



Photo Credit: Ivan Sohrakoff, 5 Tons Creative



YOLO COUNTY FOOD ACCESS SURVEY REPORT

*A report on the findings from the first food bank-led survey in California
to better understand food insecurity in Yolo County.*

APRIL 2024

YOLO COUNTY'S FIRST FOOD ACCESS SURVEY

Yolo Food Bank's (YFB) "Yolo County Food Access Survey" is the first population-based and food bank-led survey of its kind in California.

The survey was prepared by YFB and administered by the Institute of Social Research (ISR) at Sacramento State University. YFB also incorporated feedback from Valley Vision and the Yolo Food Security Coalition.

The survey collected data around key county demographics, use of the charitable food system, access to culturally appropriate foods, CalFresh enrollment, and general food access. Using address-based and convenience sampling methods, a representative sample was reached. The data was weighted to adjust for differences in response rates among various socio-demographic groups.

The overarching goal is to more precisely understand the state of food insecurity in our county and improve the food and nutrition security of Yolo County residents.

Below is a snapshot of Yolo County's community makeup.



YOLO COUNTY SNAPSHOT

TOTAL POPULATION

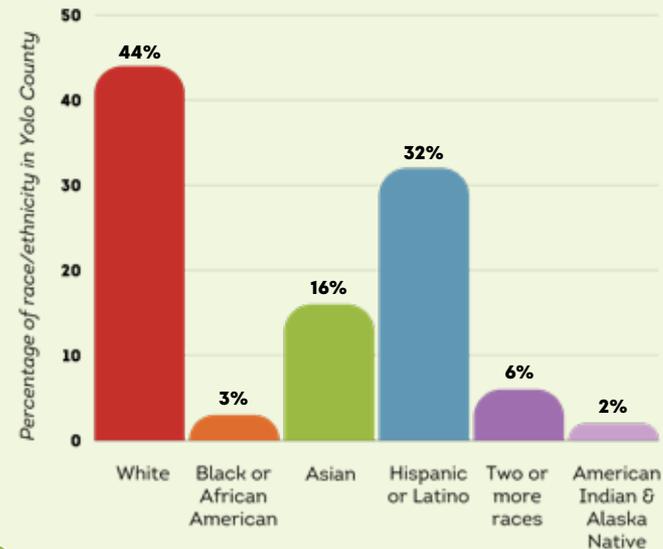
Individuals: 220,544
Households: 76,107

4 MAJOR CITIES

Davis
West Sacramento
Winters
Woodland

TOTAL POPULATION BY RACE & ETHNICITY IN YOLO COUNTY

Source: 2023 U.S. Census Bureau



HOME OF:

- UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS
- THE YOCHA DEHE WINTUN NATION

POVERTY IN CALIFORNIA

Poverty isn't just a problem for those experiencing it; it's a societal issue that impacts us all. It shapes the very fabric of our communities and determines the kind of world we live in. We have all witnessed the effects of poverty when we see the unhoused living on our streets and long lines at food bank distributions. To understand poverty in Yolo County, it's helpful to have the California poverty picture.



While the golden state of California

is known for its endless bounty of economic opportunity, it also has the highest poverty rate (at 13.2 percent) of any state in the U.S.¹ This rate is determined using the Supplemental Poverty Measure. It takes into account noncash benefits (such as CalFresh, WIC, etc.) that aid low-income families and the cost of housing, utilities, medical expenses, and other consumer needs. Income levels alone no longer tell the complete poverty story.²

POVERTY IN YOLO COUNTY

Zooming into one of California's most agriculturally abundant counties, and nestled in the heart of Northern California's Sacramento Valley, is Yolo County. Bordered by a coastal range to the west, Yolo County is characterized by fertile farmlands and picturesque towns.

Like the state of California, the county's demographics reflects California's diverse composition of cultures and identities. With a population of over 76,000 households, residents include working families, small business owners, farmers and agricultural industry workers, students, faculty and administrators, retirees, immigrants, and refugees.

Despite being known for its rich land cultivating a wide array of crops, such as tomatoes, almonds, and rice, **many would be surprised to know that out of the 58 counties in California, Yolo County is the most impoverished, with a poverty rate of 19.5 percent** according to the California Poverty Measure (CPM) reported by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC).³ The CPM is jointly produced by the Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality and the PPIC, and takes into account the cost of living and resources from social safety net programs.⁴

YOLO COUNTY HAS THE HIGHEST POVERTY RATE IN CALIFORNIA

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Background | 3 |
| Poverty in California | 3 |
| Poverty in Yolo County | 3 |
| Food Insecurity and Poverty: Inextricably Linked | 4 |
| Surveying Food Insecurity in Yolo County ... | 5 |
| Findings | 6 |
| Who is food insecure in Yolo County? | 6 |
| Who is using the charitable food system? ... | 8 |
| Is the charitable food system reaching everyone who's in need in Yolo County? | 9 |
| Why are households not accessing the charitable food system? | 10 |
| What is the utilization of CalFresh in Yolo County? | 11 |
| Closing Thoughts | 12 |
| Methodology | 14 |
| Acknowledgments | 15 |

BACKGROUND



Photo Credit: Binh Nguyen

FOOD INSECURITY AND POVERTY: INEXTRICABLY LINKED

Food insecurity is when a household experiences reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet and/or disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake due to limited or uncertain access to adequate food.⁵ The level of food insecurity is determined by the answers to the United States Department of Agriculture's Six-item Short Form Survey.⁶

A vicious cycle exists between food insecurity and poverty – each fuels

the other. When individuals lack the financial resources to access nutritious food they struggle to break free from poverty, thus creating a relentless cycle of deprivation and hardship. If we don't place food first, we cannot learn, work, grow, or prosper.

In California, the household food insecurity rate is 22 percent, as reported by the California Association of Food Banks.⁷

As the nation's leading food-producing state, and one of the most powerful in the world, California's high poverty and food insecurity rate reflects the deep inequities that exist. Many of the households in poverty who come to this state to build a better life are immediately faced with the challenge of keeping a roof over their heads and food on their tables.⁸



SURVEYING FOOD INSECURITY IN YOLO COUNTY

When Yolo Food Bank reviewed Valley Vision's "Food System Resilience Poll" in 2021 and discovered that 16 percent of respondents from the six-county Greater Sacramento area self reported low/very low food security,⁹ we knew we needed a survey that was specific to Yolo County. This effort aimed to answer the following key questions:

- **Who is food insecure in Yolo County?**
- **Who is using the charitable food system?**
- **Is the charitable food system reaching everyone who's in need in Yolo County?**
- **Why are households not accessing the charitable food system?**
- **What is the utilization of CalFresh in Yolo County?**
(California's version of USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program/Food Stamps)



"Knowing that more could be done to improve our communities, Yolo Food Bank pioneered a first-in-the-state comprehensive, population-based survey to uncover issues surrounding food insecurity, food access, and the related health concerns of Yolo County."

- Maria Segoviano, Director of Development and Communications, Yolo Food Bank



"This research provides a deeper insight to the food and nutrition challenges our community faces everyday and calls us to solve this problem together."

- Evan Schmidt, CEO, Valley Vision

What is the Charitable Food System?

The charitable food system is composed of nonprofit organizations that collect and give out food to those who need it, whether through food banks, pantries, or other community programs.

Yolo Food Bank works with a network of passionate volunteers, committed donors, grocers, retailers, farmers, processors, and food distributors. We recover, collect, store, and distribute over 10 million pounds of food each year.

We distribute food each month through direct distributions and through over 80 local partner agencies that serve families, seniors, college students, refugees, immigrants, unhoused individuals, and other vulnerable community members.

FINDINGS

WHO IS FOOD INSECURE IN YOLO COUNTY?

Understanding the socio-demographics of those who are food insecure is crucial for Yolo Food Bank to effectively serve our neighbors.

At 29.2 percent, nearly 1 in 3 households are food insecure in Yolo County. This rate is the highest self-reported food insecurity rate by any measure – **higher than both state and national averages**. Our survey results show that Black and Latino households bear the heaviest burden of food insecurity compared

to residents overall. Recognizing Yolo County relies greatly on its agricultural economy, Yolo Food Bank collected data specifically on agricultural workers. We discovered that **a staggering 52.9 percent of households working in the agricultural industry are food insecure in Yolo County**.

In addition, almost **40 percent of households with children and nearly 20 percent of households with seniors** reported living in a food insecure

household. As far as geographic regions, respondents who live in the city of Winters and the unincorporated areas of Yolo County reported having the highest levels of food insecurity.

By knowing who needs assistance the most and why, we can ensure our programs are meeting the need, so that no one in our community gets left behind.

The data below (Table 1) shows the disparities within our community.



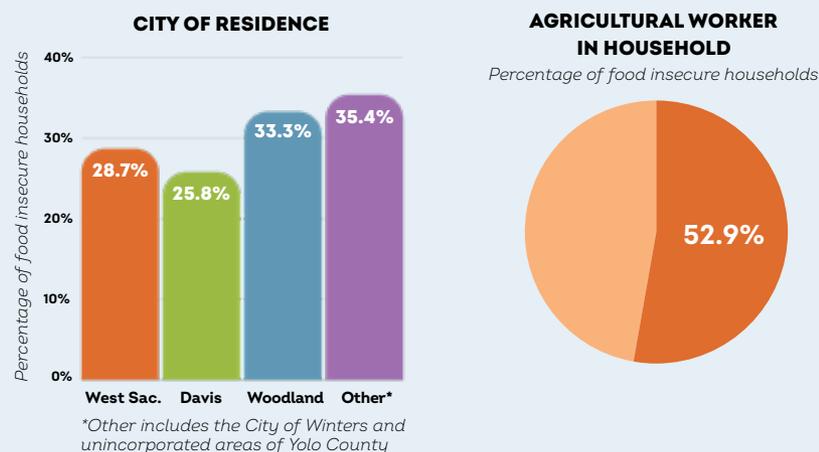
Nearly 1 in 3 households in Yolo County are food insecure



Photo Credit: Julia Aue Photography

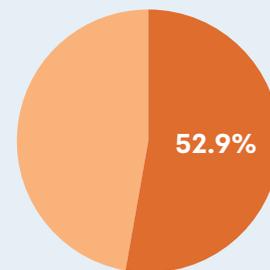
TABLE 1: PERCENT OF FOOD INSECURE HOUSEHOLDS BY RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Source: Yolo Food Access Survey



AGRICULTURAL WORKER IN HOUSEHOLD

Percentage of food insecure households



RACE & ETHNICITY

Percentage of food insecure households



*Note: Respondents may identify with more than one race / ethnicity



Photo Credit: Liz McAllister

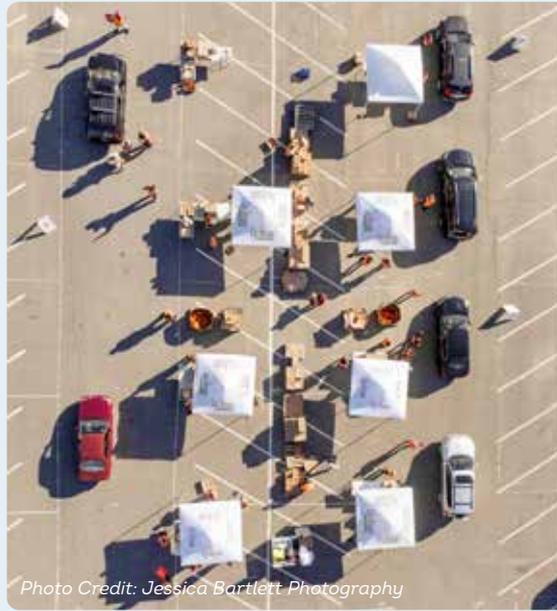


Photo Credit: Jessica Bartlett Photography



Photo Credit: Brittany Cornejo, Yolo Food Bank



Photo Credit: Brittany Cornejo, Yolo Food Bank



Photo Credit: Yolo Food Bank



Photo Credit: Yolo Food Bank



Photo Credit: Jessica Bartlett Photography



Photo Credit: Vicky Chaebn, Yoon



Photo Credit: Bibiana Garcia

FINDINGS



Photo Credit: Brittany Cornejo, Yolo Food Bank

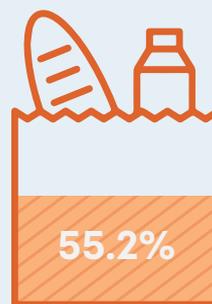
“The charitable food system was not originally designed to be a permanent solution to solving food insecurity. It emerged as a response to immediate needs, providing temporary relief for those facing hunger. However, over time, it has become an integral part of addressing food insecurity in many communities.”

- Karen Baker, Executive Director, Yolo Food Bank

WHO IS USING THE CHARITABLE FOOD SYSTEM?

Respondents were surveyed about their use of the charitable food system regardless of their food security status.

Over half of the households surveyed reported using charitable food services frequently or very frequently (55.2 percent).



Nearly 1/4 of households obtain at least half of their monthly groceries from these services.

Respondents who identify as Latino households reported the highest use of charitable food services. Households living in the city of Winters and the unincorporated areas of Yolo County report utilizing the charitable food system the most.

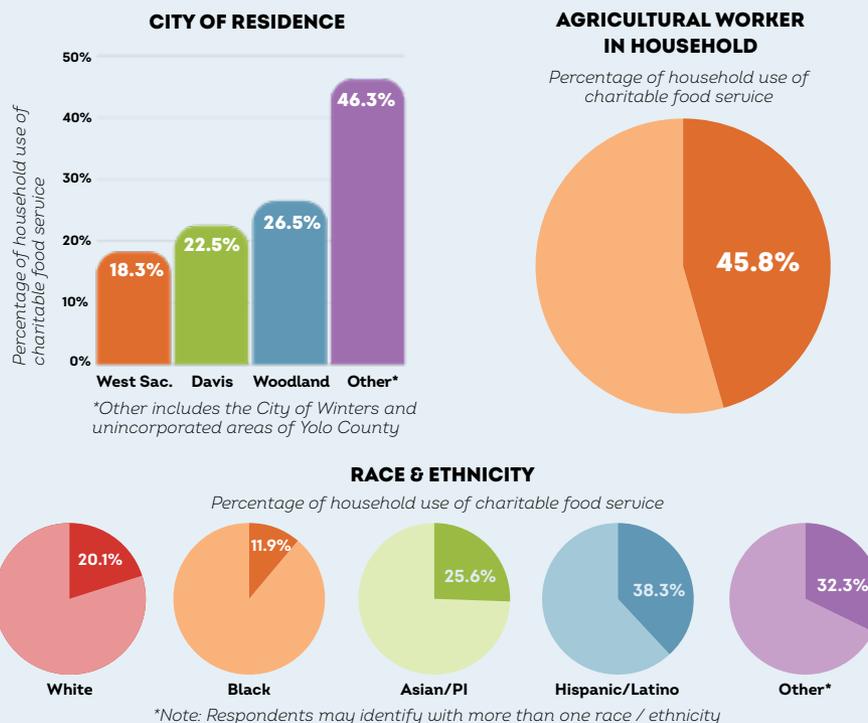
Over 45 percent of households living with someone working in the agricultural industry indicate they use the charitable food system.

Households with children were more likely than households with seniors to use charitable food services.



TABLE 2: PERCENT OF HOUSEHOLD USE OF CHARITABLE FOOD SERVICE BY RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Source: Yolo Food Access Survey



IS THE CHARITABLE FOOD SYSTEM REACHING EVERYONE WHO'S IN NEED IN YOLO COUNTY?

Yolo Food Bank partners with over 80 local agencies encompassing everything from neighborhood and school-based food pantries, recovery centers, senior meal delivery programs, community meal programs, and more.

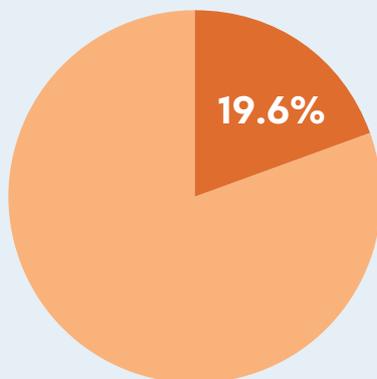
These agencies play a critical role in strengthening the social safety net by reaching some of the most vulnerable populations. It is a mutually beneficial partnership where the organizations are sourcing on average 60-80 percent of their food from Yolo Food Bank. As a result, more than 9,400 households are reached monthly through the services of our partner agencies.

In addition, Yolo Food Bank directly distributes food to over 12,900 households monthly through our

community food distributions. Our work is supported by the Yolo community and through our affiliation with Feeding America and the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano County. Yolo Food Bank is also the USDA's official Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) provider in the county, supplementing the diets people with low income at no cost.¹⁰

Although Yolo County's charitable food system is diverse and robust, not all food insecure residents utilize these resources.

Of those who reported living in a food insecure household, 19.6 percent do not access food from these charitable services.



An estimated gap of nearly 20 percent of those who reported living in food insecure households do not access food from these charitable services.



Photo Credit: Brittany Cornejo, Yolo Food Bank



Photo Credit: Sammantha Reyes

FINDINGS

WHY ARE HOUSEHOLDS NOT ACCESSING THE CHARITABLE FOOD SYSTEM?

While nonprofits and faith-based organizations in our community try to educate about food insecurity resources, we discovered that households are not always accessing the charitable food system.

When asked about the reasons these households were not accessing food, we discovered interesting findings:



27.1 percent stated they believe they do not qualify for these resources.



20.8 percent of households do not know where to go to obtain the services they need.



16.8 percent of households stated the food rarely or never meets their traditional, cultural, religious, and nationality needs.



Photo Credit: Brittany Cornejo, Yolo Food Bank

“Through this survey process we’ve identified who is food insecure and who is utilizing the charitable food system, we now know the gaps that we need to address to meet the needs of our neighbors.”

– Genevieve Pyeatt, Director of Programs, Yolo Food Bank

An interesting fact to note:

When respondents were asked what they do with food they received but did not consume, **64.1 percent reported that they gave it to family members or friends**, confirming what we know about Yolo County’s spirit of generosity to be true.



WHAT IS THE UTILIZATION OF CALFRESH IN YOLO COUNTY?

The CalFresh program, California's version of the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly known as food stamps), is an important government-funded resource for food insecure households. It provides eligible individuals and families with funds to purchase food, offering consistent support.

However, accessing CalFresh can be challenging to apply for due to eligibility criteria based on income, citizenship status, and household composition.

The charitable food system, on the other hand, often sees higher use than CalFresh due to fewer barriers to access, including zero to little eligibility criteria, simpler application processes, and fewer bureaucratic hurdles.

In Yolo County, 18.9 percent of respondents reported utilizing CalFresh. This is not a measure of who is eligible but a measure of those who are accessing it.

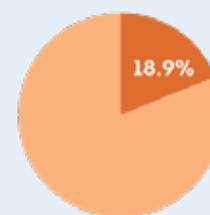
When respondents were asked about their utilization of CalFresh in the month of February 2023, **43.6 percent cited they obtained nearly all or all of their household food through the program.**

Asian households were more likely than other residents to live in a household that uses CalFresh. As far as geographical differences, households in Davis were more likely to utilize CalFresh than those anywhere else in Yolo County.

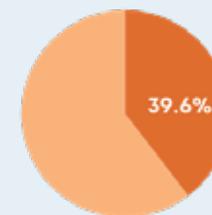
Opportunities to increase CalFresh enrollment exist; as we discovered that more than 1/5 of respondents cited not knowing if they were eligible for the program, and 10.2 percent of households did not know about CalFresh at all. An interesting side note is that 25.7 percent of respondents noted they just never attempted to apply for CalFresh.



Photo Credit: Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

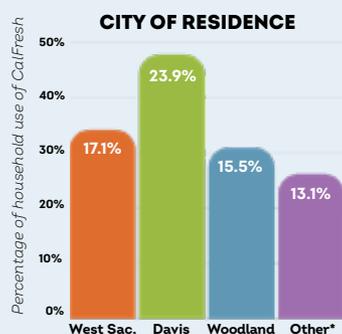


Percentage of respondents in Yolo County that utilize CalFresh



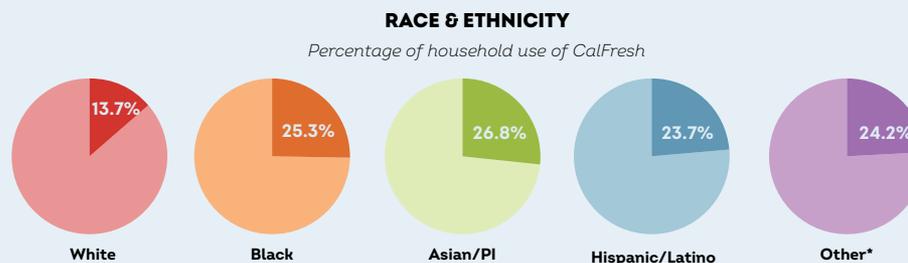
Of the 18.9% who utilize CalFresh, 39.6% also utilize the charitable food system

TABLE 3: PERCENT OF HOUSEHOLD USE OF CALFRESH BY RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS*



*Other includes the City of Winters and unincorporated areas of Yolo County

Source: Yolo Food Access Survey



*Note: Respondents may identify with more than one race / ethnicity

CLOSING THOUGHTS



Photo Credit: Vicky Chaebin Yoon

We see this survey as just the beginning of understanding the food insecure population of Yolo County. The timing of this survey captures findings that portray a community in a post COVID-19 era, and it's difficult to predict how our neighbors will continue to adjust in this current environment.

The charitable food system has been operating at full speed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The high rate of food insecurity illustrates the continuous need that exists in our county. Many pandemic-era benefits, such as extra CalFresh emergency allotments, Pandemic EBT, and the expanded Child Tax Credit have ended causing food insecurity to spike. All while food prices have increased year after year, and overall inflation was up 3.4 percent in 2023.¹¹

State and local jurisdictions are well aware and have enacted policies and actions that provide assistance to impoverished families and the working poor. **Yet, many gaps still remain.** We invite you to reach out to us to learn how you can get involved. It is going to take all of us, the charitable food system, government, companies, and private philanthropy to end food insecurity in our communities.





Photo Credit: Seren Elisa Fernandez

Yolo Food Bank's Next Steps



Educate the community about the state of food insecurity in Yolo County



Develop strategies with the community to address gaps in accessing the charitable food system



Evaluate and ensure that Yolo Food Bank's Community Food Distributions meet the needs of food insecure neighbors



Work collaboratively with the county to increase CalFresh enrollment



Examine our outreach methods to reach more of those in need

How You Can Get Involved



Share this report with your community to educate and inspire new solutions



Get connected with a local nonprofit tackling food insecurity, either by becoming a volunteer or donor



Advocate for sustainable government, corporate and philanthropic funding/investment in the charitable food system

Survey Population, Recruitment and Data Collection

In order to recruit a representative sample from the Yolo County adult population, Institute of Social Research (ISR) and Yolo Food Bank (YFB) used two recruitment methods: address-based sampling (ABS), and convenience sampling. 77,409 addresses were mailed an invitation letter (in English and Spanish, with a link to an online version of the letter in Russian, Chinese, and Farsi). It briefly described the survey, provided a link and QR code to access the survey online, along with a unique, one-time use survey code which tied responses to sampled residences and prevented fraudulent multiple survey taking. Respondents could also request a paper survey by emailing or calling ISR, and then a paper copy with a paid returned envelope was provided by mail.

A total of 3,829 were recruited through ABS and 149 through convenience sampling (60 were matched back to an ABS address), indicating a response rate of 5.1 percent of the ABS sample. The overall margin of error for the survey is +/- 1.5 percent. The survey data was weighted to account for varying response rates across key socio-demographic characteristics and recruitment methods to ensure the findings are representative of Yolo County's adult population.

For the full methodology, visit yolofoodbank.org. If you have any questions regarding the methodology contact Genevieve Pyeatt: genevieve@yolofoodbank.org

Citations

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2. U.S. Census Bureau, Poverty in the United States: 2022.
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8. CalMatters, "California keeps its title as having the nation's highest poverty rate," 2023.
9. Valley Vision, "Food System Resilience Poll," and "Food System Action Plan" 2021.
10. The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), USDA.
11. USDA Economic Research Service, Food Price Outlook 2024.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



Photo Credit: Jessica Bartlet Photography

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Thank you to Valley Vision for providing crucial insights and guidance in developing this report:

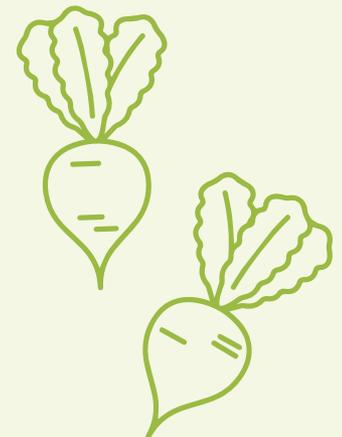
Trish Kelly, Managing Director
Evan Schmidt, Chief Executive Officer

Thank you to Yolo Food Bank's Board of Directors:

Elizabeth Schmitz (Chairperson), Juan Barajas, Dominic Bruno, Jennifer Engstrom, Patrice Griffith, Matt Mariani, Tammy Powers, Jonathan Reyes, Ned Spang, and Kate Stille

Thank you to Eliza Gregory, Assistant Professor of Photography and Social Practice in the Design Department at Sacramento State, who coordinated a project with Yolo Food Bank and the following photographers who contributed photos to this report: Charles Brewer, Seren Elisa Fernandez, Bibiana Garcia, Binh Nguyen, Sammantha Reyes, Joseph Dominic Roman, and Vicky Chaebin Yoon.

This report was made possible by Sutter Health, USDA Reach and Resiliency I & II grants, and the generous support of our community.



“This survey is a remarkable example of how food banks can use data to better understand food insecurity in their communities and drive solutions with their partners. It’s a unique model that we’d love to see replicated.”

- Stacia Levenfeld, CEO, California Association of Food Banks



Photo Credit: Brittany Cornejo, Yolo Food Bank

For more information about how to use data from this survey, please contact:

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Yolo Food Bank works as a community to meet the food and nutrition needs of Yolo County.

Learn more and get involved: yolofoodbank.org