

Note from the CEO

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Fighting the stigma of food insecurity.

In 2024, we celebrated our 40th anniversary by sharing stories that highlighted our history, the impact of food on lives, and key milestones from the past four decades. It was a year of reflection and gratitude.

As we step into 2025, our focus shifts to tackling the stigmas surrounding food insecurity head-on. We'll shed light on those who face food insecurity—it might surprise you—and to educate, inform, and challenge the myths about who needs support from the food bank. Through compelling content, we'll invite those who share our mission to join us in breaking down the barriers and misconceptions our clients often face. Together, we can create a more informed and compassionate community.

To create a central gathering place for this content, we've created a landing page on our website: foodbanklarimer.org/stigma. Here, you'll find FAQs about food insecurity, a series of myths and facts, and even some interactive tools and simulations. We hope you'll go online, poke around, and then share this page with people you know.

My experience with food insecurity

Anyone can face food insecurity. I have my own story. I am a first-generation college student and when I applied for college, I knew I'd be entirely on my own as my parents could not afford to provide financial support. I immediately found a job—two in fact—but even though I was working nearly full time while also being a full-time student, I was falling behind financially. I can't say I ever went hungry or skipped meals, mainly because my best friend would use two meal swipes when we went to the dining hall (you could do that then!). I couldn't afford my own meal plan; I could barely afford much more than pasta and cereal. I applied for and was approved for SNAP benefits, called Food Stamps at the time. I continued to work the same amount and take classes, but I was able to afford a much more balanced diet. I was also able to pay more of my bills (including books and such) and not take on so much debt. It was a small fraction of time in my life, but these resources helped me through a few very difficult and stressful years.

At the time, Food Stamps were not electronic; they came as paper coupons. The stigma I faced came from others at the grocery store. I despised going shopping because almost certainly at least one shopper or the cashier would give me a disapproving look when I paid. I felt shame in a very real way. I knew my character was being judged simply because I needed some help. Although it was a harsh lesson, it was a lesson I'm glad I have today because it taught me empathy. It is why dignity is a core value at the Food Bank for Larimer County – because regardless of circumstance, everyone deserves to be treated with respect. Every day, we work incrementally to break down stigma by providing a welcoming and judgement-free environment for our clients.

What trends are showing us

The reasons people shop at our Food Share No-Cost Markets today haven't changed significantly over time but the gap between income and expenses has. The top three cited reasons for food insecurity are rising food costs, insufficient income, and the high cost of rent or buying a home.

The overwhelming message we hear from our clients is that dollars simply aren't stretching as far as they used to because of high living costs, especially the cost of food. A recent Feeding America report, notes a spike in food insecurity in 2022 (the most recent year for which we have data), "amidst historically high food prices and the expiration of many pandemic-era programs." To be food secure, the report says, people need more money now than they have in the last 20 years. In other words, many people who lived at some level of being "middle income" 20 years ago didn't usually worry about whether they could afford food that month. But, today, people at a comparable income more often do.

Food is just about the only commodity that is regularly accessible, at no cost, to help individuals and families facing this income gap. Thank you for your support and for joining us on this journey of learning to fight the stigma of food insecurity.

