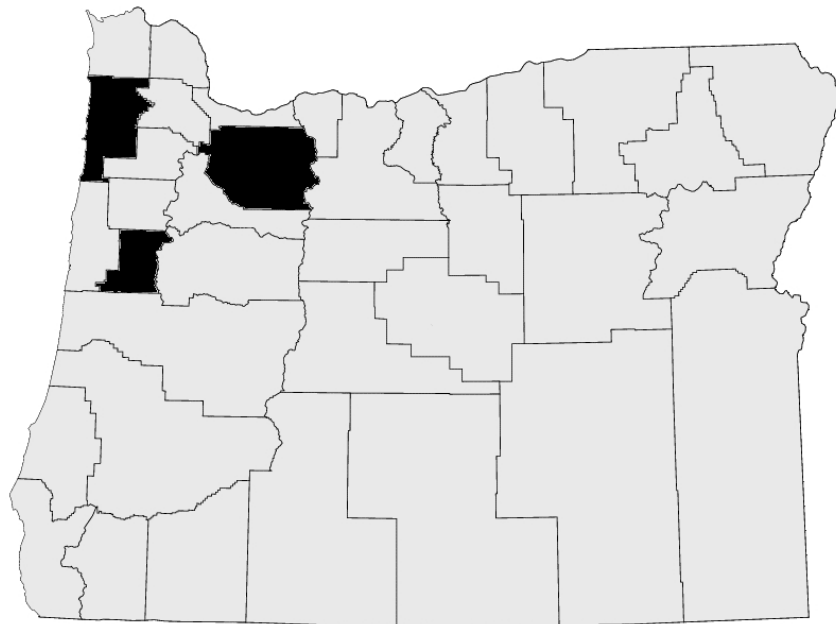


Overcoming Barriers to Access of Federal Food Programs:

Highlights and Conclusions from Oregon's Benton, Clackamas, and Tillamook Counties



Bob Zager

Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellow



This paper highlights findings from a study of access to food programs in three Oregon counties. Over the course of investigation, interviews were conducted with people ranging from food stamp office managers, social service agency program directors, food bank staff, and private citizens heavily involved in community food programs. Focus groups gave current and past clients the opportunity to critique their experience with area food programs and voice their ideas on ways to make future experiences better. Data was collected from state agencies that administer food and nutrition programs (Oregon Departments of Education and Human Services) and detailed demographic and economic data sources, including the U.S. Census and the Oregon Department of Employment. The varieties of data are intended to give a broad picture of how numerous food programs are accessed in these communities. Ideally, an analysis of this breadth will provide insight into ways to overcome local access barriers, as well as barriers that are present across counties.

The study of access to federal food programs in Benton, Clackamas, and Tillamook Counties, Oregon revealed four major trends present in interviews, focus groups, and analysis of program and demographic data. The need to better reach immigrant and ethnic communities through more extensive and appropriate outreach; the need for community organizations to engage in more frequent cooperation and collaboration on projects that enhance food program access; the deterrent effect of prohibitively burdensome administrative procedures involved in program sponsorship (especially the Summer Food Service Program [SFSP]) for some potential sponsors; and the strain on quality of client service caused by rapidly increasing caseloads and static or

decreasing program staff were identified as major barriers to nutrition programs in all three counties.

Immigrants and their families face two major barriers in accessing federal food programs, especially food stamps. First, there is much misinformation prevalent that leads immigrants to fear that they will face immigration penalties, including deportation, if they apply for Food Stamps, even for their children. Second, the language and cultural communication differences make many of the usual outreach methods ineffective for this population. A Tillamook County Head Start employee who works with many immigrant families stated that many immigrants believe that using Food Stamps “puts a black mark against them” and means they would “never be able to get their citizenship.”

Civic and faith-based organizations play an important role in helping a community meet its food needs. There are times, however, when the task at hand is too great for one organization to tackle alone, especially when they depend largely on volunteer staff. Their ability to ensure adequate and nutritious meals for more community members would increase greatly if they were able to pool resources. This would allow them to gather sufficient administrative size and stability to run a program, such as sponsoring Summer Food sites.

The research shows that many potential SFSP sponsor organizations, including school districts, are turned off to sponsorship by the perceived level of paperwork and administrative restrictions associated with the program. The most immediate course of action to remedy Summer Food’s administrative difficulties is to provide greater resources to potential site sponsors, helping them navigate the application and site setup process and advising them on ways to make Summer Food sponsorship more feasible in

their community. In the longer term, steps taken to make the paperwork requirements and other Summer Food rules less burdensome to sponsors would greatly increase the number of sponsors and, therefore, the number of children receiving a nutritious meal in the summer.

Overcoming the natural barriers to participation in all federal food programs has become more difficult in the past few years, as Oregon (like most of the nation) has seen decreases in available jobs and, thus, a rise in the number of people eligible for the use of food programs. Oregon's rural communities that once depended on industries like logging and canning have experienced drastic job losses in those areas, and many individuals and communities have not yet found a transition to stable, living-wage jobs that can provide regularly for adequate housing, medical care, child care, and food. As many more Oregonians have turned to programs like Food Stamps in recent years, the offices managing their cases have not experienced corresponding increases in staff and resources, and in some cases, staff numbers have decreased. Thus, research shows that clients are forced to deal with some staff members who have not received training sufficient to ensure that they administer program rules in a fair and respectful manner, turning some eligible people off to the program. There also appear to be minimal resources available to do targeted outreach to more mobile populations not already receiving other social services, leaving some rural and ethnic communities under-informed on their options available to help them provide food for their families.

These barriers to food program participation are not without corresponding successes, though. The Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program is generally regarded by clients and non-clients alike as a program highly effective in ensuring the

proper nutrition of children in their first few crucial years of development. Farmers markets, serving seniors and WIC clients who participate in the voucher program, have been well received by clients, as well as vendors who enjoy the additional revenue they receive. The Tillamook farmers market, after beginning the use of Food Stamps late in the 2003 season, has seen tremendous support for its ability to draw from local agricultural resources to help ensure all in the community have a healthy meal to eat.

Fact sheets for each county provide a more detailed look at the Food Stamp Program, the Summer Food Service Program, the After School Snack and Meal Program, Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) in Benton, Clackamas, and Tillamook Counties. Whether they are concerned individuals, involved community groups, or statewide hunger advocates, Oregonians are encouraged to find a piece of the puzzle of ensuring healthy meals for all our neighbors and see what they can do to help others overcome the barriers to food program access. The Oregon Hunger Relief Task force welcomes your support in these efforts and invites you to have us guide you in your work. Contact the Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force at (503) 963-2291 or visit on the internet at <http://www.oregonhunger.org> for assistance.

A Guide to **FEDERAL FOOD PROGRAMS** in



TILLAMOOK COUNTY



Overcoming Access Barriers

COMMUNITY NEED

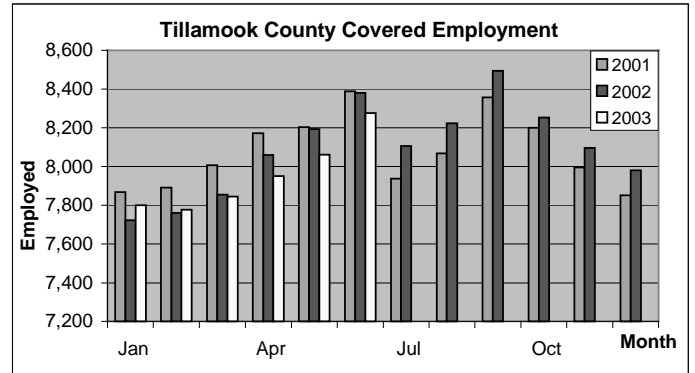
“Seen a lot of...livelihood leave.” The Tillamook economy has taken a hit over the past few years, along with the rest of the Oregon, continuing the trend of a loss of jobs in canning and logging, sometimes replaced with lower-paying service sector jobs. The agriculture and tourism industries contribute to the high seasonality of available work, leaving many looking for jobs during fall, winter, and early spring.

Poverty	Tillamook	Oregon
Population	23,794	3,347,667
% pop ≤ 100% FPL	11%	12%
% pop ≤ 185% FPL	31%	27%
% pop under 18, ≤ 185% FPL	42%	34%
% pop 0-4, ≤ 185% FPL	59%	39%
Average Pay	\$25,402	\$33,685

FPL
Federal
Poverty
Level

Tillamook has a comparable number of “poor” (≤ 100% FPL) but slightly more “near poor” (≤ 185% FPL) than Oregon as a whole. The percentage of children under 185% of poverty is high, especially for those age 0-4, where over half are living under that level.

“Food bank use has gone way up of late.” Demand for food bank services, as well as many other social services for low-income people, has increased greatly in the past years. Public and private organizations serving those in need have struggled to meet this ever-increasing need with limited resources.



Tillamook employment experiences a high seasonal variation, with December – March experiencing the most meager levels. High seasonality can cause families to cycle between food program eligibility and non-eligibility, at times leaving families hungry when they may be unknowingly temporarily eligible.

CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS

“Tillamook has no Summer Food sites.” Tillamook children are without any Summer Food Service Program sites during the summer months when they are not fed in school. Adding free meals to children’s summer programs can help improve attendance, giving more kids the chance to stay active and well fed

Tillamook serves meals to **zero** children during the summer, compared to an average of **1,183** children receiving free and reduced price meals during the school year.

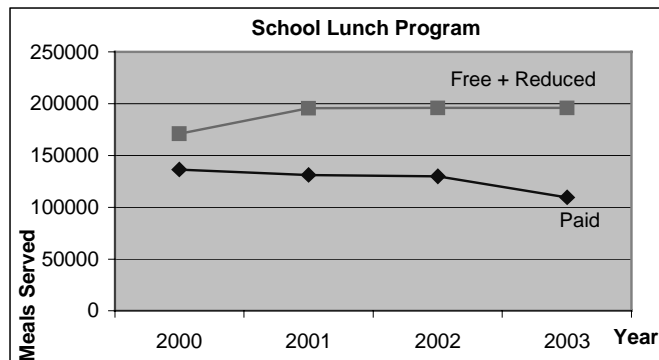
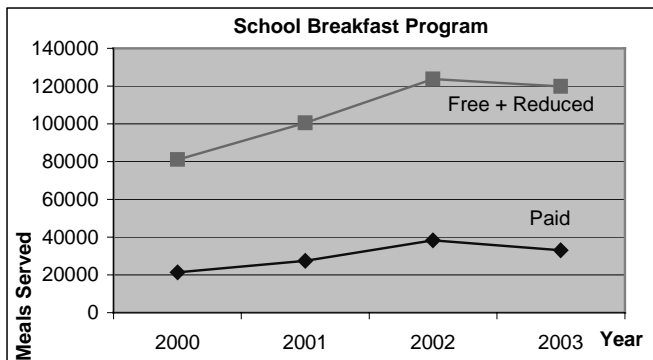
“There are not a lot of after school programs for kids.” In addition to simply providing food, programs that utilize the After School Snack and Meal Program provide a place for children who need a safe, supervised environment after the school day ends.

Tillamook has **zero** active After School Snack and Meal Program sites.

Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	Tillamook
Total WIC package value (FFY 2003)	\$422,287
# WIC packages distributed per year	9146
Women Participating	174
Infants Participating	129
Children Participating	428

Approximately 77% of children eligible (age 0-4) participate in WIC, compared to a state average of 84%. Based on the number of women participating in the Oregon Health Plan (OHP), approximately 56% of eligible women are participating in WIC, versus the state average of 72%. These comparisons indicate that Tillamook may have a lower rate of WIC participation than average in Oregon, and certainly that there is room for expansion of WIC to more eligible people.

Child Care	Tillamook	Oregon
Number of Slots per 100 children (under 13)	15	18
% Enrolled with CCR&R	94	81
Total child care providers	54	
Total FCC homes	45	
Total receiving USDA	20	

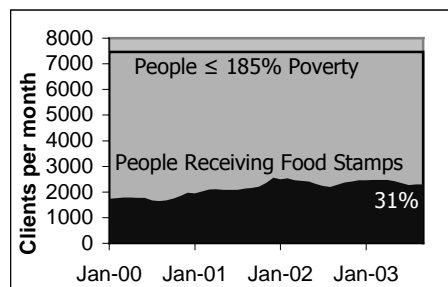


FOOD STAMPS

"Immigrants...don't understand that they can apply for just their kids." Access to food programs, especially food stamps, could benefit greatly from expanded outreach to Hispanic and other immigrant communities. Many immigrants have the false belief that applying for Food Stamps (for themselves or their children) is detrimental to their immigration status and could result in deportation.

"...Pride as a reason not to get Food Stamps."

Many Tillamook residents, especially seniors, believe that using Food Stamps represents an unacceptable failure in one's ability to be self-reliant and are deterred from applying.



Only 31% of those potentially eligible for Food Stamps ($\leq 185\%$ FPL) are receiving them, as of September 2003.

IMPROVING FOOD PROGRAM ACCESS

The "interest is there." While there are a number of individuals and organizations interested in developing Summer Food Program sites for Tillamook children, two main factors have prevented them from doing so: 1) The amount of paperwork is daunting for small and understaffed groups and 2) organizations have not gotten together to pool resources and share the administrative load.

"People want to help if they know how" but there is "often little coordination" between efforts. The sense of community in Tillamook is strong, and people generally are eager to participate in activities that help the community stay fed and healthy, especially projects that bring people together to utilize their agricultural ingenuity like community gardens and the farmers market. Unfortunately, many efforts by schools, churches, and non-profits have not coordinated with each other, making it more difficult for those in needs to find assistance and causing community resources to reach fewer people than they might with cooperation.

Possible ways to improve access:

- Work to start up Summer Food sites, especially by encouraging the three school districts to collaborate on administration of sites using shared resources.
- Continue to expand outreach to those eligible for food programs, especially ethnic communities where language and cultural differences present barriers to understanding of programs. Seniors and the disabled are other under-reached groups to target.
- Support measures that increase the availability of stable living-wage jobs and decrease housing and child care expenses for low-income people.
- Look to develop or strengthen existing community projects that combat hunger – like community gardens and the farmers market.

SOURCES

Community Need: Shelly Bowe, CARE; 2000 US Census; Debby Livingston, Salvation Army; Oregon Department of Employment, OLMIS, Covered Employment and Wages
Child Nutrition Programs: Shelly Bowe, CARE; Shelly Bowe, CARE; Oregon Department of Education; Oregon Child Care Resource & Referral Network
Food Stamps: Monica Pyle, Tillamook Head Start; Focus Group Participant; Oregon Department of Human Services
Improving Food Program Access: Marlene Putman, Tillamook Commission on Children and Families; Shelly Bowe, CARE

A Guide to FEDERAL FOOD PROGRAMS in



CLACKAMAS COUNTY



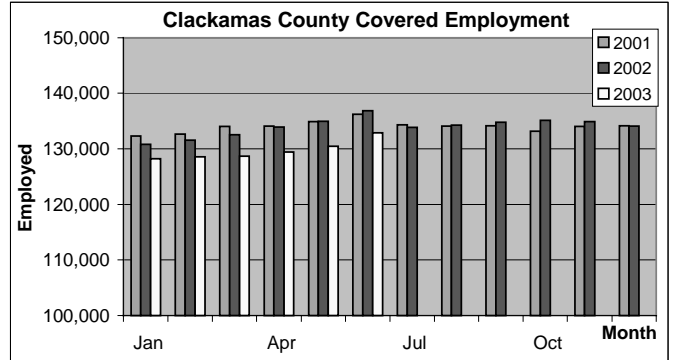
Overcoming Access Barriers

COMMUNITY NEED

The need for food programs is especially great "in rural communities, for those who are shut in at home [the elderly and disabled], and those intermittently homeless."

Poverty	Clackamas	Oregon
Population	335,122	3,347,667
% pop ≤ 100% FPL	7%	12%
% pop ≤ 185% FPL	17%	27%
% pop under 18, ≤ 185% FPL	21%	34%
% pop 0-4, ≤ 185% FPL	25%	39%
Average Pay	\$34,332	\$33,685

FPL
Federal
Poverty
Level



Employment in Clackamas is down overall since 2001, and there is a low level of seasonal variation in employment.

CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Almost "no schools run Summer Food Programs."

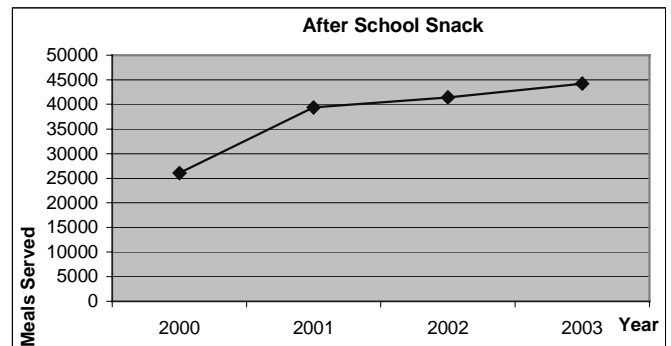
Children in low-income households in Clackamas where meals are sometimes skipped or incomplete face even greater problems once school lets out and they cannot depend upon a free nutritious breakfast and lunch five days a week. Even areas where fewer than 50% of the student population is eligible for free or reduced price meals, there are families in pockets of poverty who could benefit from the Summer Food Program.

Clackamas serves meals to an average of **103** children during the summer, compared to an average of **8,938** children receiving free and reduced price meals during the school year. This 1% summer-to-school year ratio is negligible compared to the Oregon average of 18%.

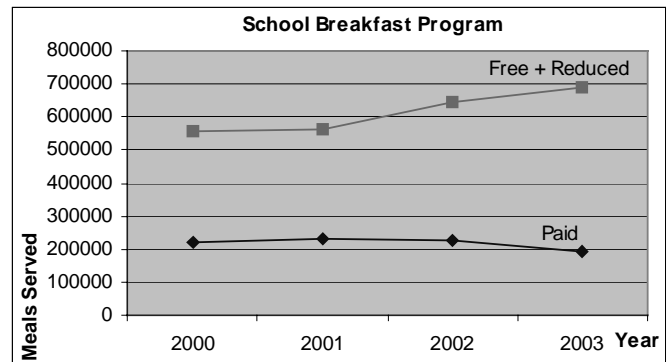
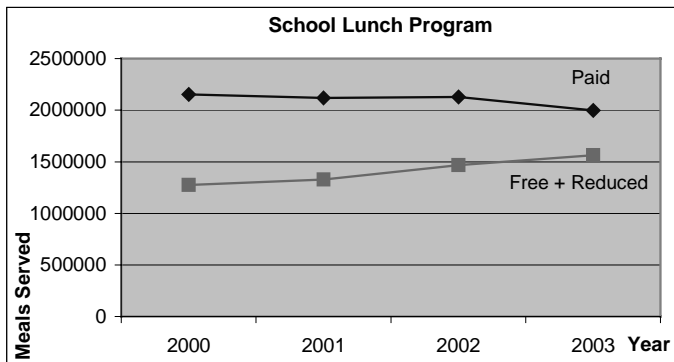
Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	Clackamas
Total WIC package value (FFY 2003)	\$3,096,971
# WIC packages distributed per year	67,075
Women Participating	1270
Infants Participating	1104
Children Participating	3108

Approximately 75% of children eligible (age 0-4) participate in WIC, compared to a state average of 84%. Based on the number of women participating in the Oregon Health Plan (OHP), approximately 73% of eligible women are participating in WIC, versus the state average of 72%. These comparisons indicate that Clackamas may have a lower rate of WIC participation than average in Oregon among children and an average rate among women, and that with both there is room for expansion of WIC to more eligible people.

Child Care	Clackamas	State Average
Number of Slots per 100 children (under 13)	17	18
% Enrolled with CCR&R	77	81
Total child care providers	628	
Total FCC homes	489	
Total receiving USDA	210	



For 2003 the After School Snack and Meal Program had merely a 5% ratio of low-income children served after school to those served during school.



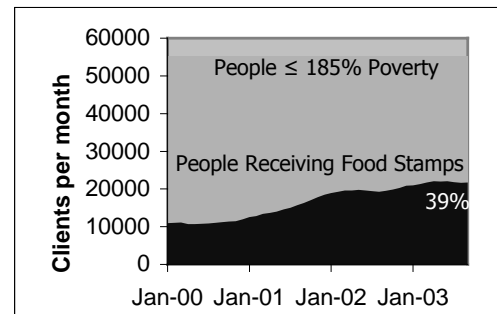
FOOD STAMPS

Alternative avenues for distribution of Food Stamp outreach materials have been successful.

Staff at Clackamas County Social Services have done outreach at places like the Gladstone branch of the Post Office and have dropped off outreach materials at more isolated areas on their way home from work. Efforts like this to reach communities in familiar and easily accessible settings should be continued and expanded where possible.

"Lack of education and information on the program; people think they won't qualify" for Food Stamps.

The lack of information or presence of misinformation is one of the biggest barriers to Food Stamp Program participation by those eligible. Another major barrier is the stigma associated with Food Stamps; clients are often treated differently at the grocery checkout when they use Food Stamps.



Only 39% of those potentially eligible for Food Stamps ($\leq 185\%$ FPL) are receiving them, as of September 2003.

SUGGESTED WAYS TO IMPROVE ACCESS

"A lot of organizations...have motivation but not the capacity." At times the infrastructure of community organizations needed to run a summer food program is not present where it is needed. The disconnect between urban and rural communities can leave some outlying communities' needs for anti-hunger services unknown, and thus unmet.

Possible ways to improve access:

- Attempt to setup Summer Food or After School Snack and Meal programs in Clackamas' "pockets of poverty." If school boundary areas do not qualify by having 50% or more of the student population eligible for free or reduced price meals, work to get

more families to submit their school meals forms and/or pursue alternative methods of qualification. (Consult the Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force for possibilities.)

- Continue to expand outreach to those eligible for food programs, especially in ethnic communities where language and cultural differences present barriers to using programs.
- Support measures that increase the availability of stable living-wage jobs and decrease housing and child care expenses for low-income people.
- Seek opportunities to form urban-rural partnerships to strengthen mutual understanding of the hunger and poverty issues facing each environment.

SOURCES

Community Need: John Coffey, Clackamas County Social Services; 2000 US Census; Oregon Department of Employment, OLMIS, Covered Employment and Wages

Child Nutrition Programs: Betty Izumi, Oregon State University Extension Service; Oregon Child Care Resource & Referral Network; Oregon Department of Education

Food Stamps: John Coffey, Clackamas County Social Services; Oregon Department of Human Services

Improving Food Program Access: Betty Izumi, Oregon State University Extension Service

A Guide to FEDERAL FOOD PROGRAMS in



BENTON COUNTY



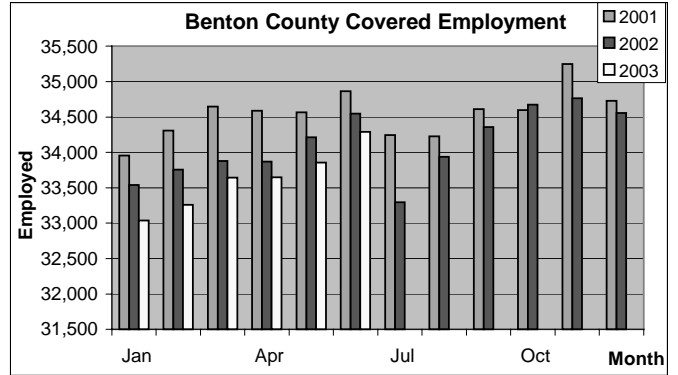
Overcoming Access Barriers

COMMUNITY NEED

"Hunger isn't just a homeless issue - it could be next door." Especially with the substantial divide between high-tech/higher education jobs and lower paying service sector jobs, many in Benton are unaware of the scope and nature of the problem of hunger. Learning that your fellow neighbors, schoolmates, or churchgoers may not always be able to afford proper meals can give community members a greater connection to the problem and a clearer reason to act to help end hunger.

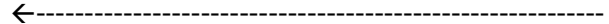
Poverty	Benton	Oregon
Population	73237	3,347,667
% pop ≤ 100% FPL	15%	12%
% pop ≤ 185% FPL	28%	27%
% pop under 18, ≤ 185% FPL	27%	34%
% pop 0-4, ≤ 185% FPL	34%	39%
Average Pay	\$36,765	\$33,685

FPL
Federal
Poverty
Level



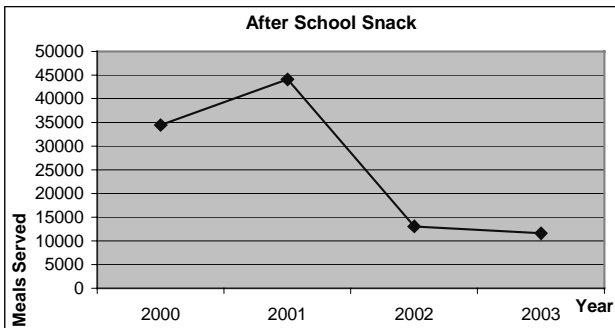
Employment dropped each year from 2001-2003, and is moderately seasonal – January, February and July being the leanest employment months.

The combination of average poverty rates (both at ≤ 100% and 185% FPL) and above average salaries indicates the presence of a significant income gap.



CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS

"The Boys and Girls Club is going strong, but is on the opposite end of the largest low-income population in Corvallis." Children may not attend the Boys and Girls Club after school program (where they serve a meal) because they cannot find transportation home.



The After School Snack and Meal Program had a precipitous drop in meals served from 2001 to 2002, when the program was cut for areas not eligible for federally subsidized snacks (where fewer than 50% of enrolled children are ≤ 185% FPL). For 2003, this is only a 5% ratio of low-income children served after school to those served during school.

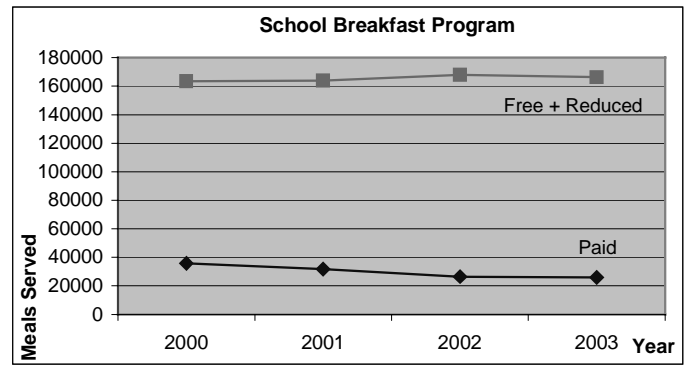
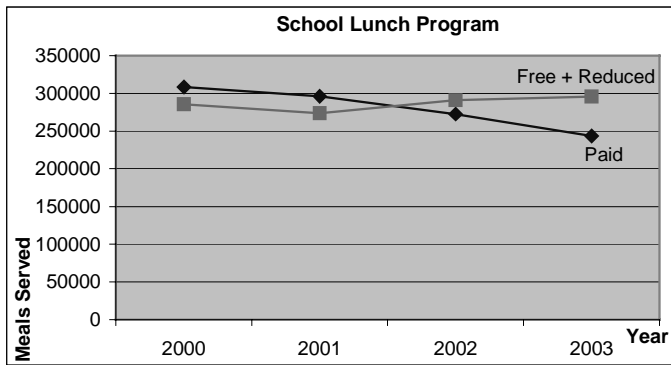
Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	Benton
Total WIC package value (FFY 2003)	\$730,807
# WIC packages distributed per year	15,828
Women Participating	346
Infants Participating	245
Children Participating	717

Approximately 72% of children eligible (age 0-4) participate in WIC, compared to a state average of 84%. Based on the number of women participating in the Oregon Health Plan (OHP), approximately 63% of eligible women are participating in WIC, versus the state average of 72%. These comparisons indicate that Benton may have a lower rate of WIC participation than average in Oregon, and certainly that there is room for expansion of WIC to more eligible people.

Child Care	Benton	Oregon
Number of Slots per 100 children (under 13)	20	18
% Enrolled with CCR&R	100	81
Total child care providers	139	
Total family homes	87	
Total receiving USDA	24	

"Need more [Summer Food sites], definitely." Especially in rural areas, children in low-income households have trouble accessing sufficient nutritious food during the day when they lack safe transportation to a summer food site.

(Summer Food, cont.) Benton serves meals to an average of **256** children during the summer, compared to an average of **1,623** children receiving free and reduced price meals during the school year. This 16% summer-to-school year ratio is comparable to the Oregon average of 18%.

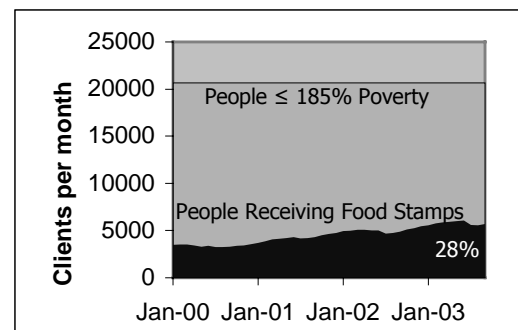


FOOD STAMPS

“Just can’t put it in Spanish and expect them [Hispanics] to come.” Often non-citizens, many of whom are Hispanic, fear deportation or other immigration penalties if their family applies for Food Stamps. Outreach to Hispanics and other ethnic communities can be continued and strengthened by using directed, population-specific outreach methods.

Many residents don’t apply because of “folklore about what it [the Food Stamp office] is like.”

Misconceptions or notions based on past experience lead to a variety of currently unfounded negative perceptions of Food Stamps. Examples of such perceptions include: long waits when applying, a lot of complicated and intrusive paperwork, and that assets such as an automobile or burial service funds will be taken.



Only 28% of those potentially eligible for Food Stamps ($\leq 185\%$ FPL) are receiving them, as of September 2003.

SUGGESTED WAYS TO IMPROVE ACCESS

“So many groups doing wonderful things, [but] a lot don’t know what each other are doing.”

Coordination of community efforts to reduce hunger and food insecurity in Benton can produce a less-intimidating menu of options when families encounter hard times and, through pooling of resources, enable some problems to be tackled that might otherwise be too big for one group alone. Teaming up to provide food, programming, and administration for a Summer Food site is a good example.

“Something like Meals on Wheels” would help the Summer Food program reach currently underserved neighborhoods, especially in rural areas.

Other communities have successfully implemented Summer Food Programs that prepare meals at a central kitchen location and then distribute them via a mobile “Summer Food Bus” that travels from site to site.

Possible ways to improve access:

- Community organizations can look for ways to collaborate on new or existing projects, such as running Summer Food sites at county parks or helping Alsea School District and its new superintendent establish a school meal program.
- Provide transportation home from the Boys and Girls Club after its after school program lets out.
- Continue to expand outreach to those eligible for food programs, especially in ethnic communities where language and cultural differences present barriers to using programs. Seniors and the disabled are other under-reached groups to target.
- Support measures that increase the availability of stable living-wage jobs and decrease housing and child care expenses for low-income people.
- Help residents of Benton County become more aware of the presence of hunger in Benton.

SOURCES

Community Need: Susan James, Linn Benton Food Share; 2000 US Census; Oregon Department of Employment, OLMIS, Covered Employment and Wages

Child Nutrition Programs: Sharon Thornberry, Oregon Food Bank; Oregon Department of Education; Oregon Child Care Resource & Referral Network; Susan James, Linn Benton Food Share

Food Stamps: Jonathon Enz, Monroe United Methodist Church; Sandy Chase, Corvallis Self-Sufficiency Office; Oregon Department of Human Services

Improving Food Program Access: Susan James, Linn Benton Food Share; Susan James, Linn Benton Food Share