

## HAMILTON COUNTY FOOD RESOURCE COALITION 2024 IMPACT REPORT

### OVERVIEW OF FOOD INSECURITY IN HAMILTON COUNTY

Hamilton County, with a population nearing 350,000, is the fourth-largest county in Indiana. According to Gleaners Food Bank, 32,162 residents—approximately 9.2% of the population—experience food insecurity, meaning they lack consistent access to sufficient food. Among them, 7,000 are children.

In 2024, the Hamilton County Harvest Food Bank experienced a 13% increase in program service expenses and a 25% increase in food distribution. Gleaners Food Bank alone distributed 3.5 million pounds of food within the county, equating to over 2.8 million meals.

Despite these efforts, food pantries across Hamilton County struggled to keep shelves stocked, and fresh produce at local farmers' markets frequently ran out. Organizations assisting food-insecure residents reported a significant rise in demand, driven by several key factors:

- **Underemployment and unemployment**
- **Rising housing costs**
- **Unexpected financial burdens** (e.g., medical bills, car repairs)
- **Generational poverty**
- **Ineligibility for SNAP benefits or child nutrition programs** due to income slightly exceeding the threshold (in many cases by less than \$100)

Additional challenges contributing to food insecurity include:

- **Insufficient wages**, making unexpected expenses unmanageable
- **Lack of reliable transportation**
- **Impact of inflation**, particularly on housing costs
- **Persistent generational poverty** (e.g., Aroma has served the same families for over a decade)
- **Limited access to grocery stores**, particularly in food deserts such as Sheridan

Despite the increasing need, food assistance organizations remain committed to serving the community. However, the growing demand highlights the **urgent need for additional resources and systemic solutions** to address food insecurity in Hamilton County.

## COALITION'S COMMITMENT AND STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Now in its third year, the **Hamilton County Food Resource Coalition** continues to unite organizations across the county in a shared mission to address food insecurity. In its brief history, the coalition has made significant progress in **fostering collaboration, breaking down operational silos, and implementing effective strategies** to ensure that every resident has access to healthy food.

### 2024 Strategic Priorities

- **Enhancing Communication and Collaboration** – Strengthen partnerships among all Hamilton County food pantries, with a particular focus on improving access and coordination in rural areas.
- **Expanding Outreach and Resource Accessibility** – Continue the development and distribution of the **Resource Card**, with an emphasis on securing funding for multilingual translations and implementing training for pantry staff and volunteers.
- **Improving Food Access and Distribution** – Develop and implement strategies to **enhance food access, support food recovery efforts, and optimize redistribution** in response to rising food costs.
- **Advancing Cultural Competency** – Promote inclusivity by expanding knowledge of **diverse and culturally appropriate food options**, improving packaging and distribution methods, offering culturally competent training, and ensuring cultural sensitivity in outreach materials.

### 2024 Strategic Priorities

#### Publication and Distribution of Resource Cards

- Distributed to all food pantries and **30 nonprofit organizations** across Hamilton County.
- Expanded to include **information on a range of services** beyond food assistance.
- Translated into **Spanish, Mandarin, Punjabi, Arabic, and French Creole** to enhance accessibility.
- **5,000 cards printed and disseminated** in 2024.

#### Completion and Implementation of Food Pantry Volunteer Training Curriculum

- Comprehensive curriculum covering **food safety, county resources, and cultural and socioeconomic diversity**.
- Successfully piloted with **Hamilton County Harvest Food Bank and the Program Partners Network** in Fall 2024.
- Training sessions scheduled for **2025 rollout**.

#### Increasing Awareness of Community Compass

- **A free mobile application** providing real-time locations of food assistance resources across Indiana.

- Promotional partnerships with **Indy Ignite Volleyball, Mad Ants, CE Stars, Grant Park, and Hamilton County Sports Authority.**
- Broad outreach campaign utilizing **flyers, window clings, posters, and restroom stickers.**

#### **Development of the Help 4 Hamilton County Website**

- A digital resource designed to **streamline access to essential services** for residents.
- Ongoing improvements in functionality and rebranding efforts led by coalition members.

#### **Northern Hamilton County Pantry Roundtable (May 2024)**

- Hosted via **Zoom** to maximize participation.
- Reports indicated a **25% rise in clients** at some pantries.
- Key discussion topics included **community partnerships, out-of-county clients, cooking classes, and volunteer recruitment.**

#### **Food as Medicine Initiative (Produce RX Program)**

- A healthcare-based initiative providing **fresh produce prescriptions** to eligible patients.
- Collaboration with **Teter Organic Farm and Hamilton County Harvest Food Bank produce distributions.**
- Pilot program phases established, with a focus on **integrating with small physician practices.**



## LOOKING AHEAD: 2025 PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIES

While significant progress was made in 2024, the work is far from complete. With the unwavering support of the Hamilton County Community Foundation, the Food Resource Coalition has set forth an ambitious agenda for 2025. The Foundation remains committed to leveraging its influence to connect the Coalition with county decision-makers, support the development and implementation of brand awareness strategies, and optimize social media outreach to further expand food access efforts. By addressing systemic barriers and advocating for a comprehensive food access system, the Coalition remains steadfast in its mission to ensure that every Hamilton County resident has reliable access to nutritious food.

### Increasing Access to Food

- Expand **Gleaners to Go** partners and Gleaners Grocery Program.
- Conduct a **Community Garden Network** survey to maximize produce utilization.
- Develop **K-12 food program** partnerships.
- Support **Second Helpings** in increasing distribution amounts and partnerships.

### Strengthening Collaborations with Food Pantries

- Host the **3rd Annual Northern Hamilton County Pantry Roundtable**.
- Engage **faith-based** pantries.
- Roll out **Pantry Volunteer Training Curriculum**.
- Launch a **data collection initiative** to identify client health issues.
- Assist pantries with **volunteer recruitment**.

### Expanding Resource Card Distribution

- Secure **funding** for additional printing.
- Expand distribution to **private sector workplaces**.

### Engaging Local Officials and Stakeholders

- Host a **legislative breakfast** to address systemic food accessibility barriers.
- Investigate funding for a **comprehensive food access system**.
- Engage in **discussions on local food production strategies**.

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

Hamilton County is one of the wealthiest counties in Indiana, yet more than **32,000 residents struggle with food insecurity**. This crisis is not unique to Hamilton County, but addressing it requires **local commitment, collaboration, and action**. The **Hamilton County Food Resource Coalition** remains dedicated to **uniting organizations, leveraging resources, and advocating for systemic solutions** to ensure that every resident has **consistent access to nutritious food**. By continuing to **build partnerships, expand programs, and engage key stakeholders**, the coalition is driving meaningful change and working toward a future where **no one in Hamilton County goes hungry**.

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## WITH GRATITUDE

The work would not be possible without the dedicated Food Resource Coalition members. Their commitment and contributions are the reasons the mission moves forward.

Anita Hagen  
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Janet Gafkjen  
*HC Harvest Food Bank Project Development Coordinator*

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*IN Farmers Market Community of Practice Director*

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Phil Mellencamp  
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Katy Rogers  
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*Westfield Washington Twp. Trustee Manager of Community Outreach and Client Services*

JJ Sharp  
*Fishers Health Dept. Project Manager*

Jon Meinert  
*Second Helpings Food Rescue and Transportation Director*

Ann Stansfield  
*Volunteer Master Gardner*

Bob Perry  
*Volunteer St. Vincent DePaul*

Merlin Gonzalez  
*Faith Hope Love Executive Director*

Barbara Morris  
*Faith Hope Love Board Member*

### Hamilton County Community Foundation

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Jeena Siela  
*Senior Community Leadership Officer (former)*

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