affording enough food due to lack of resources. The USDA reports, "*The defining characteristic of very low food security is that, at times during the year, the food intake of the household members was reduced and their normal eating patterns were disrupted because the household lacked money and other resources for food.*"²

Percentage of Poverty by County



Mapping Hunger 2007
Map by Jennifer Torres

Food insecurity data are collected through the Current Population Survey, conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, through an annual food security survey. The results are published in an annual report entitled, *Measuring Food Security in the United States, Household Food Security in the United States*. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.

Hunger and food insecurity can have long lasting health consequences, especially for children. In a June 2002 paper entitled, *The Consequences of Hunger and Food Insecurity for Children, Evidence from Recent Scientific Studies*, an analysis prepared by the Center on Hunger and Poverty at Brandies University, the authors report that the adverse consequences of hunger and food insecurity for children include:

Health

- **Poorer overall health status and compromised ability to resist illness**
- **Increased health problems such as stomach-aches, headaches, colds, ear infections and fatigue**
- **Greater incidence of hospitalization**

Psychosocial and Behavioral

- **Higher levels of aggression, hyperactivity and anxiety as well as passivity**
- **Difficulty getting along with other children**
- **Increased need for mental health services**

Learning and Academic

- **Impaired cognitive functioning and diminished capacity to learn**
- **Lower test scores and poorer overall school achievement**
- **Repeating a grade in school**
- **Increased school absences, tardiness and school suspension.**³

Some food-insecure turn to Federal food assistance programs or emergency food providers in their communities when they are unable to obtain enough food.

Nationally, just over half of food-insecure households surveyed in 2005 said that in the previous month they had participated in one or more of the three largest Federal food assistance programs – the National School Lunch Program, the Food Stamp program, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Nationally, about 22% of food-insecure households obtained emergency food from a food pantry at some time during the year.

Food Stamps

The Food Stamp Program is perhaps the best-known Federal nutrition program in the United States and is considered the first line of defense in the fight against hunger. Food stamp benefits are issued through Electronic Benefits Transfer cards, known as EBT. The use of these cards has reduced fraud, reduced administrative costs and reduced the stigma of receiving these benefits. Food stamps are a means-tested program with strict eligibility requirements. Able-bodied adult recipients are required to be involved in employment activities if they are not already employed.

The Food Stamp Program is administered by the United States Department of Agriculture. Benefits are delivered on the state level by the Utah Department of Workforce Services (DWS). There are 35 DWS offices throughout the state. In addition, to administering the Food Stamp Program, DWS oversees the eligibility process for other support services like childcare subsidies, cash assistance and medical programs. DWS also offers employment services for both employers and job seekers.

The Food Stamps Program contributes millions of dollars to state and local economies. It creates jobs and helps low-income families make ends meet. The Economic Resource Service⁴ reports the multiplier effect for food stamps. Every \$5 of food stamps creates \$9.20 in economic activity. In fiscal year 2006 Federal funding for food stamps, or in other words the amount of food stamp benefits issued in Utah, was \$140,415,915.

Food Stamps in Utah

Many Utahns choose not to participate in the Food Stamp Program. According to the Food Research and Action Center⁵ only 60% of eligible Utahns access the program. Though there was a slight decrease from 2005 to 2006, less than 1% of caseloads have been increasing dramatically since the year 2000. As of August 1, 2007, there were approximately 51,497 Utah households receiving food stamps, or 5.2% of the total population.

- **From 2000 to 2006, there was a 67% increase in the number of households accessing the Food Stamp Program**
- **The average benefit per household in Utah is just over \$209**
- **23 % of food stamp households have a family member with a disability**
- **Food stamp benefits can only be used to purchase of food. Non-food items like personal toiletries and cleaning supplies. Other non-food items are not allowable purchases. Food stamp recipients can also use their benefits to purchase plants and seeds for vegetable gardening.**

While participation in the Food Stamp Program has increased, 40% of eligible households do not access the program. Access to offices and a reluctance to depend on government services prevents many Utahns from participating in programs for which they are eligible. While there are 35 DWS locations throughout the state, Utahns living in rural counties have to travel long distances to access services.

Women, Infants and Children (WIC)

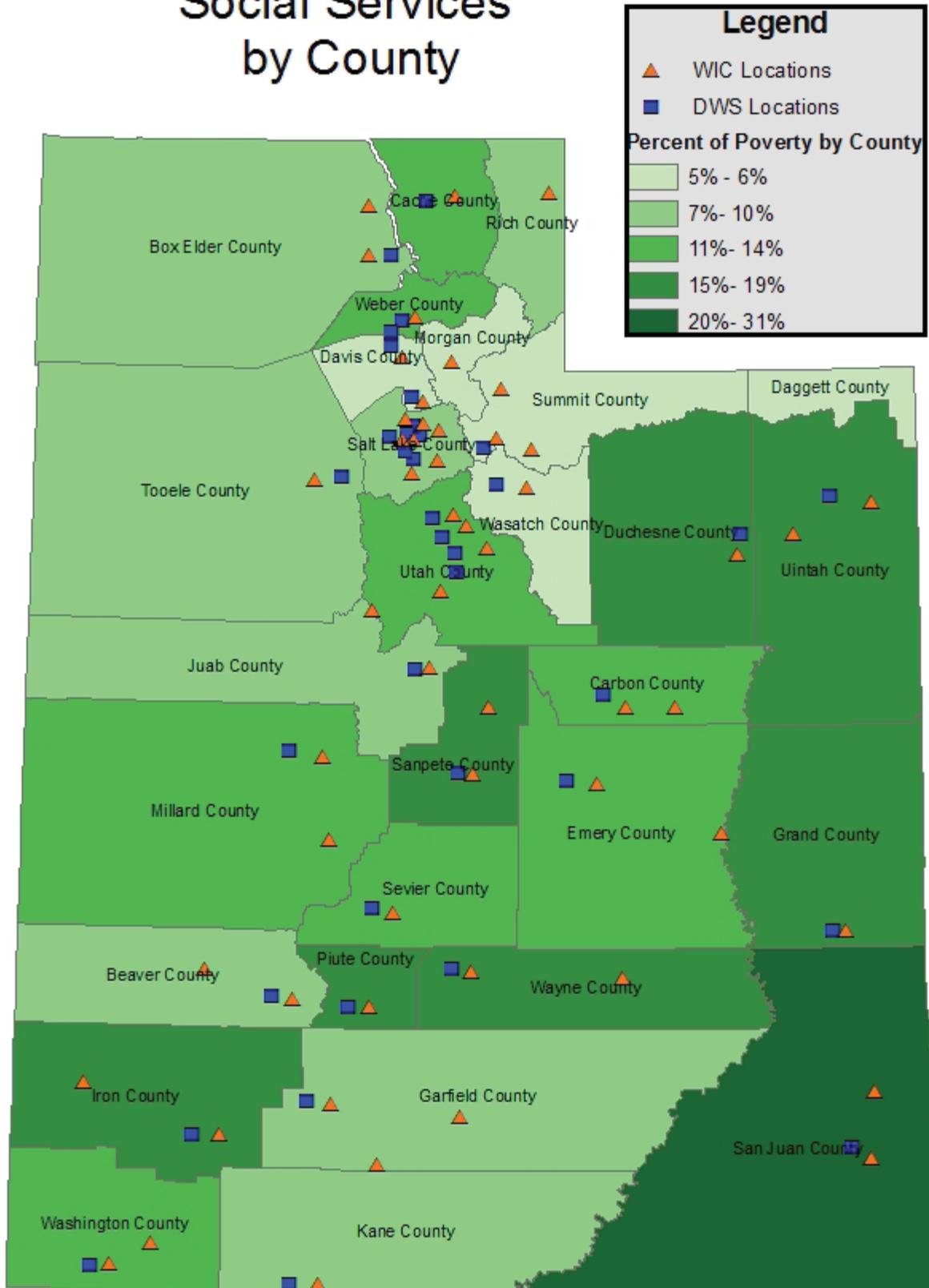
The Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children, otherwise known as WIC, provides new mothers, pregnant women, infants, and children under the age of five, who are considered to be at a nutritional risk, with supplemental foods through a monthly food package that is targeted to improve nutrition. According to the Food and Nutrition Services website, participation in the WIC program has demonstrated the following benefits:

- **Improved birth outcomes and savings in health care costs**
- **Improved diet and diet related outcomes**
- **Improved infant feeding practices**
- **Improved cognitive development⁶**

While a more modest program than food stamps, the WIC program in Utah serves over 66,000 low-income children and mothers each month.

Programs like food stamps, free and reduced price school meals, senior congregate meals, and WIC are designed to help increase household resources and improve nutrition. However, all of these programs are means-tested and have income eligibility requirements that prevent many working poor households from participating. Many eligible households choose not to participate in Federal nutrition programs and rely on food pantries to help provide supplemental groceries. (See “Social Services by County Map” page 5.)

Social Services by County



Mapping Hunger 2007
Map by Jennifer Torres

Emergency Pantry Analysis

Emergency food pantries provide critical support both to working poor households that have too much income to qualify for Federal nutrition programs and households whose Federal benefits and income are inadequate to meet their household's nutritional needs.

The emergency food pantry system is made up of a variety of organizations including America's Second Harvest (A2H), statewide and regional food banks and food pantries.

- **America's Second Harvest – umbrella organization for certified food banks**
- **Food bank – private, non-profit distribution warehouse, usually affiliated with A2H, a national coordinating network for food banks**
- **Food pantry – community-based, non-profit food assistance program most often found at churches and social service agencies. Pantries are generally operated by faith-based organizations, private non-profits and public non-profits supported by Associations of Governments. Pantries provide a limited amount of food to individuals and families facing either food emergencies or ongoing food needs.**

Emergency food pantries rely heavily on local support for both food and volunteers. Funding for these services includes state, local and Federal level funding. Many pantries lack infrastructure to improve service delivery or nutritional value of the food distributed. Many pantries rely on regional food banks for support as well as support from Alliance for Unity, Holiday, Boy Scouts of America and National Association of Letter Carriers food drives. Funding for other needs like forklifts and other equipment is limited.

The 57 pantries that were interviewed for this report serve an average of 20,000 households a month. The holidays and late summer are often busier months for emergency food pantries throughout the state and pantries often struggle to meet the needs of their individual communities. If the national average of 3.5 % of all households obtaining emergency food from food pantries were applied to Utah, the resulting number would be approximately 27,000 non-duplicated households receiving emergency food from food pantries which represents only 17.5% of food-insecure

and very-low food-secure households. In Utah, using the national percentages result in 27,000 households receiving food from pantries, pantry distributions represent 34% of households in poverty and 12.5% of households below 185% of poverty.

Nationally food-insecure households are 17 times as likely as food-secure households to have obtained food from a food pantry. Also nationally, of the households that reported having obtained food from a food pantry in the last 12 months, 48% reported that this had occurred in only 1 or 2 months, 21% reported that it had occurred in almost every month, and the remaining 31% reported that it had only occurred in "some months, but not every month."

A large majority, 78%, of food-insecure households nationally, and 71% of very low food-secure households, did not use a food pantry at any time during the previous year. In some cases this was because there was no food pantry available or because the household believed there was none available. Among food secure households that did not use a food pantry, 25% reported that there was no such resource in their community, and an additional 20% said they did not know if there was one. Nevertheless, even among food-insecure households that knew there was a food pantry in their community, only 33% availed themselves of it.

About 32% of national households that used food pantries and emergency kitchens were classified as food-secure. Statistics show that almost half of food-secure households that did use emergency food pantries and emergency kitchens did, however, report some concerns or difficulties in obtaining enough food by responding positively to 1 or 2 of the 18 indicators of food insecurity, indicating marginal food insecurity. A household must report occurrence of at least three of the indicators to be considered food insecure.

Nationally, households with children were nearly twice as likely as those without children to use food pantries (4.8% compared to 2.8%). Food pantry use was especially high among female-head of households with children (10.5%), while use by married couples with children (2.7%) and households with elderly members (2.3%) was lower than the national average.

Nationally, use of food pantries was higher among Blacks (7.8%) and Hispanics (3.9%) than among non-

Hispanic Whites (2.7%), consistent with higher rates of poverty and food insecurity of these minorities.

Just over one in four (27%) of the households nationally that received food stamps in the month prior to the food-security survey also obtained food from a food pantry at some time during the year. These households comprised 48.6% of all households that reported using a food pantry. A sizeable majority of food pantry users (66.2%) received food from at least one of the three largest Federal food assistance programs. The remainder of food pantry users (33.8%) did not participate in any of the Federal food programs.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is a key partner in responding to Utahns in need. Local bishops often provide food boxes and other services to meet the basic needs of struggling families through Bishops' Storehouses located throughout the state. It is estimated that less than 5% of the church membership in the United States and Canada access these services.⁷

Pantry Demographics

Of the 64 primary pantries currently in the Utah Food Bank Services network, 57 participated in this study.

3 counties have no pantry:

- Piute - 16.2% poverty
- Rich - 10.2% poverty
- Wayne - 15.4% poverty

The 5 counties with the highest percent of poverty have only 5 pantries and serve a total of 1,029 households (there are approximately 79,000 households in Utah in poverty):

- San Juan - 31% poverty
1 pantry/130 households
- Iron - 19% poverty
2 pantries/500 households
- Duchesne - 16.8% poverty
1 pantry/175 households
- Piute - 16.2% poverty
no pantry
- San Pete - 15.9% poverty
1 pantry/224 households

Of the 57 pantries in the study, households served is distributed as follows:

- Less than 250 households served
36 pantries
- 251 to 500 households served
12 pantries
- 501 to 750 households served
4 pantries
- Over 751 households served
5 pantries

Pantries that serve the most number of households are:

- Catholic Community Service – Ogden
- Community Action Services – Provo
- Crossroads Urban Center – Salt Lake City
- Catholic Community Services – Salt Lake City
- Family Connection Center – Layton

The number of days that pantries are open varies. In addition to posted hours, many pantries are willing to open if needed

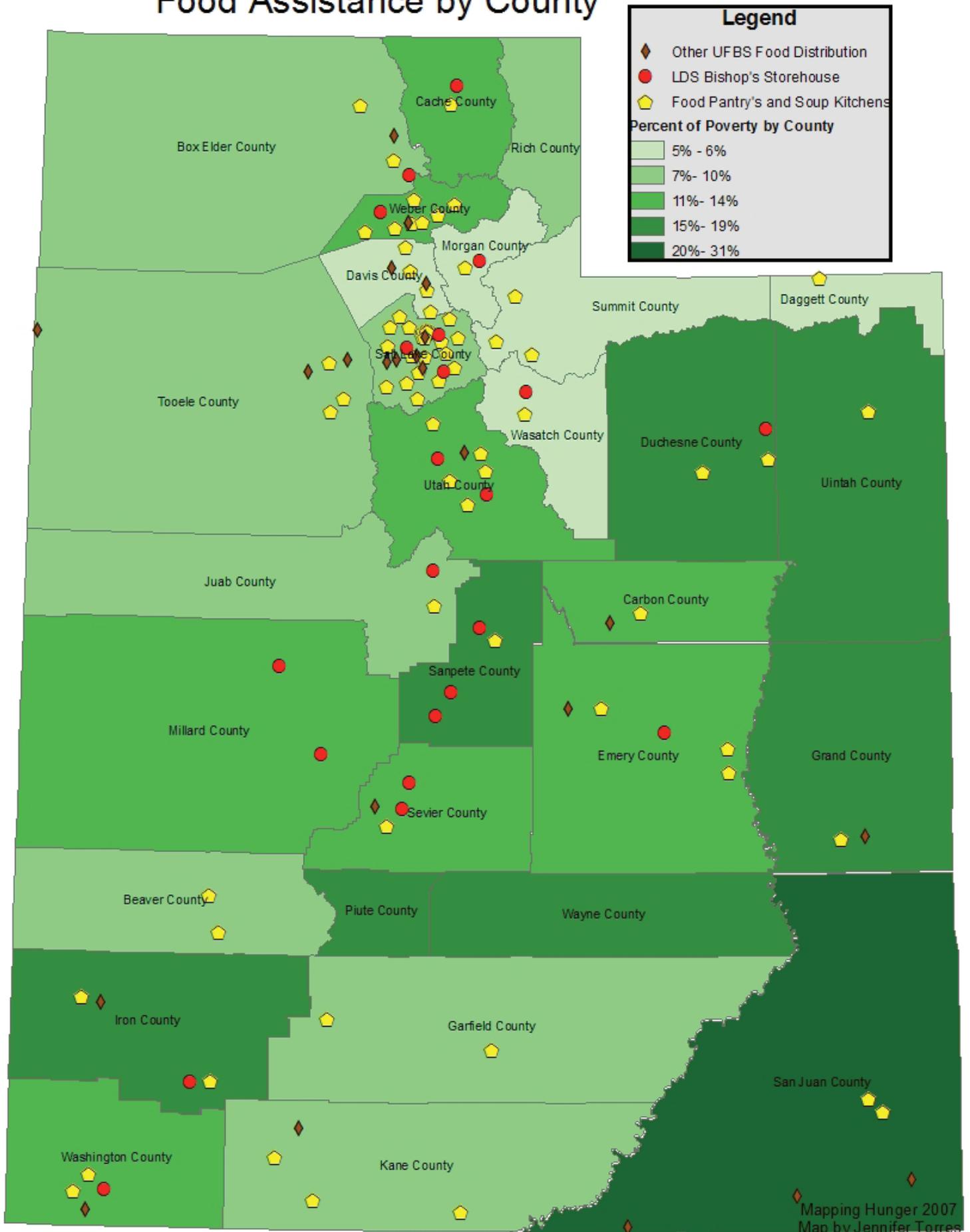
- By appointment only - 2
- 1 day a week - 9
- 2 days a week - 12
- 3 days a week - 7
- 4 days a week - 6
- 5 days a week - 20
- 6 days a week - 1

Of these 57 pantries:

- 27 are faith-based which is 42% of the total pantries (this does not count 22 LDS Bishop's Storehouses)

(See "Food Assistance by County" pg. 8)

Food Assistance by County



Mapping Hunger 2007
Map by Jennifer Torres

Facility and Equipment

In order to operate and distribute food to the public, emergency food pantries must meet health and safety standards set out by the United States Department of Agriculture, the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food and the Utah Department of Health. Pantries also need adequate equipment and space to store dry goods and perishable products that require refrigeration and freezing. Most pantries meet these standards. Utah Food Bank Services works on an ongoing basis with those pantries that need improvement.

Emergency food providers are often limited to the kinds of food they distribute because they lack enough space, do not have sufficient refrigeration and freezer capacity. Most emergency food pantries have residential refrigerators and freezers, making it difficult to carry large quantities of food that require refrigeration or freezing.

- **51% (29) of pantries responding to the survey reported that they have inadequate dry storage areas to store shelf stable items, canned goods and boxed meals**
- **46% (27) of pantries report needing to increase or improve refrigeration capacity; Carbon County Food Bank was the only pantry reporting no refrigeration**
- **33% (19) of pantries report needing increased freezer capacity**

Un-met Equipment Needs

Infrastructure is an important component of increasing capacity and expanding services in emergency food pantries. Without appropriate equipment it is difficult for emergency food providers to store food adequately and safely:

- **58% of pantries (33) reported having un-met equipment needs. Shelving, freezer capacity and refrigeration represented the equipment that is most needed**
- **15 pantries reported the need for additional shelving**

Food Sources

Emergency food pantries depend on food banks, their community, statewide food drives, private donations and other sources to stock their shelves. Statewide food drives, local support, USDA, Utah Food Bank Services and commercial donations represent the most important sources of food for pantries statewide.

- **42% (24) of emergency food pantries rely on Utah Food Bank Services for at least 50% or more of the food they distribute**
- **63% (36) of pantries rely to some degree on local donations and support from their local community for food**
- **63% (36) of pantries rely to some degree on donations from on Scouting for Food, Letter Carriers and the Holiday Food Drives to meet the needs of their community. 53% of these 36 pantries report that these statewide food drives are a primary source of product/food, representing at least 30% of the food they receive**
- **40% (23) of pantries conduct local food drives, partnering with scout troops, schools, businesses and other community partners**
- **Almost all pantries indicated that they would like regular access to eggs, milk, cheese and fresh produce.**
- **Most pantries indicated that they would distribute more food if they had the capacity to receive and store it.**

Food Purchases

Unlike grocery stores that have a seemingly endless variety of food, emergency food pantries are limited to what they distribute based mostly on donations. However, emergency food pantries often purchase food to supplement their inventories. Pantries purchase food when donations are inadequate to meet demands and to provide more balanced food boxes.

- **64% of pantries (35) reported purchasing food**
- **Pantries spent over \$199,000 to augment their food supply**

Funding

Emergency food pantries rely on numerous funding sources to operate. Funding varies depending on what kind of organization operates the pantry. Pantries operated by churches depend heavily on the support of their congregations for volunteers as well as food. Larger organizations have more diverse funding, and have a greater capacity to serve more people.

Emergency Food Network Funding (EFN) from the Department of Community and Culture and funding from the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) play a vital role in supporting the emergency food network in Utah. Without these sources of funding, pantry capacity would be greatly reduced in the state and some rural communities would lose pantries altogether.

- **56% (32) of pantries receive funding from local, state or Federal funding sources**
- **56% (32) of emergency food pantries receive funding from the sales tax rebate on donated food**

Staff & Volunteers

One of the greatest challenges for emergency food pantries is adequate staff and volunteers. Staff play an important role in service delivery, training and ensuring that regulations are followed.

The pantries surveyed reported the need for additional paid staff:

- **40% (23) pantries reported needing additional staff**
- **30% (17) of pantries report staffing as one of their greatest needs**

Volunteers are an essential part of the emergency food network. Volunteers interact with clients, prepare food boxes, provide resource information, pick up donated food and at times deliver food to homebound elderly and clients with disabilities. Despite the impressive numbers of volunteers serving in pantries, gaps remain:

- **89% (51) of the pantries surveyed report utilizing volunteers**

- **An average of 1,696 volunteers donate approximately 11,324 hours, at \$5.15 an hour this amounts to over \$58,000 worth of donations each month to pantries throughout the state, or nearly \$700,000 a year**
- **40% (23) of pantries report needing additional volunteers**
- **27% (16) of pantries report inadequate volunteers as one of their greatest challenges**

Challenges

Emergency food pantries are a critical part of the safety net that serves low-income families. They operate with the help of volunteers and the generosity of their community with both monetary and food donations. Government funding provides support through CSBG, EFN, as well as CDBG and FEMA funding. However, many pantries must limit whom they serve, how much food they distribute and what kinds of food they distribute based on the adequacy of their equipment, facilities and availability of food.

Pantries were asked to identify their agency's biggest challenges. Pantries responded in the following categories. Some pantries reported in more than one category:

- **26 identified budget and fundraising as their biggest challenge**
- **23 reported storage capacity as their biggest challenge**
- **17 reported staffing as their biggest challenge**
- **16 reported needing more and better-trained volunteers**
- **4 said transportation is their biggest challenge**
- **6 identified lack of access to food as their biggest challenge**
- **7 reported other concerns that included the need for increased transportation options for clients, and more community awareness**

Summary

Emergency food pantries throughout the state serve thousands of low-income households each month. Hundreds of volunteers and emergency food pantry staff distribute food to those in need. Pantries utilize available resources and have enormous support from the communities in which they operate. When asked what their biggest strength is pantry staff reported their ability to help families in need, volunteers, and supportive communities.

However, in order to improve service delivery, increase community awareness, and improve the quality of food, pantries need additional support from the state, local and county governments as well as more support from local communities. Efforts should be made to understand these issues on the local as well as the state level. Advocates, service providers and policy makers can use this information to begin meaningful conversations about how to eliminate hunger and food insecurity in the state of Utah.

Initiatives that would support reducing hunger in Utah include:

- **Find ways to increase food program utilization in gap areas where distance and other factors are obstacles**
- **Find ways to provide access to emergency food in gap areas where distance and lack of pantries are obstacles (ex. Transitions Food Pantry in Blanding, with the help of Utah Food Bank Services has recently opened two new pantries in San Juan County located in Monument Valley and Montezma Creek)**
- **Find ways to increase access to food by addressing issues such as hours and staffing (paid and volunteer)**
- **Assist existing pantries by offering staff training and facility expansion/improvements such as shelving, refrigeration and additional storage capacity**
- **Promote efforts to increase community awareness of pantry needs and services, including promotion through other service agencies**
- **Help individuals in need be aware of all services available to them**
- **Ensure that an adequate amount of emergency food is available for pantry use**
- **Develop a better understanding of community needs by conducting a pantry study that focuses on individual client needs**

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