



2024 HUNGER SNAPSHOT COWLITZ COUNTY

Food insecurity is an issue that affects every county in Washington, and rates of food insecurity are increasing.

Economic inequality, coupled with increases in the cost of living and reduced funding for food assistance since the end of the Covid-19 emergency, mean that many Washingtonians cannot reliably afford sufficient food for themselves and their families. This fact sheet represents data from 2022-2024 on the state of food insecurity and food programs in Cowlitz County.



15,890

People experiencing food
insecurity, countywide

5,430

Children experiencing food
insecurity, or **22%** of children

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, provides Washington families below 200% of the Federal Poverty Line with money each month to purchase groceries.

In Cowlitz County, **67%** of income-eligible people are participating in SNAP. This is higher than the statewide average of 52%. About **33%** of those who are income eligible are **not** enrolled in SNAP, either due to lack of knowledge about the program, fear of accessing public benefits, or restrictive eligibility requirements beyond income.

20,906

People receiving SNAP
benefits, or **19%** of the
county population

\$45,721,000

Annual value of SNAP
participation for
Cowlitz County

10,158

Income eligible
people who are **not**
enrolled in SNAP

School Meals

School meals play a crucial role in alleviating childhood hunger, and there are multiple ways to expand this resource to more children. The **Community Eligibility Provision** (CEP) allows schools with a large number of low-income families to provide meals at no cost for all students, increasing access and decreasing paperwork and stigma. **Breakfast After the Bell** is a nationally recognized best practice for maximizing access to school breakfast. It integrates school breakfast into the instructional day, ensuring all students have the opportunity to access and consume a healthy school breakfast alongside their peers. High-poverty schools in Washington are required to implement Breakfast After the Bell.

11,151

Children eligible for free school meals, or **65%** of children in Cowlitz County

31

Schools offering Free School Meals for All, or **84%** of schools

92%

School compliance with the state mandate for Breakfast After the Bell

Summer Nutrition Programs

Without access to free meals during the school day, summer is often the hungriest time of year for low-income children. Two federal nutrition programs tackle this problem - Free Summer Meals, which provides free meals in the community to kids under 18, and SUN Bucks, which provides \$120 per eligible child to help families with grocery costs.

19,095

Free Summer Meals served in 2024, or **1.5%** of the state total

11,530

Children receiving SUN Bucks, or **1.9%** of the state total

Women, Infants, & Children

The WIC program provides women, infants, and children under 5 with money for food and formula, along with nutrition education and health screenings.

3,988

WIC participants, representing over **\$1,954,700** in redeemed benefits

Emergency Food Assistance

Food banks and pantries are critical resources for families, providing immediate food support and serving as information hubs for additional assistance programs.

3,114,260

Pounds of food distributed, reaching over **4,433** households



How Can Local Communities Help?

Share Information

Use Hunger Free Washington's [social media graphics](#) and [digital flyers](#) to raise awareness of programs and [request printed materials](#) to reach more people.

Stay Up to Date

With many new legislators and priorities in state and national government, many of these programs may be subject to changes. Keeping a weather eye on changes and sharing accurate information can help your community make the most of these programs with the least fear and worry. Stay up to date with the [Know Your Benefits](#) page.

Advocate

Raise your voice in support of your neighbors and help increase or protect food assistance. Sign up for updates from the Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition and find more information about advocacy [here](#).

Help people enroll in programs

One of the most effective ways to help people access food programs is to help them apply! In many cases, applying for one program will help people access many others; Basic Food in particular can enroll eligible families in all of the other listed programs and more. Learn more about these programs at Hungerfreewa.org or go directly to applications with these links!

- [Basic Food](#)
- [WIC](#)
- [Free School Meals](#)
- [SUN Bucks](#)
- [Summer Meals](#) (No application required!)

Data Sources

Food insecurity: [Feeding America Map the Meal Gap, 2022](#)

Population & population under 200% of the Federal Poverty Line: American Community Survey, Table S1701, 2023 one-year estimates & 2022 five-year estimates

Number of children eligible for Free or Reduced Price meals: Area Eligibility Data [2023-24 Report](#)

Schools operating CEP: [Schools Operating CEP in School Year 2024-25](#)

Schools eligible to operate CEP: [2024-25 CEP-Eligible LEA & School Report](#)

Schools operating HB 1238: [Schools Operating HB 1238 in School Year 2024-25](#)

WIC data: 2023 [WIC Annual Report – Data Sheet – County \(PDF\)](#)

Emergency Food Assistance data: State Fiscal Year 2024 EFAP Data

Breakfast After the Bell mandated schools: Schools Required to Implement BAB [2024-25](#)

Breakfast After the Bell implementation: Breakfast model reports, obtained from OSPI



For all County Fact Sheets,
data sources, and more:

HungerFreeWA.org/FactSheets