

## *Hunger in America 2014: Satisfying a Hunger for Local Data*



Attention, local data geeks: Results from the 2014 *Hunger in America* study are in, and for the first time we have state- *and* county-level data for Vermont!

The study is conducted every 4 years by Feeding America to better understand the people who seek assistance from its national network of food banks. 2014 data for Vermont were collected by the Vermont Foodbank through more than 100 site visits to network partners (food shelves and meal sites in every community around the state) and 700 face-to-face interviews with clients at these sites.

Lucky for us, Feeding America created this great 3-minute video summarizing the key results. (If you still want to read the whole report, it's [here](#); or, you can dig down a little deeper with the reports for [Orange](#) and [Windsor](#) counties.)

While access to food is widely known to be an important determinant of health, this study breaks down the complex relationship between being food insecure and an individual's health and wellbeing. Here are two statistics that stood out to me, along with examples of promising programs in our region and across the US that work to combat these striking numbers:

71.8% of households who used Vermont Foodbank services reported purchasing inexpensive, unhealthy food because they could not afford healthier options.

- **Double Value Coupon Program** – This incentive program matches customers dollar for dollar when they spend their federal nutrition benefits (e.g., SNAP) at participating farmers' markets. To implement the program, the national nonprofit Wholesome Wave partners with community-based organizations around the US – in our service area this includes the City of Lebanon, the New Hampshire Food Bank, and the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont.
- **Claremont Food Club** – At a much more local scale, a nutrition program is being developed and implemented at the Claremont Soup Kitchen. For 15 weeks, participants will receive a weekly nutrition education class, a cooking demonstration and a share of fresh, local vegetables from Dartmouth Organic Farm. Other community partners include The Dartmouth Institute, Good Neighbor Health Clinic and Associates in Medicine at Valley Regional Hospital.

23% of households who were served by the Vermont Foodbank network include a person with diabetes, and 46% include a person with high blood pressure.

- **YMCA Diabetes Prevention Program + VT Fresh** – This project combines an evidence-based disease prevention program with a local nutrition education program. Why? Cheap food – often high in calories but poor in nutrition – is linked to obesity, and obesity puts people at an increased risk of diabetes (along with a host of other health problems). The Greater Burlington YMCA runs a 12-month program for pre-diabetics (it's 1 of [6 self-management programs](#) that Vermont Blueprint for Health offers for free at sites throughout the state). Group sessions led by a lifestyle coach take place on a weekly, then monthly, basis. At one pilot site, these sessions were paired with programming by VT Fresh, an initiative of the Vermont Foodbank: 5-minute

cooking demos with simple recipes featuring one vegetable as the primary ingredient. After the demo and a taste test, participants could take both the vegetable and recipe home.

- **Fruit and vegetable prescription programs** – Programs that provide “prescriptions” for fruit and vegetables aim to increase access to healthy food for low-income patients with obesity and diet-related disease. For instance, Wholesome Wave’s FVRx initiative has been successful connecting health care providers, local farmers and overweight/obese children and their families, launching 18 programs and reaching over a thousand patients. Although FVRx is not in Vermont or New Hampshire yet, a similar program, called “Farmacy,” is being developed in Claremont. This is welcome news, since 41% of the people who took the Claremont Health Survey last summer were obese and many expressed a desire for better access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

Having available, meaningful local data is exciting and important for understanding the problem, but it’s just the first step. Each of these programs makes it clear: Cross-sector collaboration is a key ingredient for addressing issues of food insecurity in our communities. To simultaneously end hunger and improve health, charitable food and hunger advocates should continue to seek opportunities to partner with local farms, nonprofits, and health care providers.

What can you do? Here are 3 actions you can take to support the Claremont Food Club and Farmacy programs:

- Make a monetary donation to support the financial viability of these programs.
- Make a donation to support families’ ability to use healthy food at home – things like cutting boards and plastic containers with lids.
- Have experience in culinary instruction? Volunteer your time and help out with cooking demos!