

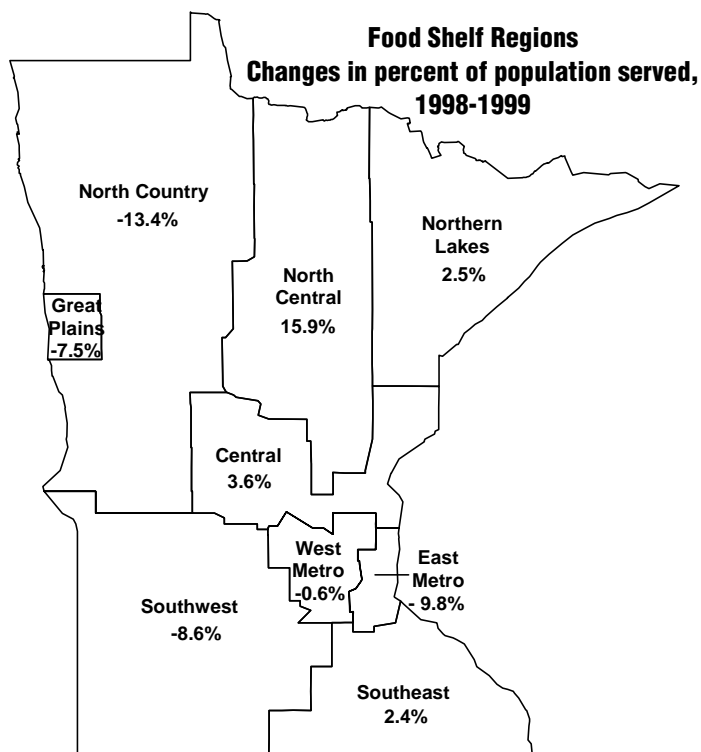
Minnesota food shelf use and socioeconomic indicators 1998 and 1999

Food shelf use decreased slightly in Minnesota from 1998 to 1999, from 1,266,408 individual visits in 1998 to 1,248,065 visits in 1999. At an estimated 5.3 visits per person, (generally accepted figure for visits per individual in Minnesota, Minnesota Hunger Partners) this implies that 235,484 separate individuals visited food shelves in 1999, nearly 5 percent of the state's population.

Individual visits increased in five of the state's nine food bank regions and declined in the other four. The increases ranged from a small 0.7 percent increase in the West Metro region to a 17.3 percent increase in North Central. But declines in food shelf visits in the state's other four regions – ranging from a 7.1 percent decline in Great Plains to a 13.1 percent decline in North Country – more than matched the increases, resulting in the 1.5 percent net decline in individual visits statewide.

Taking population growth into account, and assuming 5.3 visits per individual, there has been a 2.5 percent decrease from 1998 to 1999 in the percent of the state's population served by food shelves (the estimated “food shelf use rate”) from 5.1 percent in 1998 to 4.9 percent in 1999. But again, this trend varies widely by region. While North Country experienced a 13.4 percent decrease from 1998 to 1999 in the estimated percent of population using food shelves and East Metro saw a 10 percent decrease, North Central had a 15.9 percent increase and Central's food shelf use rate increased over 3 percent.

In 1999, the East Metro region had the lowest food shelf use rate (2.8%); Central, Northern Lakes and Southwest are lower than average (4.0%, 3.7% and 3.7%, respectively), Southeast is slightly above average (5.1%), North Central, North Country and West Metro are considerably above average (6.9%, 6.4%, and 6.3%), and Great Plains has the highest food shelf use rate in the state (8.9%)



Economic and food program use indicators, 1998-1999

During the same time period, the Minnesota unemployment rate remained at a low 2.5 percent, while average weekly wages increased 4.4 percent, from \$581.26 to \$606.63. Services and trade were the two largest sectors of employment in 1998, constituting 28 percent and 24 percent, respectively, of all jobs in the state. In the mid-1990s – the most recent period for which poverty data are available – the percent of total population in poverty declined by 19.4 percent, from 10.8 percent in 1993 to 8.7 percent in 1998 to \$33,239 in 1998 to \$37,483 in 1999, a rise of 12.8 percent. The state's Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) caseload declined 10.5 percent. About 10 percent of Minnesotan's federal tax returns claimed the Earned Income Tax Credit and 8.6 percent of state tax returns claimed the Working Family Credit.

The percentage of children approved for free and reduced-price school lunches increased 0.4 percent, from 26.2 percent of enrolled students to 26.3 percent, while the number of families receiving Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) declined 3.8 percent. The number of households receiving food stamps declined 3.6 percent and the number of people served home-delivered meals declined 1.2 percent. The number of families receiving child care subsidies increased by 13.7 percent.

About 43 percent of renters in Minnesota pay more than they can afford (based on fair market rent), and the ratio of median home sale prices to average wages increased by 7.5 percent over the 1995-96 to 1998-99 period.

Factors that contribute to food shelf use

Based on statistical analysis, we found that the greater the proportion of a county's labor force in the higher-wage sectors of manufacturing and construction, the lower the county's food shelf use rate; and the higher the percentage of service sector employment, the higher the food shelf use. Two other factors were associated with lower food shelf use: higher median income and higher WIC participation rates.

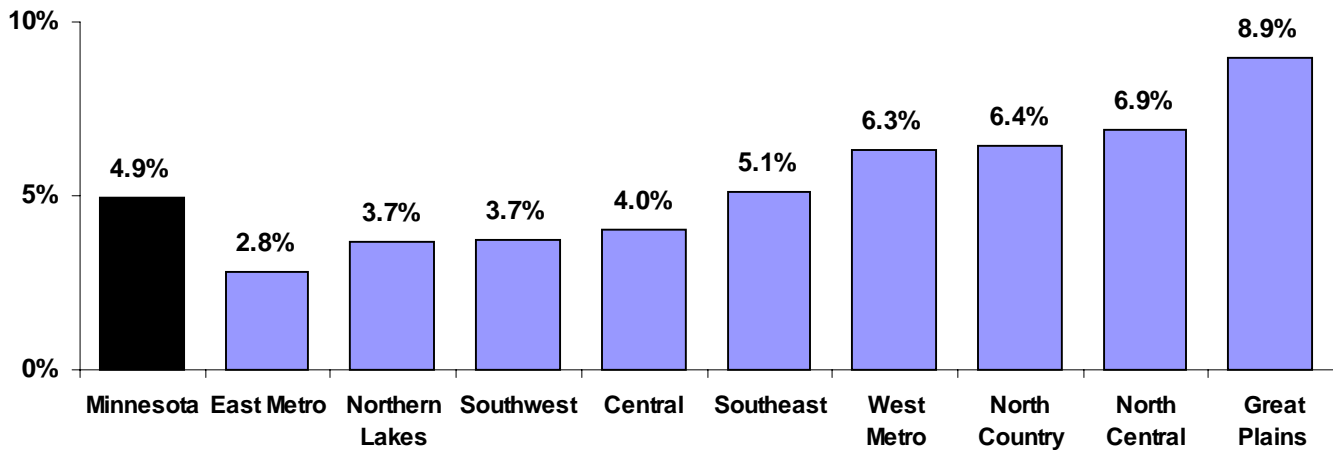
Regional factors in food shelf use:

- The North Central region experienced the greatest growth in food shelf use, perhaps related to low wages and unemployment. The area has the highest unemployment rate in the state, although unemployment has declined quite a bit, and many people work in the low-wage service sector. Wages have increased, but they are still among the lowest in the state. Also, area food shelves have been increasing their outreach and attempting to provide better services. As a result, there may be more people aware of the help that the food shelves provide in an area where socioeconomic indicators suggest higher need.
- The North Country region had the greatest decline in food shelf use. North Country, along with Southwest and Great Plains, is almost recovered from the severe flooding and tornadoes experienced in recent years. North Country has the second lowest rate of employment in the two lowest paying industries, services and trade (49 percent). Also, while WIC participation has been dropping throughout the state, in North Country it is dropping at a much lower rate, the second lowest in the state. Taken together, all of these indicate less need for food shelf assistance.

1. FOOD SHELF USE, 1998 AND 1999

	Individuals served, 1998	Individuals served, 1999	Change, 1998-1999	Estimated percent of population served, 1998	Estimated percent of population served, 1999	Change, 1998-1999
Minnesota	1,266,408	1,248,065	-1.5%	5.1%	4.9%	-2.5%
Central	76,871	81,384	5.9%	3.9%	4.0%	3.6%
East Metro	168,081	153,691	-8.6%	3.1%	2.8%	-9.8%
Great Plains	26,387	24,512	-7.1%	9.7%	8.9%	-7.5%
North Central	58,849	69,045	17.3%	6.0%	6.9%	15.9%
North Country	129,710	112,685	-13.1%	7.4%	6.4%	-13.4%
Northern Lakes	45,461	46,665	2.6%	3.6%	3.7%	2.5%
Southeast	125,498	130,513	3.2%	5.0%	5.1%	2.4%
Southwest	101,321	92,342	-8.9%	4.1%	3.7%	-8.6%
West Metro	534,230	538,189	0.7%	6.4%	6.3%	-0.6%

2. ESTIMATED PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION SERVED BY FOOD SHELVES, 1999



3. MINNESOTA

	1998	1999	Change
Individual visits to food shelves	1,266,408	1,248,065	-1.5%
Population	4,726,411	4,775,508	1.0%
Estimated percent of population served by food shelves	5.1%	4.9%	-2.5%
Unemployment rate	2.5%	2.5%	0
Average weekly wage	\$581.26	\$606.63	4.4%
Percent of population in poverty, 1993 and 1995	10.8%	8.7%	-19.4%
Median household income	\$33,239	\$37,483	12.8%
MFIP (welfare) participation	48,060	43,009	-10.5%
Earned Income Tax Credit rate	9.7%	9.3%	-4.1%
Working Family Credit rate	8.6%	na	na
Percent of enrolled students approved for free/reduced price lunch	26.2%	26.3%	0.4%
WIC participation (persons)	92,702	89,170	-3.8%
Food Stamp participation (households)	96,921	93,447	-3.6%
People served home-delivered meals	16,898	16,699	-1.2%
Subsidized child care families	23,365	26,564	13.7%
Percent of renters unable to afford fair market rent	na	43%	na
Median home sale price relative to average annual wages, 1995-96 and 1998-99	2.11	2.27	7.5%

Implications and recommendations

The Minnesota economy is booming. Unemployment rates are at historical lows and median household income is at an all-time high, among the best in the nation. The “rising economic tide” seems to be benefiting more people, indicated by the overall drop in food shelf use in Minnesota. Regardless, last year, more food bank regions in the state experienced increased use than declining use.

Wages: A number of people, including those leaving welfare for work, are earning low wages, perhaps working in service jobs, and having serious trouble making ends meet. Family health problems or other family crises can bring about situations that add to the need for assistance by programs such as food shelves. Efforts to increase wages so that families have sufficient income to meet their daily living needs and efforts to make available programs that help fill in the gaps for families are still very important in order to aid families who have not benefited by the improved economy.

WIC participation: WIC is one program that is helping families deal with meeting their food and nutrition needs. The higher the WIC participation in an area, the lower the county's food shelf use. Recently, the number of eligible women, infants and children participating in the program has declined, and some efforts were made to halt the decline. Efforts should continue to support increased use and ease of access to WIC in Minnesota, including sufficient funding so that all eligible people can get support from the program.

Affordable housing: Another strain on low income people is the cost of housing. Housing costs in Minnesota are quite high and are increasing. At least 40 percent of Minnesotans, and more in some regions,

are unable to afford the 1999 fair market rent. Most often, people pay for housing first, and then deal with other needs such as food. As housing costs increase, especially for those with low-paying jobs, less money is available for food. As a result, more people need the support provided by food shelves. Efforts to increase the supply of affordable housing should be continued so that low-income people have options available that allow them to meet all their basic needs.

About this report

In 1999, Minnesota Hunger Partners contracted with the Wilder Research Center to analyze 1998 and 1999 food shelf use in Minnesota and how it relates to a variety of socioeconomic indicators. Hunger Partners provided data on food shelf use; and other statistics were gathered from various sources.

The full report discusses statewide patterns and regional variations in food shelf use, and then does the same for economic indicators, food program indicators and other indicators of need. It also describes the results of statistical analyses of relationships between food shelf use and the various indicators.

The full report also provides summary tables for the state and for each of the state's nine food bank regions which pull together food shelf use and all indicators for the specified geographic area and gives a verbal description of that area's patterns and trends.

The appendix of the full report provides a series of tables providing food shelf use data and indicator data for each county, organized alphabetically within each food bank region, for 1998 and 1999, or for the most recent years available. Definitions, sources and clarifying notes for each indicator are found at the end of each table.

For more information

The full report is available at www.wilder.org. To obtain additional copies of the summary, contact the Minnesota Food Shelf Association at 612-870-9170. Authors: Doug Clement, Richard Chase, Laura McLain