

## **BACN Board Primer on Food Security/Access to Healthy Food**

*Meeting the basic needs of our community – food, clothing and shelter*

### **What is food security?**

*Individual Food Security* is a term used to describe a person's confidence in knowing that they will have enough healthy, nutritious food to feed themselves and their household. *Community Food Security* is a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally appropriate, nutritionally sound diet through an economically and environmentally sustainable food system that promotes community self-reliance.

### **How big a problem is food security nationally?**

Feeding America, the nation's leading domestic hunger-relief organization, conducts a comprehensive study of hunger in America every four years. In their 2014 report, they documented a historically high demand for food assistance. The Federal Government's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) grew 50% between 2009 and 2013. Demand for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) also reached historic highs.

In 2012, more than 1 in 7 households experienced food insecurity at some point during the year. 39% of these households included at least one child and 33% included at least one senior citizen. In addition, households with at least one senior are significantly more likely to have their benefits last less than a week! Some food insecure households do not qualify for federal assistance, and most require other supplemental sources of food. The majority of food insecure households depend upon charitable food assistance as an integral part of their monthly food strategy.

### **Is food security and the lack of access to healthy food a problem in Benzie and Northern Manistee Counties?**

In 2014, the Benzie Sunrise Rotary Club completed a study in the Grand Traverse area (Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska and Leelanau counties) to increase understanding of the food security environment and to identify opportunities for increased collaboration and support to area hunger relief organizations. Results, summarized in the 2017 Benzie County Master Plan, are consistent with the Feeding America study.

In 2014, area pantries saw a significant increase in client visits. In Benzie County, 63% of households who visited local pantries were food insecure and 36% lived in very low food secure households – meaning that the eating patterns of one or more household members were disrupted and their food intake reduced because they could not afford enough food. 67% of clients lived in very low income households and 48% lived on fixed incomes due to age, disability or other reasons.

Demographic trends indicate that almost all of Benzie County's growth between 2000-2014 was concentrated in age groups of 50 and up. The number of households with one or more people over age 60 increased by 32%. These trends are projected to continue.

### **How do individuals and households cope with food insecurity and lack of access to healthy food?**

Most food insecure households are forced to make spending trade-offs between food and other necessities such as medical care, housing, utilities and transportation. This practice is particularly true in Northwest Michigan where wages are low and the cost of housing, utilities and transportation is above average.

More than 50% of food insecure households receive help from family and friends, 79% purchase inexpensive, unhealthy food, and 40% water down food and drinks to make them last longer. 55% percent report using 3 or more coping strategies on a regular basis.

### **What are some of the consequences?**

Processed and pre-packaged foods are more affordable than fresh foods. However, they are typically higher in fat, sodium and sugar - foods that contribute to obesity. Almost 1/3 of Benzie County residents are obese, making it a top health risk in our area. Obesity leads to chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease and hypertension. Adults who are food insecure are more likely to report mental health problems and issues with employment. Poor nutrition also contributes to learning difficulties in children.

### **What does this mean for BACN?**

BACN is the primary provider of supplemental food in Benzie and Northern Manistee Counties. Our food pantry offers a model service program. In 2017, the BACN Food Pantry served over 1,000 different households and distributed close to \$400,000 of food. Our self-shop concept fosters dignity and respect. Shelves are stocked with a variety of staples as well as with foods high in protein such as meat, fish and dairy products. We offer fresh fruits and vegetables and foods with higher nutritional content.

In addition to the Food Pantry, BACN has forged strong community partnerships - Benzie Senior Resources (supplemental food bags to seniors), Benzie Central Schools (supplemental food bags to students), Lake Ann Food Pantry (outreach services), and Michigan State University Extension Service (nutrition education). We have a formal partnership agreement and are an integral part of the food distribution system for Food Rescue, a program of Goodwill Industries of Northern Michigan. BACN is also an active member of the Northwest Food Coalition, a network of largely volunteer-based area pantries and emergency meal sites

BACN has the relationships, the knowledge, and the expertise to build on these practices. Providing food to community members with limited resources has always been and continues to be integral to our mission. Addressing food security and access to health food is also directly aligned to our vision – to foster a whole and healthy community by alleviating the effects of poverty and promoting self-sufficiency in the lives of people we serve.

### **What more can BACN do to increase our impact on food security and access to healthy food?**

The need for new and expanded services is derived from data from multiple sources: demographic trends, research studies, survey results, and input from partners, staff and Board members. Some of these services include 1) Expanding supplemental food services for both seniors and students, 2) Offering more hands-on food preparation, nutrition education, and employment opportunities, 3) Extending hours, 4) Developing meal kits that can be picked up or distributed by our partners, 5) Working with community agencies and local farmers to provide better access to fresh, healthy foods, and 6) Entering into new partnership agreements. The list could go on and on. We know what needs to be done and are excited about moving BACN in this direction.

### **What do we need from the Board?**

The Board needs to understand the impact that food insecurity and access to healthy food has on our Neighbors. They need to be committed to the goal of increasing BACN's capacity to help Neighbors achieve food security and access to healthy food through a comprehensive focus on food services and operations. This meets a documented need and builds on BACN's strengths - our thoughtful leadership in food access in the region, our reputation for being the key provider of supplemental food in the community, the strong collaborative partnerships we have built over the last several years, and the expertise we have in food operations with our staff and volunteers.

Adopting this goal will enable the Programs and Services Action Team to move forward with focused and specific recommendations for new and expanded services and the Organizational Development Action Team to present well defined options for our facilities.

**Summary**

Food insecurity and lack of access to healthy food in Benzie and Northern Manistee counties is a significant problem. Charitable food organizations like BACN play a critical role in supporting struggling households with their food needs. BACN is poised to take on an expanded leadership role through a comprehensive focus on food security.

As a result of this renewed focus, we will see a reduction in food insecurity in children and seniors, a greater availability of healthy food for Neighbors, and improved opportunities for meaningful volunteer work for community members. Our food services will grow and develop through forging strong partnerships with other organizations addressing food security. We will improve the efficiency of operating systems, offer greater social support, and become more flexible in addressing new and changing needs. Our other programs - clothing, financial assistance and basic adult education – will be sustained as we build a more whole and healthy community.