March 2026

Avon, Barkhamsted, Canton, Colebrook, East Granby, Farmington, Granby, Hartland, New Hartford, Simsbury

FOOD INSECURITY IN THE FARMINGTON VALLEY HEALTH DISTRICT

An Issue Brief for Town Leaders

Of the Farmington Valley Health District's more than 110,000 residents, approximately 10% are considered food insecure and 23% are considered income constrained.[1]

Recommendations to improve food access include establishing a regional approach to food pantry access, considering a line item to town budgets for charitable food organizations, and updating 211 for accuracy.

Definition

Food insecurity is a growing issue with significant effects on families and communities. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food insecurity as a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food.[2] This is distinctly different from hunger, which is an individual-level physiological condition that may result from food insecurity.[2]

What is the problem?

A family's access to and knowledge of nutritious food can be determined by the neighborhood and built environment, education access and quality, and economic stability. These factors are known as the social determinants of health and play a role in what we consume and therefore our health.

For example, individuals that are unable to access healthy food are more likely to experience chronic disease and acute illness.[3]

Children without access to healthy food may have challenges with development, difficulty concentrating, and are more likely to demonstrate social and behavioral challenges.[4] Older adults facing food insecurity are more likely to experience depression or have a chronic disease such as obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, and asthma.[5]

Reducing food insecurity has great benefits to individuals, families, and communities alike including improved health outcomes, reduced healthcare costs and hospitalizations, decreased levels of stress, improved quality of life, reduced poverty, improved productivity, and increased economic activity.[6]

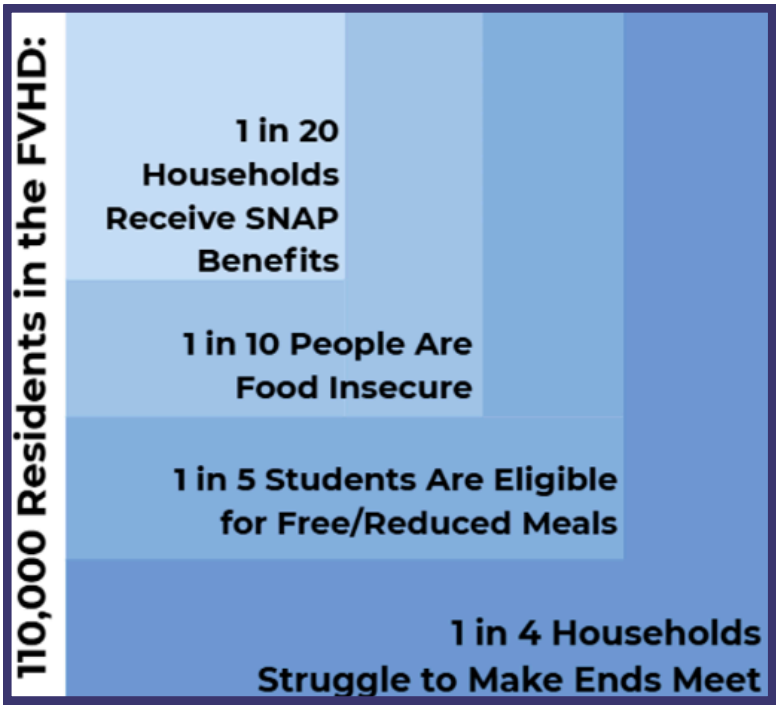


Panelists during the FVHD Food Insecurity Summit. Photo by Shelley Forker, January 2026.

Data

Food insecurity data is sourced from the USDA's *Household Food Security Report*, which will no longer be released after 2024. In Connecticut, on average 12.1% of households were food insecure from 2022 to 2024.[1]

The Farmington Valley Health District is home to more than 110,000 residents. Approximately 10% of residents face food insecurity, meaning they do not have consistent access to enough nutritious food.[1] Additionally, 23% of residents fall below the ALICE threshold (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed).[7] These households earn above the federal poverty level but struggle to afford basic necessities such as housing, food, and healthcare. Because many households spend a large portion of their income on rent or a mortgage, this often leads to having fewer resources available for nutritious food and other necessities.[8]



Data adapted from multiple sources[1,7,9,10]

Current resources to help CT residents

There are state and local organizations that can assist residents with accessing federal food assistance programs, including End Hunger CT!, 211, and town social service departments.

Farmington Valley residents have access to food banks and food pantries. Many food pantries are a part of CT Foodshare's network, enabling them to receive donations and shop from the state food bank. The several food pantries in our district are either nonprofit or partnered with town social service departments.

Food Insecurity Summit findings

On January 14, 2026, FVHD hosted a Food Insecurity Summit at the Avon Senior Center community room. Joining us were local leaders, community members, food pantries, and other partners. Two panels, consisting of representatives from CT Foodshare, UConn Rudd Center, End Hunger Connecticut!, Healing Meals, Waste Not Want Not Community Kitchen, as well as Representative Eleni Kavros-DeGraw, discussed the impact of food insecurity as well as innovative strategies to address this growing issue. The panels were moderated by Christian Duborg, food and nutrition policy analyst from the state's Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity, and Opportunity (CWCSEO).



Panelists and audience during the FVHD Food Insecurity Summit. Photo by Shelley Forker, January 2026.

Panelists emphasized that food insecurity is often misunderstood and stigmatized in our district. Common myths include that food insecurity is not prevalent, food pantries can fix food insecurity, and individuals experiencing food insecurity do not want healthy food options.

Growing demand and changes in funding for food assistance services have become major challenges. Panelists also discussed the barriers faced by individuals who earn above the federal poverty line and are not eligible for assistance programs but still face food insecurity. One FVHD resident described how people in this category feel ashamed going to food pantries. **Panelists recommended health leaders advocate and raise awareness on this issue.**

The second panel discussed how organizations across the state are working to address food insecurity through a variety of programs such as SNAP outreach and application assistance, free community meal programs, and meal delivery services.

Food assistance organizations disclosed challenges collaborating with policy makers. **The panelists emphasized the importance of partnerships between organizations to share resources and improve food access.**

The event ended in a collective brainstorm session. A common theme during this discussion was the need to improve communication between organizations and towns. Social media and local government websites that share resources were deemed as useful. Attendees also brainstormed solutions which are described in the recommendations section of this brief.

"Many people who qualify for assistance do not use it. Some are unsure what the pantry offers, while others feel too much pride or fear of being judged. Often, they will exhaust every other option before they walk through our doors."

Quote from a food pantry representative within the FVHD, September 2025.

Recommendations

Localities are in a unique position to address food insecurity in their communities. **Establishing a regional approach to food pantry/bank access can allow for a wider number of services and organizations to maximize resources** such as donations, grant opportunities, and volunteers. This strategy could also address stigma of residents feeling reluctant to visit food pantries within their own town.

Additionally, **creating a regional food access guide would enhance knowledge** of the food assistance programs that exist within the Farmington Valley.

Municipalities may also consider adding a line item to their budget for town-affiliated food pantries and other charitable food organizations.

Updating 211 to accurately reflect the charitable food organizations in the Farmington Valley with correct hours and eligibility criteria was also noted as a priority.

Resources

211: www.211ct.org
CT Foodshare: www.ctfoodshare.org
Text 85511 for Foodshare Information
End Hunger Connecticut!: endhungerct.org
2024 USDA Household Food Security Report:
www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details?pubid=113622
FVHD Food Insecurity Summit 2026:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=-trE6SFKjZI

Please contact your town social service department for information on local food pantries.



FVHD Food Insecurity Summit. Photo by Shelley Forker, January 2026.

References

[1]Ribar, D.C., Harris, V., Dewey, A., Dawes, S., and Engelhard, E. (2025). *Map the Meal Gap: An Analysis of Local Food Insecurity and Food Costs in the United States in 2023.* Feeding American National Organization. https://map.feedingamerica.org
[2]United States Department of Agriculture. (n.d.). Food Security in the U.S. - Definitions of Food Security | Economic Research Service. https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security
[3]Feeding America. (n.d.). Hunger and food insecurity. https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/food-insecurity
[4]Gallegos, D., Eivers, A., Sondergeld, P., & Pattinson, C. (2021). Food Insecurity and Child Development: A State-of-the-Art Review. International journal of environmental research and public health, 18(17), 8990. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18178990
[5]Leung, C. W., Kullgren, J. T., Malani, P. N., Singer, D. C., Kirch, M., Solway, E., & Wolfson, J. A. (2020). Food insecurity is associated with multiple chronic conditions and physical health status among older US adults. Preventive medicine reports, 20, 101211. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pmedr.2020.101211
[6]Food Research & Action Center. (2017). The Role of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in Improving Health and Well-Being. Hunger & Health.
[7]United For ALICE. (2025). "The State of ALICE in Connecticut: 2025 Update on Financial Hardship." https://www.UnitedForALICE.org/Connecticut
[8]Ashbrook, A. (2024). Food insecurity and housing instability are inextricably linked. Food Research & Action Center.
[9]CT EdSight. (2026). Free and reduced-price meal eligibility export. CT.gov EdSight.
[10]U.S. Census Bureau. (2023). American Community Survey 5-year estimates 2019-2023. SNAP Households. https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/7fd0ee163b8349808b4254b23848e7ad/