

# HUNGER IN SOUTHEAST KANSAS

## SOUTHEAST KANSANS EXPERIENCING HUNGER ARE NOT ALONE

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

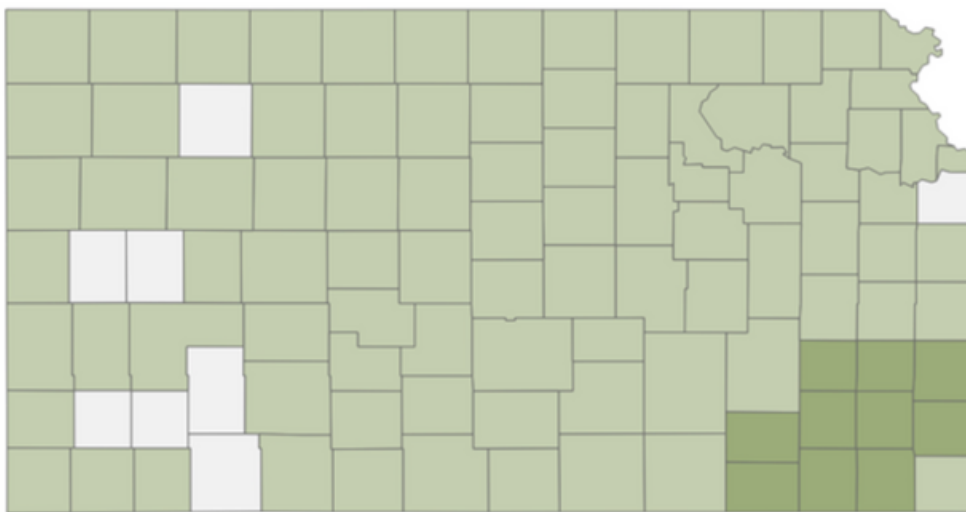
According to Feeding America, it is projected that one in six Southeast Kansans is food insecure. This number is much higher among Southeast Kansas kids at a staggering one in four. Even more notably, these projections show much higher rates of food insecurity than Kansas as a whole.<sup>1</sup>

**“Hunger looks like the faces of the people you see everywhere in Southeast Kansas. Your neighbors, your colleagues, the senior at the checkout line, or the kid crossing the street. No matter where you are in an area with high poverty rates, some of the people around you are likely food insecure.”**

**-Matt O'Malley, Live Well Crawford County**

In Summer 2021, Kansas Appleseed Center for Law and Justice held conversations with many Southeast Kansans about food insecurity and related issues in their communities. The goals of the conversations were to understand common themes and address barriers to food access for Southeast Kansans. Kansas Appleseed compiled opinions and recommendations identified through these conversations. Kansas Appleseed is committed to continuing these conversations to ensure a future where all Southeast Kansans can thrive.

### 2021 Projected Overall Food Insecurity Rate



Source: Gundersen, C., Strayer, M., Dewey, A., Hake, M., & Engelhard, E. (2021). *Map the Meal Gap 2021: An Analysis of County and Congressional District Food Insecurity and County Food Cost in the United States in 2019*. Feeding America.



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# BARRIERS TO ADDRESSING FOOD INSECURITY IN SOUTHEAST KANSAS

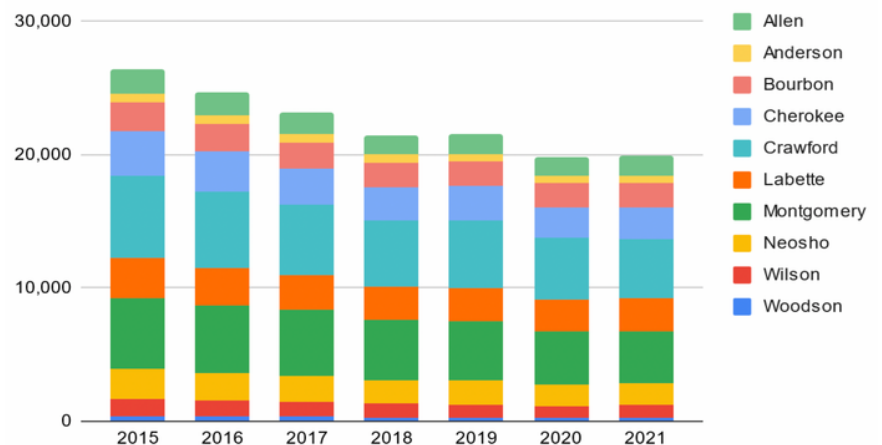
## Low SNAP Participation

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as “food stamps,” is the largest food assistance program administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). SNAP is a main lever for confronting poverty, hunger, and inadequate nutrition in our country.<sup>2</sup> SNAP benefits ensure people have nutritious food access in a “timely, targeted, and temporary” manner.<sup>3</sup> SNAP is a responsive program and can adjust to the fluctuating needs of our communities such as population growth, unemployment, and poverty.<sup>4</sup>

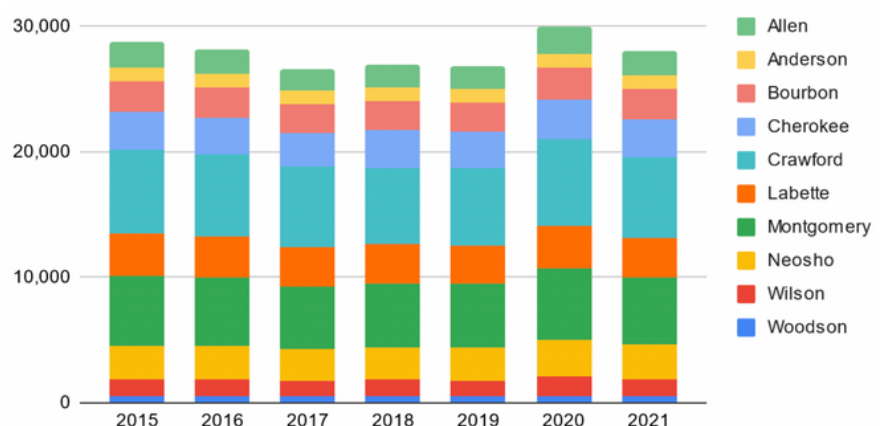
SNAP provides monthly benefits to families with household incomes at or below 130% of federal poverty guidelines. These monthly benefits are provided on a card, which looks and functions like a debit card. To receive SNAP when purchasing food, participants just need to present their SNAP card to the store clerk or cashier.<sup>5</sup> SNAP can be used to buy items such as fresh fruits, vegetables, meat, poultry, fish, dairy products, bread, cereals, snack foods, and non-alcoholic beverages. SNAP can also be used to buy seeds and plants to produce food in the future. In Kansas, the Department for Children and Families administers SNAP.

SNAP participation in Southeast Kansas has decreased significantly over the last several years, but the need for food assistance has not. The number of people who are food insecure in Southeast Kansas went up during the COVID pandemic, reaching almost 30,000. But about 6,500 fewer people had access to SNAP during the pandemic compared to 2015, a decrease of nearly 25%.

## SNAP Recipients: Monthly Average per State Fiscal Year <sup>6</sup>



## Number of People Experiencing Food Insecurity in Southeast Kansas <sup>7</sup>



# **BARRIERS TO ADDRESSING FOOD INSECURITY IN SOUTHEAST KANSAS**

## **State Policy**

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. 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.<sup>8</sup>

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 custodial must willingly work with child support services to receive SNAP food assistance. If they do not, they will not be able to access SNAP. In many of our conversations with Southeast Kansans, child support cooperation was identified as a barrier to many who need access to SNAP Food Assistance and other programs.

**“I’m afraid of having to deal with  
[child support cooperation]. I  
don’t know where my son’s dad  
lives, and I’m nervous what would  
happen if I was forced to put him  
on child support”  
-Southeast Kansas resident**



**“Child support cooperation is a  
problem. If you owe and aren’t paying,  
you can’t get food assistance. So  
people who can’t get a job to afford  
child support can’t feed themselves  
while they look for a job.”  
-Southeast Kansan working in  
social services**



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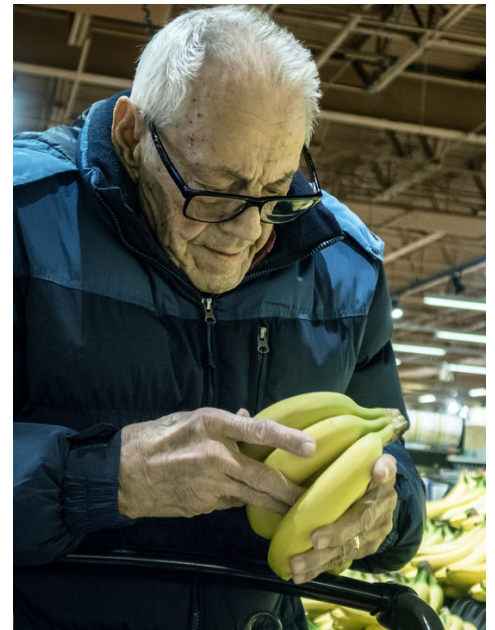
### Transportation

During Kansas Appleseed's meetings with Southeast Kansans, many identified transportation as a large barrier to accessing healthy food. Specifically, many residents identified that lack of transportation compounds other issues they may be facing such as paying for rent, utilities, and groceries for themselves and their families.

According to the USDA's most recently available data (December 2020), multiple Census tracts in Neosho, Crawford, and Cherokee counties have poverty rates of over 20% and at least 100 households without vehicles that are more than half a mile from the nearest supermarket or grocery store.<sup>9</sup>

**"Our clients who experience hunger that cannot get food stamps or that have low income[s] have a hard time getting food at our local food pantry or the Lord's Diner due to transportation. Once our clients leave the shelter and get homes, most do not have vehicles and can't find transportation to get food."**

**-Megan, sexual assault advocate**



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# OPPORTUNITIES AND SOLUTIONS

Fighting food insecurity in Southeast Kansas will take bold leadership and political will. Opportunities to reduce hunger in Southeast Kansas include:

## **Making SNAP more accessible to Southeast Kansas residents**

### **Online Purchasing Program**

In the Summer of 2020, 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 rates continue to rise. Unfortunately, not all Southeast Kansas communities have access to these two retailers. Getting more food retailers on board with this program would open up access to more Kansans.

### **Double Up Food Bucks**

Double Up Food Bucks is a program that allows SNAP food assistance 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 18 participating sites in Southeast Kansas. You can find a location near you here: [www.doubleupheartland.org/locations](http://www.doubleupheartland.org/locations)

## **Expanding transportation to ensure all Southeast Kansans have equal access to opportunities**

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

## **Undoing legislative barriers that make it harder for Southeast Kansans to put food on the table**

### **Repealing the HOPE Act**

In the 2021 Kansas State Legislative Session, our legislators had the opportunity to end the requirement of child support cooperation for SNAP and child care assistance through House Bill 2371. In 2022, advocates must work to reintroduce this and ensure that it receives a floor vote.

In addition to the child support enforcement cooperation requirement, the Kansas Legislature should repeal components of the HOPE Act that enact:

- Lifetime bans on SNAP food assistance and TANF cash assistance if a Kansan has more than one drug felony conviction
- Disallow federal or state dollars to be used on SNAP outreach by television, radio, or billboards
- Deny non-citizens food assistance while calculating their resources and income to the equation of the family's application to SNAP food assistance
- Ban broad-based categorical eligibility which would give families less restrictive eligibility and asset tests



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all those who participated and were vulnerable in sharing their experiences with hunger and food access barriers in Southeast Kansas.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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## SOURCES

1. The total insecurity percentage for SEK is 16.5% and 24.1% for children. Based on independent analysis by Kansas Appleseed utilizing the following resource: Feeding America. "State-By-State Resource: The Impact of Coronavirus on Food Insecurity study from Feeding America." March 2021.
2. United Way of Douglas County. "SNAP."
3. Food Bank of Northwest Indiana. "SNAP Outreach Assistance/Asistencia de Divulgación SNAP."
4. Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia and the Eastern Shore. "Why Increased SNAP Benefits Are Crucial During COVID-19."
5. Kansas Department for Children and Families. "Food Assistance FAQ's."
6. Kansas Department for Children and Families. "'Monthly Caseload Detail Report.'" 2021.
7. Analysis by Kansas Appleseed utilizing data from the following sources: (1) Feeding America's annual "Map the Meal Gap"; (2) Kansas Health Matters. "Food Insecurity Rate."; (3) United States Census Bureau. "American Community Survey (ACS)."
8. Kansas Appleseed Center for Law and Justice. "How the 'HOPE Act' created barriers to SNAP in Kansas." March 2020.
9. USDA Economic Research Service. "Food Environment Atlas."

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](http://www.KansasAppleseed.org)**



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