

HUNGER IN SOUTH-CENTRAL KANSAS



KANSAS APPLESEED

WHAT SOUTH-CENTRAL KANSANS NEED TO THRIVE

Kansas kids and their families need adequate access to healthy, affordable food to thrive—physically and mentally.

According to Feeding America, one in eight people in Kansas is food insecure. This number is much higher among Kansas kids at a staggering one in six.¹ Kansans who are food insecure may not be sure where their next meal will come from and may rely on the critical support Child Nutrition Programs and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provide.

To analyze hunger in South-Central Kansas, Kansas Appleseed focused on data from the following counties: Barber, Butler, Comanche, Cowley, Edwards, Harper, Harvey, Kingman, Kiowa, Marion, McPherson, Pratt, Reno, Sedgwick, Stafford, and Sumner.

We interviewed stakeholders in the region to get their perspective on hunger in their communities, including individual interviews with community members of Sedgwick, Harvey, and Butler Counties. Kansas Appleseed also asked regional Hunger Action Team members about their lived experiences and solutions. During the interviews, it was clear that while Kansans in both urban and rural communities experience hunger, its causes and potential solutions may vary from community to community. It is imperative to name differences, barriers, and solutions and to continue to uplift communities' respective perspectives.

Regional Hunger Action Teams

In 2021, Kansas Appleseed began convening Regional Hunger Action Teams comprised of community members from Northeast, Southeast, Northwest, Central, and Southwest Kansas. We met with experts from lived experiences, domestic violence shelters, sexual assault advocates, family reunification organizations, faith-based organizations from multiple denominations, and more. The goal of the Regional Hunger Action Teams is to provide Kansans with tools and resources and empower them to create solutions to hunger.



Hunger in my community has been an escalating issue. I'm interacting with multiple families on a daily basis throughout the state of Kansas who consistently do not have enough food each month. What I often hear from a parent is 'I always make sure my kids have enough to eat, even if that means I only eat one meal a day.' Yes, there are food banks around town but this doesn't help the single mother of five who doesn't have a car."

- Shylee, community resource manager working in child welfare

THE IMPORTANCE OF SNAP FOOD ASSISTANCE

Administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the country's largest food assistance program. SNAP is key to confronting poverty, hunger, and inadequate nutrition by ensuring people can access and afford nutritious food.² SNAP is a responsive program and can adjust to communities' fluctuating needs, such as population growth, unemployment, and poverty.

HOW SNAP WORKS

SNAP provides monthly benefits to families with household incomes at or below 130% of federal poverty guidelines. These monthly benefits are provided on a card, which looks and functions like a debit card. To utilize SNAP to purchase food, participants present their SNAP card to the store clerk or cashier. SNAP can be used to buy items including fresh fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy products, bread, snacks, and nonalcoholic beverages. Seeds and plants that will produce food can also be purchased with SNAP benefits.

Recipients of SNAP can utilize their benefits for online grocery purchases, including through Amazon and Walmart. Benefits cannot be used to purchase hot meals from grocery stores (like rotisserie chicken), baby items such as diapers, or household supplies such as toilet paper or laundry detergent. In Kansas, the Department for Children and Families administers SNAP.

Persons in Household	Gross Income Limit per Month	Net Income Limit per Month	Maximum Benefit per Month
1	\$1,396	\$1,074	\$250
2	\$1,888	\$1,452	\$459
3	\$2,379	\$1,830	\$658
4	\$2,871	\$2,209	\$835
5	\$3,363	\$2,587	\$992
6	\$3,855	\$2,965	\$1,190
7	\$4,347	\$3,344	\$1,316
8	\$4,839	\$3,722	\$1,504

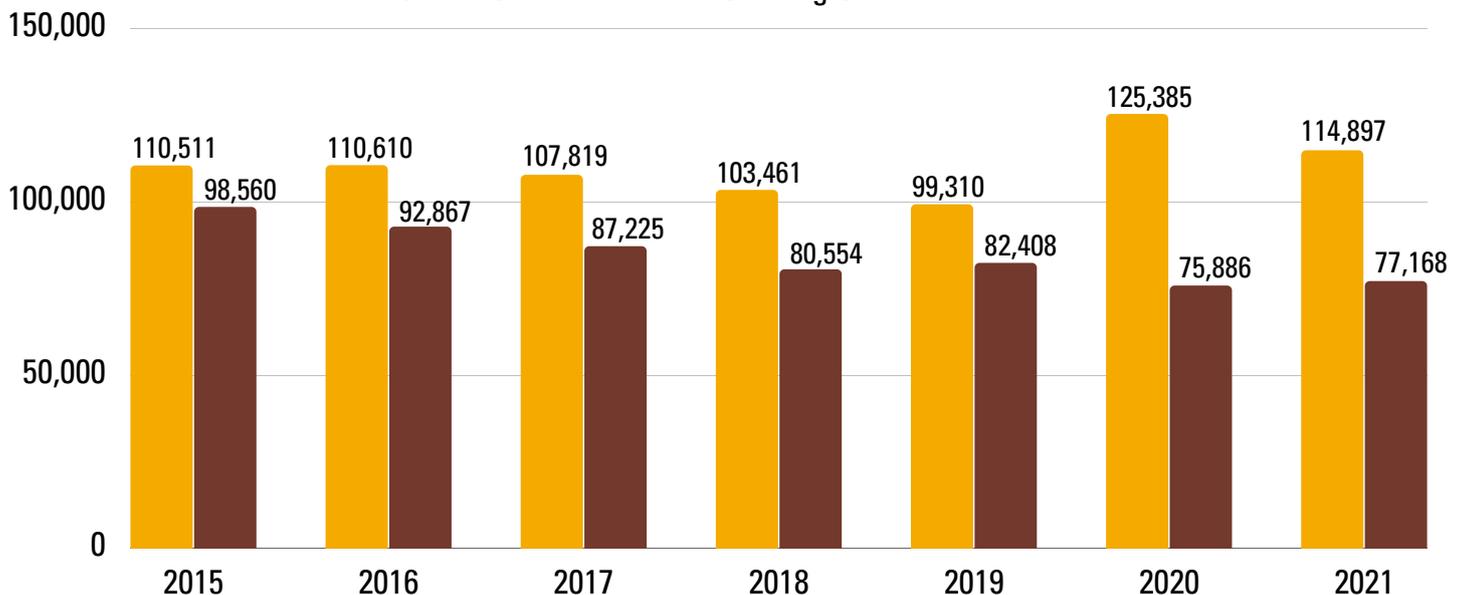
*For households with more than 8 persons, add \$492/month to gross income limit, \$379/month to net income limit, and \$188/month to maximum benefit.³



DECREASING SNAP PARTICIPATION IN SOUTH-CENTRAL KANSAS

In South-Central Kansas, both rural and urban communities faced increased food insecurity, especially amid the COVID-19 pandemic, reaching over 125,000 Kansans. At the same time, not even 76,000 South-Central Kansans had access to SNAP food assistance.⁴ From 2015 to 2020, SNAP enrollment decreased nearly 25% even as food insecurity grew dramatically. State policy barriers, specifically the so-called "HOPE Act," enacted in 2015 and 2016 cut SNAP and other programs, preventing South-Central Kansans from receiving necessary food assistance.

- South-Central Kansans Experiencing Food Insecurity
- South-Central Kansans Utilizing SNAP Food Assistance



HUNGER AND UNEMPLOYMENT IN SOUTH-CENTRAL KANSAS

Unemployment is a primary driver of hunger, and South-Central Kansas is no exception.⁵ Due to the pandemic, unemployment in the region spiked. In effect, food insecurity significantly increased in 2020.

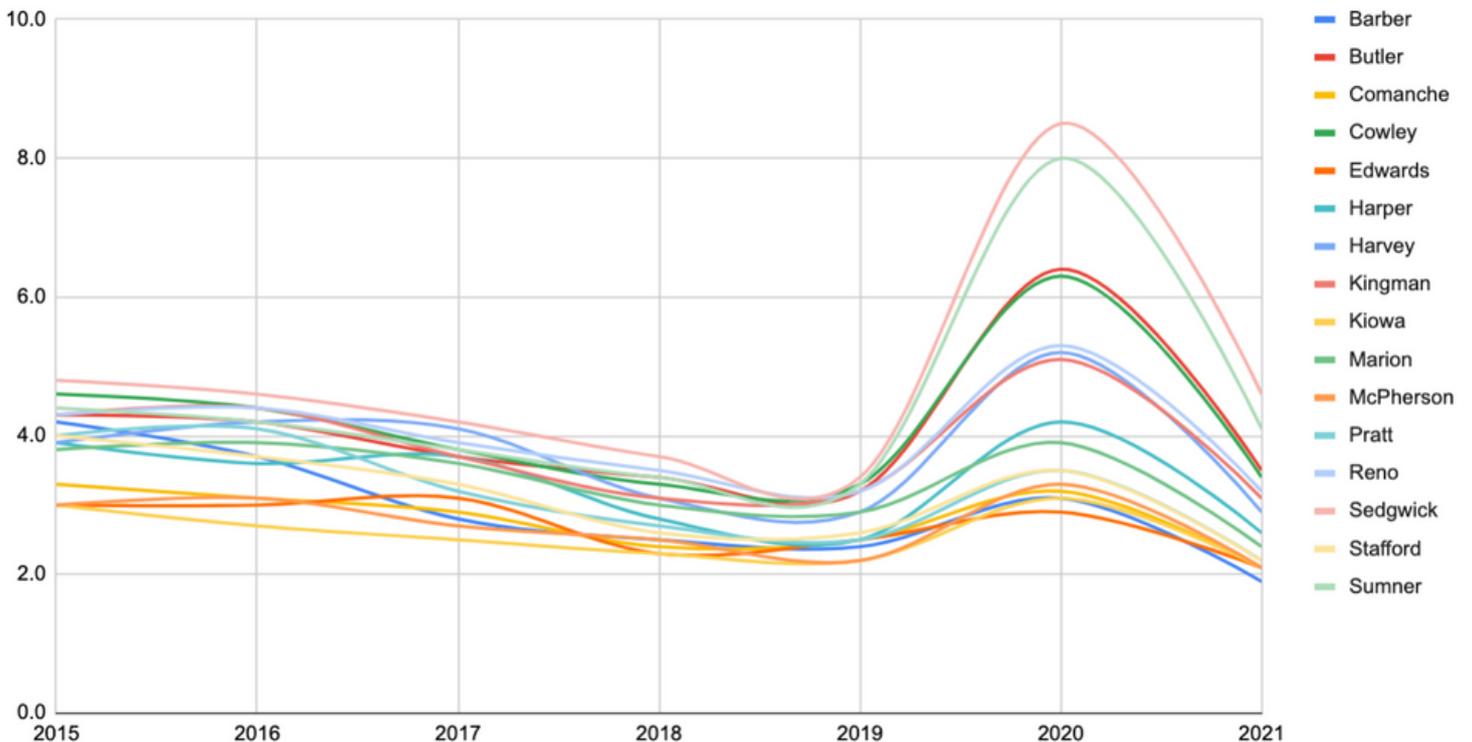
County	Food Insecurity Rate	Number of Food-insecure Residents
Barber	15.2%	722
Butler	12.3%	8,175
Comanche	11.8%	213
Cowley	15.2%	5,395
Edwards	10.9%	316
Harper	15.5%	882
Harvey	12.6%	4,368
Kingman	11.8%	882
Kiowa	11.6%	293
Marion	12%	1,438
McPherson	11.8%	3,381
Pratt	12.3%	1,186
Reno	13.8%	8,722
Sedgwick	14.6%	74,617
Stafford	12.3%	518
Sumner	14.6%	3,395

Food insecurity rates in Sumner County, for example, jumped from 12.6% to an alarming 16.0% between 2019 and 2020.⁶ As of March 2022, the unemployment rate in Kansas was 2.9% (not seasonally adjusted).⁷

Food insecurity can also be influenced by factors such as income, race and/or ethnicity, gender identity, disability, and employment. When money isn't available or is limited, the risk of food insecurity increases. Impoverished or low-income households with high unemployment rates will find it more difficult to meet basic household food needs.

Information compiled by Kansas Appleseed using the most recently available data from the USDA, Feeding America, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Food Research & Action Center, and America's Health Rankings.

ANNUAL UNEMPLOYMENT IN SOUTH-CENTRAL KANSAS⁸



NAMED BARRIERS TO ADDRESSING FOOD INSECURITY

Limited Access to SNAP Food Assistance

State policy is the largest barrier to accessing SNAP food assistance. In 2015 and 2016, the Kansas Legislature passed a series of bills that proponents called the “HOPE Act” which put barriers into place that make it much more difficult for Kansans to access SNAP Food Assistance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Child Care Assistance.⁹ The policy hurdles enacted by the HOPE Act had significant impacts, damaging Kansas’s ability to draw upon the positive attributes of these safety net programs.

One of the policies enacted in the harmful HOPE Act legislation is conditioning child support cooperation to receive SNAP food assistance benefits. This means that both custodial and non-custodial parents must willingly work with child support services to receive SNAP food assistance!¹⁰ If they do not, they will not be able to access SNAP. South-Central Kansans named child support cooperation as a barrier to families who need access to SNAP food assistance and resources needed to thrive.

Additionally, South-Central Kansans identified income barriers for SNAP eligibility. For example, Social Security Income does not cover all bills but recipients may receive fewer SNAP benefits because of it. It’s harder to supplement this income with food resources like pantries because there are fewer in rural areas.

Lack of Transportation

In both rural and urban areas of South-Central Kansas, residents identified transportation as a large barrier to accessing healthy food and resources. The lack of transportation significantly impacts South-Central Kansans with disabilities who cannot walk to food pantries and grocery stores nor carry groceries home. Ableist infrastructure, or infrastructure that excludes or discriminates against people with disabilities, continues to be a barrier for both rural and urban communities across the region.

In 2021, Wichita Transit removed close to 200 bus stops, the most being from District 1 and District 6.¹¹ This is four times as much as in 2019, when Wichita Transit last adjusted bus stops. District 1 also lost its last grocery store in 2021.¹²



Food Pantry Accessibility

When looking at pantries across the state, Kansans have identified best practices that have helped those seeking assistance to do so with dignity and autonomy. Some best practices include:

- Allowing clients to “go shopping” in the pantry so they can get the food that works best for them and their families, including culturally appropriate food.
- Reducing paperwork and ID burdens so pantries can be more accessible.
- Expanding office hours to include evenings and weekends.

“

[Many South-Central Kansans] can't utilize SNAP for delivery. It's not as much we need more food, we need to be able to get it."

— Jennifer, Harvey County, on the realities of food insecurity in rural communities of Kansas

“

SNAP is not used hardly at all in our community. The income guidelines were so difficult in the past. I have heard it is better now, but most people do not know about it or do not want to deal with it."

— Sheryl, Butler County, on barriers to accessing SNAP food assistance

OPPORTUNITIES AND SOLUTIONS

Food insecurity in Kansas is a policy choice. Fighting food insecurity in South-Central Kansas will take bold leadership and multifaceted strategies centered around impacted Kansans in both urban and rural communities.

Online Purchasing Program

Kansas SNAP participants have the opportunity to participate in the EBT Online Purchasing Program. Kansas was approved to offer online purchasing through Amazon and Walmart using SNAP Food Assistance. Being able to purchase groceries online helps SNAP work better for Kansas families and adds safe options for families to get their groceries, especially as COVID-19 arises in communities.

Double Up Food Bucks

Double Up Food Bucks is a program that provides SNAP recipients incentives to buy fresh fruits and vegetables. It provides a dollar-for-dollar match for SNAP recipients, up to \$25 per day, at participating grocery stores and farmers' markets. Currently, there are over 12 participating sites in South-Central Kansas. You can find a location near you here:
www.doubleupheartland.org/locations

Expanding transportation to ensure equal access to opportunities

Transportation solutions can include providing rides to food banks, delivering healthy meals to homes, and strengthening existing public transportation.

For example, in Sedgwick County, United Way of the Plains has used the food delivery service DoorDash to get resources to individuals and families in the Wichita area. Ride United's Last-Mile Delivery will delivery items including meals, food pantry supplies, hygiene products, and more directly to individuals for free. Organizations and nonprofits in Wichita can utilize this resource to deliver necessities to residents, if you are interested in participating or need more information you can contact United Way of the Plains at uwp@unitedwayplains.org.

OPPORTUNITIES AND SOLUTIONS

Eliminating the state food sales tax

In 2022, the Kansas Legislature passed a plan to gradually reduce the 6.5% state food sales tax—the second-highest food sales tax in the nation—to 0% by 2025. Eliminating the state food sales tax will provide a helpful boost to food security for all Kansans and would save a Kansas family of four at least \$500 per year.

Creating safe, inclusive spaces in charitable food options

Throughout conversations in South-Central Kansas, we heard that there is a great opportunity in diversifying pantry options to represent all Kansans from all beliefs and backgrounds. Many of the charitable options are faith-based, and some pantries require people to attend a service before receiving food. Food pantries should strive to be inclusive and reflect the diverse communities they serve.

Repealing policy barriers to SNAP food assistance

As one of the most effective anti-poverty and anti-hunger programs, elected officials should ensure Kansans have access to SNAP food assistance. By repealing cuts to SNAP—including measures within the HOPE Act—Kansans will better be able to thrive. Additionally, during the 2022 legislative session, the Kansas Legislature passed a bill subjecting people who are considered able-bodied without dependents to involuntary employment and training programs, tacking on even more hurdles for Kansans who may just need a month or two to get back on their feet.

Anti-hunger champions must work to ensure Kansans and their loved ones grow strong by advocating for SNAP. The Kansas Legislature should repeal all cuts to safety net supports like SNAP food assistance including:

- Lifetime bans on SNAP food assistance and TANF cash assistance if a Kansan has more than one drug felony conviction
- The child support cooperation requirement to access SNAP
- Disallowing federal or state dollars to be used on SNAP outreach by television, radio, or billboards
- Denying non-citizens food assistance while calculating their resources and income into the equation of the family's application for SNAP food assistance
- Banning broad-based categorical eligibility which would give families less restrictive eligibility and asset tests
- Implementing harmful, ineffective work requirements

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all those who participated and were vulnerable in sharing their experiences with hunger and food access barriers in South-Central Kansas. Your time, stories, and experiences are valid and your truth is filled with solutions to hunger issues Kansans face.

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Kansas Appleseed Center for Law and Justice is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization dedicated to the belief that Kansans, working together, can build a more thriving, inclusive and just state.

www.KansasAppleseed.org



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