The Daily Campus



THE INDEPENDENT VOICE OF THE **UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT** SINCE 1896 • VOLUME CXXIX, NO. 117

Tuesday, April 14, 2026

Rising Food Insecurity Across Connecticut Increases Demand for Community Food Pantries

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At the Mansfield Public Library, a small shelf near the entrance holds canned goods, pasta and cereal. A printed sign taped above it reads, "Are you in need of food?" On the floor nearby, a donation box invites visitors to leave unopened items for others in the community.

The pantry sits just off the main walkway, visible but not central. There are no forms to fill out and no staff monitoring who takes from it. Visitors can quietly pick up what they need or leave something behind as they pass through.

Anyone walking into the library can access the pantry without the barriers of traditional food assistance.

Library Director Devon Andrews said the pantry's placement near the entrance was intentional, allowing people to access it easily without being under a spotlight.

"We wanted to see how we could help support the efforts to lessen food insecurity in the community," Andrews said. "Libraries are so much more than books. They're about meeting the needs of the community."

The pantry opened in January as a partnership with Mansfield Human Services, according to Andrews. While small, it reflects a much larger problem of rising food insecurity, unfolding across Connecticut.

According to Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap study, as of 2023, about 516,640 people in Connecticut, roughly one in seven residents, are food insecure. Of those, 122,660 are children, meaning nearly one in six children in the state experiences food insecurity.

The same study shows that in Mansfield, the food insecurity rate is 18.6%, affecting about 4,170 residents, as of 2023.

Jason Jakubowski, president and CEO of CT Foodshare, said hunger levels in the state are approaching pandemic levels.

"Right now, there are about 515,000 people in Connecticut who are food insecure," Jakubowski said. "That's almost as many as there were at the peak of the pandemic when everything was shut down."

Food insecurity has increased 11% from 2024 to 2025, Jakubowski said. The increase reflects the combined impact of rising grocery prices, housing costs and reductions in federal food assistance.

Another major factor was the disruption of federal food assistance programs in early November 2025. When a federal government shutdown temporarily halted Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, food pantries across Connecticut saw demand surge almost immediately.

Daniel Giacomi, Director of Program Oversight and Grants Administration at the Connecticut Department of Social Services, said SNAP participation has recently declined, though not because the need has gone away.

SNAP serves about 10 to 11% of Connecticut residents, Giacomi said.

"The number has decreased, but it does not necessarily mean that the need has decreased," Giacomi said.

Recent federal policy changes have made it harder for some residents to qualify for or remain on benefits, Giacomi said.

"We saw our lines literally double and, in some cases, triple overnight," Jakubowski said. "We were the only way people could get emergency food when the government shut down."

The shutdown also created widespread uncertainty for residents relying on SNAP benefits, Giacomi said.

"All households had a delay in receiving their benefits of approximately a week and a half," Giacomi said.

At the time, Jakubowski estimated that nearly 99% of Connecticut's 360,000 SNAP recipients relied on CT Foodshare-supported resources during the disruption.

SNAP benefits also play a significant role in Connecticut's economy. According to Feeding America, the $584.7 million distributed through SNAP generates nearly $994 million in economic activity statewide, meaning disruptions to the program can have widespread financial effects.

"These people are employed. They have a job, sometimes they have more than one job," Jakubowski said. "The problem is the cost of living is just so high that it's hard for them to survive without supplemental food assistance."



Devon Andrews, library director of the Mansfield Public Library, stands proudly next to the stocked shelves of the library's satellite food pantry on Feb. 27, 2026.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR.

According to CT Foodshare, the organization distributes food to a statewide network of food pantries, community kitchens and mobile distribution sites. The organization now distributes more than 45 million meals annually, up from roughly 40 million meals just three years ago, Jakubowski said.

"That's not a number we like to see go up," Jakubowski said. "It means there's more hunger."

Since 2020, the number of food-insecure residents in Connecticut has grown by about 152,600 people, a 40% increase, according to statewide hunger reports.

To close the current meal gap, which is the difference between meals needed and meals available, Connecticut residents would need 97.9 million additional meals a year, Jakubowski said.

While hunger is often associated with large cities, data shows it affects all communities statewide, Jakubowski said

"There is at least one food pantry in every single one of the 169 towns in Connecticut," Jakubowski said. "People think it's just in cities like Hartford or Bridgeport, but that's not true. Even affluent places like Greenwich have about a thousand families using food pantries every month."

Despite this, some cities experience higher rates of food insecurity than others. According to CT Foodshare data from May 2025, the cities with the highest food insecurity rates include Hartford, Waterbury, Bridgeport, New Haven and Windham.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. food prices increased by 23.6% from 2020 to 2024.

When school ends in the summer, many families lose access to free or reduced-priced breakfasts and lunches that children receive during the school year, Jakubowski said.

Housing costs also contribute to financial pressure for many families, which increases food insecurity, Jakubowski said. In August 2020, for example, single-family home prices peaked at $437,000, according to state housing data.

"The number one thing you hear when you go to any of our lines is the cost of groceries," Jakubowski said. "The number two thing you hear is housing, specifically the affordability and availability of housing."

Gov. Ned Lamont is considering implementing policy changes to address the problem, according to CT.GOV. One proposal would provide universal free school breakfast to K–12 students statewide.

"Any meals that kids can get that they don't have to rely on being at home for is a win," Jakubowski said.

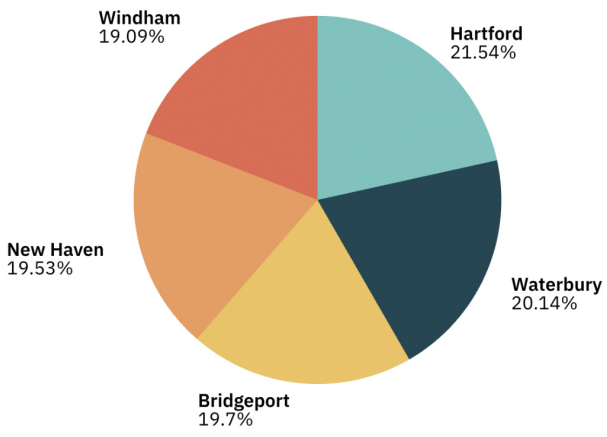
Back at the Mansfield Public Library, Andrews sees the pantry as one small piece of a larger effort to support residents.

"We try to respond to the gaps that exist in the community," Andrews said. "If people need access to food, we want to help provide that."

The library is more than just a place with books, Andrews said.

"There are so many reasons to be here... so you might as well pick up some food while you're here," Andrews said. "We're hoping that by having it in a place that offers so many things, that the stigma can lessen."

Food Insecurity Rates in Connecticut's Top Municipalities, May 2025



Source: CT Foodshare

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