

# HUNGER IN MONTANA:

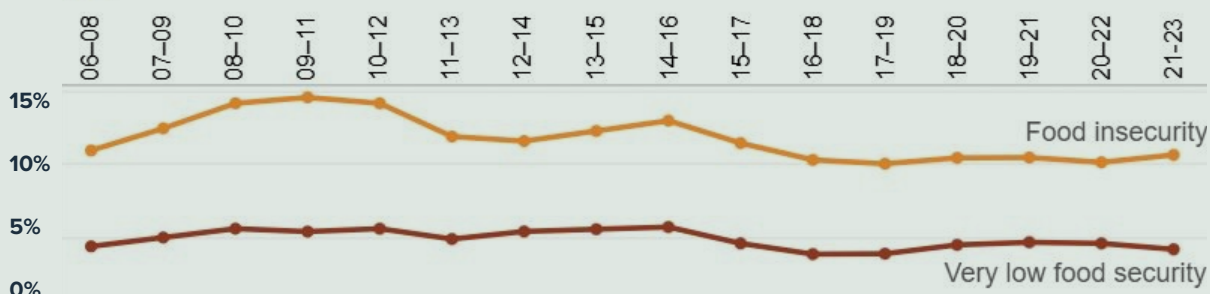
When Healthy Food is Available for All,  
Communities Thrive and Grow



Access to nutritious, affordable food shapes health, stability, and opportunity across Montana. But many families struggle to get the food they need, especially in rural and Tribal areas where distance, limited grocery options, and fragile supply chains make everyday access harder.

Understanding who faces the biggest barriers helps communities, funders, and policymakers focus resources where they're needed most.

## Food Insecurity is Persistent in Montana<sup>1</sup>



15 years  
of data show  
almost no  
improvement.

Hunger is widespread, but not evenly distributed.

## Who is Most Impacted?

Low-income families and children face the greatest risk.

**About 1 in 8 Montanans and 1 in 6 children experience food insecurity.<sup>2</sup>**

Families living on low wages or fixed incomes are often forced to choose between food, housing, childcare, and healthcare.

Rural, frontier, and Tribal communities face steeper barriers.

**Roughly 17% of Montana children are food insecure**, with much higher rates in frontier counties like **Lincoln (28%), Sanders (26%), Glacier (29%), and Mineral (27%),<sup>1</sup>** where distance, limited grocery options, and higher food prices make access even harder.

## Public Assistance Matters — But It's Not Enough

**SNAP is a lifeline.** It helps 87,498 Montanans (7.7%)<sup>1</sup> afford food each month.

Children make up nearly 40% of SNAP participants, and 63% of SNAP households include kids.<sup>4</sup>

The average \$146 per person per month doesn't keep up with higher food costs in rural and Tribal communities, so cuts or added enrollment hurdles hit families with the fewest options the hardest.<sup>1</sup>



## Moving Toward Food Sovereignty

Many communities are working beyond short-term food access toward food sovereignty, giving communities a stronger role in how food is grown, distributed, and shared. These efforts center local knowledge, cultural practices, and leadership so food systems reflect the people they serve.

## Community Strengths to Build On

Communities across Montana are already building solutions, and they're strongest when people most affected by hunger help shape and lead them.



- School and community gardens and farm-to-school partnerships connect kids and families to healthy, locally grown food.
- Mobile markets and rural food distribution programs bring healthy food directly to families who live far from grocery stores.
- Tribal communities are leading food sovereignty efforts that restore traditional foodways and strengthen cultural and physical health.

## Actions Leaders Can Take

Hunger looks different across communities, so our responses should too. Focusing resources where barriers are highest is how change happens.

### Nonprofit Leaders

- Involve families most impacted by hunger in designing programs, and share stories that show what community-led approaches can achieve.
- Build partnerships that reduce day-to-day barriers like transportation, stigma, and enrollment hurdles.

### Philanthropy Leaders

- Invest in community led food access and food sovereignty, including small town and Tribal food infrastructure.
- Provide flexible, multi-year funding so organizations can respond to the realities families face.

### State Leaders

- Protect and expand SNAP, Double SNAP, and WIC across all counties and reservations.
- Invest in local food systems and remove policy barriers that limit access for families.

### Endnotes

1 USDA Economic Research Service (2025). Food Security in the US. Retrieved from <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/interactive-charts-and-highlights#States>

2 Feeding America. (2023). County-level child food insecurity: Montana [Data from "Map the Meal Gap" interactive tool]. <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2023/child/montana>

3 U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2022). Montana SNAP state fact sheet [PDF]. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program>

4 Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. (2025, January 21). Montana: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) fact sheet. [https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/snap\\_factsheet\\_montana.pdf](https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/snap_factsheet_montana.pdf)

## Turning Investment into Action

Headwaters Foundation supports organizations that build leadership and a sense of belonging with families, elevate their voices to policymakers, and create the conditions for meaningful change to happen.

Learn more about our work and grantees at [www.headwatersmt.org](http://www.headwatersmt.org)