Increases in Food Insecurity due to COVID-19: What Can be Done?

Craig Gundersen
University of Illinois
ACES Distinguished Professor
Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics
Defining Food Insecurity

• A household’s food insecurity status is based on responses to 18 questions in the Core Food Security Module (CFSM)

• Examples of questions:
  – “I worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more”
  – “Did you or the other adults in your household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn’t enough money for food”
  – “Were you ever hungry but did not eat because you couldn’t afford enough food”
  – “Did a child in the household ever not eat for a full day because you couldn’t afford enough food”

• Categories
  – food insecure if have 3 or more affirmative responses
Key Tools to Reduce Food Insecurity

- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**
  - In existence for over 50 years
  - Available to eligible Americans of all ages
    - largest “near-cash” assistance program
  - Central goal is to reduce food insecurity
    - succeeds
  - Why does it succeed?
    - reaches those most in need
    - provides a substantial amount of money for food
      - maximum of almost $700 per month for a family of four
    - can be used at virtually all retail food outlets
    - gives dignity and autonomy to recipients
Key Tools to Reduce Food Insecurity

• Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
  – Specific responses during COVID-19
    • interview waiver
    • signature waiver
    • lengthening the recertification period
    • P-EBT
    • temporary boost to maximum benefit
    • online benefits can be used with Walmart and Amazon
  – Demonstrates flexibility of SNAP
Key Tools to Reduce Food Insecurity

• Food banks
  – Nevada food banks
    • Three Square Food Bank
    • Food Bank of Northern Nevada
  – Critical importance to
    • those for whom SNAP benefits are not enough to escape food insecurity
    • those who are ineligible for SNAP
      – over one-in-four food insecure persons are ineligible for SNAP
  – Specific responses during COVID-19
    • quickly expanded distribution of food despite challenges
    • dramatically increased number of pounds distributed