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11.18.2025

Informational Briefing on Food Security in the Counties

For the City and County of Honolulu
Committee on Energy, Environment, and Sustainability



Submitted by Appleseed Hawai'i, Hawai'i Foodbank, and Maui County Councilmember Gabe Johnson for Informational Briefing No. 4
Committee on Energy, Environment & Sustainability | November 18, 2025

MISC. COM. 608 EES

Agenda

01/
Opening Remarks and Introductions

02/
State of Food Insecurity Report 2025

03/
County Levers for Addressing Food Security

04/
Innovations and Lessons from Maui County



01/
Opening Remarks and Introductions

Daniela Spoto,
Hawai'i Appleseed



02/ State of Food Insecurity Report 2025

Elia Herman,
Hawai'i FoodBank



THE STATE OF
FOOD INSECURITY
IN HAWAIʻI 2024-2025

Commissioned by

HAWAIʻI'S FOOD BANK HUI

Elia Herman, Director of Advocacy, Hawaiʻi Foodbank

WHAT IS FOOD INSECURITY?

Food insecurity is the lack of access to enough food for an active, healthy life.

Households with **LOW** food security reduce dietary quality and variety. Households with **VERY LOW** food security reduce their food intake, skip meals, or go whole days without eating.



METHODOLOGY

- Administered by Ward Research and analyzed by Pirkle Epidemiology and Evaluation Consulting, LLC

- A statewide survey of 1,079 residents statewide, using the United States Household Food Security Survey Module conducted in May/June 2025 and asked about the previous 12 months

- Weighting procedures allowed findings to be generalized to the state population as well as each county.



KEY FINDINGS - OVERALL

- Nearly 1 in 3 Hawai‘i households (32%) were food insecure between mid-2024 to mid-2025.

- One in five (21%) experienced very low food security, meaning one or more household members went hungry, skipped meals, or went whole days without eating because they could not afford enough food.

- 11% of households went a whole day without food at least once during the year – most reported this occurred some months or nearly every month.

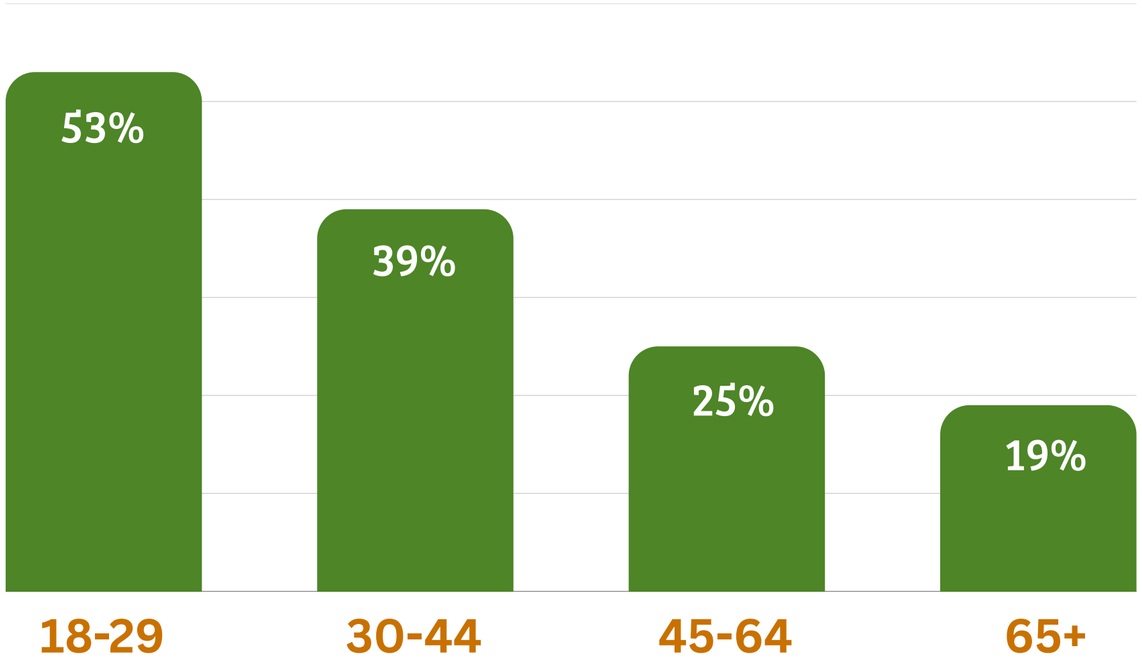
32%
of Hawai‘i households were food insecure in 2024-2025

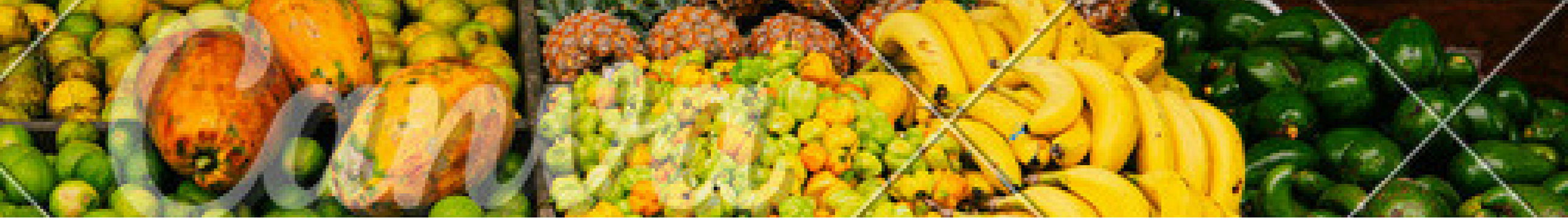
11%
of households went a WHOLE DAY WITHOUT FOOD



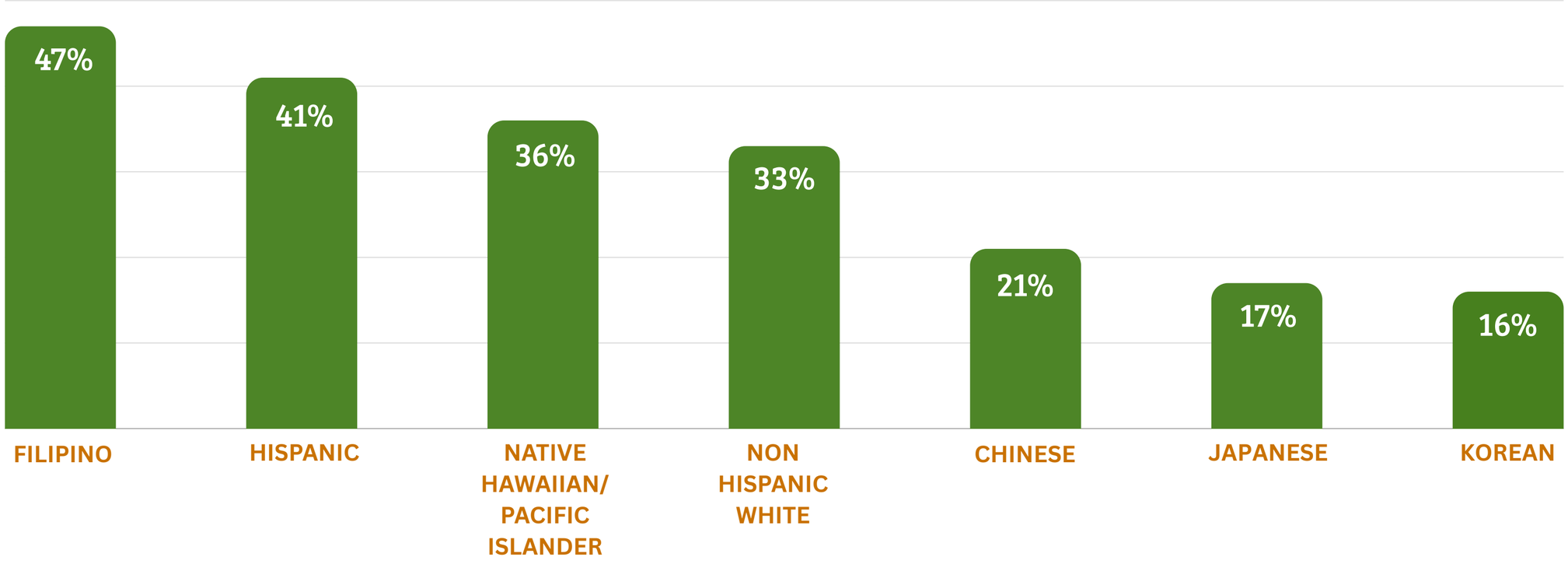
KEY FINDINGS – FOOD INSECURITY BY AGE

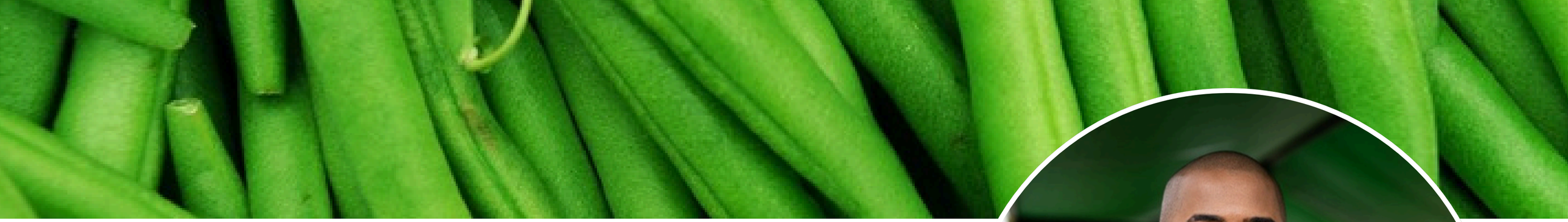






KEY FINDINGS –
FOOD INSECURITY BY RACE AND ETHNICITY







KEY FINDINGS – DEMOGRAPHICS AT HIGHER RISK

58%

of those currently enrolled in higher education were food insecure

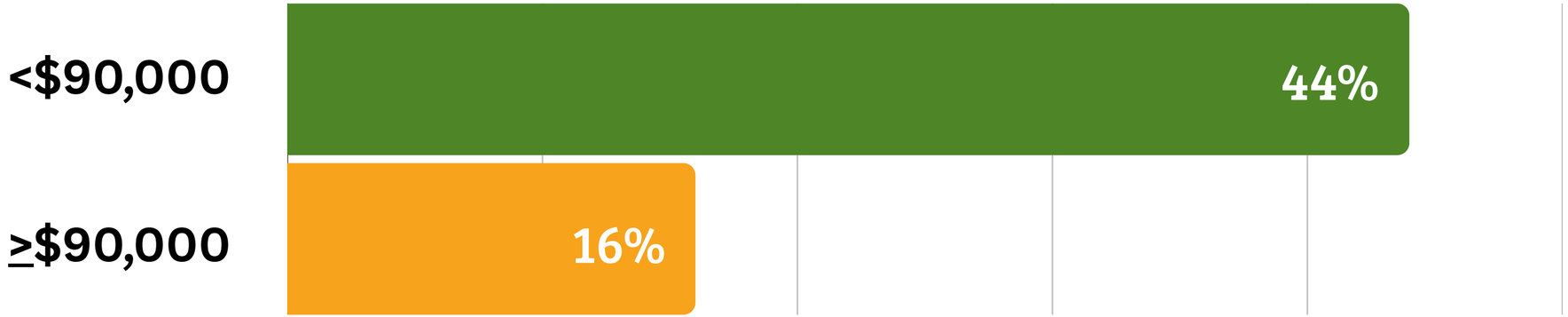
41%

of those identifying as LGBTQIA+ were food insecure



KEY FINDINGS –
FOOD INSECURITY BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Statewide, 44% of households earning less than $90,000 were food insecure, compared to 16% of households earning above that amount.





KEY FINDINGS – HEALTH IMPACTS



Food insecurity is strongly linked to chronic health conditions



37% of ADULTS
in food insecure households
have anxiety or depression

as compared to **20%** in
food secure households

17% of ADULTS
in food insecure households
have gastrointestinal problems

as compared to **8%** in
food secure households



Food insecurity creates impossible choices



41% of ADULTS
in food insecure households
delayed or skipped
medical treatment or care

as compared to **15%** in
food secure households



KEY FINDINGS – CHILD FOOD INSECURITY

In households with children, adult food insecurity was especially high at 45% (up from 38% in 2023), indicating that parents and caregivers often sacrifice their own meals to ensure their children can eat.



34% OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN experienced food insecurity

51%
MULTIGENERATIONAL households were food insecure



11% OF CHILDREN lived in households where one or more children were hungry



KEY FINDINGS – SCHOOL AND SUMMER FOOD PROGRAMS

41%

of households with children participated in free or reduced-price school lunch programs, while only

31%

participated in school breakfast programs

68% of those who wanted summer food support but **did not receive it** were food insecure

- **Critical role of year-round nutrition programs**
- **Opportunities to increase access and participation in school breakfast**
- **Need to expand food support programs during the summer**





KEY FINDINGS – SNAP

- 16% of Hawai‘i residents applied for SNAP in the past year
  - 11% approved
  - 5.5% denied

- Of those denied, 83% were food insecure

83%

denied SNAP benefits were **FOOD INSECURE**

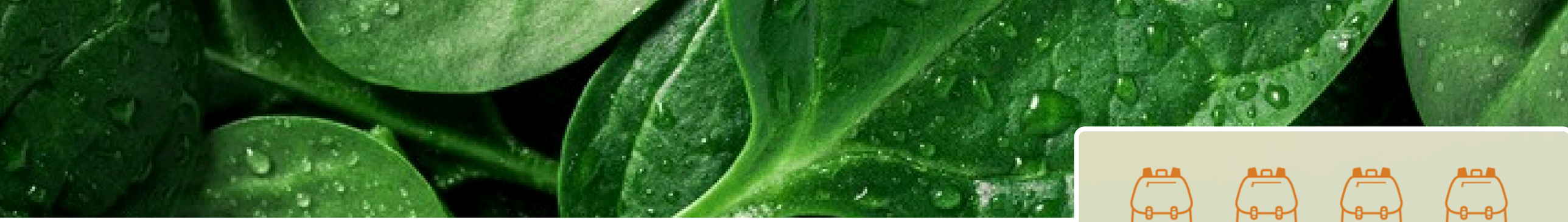
Food banks are one of the ways to help fill that gap





KEY FINDINGS – GROWING, HUNTING, SHARING FOOD

- Food insecurity is linked to both necessity and resilience.
- Food-insecure households are significantly more likely to **hunt**, **fish**, or **raise animals** to supplement their diets.
- **Community sharing networks** like gifted or exchanged foods such as fruits, vegetables, chickens, and venison also play a vital role in helping families make ends meet.



KEY FINDINGS – DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

- Only 15% of Hawai‘i households feel prepared for a disaster.
- Among food insecure households, only 6% feel prepared.
- Lack of financial resources was **eight times** as many individuals living in food insecure households experience this barrier compared to those in food secure households.





Kaua'i County

32% food insecure households (23,000 individuals)



Honolulu County

25% food insecure households (247,000 individuals)



Maui County

41% food insecure households (67,000 individuals)

GEOGRAPHY

Food insecurity remains high statewide, with Hawai'i Island and Maui County continuing to experience the highest levels.



Hawai'i County

43% food insecure households (90,000 individuals)

BROADER IMPACTS

Honolulu County

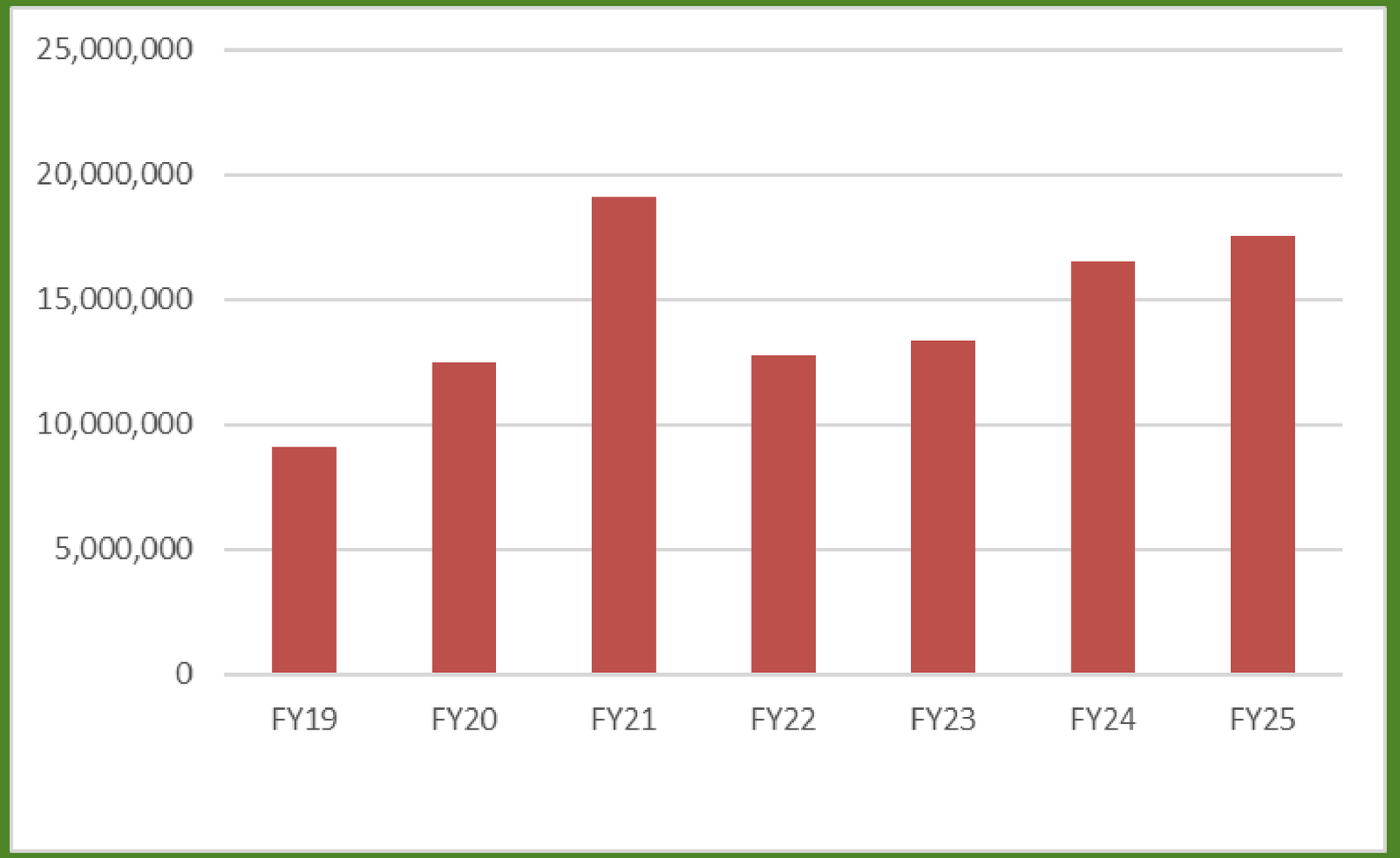
25% food insecure households (247,000 individuals)



- One-quarter of the population on O‘ahu is food insecure.
- **Two-thirds** of O‘ahu's food insecure households are experiencing **very low food security.**
- **17.1%** of households were categorized as **marginally food secure**, which is the highest of any county.

MEALS PROVIDED TO FAMILIES & COMMUNITIES IN HONOLULU COUNTY





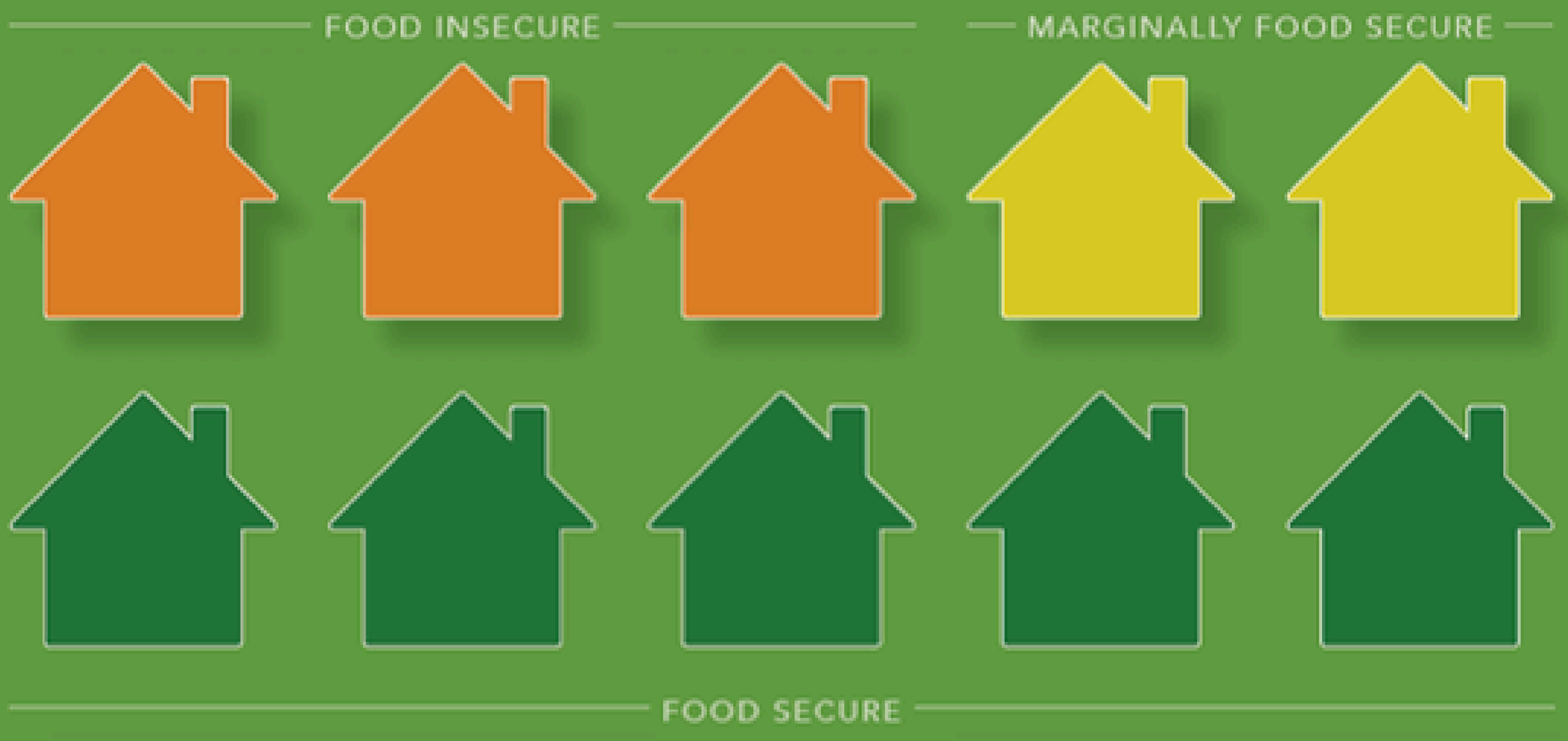
Last year, Hawai'i Foodbank connected families and communities with over

17.5 MILLION MEALS,

close to the peak of the pandemic.

IMPLICATIONS

Hawai‘i is the most costly state in the U.S. to live, with salaries incongruent with the elevated costs of living in the state. Nearly half the population (48%) is either food insecure or only marginally food secure.



32% of households in Hawai‘i are food insecure, and nearly 2 in 10 are one or two paychecks away from needing help, even among those families who are food secure.

IMPLICATIONS

- USDA cuts of over $2.5 million/year worth a food/year for Hawai‘i Foodbank on O‘ahu, while serving as many people as during the peak of the pandemic

- These challenges are compounded by recent 2% cut to SNAP allotments and broader cuts to SNAP and Medicaid at the federal level, the largest of their kind in U.S. history.

- These cuts will amplify risks to the most vulnerable populations, including families, older adults, veterans, homeless, and youth transitioning out of foster care.

BROADER IMPACTS



HEALTH IMPACTS

Food insecurity presents complex, long-term challenges linked to many negative health outcomes, including a higher probability of chronic disease, higher rates of mental health issues, and added health care costs.

EDUCATION IMPACTS

Food insecurity negatively impacts learning and development at all ages, with hungry children performing more poorly in school, demonstrating lower academic achievement and more social and behavior problems. Chronic undernutrition harms cognitive development, particularly for very young children.

ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Food insecurity leads to greater absenteeism, presenteeism and turnover in the work environment, while workers who experienced food insecurity as children create a workforce pool that is less competitive, with lower levels of educational and technical skills, and seriously constrained human capital.

CREATING SOLUTIONS

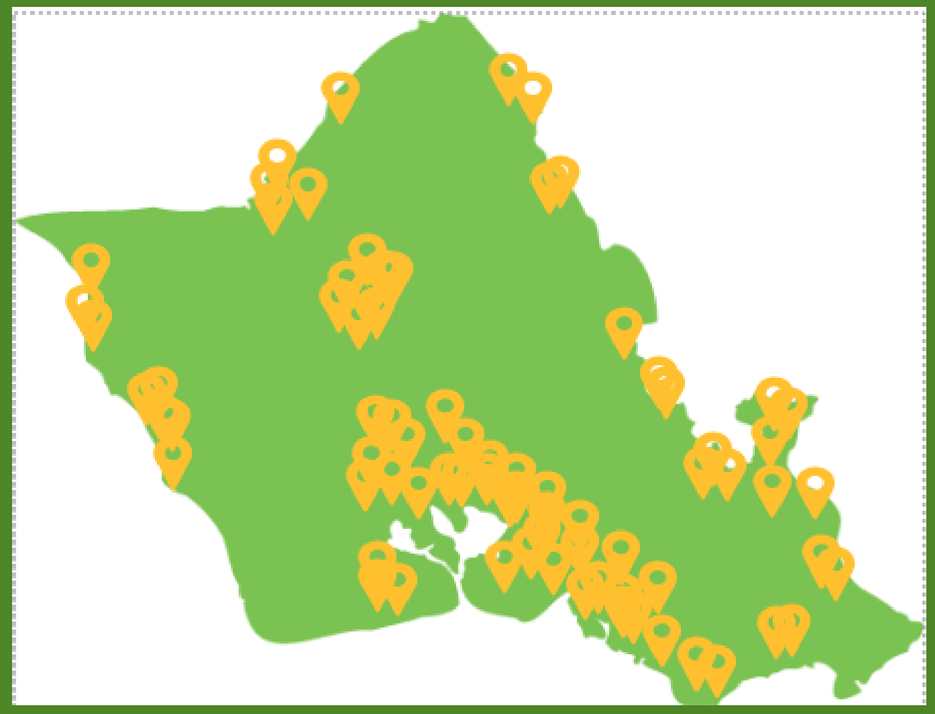
- Creativity
- Collaboration
- Coordinated Action

Ending hunger is more than meeting a basic need—it is a catalyst for healthier communities and a more equitable Hawai‘i.



FY25 IMPACT

HAWAIʻI FOOD BANK



241 Hunger Relief Partners

752 Mobile Pantry Distributions

17.5 Million Meals

6.6 Million Pounds of Fresh Produce

Over 160,000 People Served a Month



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CENTER FOR LAW & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

03/
County Levers for Addressing Food Security

Genevieve Mumma,
Hawaiʻi Appleseed



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CENTER FOR LAW & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

01/ Disaster Preparation and Planning

02/ Summer Feeding Programs

03/ Kūpuna Feeding Programs

04/ Direct Support for Food Banks

County Leadership in Combating Food Insecurity: Seizing Local Levers in Uncertain Times

New Hawaiʻi Appleseed report to be released in late November / early December!

01/ Disaster Preparation and Planning

Counties can play a vital role in disaster response by supporting emergency feeding task forces, and partnering with schools, food banks, and community organizations.



Key Agency/ Emergency Management Agencies

Kaua'i County

Objectives in county plan or in progress:

Objective 1: Emergency food is available via delivery islandwide for those with transportation barriers.

City & County of Honoulu

Built a Mass Feeding Task Force (in lieu of a Multi-Agency Feeding Plan).

Objectives in county plan or in progress:

- Establish an emergency Food Supply, Storage, and Distribution Strategy.
- Establish a rainy-day fund for local food procurement and distribution during emergencies.

Maui County

Has a Maui Emergency Feeding Task Force (EFT) along with the Maui EFT Plan, which takes a lessons-learned approach following the Maui Wildfires. The plan does not include multi-agency feeding coordination.

Objectives in county plan or in progress:

- Action 1.3.2: Create a Maui County Emergency Feeding Plan with specific actions and implementation leaders for each region.
- Action 1.3.3: Establish emergency food stores in each region of Maui County and increase cold and dry storage capacity at food pantries to improve food access and resilience during emergencies.

Hawai'i County

Has a completed County Multi-Agency Feeding Support Plan which outlines guidance and procedures for coordination among the various organizations/ agencies participating in disaster feeding operations. This plan establishes the roles and responsibilities of a Multi-Agency Feeding Task Force and supplement to an Emergency Operations Plan and/or Mass Care Annex.

02/ Summer Feeding Programs

Counties can strengthen summer feeding systems by continuing to expand coverage to underserved areas or coordinating with partners to offer non-congregate options (such as a weekly food box) in rural areas.

Key Agency/
Department of Parks and Recreation



Kaua'i County

Not an SFSP sponsor.



City & County of Honoulu

Current SFSP sponsor.

Objectives in county plan or in progress:

- Advocate to protect and expand state and federal programs that address poverty, food insecurity, and health inequities.
- Pilot a Food System Summer Fun Program.

Maui County

Current SFSP sponsor

Objectives in county plan or in progress:

Action 1.5.5: Address the summer and school break meal gap through the ʻAi Holo School Break Meal Delivery Program, summer feeding programs through DOE, and Summer EBT.



Hawai'i County

Current SFSP sponsor.

03/ Kūpuna Feeding Programs

Counties can support senior nutrition through funding, coordination, and partnerships that expand home-delivered meals, congregate sites, and food boxes.

Reach for these programs varies based on how each county chooses to allocate funds and the partners involved.

Kaua'i County

- Provides congregate and home-delivered meals.
- First and only county-funded kūpuna feeding program. Programs like Nourish Kaua'i's Kōkua Kūpuna meal kits and Common Ground's Meal Kit Delivery Program ensure seniors receive fresh, locally sourced foods—with funding flowing through the county.

City & County of Honoulu

- Provides congregate and home-delivered meals.

Objectives in county plan or in progress:

Seek state, federal, and philanthropic funding and leverage partnerships to enhance the City's Kūpuna Care Program.

Maui County

- Provides congregate and home-delivered meals.

Objectives in county plan or in progress:

- Action 1.5.9: Expand healthy, fresh food access for Kūpuna through the Go Fresh food box program.
- Action 1.5.10: Expand Kūpuna access to prepared foods, by expanding the capacity of hot meal delivery programs and reestablishing a Food Truck Meal Voucher Program for Kūpuna.

Hawai'i County

- Provides congregate and home-delivered meals.

Key Agency/ Area Agencies on Aging



04/ Direct Support for Food Banks

County funds can be targeted to help food banks expand food distribution, purchase fresh or culturally relevant foods, support local farmers, and strengthen infrastructure like cold storage and transportation.



Key Agency/ Varies



Kaua'i County

Objectives in county plan or in progress:

Obtain a commitment from County and State government for funding for producers and food access programs.



City & County of Honoulu

Objectives in county plan or in progress:

Obtain a commitment from County and State government for funding for producers and food access programs.



Maui County

Stands out as the only county with a recurring line item every fiscal year for its food bank—$400,000 per year to the Maui Food Bank.

Objectives in county plans or in progress:

- Action 1.5.1: Expand Farm to Food Bank purchasing to increase residents' access to locally grown and raised products.
- Obtain a commitment from County and State government for funding for producers and food access programs.



Hawai'i County

Objectives in county plan or in progress:

Obtain a commitment from the State government for funding for producers and food access programs

Other Notable County Initiatives



Kaua'i County

Passed resolution 2025-19 for Universal Free School Meals.

Objectives in county plan or in progress:

Develop programs to increase the access and availability of locally grown products, locally made agricultural related products, and monetary assistance (i.e. SNAP, EBT, etc.) in order to increase food security and overall county sustainability.



City & County of Honoulu

Passed resolution 25-2 for Universal Free School Meals.

Objectives in county plan or in progress:

- Advocate to protect and expand state and federal programs that address poverty, food insecurity, and health inequities.
- Partner to enhance access to SNAP, WIC, and DA BUX at farmers markets and food hubs.
- O'ahu Resilience Office works with feeding partners to offer food pantries and farmers markets at Skyline stations



Maui County

Passed resolution 24-203 for Universal Free School Meals.

Local Food Purchasing Incentive, also known as "Farm to Families" is expected to launch in FY26 through a $1 million RFP process.

Objectives in county plan or in progress:

- Action 1.5.12: Increase WIC participation for eligible residents by increasing awareness of available programs and markets that accept WIC, providing individuals with support in applying and getting recertified.



Hawai'i County

Passed resolution 42-25 for Universal Free School Meals.

Objectives in county plan or in progress:

Develop and support programs that increase the access and availability of locally grown and value-



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04/ Innovations and Lessons from Maui County

Councilmember Gabe Johnson, Maui County



Mahalo!