

# HUNGER IN SOUTHWEST KANSAS

## ADEQUATE NUTRITION IS FUNDAMENTAL

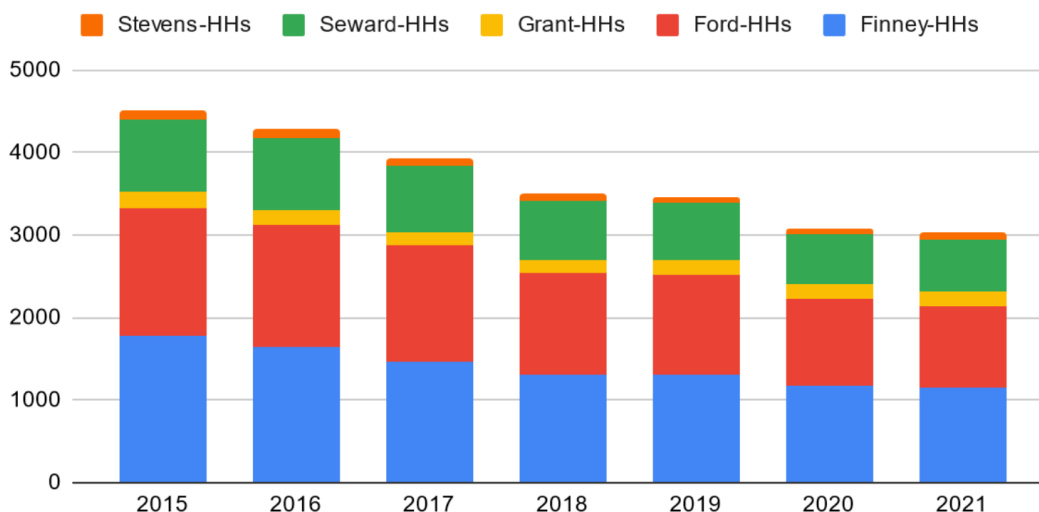
Kansas kids need adequate access to healthy, affordable food to thrive—physically and mentally. According to Feeding America, one in six kids is food insecure, meaning they may not be sure where their next meal will come from. While Kansas continues to reach more children through critical Child Nutrition Programs, there are still opportunities (as well as barriers) to making sure all families have what they need to support themselves.

Immigrant families often face unique barriers to accessing nutrition programs. These barriers include harmful policies that exclude some immigrant populations from participating, misinformation about the repercussions of accessing resources, and a lack of language access and culturally appropriate food

## THE PROBLEM

Immigrant families—regardless of their race or ethnicity—account for the highest rates of food insecurity. Racial and ethnic disparities in food insecurity persist in the United States, and in Southwest Kansas where immigrants account for 25%<sup>1</sup> of the population, these disparities are amplified by limited resources and limited access to existing anti-hunger programs. SNAP participation in Southwest Kansas has decreased significantly over the last several years,<sup>2</sup> even as the need increased.<sup>3</sup>

SNAP Monthly Case Average by Fiscal Year



1. 24.7% foreign born in Finney, Ford, Grant, Steward, & Stevens counties. Source: US Census Bureau 2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates.

2. Kansas Department for Children and Families. "Monthly Caseload Detail Reports." <http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/ees/Pages/EESreports.aspx>

3. Feeding America. "Coronavirus Hunger Research." <https://www.feedingamerica.org/research/coronavirus-hunger-research>



## WHAT CAUSES CHILDHOOD HUNGER IN SOUTHWEST KANSAS AMONG IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

Harmful policies, including discriminating immigration enforcement, family separation as a result of deportation, and policies that force families to choose between a possible immigration relief and accessing critical assistance for food, health care, and housing create a culture of fear. This has devastating effects that prevent immigrant families from accessing basic necessities, including seeking medical care and/or social service agencies to apply for programs like WIC or SNAP, even when they or their children are eligible.

## SNAP POLICY AFFECTS IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

Federal regulations limit access for recent documented immigrants to public assistance programs. Kansas, like many states, has a five-year waiting period before documented immigrant adults can access nutrition and health programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), even though they otherwise qualify. Unfortunately, these regulations bar people from receiving assistance when they need it the most like establishing themselves in a new country.

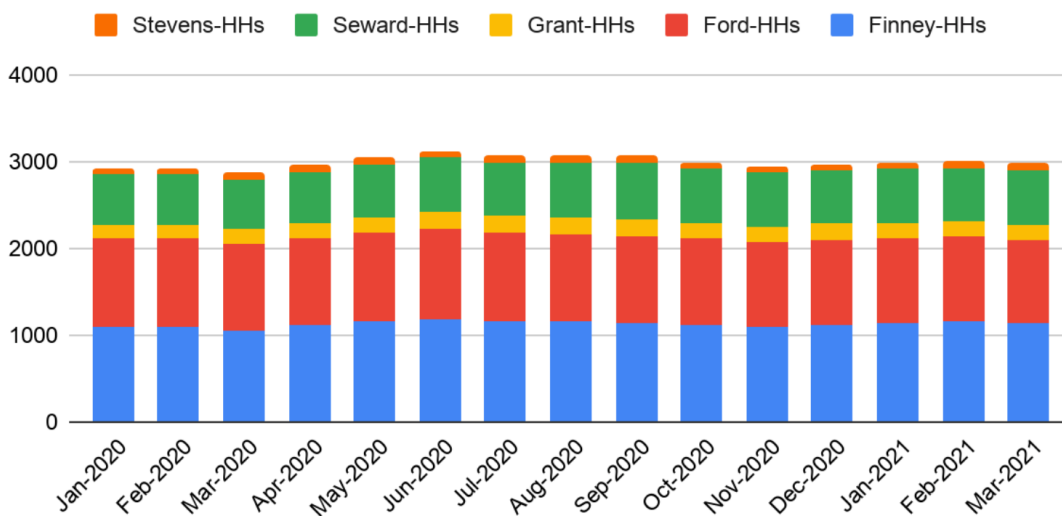
Regulations can be confusing as children can be eligible even if their parents are not. Even when parents understand their children qualify, some fear that applying for any benefits could harm their immigration proceedings. The public charge rule threatened to deny visa and legal permanent residency (green card) applications to immigrants who use certain public benefits.



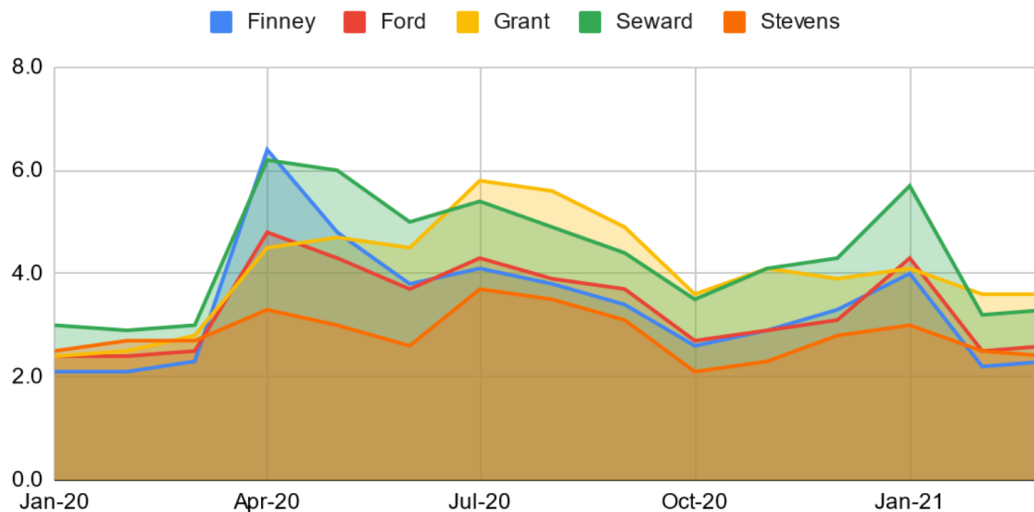
# HUNGER IN SOUTHWEST KANSAS

The number of households receiving SNAP in Southwest Kansas has stayed flat, even while unemployment spiked during the COVID-19 pandemic. Unemployment is directly linked to food insecurity.<sup>4</sup> This indicates that barriers are preventing people from receiving the food assistance they need. Immediate steps need to be taken to eliminate the hurdles and increase SNAP participation among immigrant communities in SWKS.

### Household SNAP Caseloads



### Unemployment in SW Kansas



4. Raifman, J. et al. "Unemployment insurance and food insecurity among people who lost employment in the wake of COVID-19." MedRxiv: The preprint server for health sciences. 2020. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7402065/>



# BARRIERS FOR ACCESSIBILITY

- Fear and lack of trust
- Cultural barriers including shame and stigma around accepting aid
- The pressure of the “model minority”
- Lack of awareness and misinformation on exact eligibility guidelines
- Eligibility restrictions and guidelines in federal and state aid programs

# NUTRITION PROGRAMS OPPORTUNITIES

In early 2021, Kansas Appleseed hosted two focus groups with individuals representing the immigrant community across Southwest Kansas. The goal of these conversations was to address barriers to participation in nutrition programs. Kansas Appleseed compiled the opinions and recommendations identified through these conversations:

## SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM & SUMMER MEALS

**Recommendation:** Incorporate more staple foods from community members’ cultural traditions. For example, rice and beans of varying types were mentioned repeatedly among different communities. It is necessary to address and formally support the need for culturally appropriate food options in all nutrition programs.

**Barrier:** All children should receive the same meal at school, even if they are unable to pay for reduced or full-price meals. When a child receives a different meal, it’s often referred to as “meal shaming,” and it can contribute to lower participation rates.

## FOOD PANTRIES

- There were several mentions of “informal networks” of friends and family or members within communities (e.g. apartment complexes) that support and collectively help those families or individuals who are known to be hungry or in need.
- Some immigrant and refugee communities are not familiar with or accustomed to eating “canned foods” which are staples at local food banks.
- Places of worship were repeatedly cited as known sites for emergency food assistance, more so than local food banks.
- It was suggested that other options for identification at food pantries other than Social Security numbers; driver’s licenses or state IDs would be helpful.
- Some feel that food banks often ask “too many questions” of a person asking for food or assistance. While many service providers have the best intentions, for many it is difficult to ask for help in the first place. Language barriers may compound this issue.

**Immigrants are important members of our communities. Working with immigrants and their families to address barriers to food access provides the opportunity for all Kansans to thrive!**

