

Oklahoma Food Banks 2022

Policy Positions and Priorities

Summary

The Oklahoma Food Banks Support:

- Sustaining local, state and federal resources that help increase awareness and access to vital hunger relief programs and their funding such as, but not limited to:
 - The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
 - Women, Infants and Children (WIC)
 - The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)
 - Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
 - Commodities Supplemental Food Program (CSFP).
- Boosting funding for the Double Up Bucks program to expand its reach for more Oklahomans to participate.
- Efforts that:
 - encourage and incentivize school districts to participate in the Summer Food Service Program throughout the summer or to partner with organizations who sponsor sites to increase access to nutritious meals for children up to age 18 during the summer months
 - extend summer EBT programs nationwide and
 - expand and support hunger relief efforts on post-secondary campuses.
- Changes to the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act that remove red tape to make it easier for providers and schools to feed children.
- Establishing a basic needs allowance for military service members to establish a monthly supplement to base pay for members whose income is less than 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.
- Protecting local and state funding of services and providing economic relief to those who are burdened by sales tax on groceries.
- Addressing the supply chain and prioritizing the needs of hunger relief organizations so that food security efforts remain strong.

The Oklahoma Food Banks Oppose:

- Any legislation that reduces funding of core services and programs that aid Oklahomans in need.
 - Any policy, legislation or rules that create barriers and inequitable access to food assistance.
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Where We Stand

The Oklahoma Food Banks recognize that Oklahoma has the fifth highest food insecurity rate in the nation. In order to fight hunger and feed hope, ***we must craft policies that address the root causes of hunger and poverty*** in Oklahoma. Economic, food, and health disparities intersect and often magnify one another. Stronger communities exist when people experience financial, health and food stability.

We commit to both feeding the line through food distribution that helps those who fall on hard times and ultimately shortening the line as we advocate for improved conditions for Oklahoma families to thrive. Our positions set a vision for local, state and federal leaders on what is needed to end chronic hunger and put more Oklahomans on the path to self-sufficiency.

Sustain Investment in and Access to Nutritional Programs

A 2021 U.S. Department of Agriculture report¹ found that the number of food insecure Americans remained nearly unchanged between 2019 and 2021. The findings suggest that substantial investments in safety net programs like the ones listed below made the difference and contributed to mitigating hunger during the pandemic. It's critical that we take the lessons learned and continue investing in our nation's safety net. ***The Oklahoma Food Banks support sustaining local, state and federal resources that help increase awareness and access to vital hunger relief programs and their funding such as (but not limited to):***

- The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Women, Infants and Children (WIC)
- The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
- Commodities Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)
- Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR)

Program design also determines accessibility of services. The purpose of our safety net programs is to keep families from falling behind when hard times arise. Reforms are needed at the state and federal level to help more Oklahomans avoid "the cliff effect" where families on the margins, struggling to make ends meet, lose benefits before they reach stability. An example of the cliff effect is a modest pay raise triggering disproportionate loss of assistance for working families. ***The Oklahoma Food Banks support reforms to SNAP and other assistance programs that modernize programs to consider current necessities and avoid dramatic loss of services.***

Expand Access to Nutritious Foods and Incentivize Healthier Choices

Programs like the Supplemental Food Assistance Program (SNAP) provide our greatest defense against hunger. When we invest in SNAP, we're not just putting food on the table and giving options to Oklahomans, we're growing our workforce and boosting the economy through our local grocery stores and farmers markets. For every SNAP dollar spent, \$1.61 in economic activity is generated in our local economy². For every meal our food banks provide, SNAP provides nine. With the recent modernization of the Thrifty Food Plan, we expect the reach of SNAP to go even further for boosting local economies and keeping food on the table.

One area of opportunity in SNAP is incentivizing nutritious food options. A study by the National Institute of Health³ suggests that promoting healthy behaviors requires incentivizing exploration of healthy options of food. The Double Up Bucks program in Oklahoma serves as a great example of this type of intervention. SNAP recipients can receive an extra \$1 for every dollar spent on qualifying fruits and vegetables when they shop at select, local grocery stores and farmer's markets. Participating grocery stores report that not only have they seen an increase in produce purchases, but they're seeing Oklahomans try diverse fruits and vegetables through the incentive. The program only serves a few areas in the state, but with increased funding, Oklahomans across the state can benefit from this healthy incentive. ***The Oklahoma Food Banks support boosting funding for the Double Up Bucks program to expand its reach for more Oklahomans to participate.***

Address Student Hunger

Oklahoma not only has high food insecurity rates among children, it leads the nation as the highest projected rate of children in very low food security in 2021⁴. USDA defines low food security as a lack of access to food to the extent that eating patterns were disrupted and food intake reduced. Because of this, student participation in the Free and Reduced-Price School Meals program is high across our state, with nearly 60% - or almost 400,000 students enrolled. The program serves as a lifeline to ensure that kids can eat breakfast and lunch at school. Hunger extends beyond the K–12 setting. Oklahomans pursuing higher education face high rates of food insecurity according to surveys by Temple University's Hope Center⁵. Malnutrition not only creates barriers to learning but affects the physical and mental health of students of any age.

The Oklahoma Food Banks support efforts that:

- ***encourage and incentivize school districts to participate in the Summer Food Service Program throughout the summer, or to partner with organizations who sponsor sites to increase access to nutritious meals during the summer months***
- ***extend summer EBT programs nationwide and***
- ***expand and support hunger relief efforts on post-secondary campuses.***

Remove Barriers for Addressing Child Nutrition

Federal nutrition programs play a key role in keeping children in Oklahoma fed through school meals, after school programs and summer enrichment. The Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act, which guides child nutrition programs, hasn't been updated in over a decade. Federal waivers during the pandemic gave schools, afterschool and summer enrichment providers the needed flexibility to safely and efficiently feed children. It's time to implement what worked into an updated Child Nutrition Reauthorization. ***The Oklahoma Food Banks support changes to the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act that remove red tape to make it easier for providers and schools to feed children.***

Boost Tax Credits and Programs that Give Relief to Oklahoma Families

Oklahoma Food Banks support policies that provide economic relief to vulnerable Oklahomans. Oklahoma is the fifth highest tax state for low-income earners⁶. This means that low-income earners pay a much higher percentage of their income in sales tax than higher-income earners. They spend a larger portion of their income to meet basic needs like purchasing food. As a result, many of our neighbors make the impossible choice between food or essential needs like medicine, car repair and childcare. The Earned Income Tax Credit is an example of tool that helps lift families out of poverty. Last session, the Oklahoma Legislature restored the refundability of the Oklahoma Earned Income Tax Credit (Oklahoma EITC). When state lawmakers restored the refundability of the Oklahoma EITC, it helped put more money back in the pockets of working Oklahomans. This effort was a good start, but more work can be done to give relief to Oklahoma families on the path to self-sufficiency. ***The Oklahoma Food Banks support protecting local and state funding of services and providing relief to those who are burdened by sales tax on groceries.***

Alleviate Military Hunger

For many active-duty military members, hunger is a reality. With 12 military bases, Oklahoma has a strong military presence. Feeding America estimates that as many as 125,000 active-duty service members and their families face food insecurity in the United States. Challenges like limited income of lower ranking service members, high cost of living in certain communities and financial commitments make them more likely to face hunger. Few active service members qualify for federal food assistance programs because housing allowances are considered income. Service members often are required to move from base to base, making it difficult for spouses to maintain consistent work. This can be especially challenging for family members with jobs that require special licensing which differs by state, like teachers, hairdressers or nurses. ***The Oklahoma Food Banks support a basic needs allowance for military service members to establish a monthly supplement to base pay for service members whose income is less than 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.***

Address Supply Chain Challenges

The pandemic has caused industries across the country to face a shortage of supplies and commodities due to jams in the supply chain. Oklahoma Food Banks feel the impact of the supply chain, too. From the rising cost of food and freight (nearly an extra 25% on food purchases) to the shortage of semi-truck drivers and warehouse workers, these compounding challenges put a strain on our distribution, make accessing food harder, and limit options on food variety. As state and federal leaders work to alleviate the tension on the supply chain, **Oklahoma Food Banks support prioritizing the needs of food banks and other hunger relief organizations so that food security efforts remain strong.**

Sustain Funding for State Budget

Public-private partnerships are essential to end hunger in our state. The charitable sector alone cannot alone help families reach stability. The core services our state provides ensure that all Oklahomans have the supports needed for a strong quality of life. When cuts are made to critical programs or existing funds aren't linked to inflation rates, we put our vulnerable neighbors at risk. **The Oklahoma Food Banks oppose any legislation that disconnect from inflationary trends or reduces funding of core services and programs that aid Oklahomans in need.**

Equity in Food Access

Oklahoma Food Banks believe that every human deserves food security and the dignity to have foods that meet cultural needs and values. We serve every and all residents in need of food assistance. When rules and policies are made without the lens of diverse experiences of Oklahomans, we risk worsening hunger in rural areas and among black and brown citizens and immigrant residents. Past public charge rules serve as a direct example of how policy can create barriers to food access for groups of people. The rules intended to disincentivize participation in public programs of those on the path to citizenship. Instead, it caused confusion on who qualifies and keeps many people who are eligible to receive food assistance from seeking it out of fear of deterring their journey to the American dream. Another factor that plays a role in food insecurity is language barriers. As Oklahoma diversifies, language barriers compounded with socioeconomic status and education, make linguistically sensitive and cultural strategies necessary in order to combat food insecurity in our state. With every Oklahoman in mind, **The Oklahoma Food Banks oppose any policy, legislation, or rules that create barriers to food assistance.**

For questions or partnership on our policy positions and priorities, contact
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Sources

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<https://www.moodyanalytics.com/-/media/article/2021/macroeconomic-impact-of-home-and-community-based-services-expansion.pdf>
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