

How much food insecurity there is in morris county

[Food & Diet](#)



Morris County New Jersey is considered one of the best counties to live in the United States. The statistics of this county would lead you to believe that residents are well off and are less likely to face issues like food insecurity, but sadly that is not true. The median household income is \$102, 798, 24% of those 25+ have a high school degree, and 51. 9% have a bachelors or higher. (census. gov) According to the ALICE report in 2016 5% of Morris county lives below the poverty line. (mcifp. com) The statistics jump drastically from town to town, but the feeling of hunger is the same. Those that live with food insecurities also face fear of their peers learning of their struggle. Morris County residents, specifically those in Randolph and Dover face daily worries about feeding their families, but find hope with local support.

In this study I sought to answer if and how much food insecurity there is in Morris County, and more specifically how those with food insecurities in Randolph and Dover are supported. I have been a long time donor to the only food pantry in Randolph (without realizing it's the only one in town). I began researching this issue when I saw a sign for summer lunch in Dover. To better understand this topic I spent a great deal of time researching on the internet, finding the sources of local aid, attempting to contact those that provide the support, and eventually talking to someone that works with a food pantry. The goal with this study was to learn as much about food insecurity and how it is addressed in my local area, while not directly interviewing and being with those with the food insecurities. Through discussions I learned that many with food insecurities feel embarrassed to seek help and shy away from questions about this issue.

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Food insecurity is a national as well as local problem. Approximately 14% of American households are food insecure. Very close 13% of families are food insecure in New Jersey. To understand where the needs are most prevalent is to look at where there is the most support. Every town has families that face food insecurity, but some towns more than others. Comparing Randolph and Dover gives a look at how two towns next to each other face the same problem, one on a small scale, and the other a much larger one. A quick way to see this is to observe the student on free or reduced lunch. About 6% of students in Randolph are in this program, while 74.4% are in Dover.

Thankfully support is more prevalent where there is the most need.

Randolph only has one food pantry, while Dover has four. Food pantries provide additional food for those in need. Some may require proof of need, while others rely on the honor system. To understand how food pantries assist those in need required deeper research into the sole Randolph location. A church secretary provided insight on those that visit this location. The church is located on "the other side of route ten," where live those in Randolph with lower incomes. The food pantry is not only for Randolph residents, but those in the county that are in need. Monday to Friday from 10am to 2pm anyone can come to the church office and request food from the food pantry. They do not need proof of their need, just something to show they live locally. They also are limited to once weekly visits.

Most of the food pantry visitors are moms. This shows how gender roles are prevalent and affect what needs the food pantry tries to fill. Those that are part of the SNAP program are able to buy many items at the grocery store,

but are most likely to get the most filling foods for the cost. The food pantry likewise tries to provide the foods that typical families needs on a regular basis, as well as treats that they are less likely to spend their money on. These special items include individual bags of chips, cookies, and other snacks that kids are able to pack for school. Though they may say their not hungry, or their mom forgot, it becomes clear to teachers when a student repeatedly does not bring snack like the other students due to their family not being able to afford it. As Julie, the church secretary says, a small bag a chips makes a world of difference to a child that faces food insecurities. The moms that visit the food pantry fit into the well known female role of food provider and preparer. Many of these busy working moms are happy to have semi-convenience foods provided to them to save them time. For this group, the benefits of convenience foods far outweigh the negatives.

The foods provided to those in needs do not always fit their cultural or nutritional needs. Without judging race Julie and I discussed that people from a wide variety of cultures visit the food pantry. The food given is very “ American,” but the people that receive it seem to be grateful for what they are given though is may not be food their culture would typically choose. Many of the foods are not always “ good” either. The cheaper, easier to provide in large quantities are teh white pastas, ramen noodles, canned vegetables, and cereals. Those that face food insecurities face the reality that they are not usually able to eat the “ good” foods, but have to rely on the “ bad” to satisfy their hunger. (Crowther 229-232)

Understanding the reality of food insecurity is to understand that some of the topics we have studied: eating cultural foods, choosing how much convenience foods to have, and choosing how nutritiously to eat bare little significance to this group. While working in the schools the children were taught about healthy eating, such as getting plenty of fruits and vegetables a day. The reality for the children with food insecurities is that they don't have an option. They may be given a cheap red delicious apple (which most kids do not find delicious) or a miniscule fruit cup for lunch. Or maybe they'll get a quarter cup of iceberg lettuce covered in ranch. If the food pantry has stock their mom may have picked up some canned vegetables for dinner. The parents then face getting the most for their money when shopping, and are not likely to use all their money/ benefits on fresh fruits and vegetables. The same concept is understood for the other topics as well. The topic of gender roles is not changed for those with food insecurity, but is clearly seen as it is mostly moms picking up food from the food pantry.

Though I was unaware of the prevalence growing up I now know how much food insecurity there is in a 10 mile radius from where I sit. I was taught to donate to the food pantry as able. I know see how much of a need there is for this extra source of support for my neighbors. It is important that the prevalence of food insecurity in local areas is understood. It was surprising to learn how much of a need there is in Dover specifically. The support thankfully follows where there is the most need. With such a high number of students qualifying for free/ reduced lunch there is an extension of the program in the summer. Only one of four locations in the state, Dover provides this service to those that qualify.

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In summary, food insecurity is more prevalent than many realize. This topic is uncomfortable for many to discuss. Those with food insecurities are often embarrassed to ask for help, but are grateful what the support they receive. While we are currently only providing the essentials, there may be a day when deeper thought is given to what is provided. Perhaps food pantries will have more resources and be able to provide a wide variety of cultural foods. Or maybe there will be a way to provide fresh fruits and vegetables without them going to waste. There is great potential for preventing food waste by providing excess fruits and vegetables to those that need it most (Crowther 226). For now we just hope that those with food insecurities in our local area receive the support they need.