



UNPACKING FOOD INSECURITY THROUGH THE POLICY LENS

An Overview of Nevada's Policy Landscape
and the Opportunities to Improve Through
Policy

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Food insecurity is a significant issue in Nevada, affecting 15.1 percent of the state’s population, or approximately 481,600 Nevadans, in contrast to the national average of 14.3 percent.
- Nevada’s rates of food insecurity are estimated to have resulted in over \$518 million in associated healthcare costs in 2022.
- Nearly one in four children in Nevada experiences food insecurity.
- Food insecurity influences unique yet interrelated health outcomes. For example, the [2023 Nevada Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) indicated that food-insecure high school students exhibited a prevalence of moderate-to-severe depressive symptoms at 41 percent, compared to 20 percent among their food-secure peers.
- In 2023, the Nevada Office of Food Security, in conjunction with the Nevada Council on Food Security, finalized the [Nevada Food Security Strategic Plan \(2023–2027\)](#), which outlines a unified, interdisciplinary approach to combating food insecurity across the state.

INTRODUCTION

Food security is considered a social determinant of health, the stability of which can significantly impact health outcomes and, thus, health care costs. In 2023, 14.3 percent of U.S. households faced food insecurity, totaling 47 million individuals. Nearly 40 percent of these households live above the federal poverty line, making up a “missing middle,” or a population that cannot afford the cost of groceries but does not qualify for government support. (Feeding America, 2023).

Nevada faces even higher rates of food insecurity. Feeding America estimates that 15.1 percent of Nevadans—approximately 481,460 residents—were food insecure in 2023. Of that 15.1 percent, 38 percent are above the threshold for SNAP assistance. The Nevada Council on

Food Security identified that in 2022, Nevada’s rate of food insecurity resulted in over \$518 million in associated healthcare costs (Nevada Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS], 2023).

In 2022, food insecurity in Nevada resulted in over \$518 million in associated healthcare costs.

While Nevada has made progress over the past decade through piecemeal efforts, with food insecurity rates higher than the national average, and an ever-changing national landscape for food policy, Nevada policymakers must remain proactive and adaptive—prioritizing evidence-based strategies, investing in local food systems, and ensuring equitable access to nutritious food for all residents.

This policy brief assesses Nevada’s current food-security policy landscape, encompassing federal, state, and local initiatives, analyzes how such policies may mitigate the adverse health outcomes associated with household food insecurity, and identifies opportunities to build solutions through policy.

FOOD INSECURITY: DEFINED

Food insecurity is defined by the USDA as “restricted or uncertain access to sufficient food for an active, healthy lifestyle” (USDA Economic Research Service [ERS], 2025). The USDA classifies food security status into four categories within a continuum of accessibility and adequacy.

Food Security Status	
High Food Security	No reported indications of food-access problems or limitations.
Marginal Food Security	Anxiety over food sufficiency or shortage, but little or no indications of changes in diets or food intake.
Low Food Security	Reports of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet, but little or no indication of reduced food intake.
Very Low Food Security	Reports of multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.

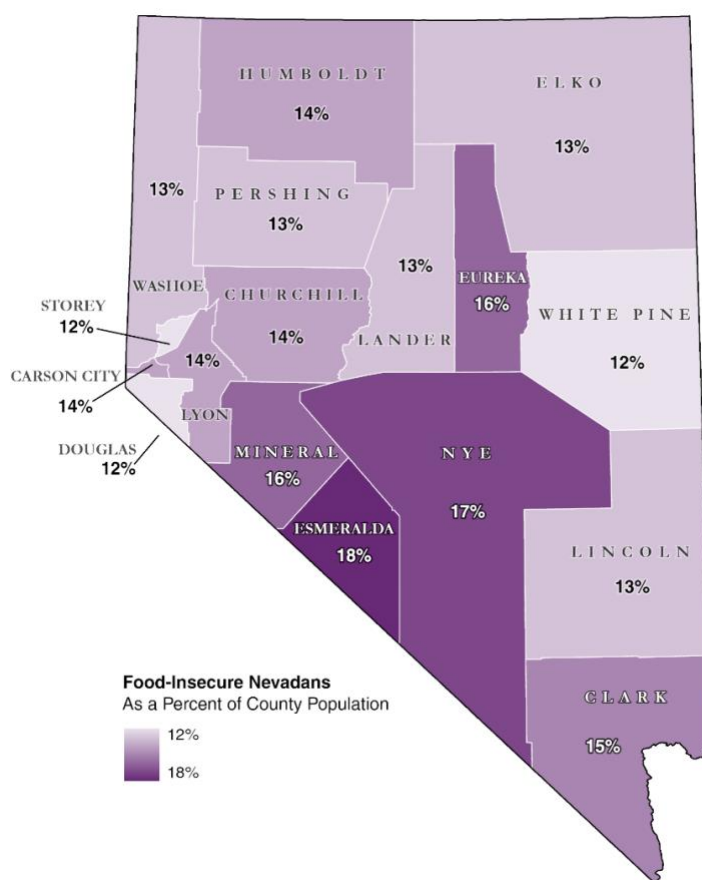
Households with low or very low food security are considered food insecure. Beginning in 2013, the USDA began using the term “low-income and low-access” rather than “food desert,” finding that affordability and accessibility are critical aspects of accurately identifying areas with limited access to healthy food. Several factors, including income, employment, race/ethnicity, disability, and access to transportation, have been linked to influencing food insecurity (Coleman-Jenson & Nord, 2013). The USDA’s Economic Research Service annually administers the Food Security Supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS), gathering data from over 40,000 households each December. This survey inquires about experiences of food insecurity, including worries about food scarcity, the difficulty purchasing nutritious meals, and the reduction or omission of meals due to financial limitations (USDA ERS, 2025). Indicators affecting access include accessibility to health food, as measured by the distance to stores and the number of stores in

the area; individual resources, such as income and access to a vehicle; and neighborhood resources, such as average income and access to public transit (ERS, 2025). The data presents national and state-level estimates, highlighting food insecurity patterns, with results essential for guiding policy and mitigating regional differences.

FOOD INSECURITY IN NEVADA

Food insecurity in Nevada has reached critical levels in recent years, with significant increases across all age groups and regions. Underserved communities, in both urban and rural areas, bear the heaviest burden, facing multiple barriers to food access, including poverty, geographic isolation, lack of transportation, and lack of affordable, nutritious food. Food insecurity is particularly severe in remote counties such as Esmeralda, Nye, and Mineral Counties where food insecurity is approximately 20 percent, as well as underserved communities such as those in Clark County, where around 15 percent of households face food insecurity (Feeding America, 2024).

Figure 1. Percent of Food-Insecure Nevadans by County (2023)



Source: Feeding America, 2024.

The U.S. Census Bureau identified that 7.1 percent of Nevadans lack household vehicle access, while just over a third (34.2 percent) live in a single-vehicle household (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). In Nevada, the Council on Food Security has identified the nexus between transportation

and food security as a specific challenge, noting that 31 percent of Nevadans surveyed reported transportation as a significant barrier to accessing emergency food resources.

THE POLICY LANDSCAPE

While food insecurity is experienced at the household level, effective solutions that will significantly impact food-insecure communities must look at the whole food system. The World Bank defines four dimensions of food security: (1) physical availability, such as the “supply side” of food security; (2) access to food, including both physical and economic access; (3) food utilization, which involves how food is prepared and consumed to meet nutritional needs; and (4) the stability of these three dimensions (World Bank, 2025). All four dimensions must be fulfilled for food security objectives to be realized. Community programs like community gardens, senior meal deliveries, and food pantries effectively meet immediate needs within these dimensions. However, a whole system approach considers the entire interconnected food system, including food production, processing, distribution, consumption, waste, and their long-term impacts. This interdisciplinary, complex approach uses multilevel strategies. Informed policy is a powerful tool to mobilize resources and establish a sustainable framework for food security in Nevada. The following highlights existing state and federal programs shaping Nevada's food policy landscape.



AT THE STATEWIDE LEVEL

In 2014, through Executive Order 2014-03, Governor Brian Sandoval created the Governor's Council on Food Security, noting that “[a]ll Nevadans, including the most vulnerable community members, low-income children and senior citizens should be able to acquire nutritious foods in socially acceptable ways.” Nevada's food security policy framework has evolved over the past decade, with the state implementing several programs and legislative measures to improve food accessibility.

Governor's Food Security Council

The Governor's Council on Food Security (CFS) was established by Governor Brian Sandoval in 2014 by executive order and codified into state law ([NRS 232.4966](#)) in 2019 through [Senate Bill 178](#) (DHHS, 2023). The CFS was created as a direct response to a statewide needs assessment identifying food access challenges and hunger as top priorities for Nevadans (Governor's Council on Food Security, 2024). Operating as a volunteer-based public body and staffed by the Nevada Division of Public and Behavioral Health's Office of Food Security (OFS),

the CFS is charged with drafting Nevada's Food Security Strategic Plan (hereinafter, the Plan) (DHHS, 2023). The CFS engages in regular strategic planning and coordination among state agencies, community partners, and non-profit organizations to oversee the Plan, which was most recently updated in 2023. The 2023 update was produced from the findings of a statewide needs assessment conducted by the OFS, in coordination with The Blueprint Collaborative and The Guinn Center.

While CFS is responsible for researching and drafting the Plan, Nevada law does not clearly delineate or authorize an entity to carry it out.

Nevada Food Security Strategic Plan (2023-2027)

This comprehensive plan aims to address the systemic causes of food insecurity, improve the coordination of food programs, and increase food access in underserved communities. It calls for greater investment in community partnerships, including mobile food programs, food banks, and the expansion of the Healthy Nevada Fund. The Plan is structured around five foundational pillars, each with targeted goals and strategies to address food insecurity across the state and improve Nevadans' quality of life and health by increasing food security statewide (DHHS, 2023). It emphasizes systemic change, local food production, targeted support for high-risk populations, improved access, and capacity building (Frobes, 2024).

The Plan outlines a unified, interdisciplinary approach to combating food insecurity across the state. It delineates five strategic pillars: Lead, Grow, Feed, Reach, and Build. Each is paired with specific policy objectives and practical suggestions, as well as entities that the CFS recommends be appointed as the parties responsible for implementation.

Figure 2. Nevada Food Security Strategic Plan (2023–2027): An Overview

Pillar	Key Responsibilities	Recommended Lead Entities	Supporting Partners
Lead	Convene annual Food Security Summit; develop cross-sector data sharing; advise on statutory changes	Office of Food Security (OFS); Council on Food Security (CFS)	State/local government; individuals with lived experience
Grow	Support local food producers; expand local procurement; enhance supply chain resilience	Nevada Department of Agriculture; CFS	Farmers; ranchers; nonprofits; federal agencies
Feed	Upgrade food storage/distribution infrastructure; expand food recovery; improve logistics	Food banks; OFS; CFS	Pantries; logistics partners; Department of Agriculture
Reach	Expand enrollment in nutrition programs; reduce access barriers; improve cultural food relevance	OFS; CFS; Division of Welfare and Supportive Services (DWSS)	Tribal groups; senior services; transportation sector
Build	Educate food security providers; coordinate public awareness campaigns; facilitate professional development	OFS; CFS; public health organizations	Food banks; educational institutions; community groups

As designed, each entity would fulfill a specific function in executing and overseeing the plan's actions, with a clear distinction among proposed leadership, operationalization, and community engagement roles.

Home Feeds Nevada Agriculture Food Purchase Program

In 2021, through Senate Bill 370, the Nevada Legislature created the Home Feeds Nevada Agriculture Food Purchase Program. This program tasks the Nevada Department of Agriculture with buying specific foods grown, produced, or processed in Nevada for distribution to designated food banks contingent upon funding availability. The program was initially funded using \$2 million secured from the American Rescue Plan Act in 2022, followed by \$6 million from the USDA Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement Program and Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program in 2023. In March 2025, the Trump Administration canceled \$1 billion in grants for these two programs nationwide, which for Nevada amounts to approximately \$4.1 million for the Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement Program and \$3.9 million for the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program for fiscal year 2025.

In 2025, [Senate Bill 233](#) (SB 233) allocated \$800,000 for the Department of Agriculture to operate the Home Feeds Nevada Agriculture Food Purchase Program. While this new funding doubles the state funding to the program, the loss of federal funds threatens the program's future. SB 233 also directs CFS to conduct a study on the program, assessing its long-term financial stability and identifying sustainable revenue sources. The study must be completed by December 1, 2026.

Center for Nutrition and Health Impact, Online Ordering Shopping Project

Through a cooperative agreement with USDA Food and Nutrition Service, the Center for Nutrition and Health Impact has funded four competitive sub-awards to State Agencies administering the Special Supplement Nutritional Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Nevada is one of the WIC State Agencies selected to receive a sub-award. Through this program, Nevada WIC is leading a project to test the integration of WIC online shopping using the "WICShopper" app. The program is expected to launch in fall 2025 and will allow WIC participants in areas of northern Nevada to order WIC-eligible food through the app. Savemart will process the orders, allowing WIC participants to pick up their orders via a curbside transaction. The program will serve portions of Northern Nevada, with the hopes of expanding it statewide.

Nevada's No Wrong Door System

Beginning in 2005, the Nevada Aging and Disability Services Division (ADSD) has worked with stakeholders and other Department of Health and Human Services agencies to adopt a "No Wrong Door" approach to offer services to individuals accessing long-term services and supports. The [No Wrong Door Strategic Plan](#) was published in 2015, and establishes an approach to streamline available services for older adults and individuals with disabilities living in Nevada. Relative to food security, the DWSS will refer the applications of individuals applying for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits that are also eligible for Women, Infants, and Children benefits to the Nevada WIC program. Similarly, if an individual in Nevada is receiving SNAP benefits and is categorically eligible for WIC (e.g. pregnant, postpartum, breastfeeding women, infants or children up to age 5), then WIC only requires proof that they currently receive SNAP benefits to approve their WIC eligibility.

Assembly Bill 345 (2025)

In 2025, the Nevada Legislature passed [Assembly Bill 345](#), which addresses, in part, food insecurity by mandating that the Board of Regents conduct an interim study investigating the

scope and causes of financial and food insecurity among Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) students.

Approximately 22 to 24 percent of students across all seven universities experienced food insecurity in at least four consecutive surveys conducted from 2016 to 2022.

This legislation was supported by a 2022 NSHE report, which indicated that 22 to 24 percent of students across all seven universities experienced food insecurity in at least four consecutive survey waves from 2016 to 2022 (University of Nevada, Reno, 2022). These rates are higher among students of color, including Native American, Alaskan Native, and Black/African American students (Southern Nevada Health District, 2021). Food insecurity rose during the COVID-19 pandemic and has remained elevated (Southern Nevada Health District, 2021). The State's NSHE institutions, including UNR, UNLV, and the College of Southern Nevada (CSN), have established campus food pantry initiatives (e.g., Pack Provisions at UNR, the UNLV Food Pantry, and the Coyote Cupboard at CSN) to mitigate food insecurity (Green, 2020). These pantries are evolving to meet the shifting needs of students by providing more healthy food, facilitating remote ordering, and helping students' families (UNLV News Center, 2022).

Research consistently shows that food insecurity among college students is linked with poorer academic performance, including lower grades, reduced ability to concentrate, and increased delays in graduation (Mobley et al., 2024). Students experiencing food insecurity frequently endure increased stress and anxiety, which subsequently impedes their academic advancement and achievement (Loofbourrow & Scherr, 2023). Assembly Bill 345 ensures that food insecurity on NSHE campuses will be examined formally and extensively, with the intent to generate actionable recommendations for the state's public higher education institutions (Nevada Legislature, 2025). The bill complements other efforts to address food insecurity by informing action through data collection (Nevada Legislature, 2025).

Assembly Bill 405 (2025)

The 2025 Legislature also passed [Assembly Bill 405](#), which directs the Nevada Council on Food Security to conduct a study to evaluate food insecurity, looking specifically at (1) existing laws and policies in this State designed to address food insecurity; (2) identifying areas where community gardens or urban farms could be developed; and (3) coordination of efforts in addressing statewide food security.

Assembly Bill 326 (2019)

In 2019, the Legislature passed [Assembly Bill 326](#), which adds "fresh food retailers" to the Nevada New Markets Jobs Act, in an effort to expand into "underserved communities," focusing on rural areas and urban neighborhoods with limited access to fresh, nutritious food, by offering such businesses tax credits. Per the Nevada Division of Business and Industry's latest biennial report, only one qualified fresh food operator has opened under this law. Mario's Westside Market, in Las Vegas's Historic Westside, provides critical access to healthy and fresh food that is otherwise hard to locate in this neighborhood (Department of Business and Industry, 2024).

NATIONAL LEVEL PROGRAMS

Federal nutrition aid programs are crucial in mitigating food insecurity and promoting public health in the United States. The most notable programs include SNAP and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, both of which are managed by the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service in collaboration with state agencies and constitute essential components of federal initiatives aimed at mitigating diet-related inequities, enhancing nutrition, and alleviating poverty (Fleischhacker et al., 2019). Their reach and complementary services render them essential elements of any holistic plan to improve food security among at-risk communities.

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

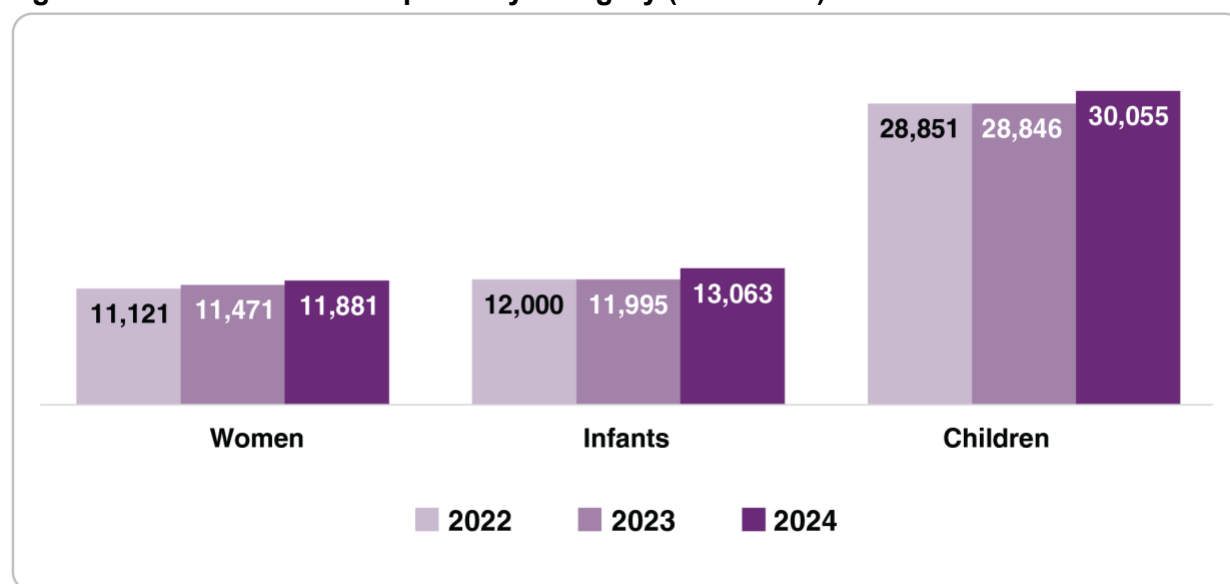
The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, commonly known as "WIC," is a federal assistance project charged with supplying healthy food, nutrition education, and breastfeeding support to low-income pregnant women, new mothers, and children under five years old (Feeding America, 2024). The program, which is overseen by the USDA, seeks to enhance health outcomes for at-risk communities by tackling food insecurity and advocating for nutritious dietary practices (White et al., 2025).

The initiative also aims to assist people at nutritional risk, including those who are underweight, overweight, or impacted by conditions such as anemia. The benefits include access to healthy food such as dairy items, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and infant formula. It also provides nutritional counseling, lactation support, and health assessments to promote the health and welfare of women and children.

The WIC program in Nevada is administered by the Division of Public and Behavioral Health, working in collaboration with 15 local agencies, [the Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada WIC Program](#), and over 280 authorized vendors (DHHS, 2023). During Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, the state recorded an average of 50,770 participants each month, comprising 12,300 women, 14,900 infants, and 23,600 children. This figure represents a 14 percent increase from the caseload observed in FY 2022 (USDA-FNS, 2025).

During Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, Nevada WIC served an average of 50,770 participants each month, comprising 12,300 women, 14,900 infants, and 23,600 children. This figure represents a 14 percent increase from the caseload observed in FY 2022.

Figure 3. Nevada WIC Participants by Category (2022-2024)



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (FNS) (2025). *WIC Program: Total Participation by State, FY 2020-2024 (Nevada Data File)*.

Findings from a WIC eligibility study indicate that Nevada serves approximately 48 percent of the 105,000 individuals eligible for WIC, with coverage among pregnant women falling to a mere 41 percent (USDA-FNS, 2023). The data indicates that coverage is most robust in Clark County, at approximately 60 percent, and in Washoe County, nearing 55 percent. However, it diminishes significantly in frontier counties like Eureka and Lincoln, where it drops below 35 percent of those eligible, as reported by Nevada's public WIC dashboard (Nevada Office of Analytics, 2024).

Less than half of the Nevadans who are eligible for WIC actually access services, with even lower rates in frontier counties. In Eureka and Lincoln Counties, rates drop below 35 percent.

Ongoing obstacles underpin these discrepancies. Geographic isolation results in several rural counties having only one clinic and vendor, compelling families to travel extensively or depend on remote certification. Mitigating these deficiencies via mobile clinics, enhanced online purchasing, and a cross-agency data portal would advance Nevada towards equitable WIC coverage statewide.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is the largest federal nutrition assistance program in the United States, representing 68 percent of USDA nutrition assistance expenditures and serving an average of 42.1 million participants monthly in fiscal year 2023, with a federal expenditure of \$112.8 billion (SNAP | FNS 2025). The USDA's Food and Nutrition Service oversees SNAP at the federal level, while state and local agencies manage daily operations. The program offers monthly benefits through Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards, which can be

utilized to acquire most food items for home consumption at authorized retailers (SNAP | ERS 2025).

Eligibility for SNAP is generally assessed based on household income, assets, and expenses, with benefits adjusted in accordance with the USDA's Thrifty Food Plan, which delineates the expense of a minimally adequate diet (SNAP | ERS 2025). The program's entitlement framework facilitates adaptability to economic variations, automatically adjusting in accordance with changing needs. Evidence consistently shows that SNAP serves as an effective antihunger and antipoverty tool, elevating millions from poverty and resulting in quantifiable enhancements in food security, dietary intake, and health outcomes for recipients (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) | ERS 2025). Recent data indicate that the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is essential for maintaining food security in Nevada. In FY 2024, an average of about 505,500 individuals in Nevada, 15.5 percent of the state's population, received SNAP benefits monthly. Nevada's participation rate ranks eighth nationally, including the District of Columbia (SNAP | FNS 2025).

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The One Big Beautiful Bill Act (H.R. 1) modifies SNAP, requiring increased state matching on administrative expenses. Based on the State Fiscal Year 2025 budget, this new cost-sharing requirement could require Nevada to pay an additional \$20 million per year, beginning in FY 2027.¹ The new law also includes additional work requirements and new eligibility restrictions, which bypass existing Nevada policies that removed specific eligibility criteria to make the program more accessible. These changes may result in decreased program participation and benefits, potentially heightening food insecurity among Nevada's most vulnerable residents by diminishing SNAP's reach and fiscal sustainability (SNAP | ERS 2025).

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

The Child and Adult Care Food Program is a federal program funded by the USDA, in coordination with the Nevada Department of Agriculture. The CACFP provides healthy meals and snacks to children and adults in nonresidential daycare centers. Independent centers and sponsoring organizations enter into agreements with the Nevada Department of Agriculture, Division of Food and Nutrition, to operate the program. Facilities that offer CACFP benefits include: childcare centers, family daycare homes, afterschool programs, homeless shelters, and adult daycare centers. In Nevada, the average daily attendance to a CACFP provider was 23,726 in March 2025 (USDA FNS, 2025).

Children Nutrition Commodity Support (CNCS)

The Nevada Department of Agriculture administers several federal programs to supplement children's nutrition. The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) assists schools and other agencies in providing nutritious lunches to children by offering financial assistance and donated

¹ HR 1 also includes a state matching requirement for SNAP program allotments beginning in FY 2028, ranging from 0 to 15 percent for any state that has a payment error rate greater than 6 percent. States with a payment error rate of less than 6 percent will have a state match of 0 percent. For FY 2024, Nevada reported a payment error rate of 5.94 percent.

commodity food to help reduce lunch program costs. In April 2025, NSLP served 4,381,973 meals in Nevada. The School Breakfast Program (SBP) reimburses states to operate nonprofit breakfast programs in schools and residential childcare institutions. The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) provides meals and snacks to kids of all ages at no cost during the summer at schools, parks, and other neighborhood locations. The SFSP also offers some rural communities “meals to go.”

The Summer Food Service Program served 13,667 children in Nevada in July 2024.

Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program

The Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) is a federal program run by USDA to provide eligible seniors with vouchers that can be exchanged for eligible foods at participating farmers’ markets and farm stands. The federal government sets the eligibility criteria (see Figure 4). For the 2025 program, there were 20 participating farmers’ markets in southern Nevada and 22 participating in northern Nevada (Nevada Department of Agriculture, 2025).

Figure 4. Nevada SFMNP Eligibility Criteria, 2025

Household Size	Yearly Gross Income	Monthly Gross Income
1 Senior	\$27,861	\$2,322
2 Seniors	\$37,814	\$3,152

Source: Nevada Department of Agriculture

Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR)

USDA operates the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), which provides USDA foods to income-eligible households living on Indian reservations and to American Indian households living in approved areas near reservations. Many households that participate in FDPIR do so as an alternative to SNAP, as access to SNAP-eligible food stores for this demographic may be limited. In Nevada, total participation in FDPIR was 429 in April 2025 (FNS Program Participation Dashboard).

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) is another federal program operated by the USDA that provides food to low-income individuals at no cost. The USDA provides food and administrative funds to states to operate TEFAP. Figure 5 shows 2025 income thresholds for TEFAP eligibility in Nevada.

Figure 5. Nevada TEFAP Income Eligibility, 2025

Household Size	Maximum Weekly Household Income	Maximum Monthly Household Income	Maximum Annual Household Income
1	\$557	\$2,413	\$28,953
2	\$753	\$3,261	\$39,128
3	\$949	\$4,109	\$49,303
4	\$1,114	\$4,957	\$59,478
5	\$1,340	\$5,805	\$69,653
6	\$1,536	\$6,653	\$79,828
7	\$1,731	\$7,501	\$90,003
8	\$1,927	\$8,349	\$100,178
For each additional family member, add:	\$196	\$848	\$10,175

Source: Nevada Department of Agriculture.

THE IMPACT OF FOOD INSECURITY DISPARITIES IN THE POPULATIONS AFFECTED

Specific populations endure an unequal distribution of the burden of food insecurity. Children are especially susceptible, with almost one in four Nevada children residing in food-insecure households, substantially exceeding the national average of 16.5 percent (Feeding America, 2024). Furthermore, Black and Hispanic communities exhibit elevated levels of food insecurity, with 21 percent of Black families and 19 percent of Hispanic households in Nevada indicating food insecurity, in contrast to the national averages of 19.4 percent and 17.3 percent, respectively (USDA ERS, 2024). Additionally, tribal communities experience some of the most significant levels of food insecurity. At a national level, approximately 25 percent of American Indians and Alaska Natives are food insecure, with even higher rates in rural communities due to physical remoteness and restricted access to food stores (U.S. Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2024).

Lastly, older adults face several risk factors for food insecurity, specifically fixed incomes, poor health conditions, a lack of social support, and reduced access to transportation, as well as functional limitations impacting their ability to obtain or prepare food. In a survey conducted in 2022 by The HELLO Project, 10.7 percent of seniors surveyed self-reported that they cut the size of their meal or skipped meals almost every month because there was not enough money for food (Nevada Tomorrow, 2025).

TIES TO HEALTH OUTCOMES

Food insecurity presents differently throughout life, influencing unique yet interrelated health outcomes. During early childhood (0-5 years), inadequate and inconsistent nutrition is associated with increased risks of iron-deficiency anemia, stunted growth, and delayed language and motor development (Gundersen & Ziliak, 2015). Research indicates a graded relationship between household food insecurity and adverse health effects, such as elevated rates of hypertension, diabetes, and depression in adults, as well as increased developmental delays in children (Pasha et al., 2024). The 2023 Nevada Youth Risk Behavior Survey indicated that food-insecure high school students exhibited a prevalence of moderate-to-severe depressive symptoms at 41 percent, compared to 20 percent among their food-secure peers. Additionally, these students were 2.3 times more likely to have set up a suicide plan (Nevada Department of Education, 2024). Older adults (≥ 65 years) in food-insecure households exhibit elevated rates of frailty, falls, and hospital readmissions, with national analyses revealing a 53 percent increase in annual health-care expenditures compared to food-secure seniors (Berkowitz et al., 2014).

In 2023, 41 percent of food-insecure high school students exhibited a prevalence of moderate-to-severe depressive symptoms, compared to 20 percent among food-secure peers.

Maternal mental health offers a telling lens on how food insecurity translates into concrete health burdens. Multiple longitudinal studies indicate that mothers in food-insecure households exhibit two to three times greater odds of screening positive for major depressive disorder or generalized anxiety (Garg et al., 2014; Laraia, 2013; Poblacion et al., 2022). The Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS) in Nevada reveals that mothers experiencing food insecurity are 2.4 times more likely to report postpartum depressive symptoms compared to their food-secure counterparts (DHHS, 2024). Chronic stress resulting from resource scarcity physiologically elevates cortisol levels, disrupting mood regulation and contributing to negative obstetric outcomes, including pre-eclampsia and preterm birth (Pasha et al., 2024). The challenges associated with maternal mental health adversely affect caregiving abilities and early bonding, thereby perpetuating an intergenerational cycle. Children who experience both food scarcity and maternal depression demonstrate diminished cognitive and socio-emotional development (Berkowitz et al., 2014). Addressing food insecurity, especially in Nevada's underserved communities, is essential for enhancing maternal mental health and, consequently, overall population health.

POLICY CHANGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

CHANGES TO FEDERAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Over the past four years, the federal government has expanded SNAP and WIC and established food security-related Medicaid financing channels. These reforms include the 2021 review of the Thrifty Food Plan, which permanently increased maximum SNAP benefits by about 21 percent,

making assistance more closely match the cost of a nutritionally adequate market basket (USDA-FNS, 2021). Additionally, the USDA has introduced the WIC Online Ordering and Transactions Proposed Rule, which proposes the authorization of nationwide online EBT transactions and a five-year Produce Rx demonstration authority, enabling states to provide fruit and vegetable prescriptions for diet-sensitive conditions (USDA-FNS, 2025). The proposed rule has not yet been finalized; but, USDA is currently reviewing public comments.

The FY 2024 Consolidated Appropriations Act permanently established an increased cash-value benefit (CVB) in WIC, amounting to \$25 per child and \$44 to \$49 per woman (USDA-FNS, 2025). Additionally, a 2024 notice of proposed rulemaking would mandate remote certification and online/mobile redemption and require states to use SNAP and Medicaid files for adjunctive eligibility (USDA FNS, 2025).

Most recently, the passage of the [One Big Beautiful Bill Act \(H.R. 1\)](#) enacted changes to the federal SNAP program. These reforms will shift higher cost-sharing burdens onto states and eliminate certain work reporting exemptions for those experiencing homelessness, youth in foster care, and veterans. These reforms directly impact Nevada policymakers' decisions addressing Nevada's food security system.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR NEVADA

The Nevada Food Security Strategic Plan offers a strong framework for policymakers to implement system-wide changes to improve Nevada's food security. However, without an entity authorized in statute to lead the implementation, Nevada relies on piecemeal efforts to drive change. Nevada policymakers may wish to consider the following policy opportunities:

Policy Opportunities

- **Authorize a statewide entity to implement a whole system approach to addressing food insecurity.** The Food Security Strategic Plan is a foundational document that identifies the extent of food insecurity in Nevada and outlines statewide objectives, strategies, and tactics to tackle the issue. However, neither CFS nor OFS has been granted the authority to execute the Food Security Strategic Plan. The progress achieved so far has been realized through individual organizational activities rather than through a unified statewide effort. Appointing a state entity to spearhead implementation of the Plan is vital to carrying out the vision that has been articulated by the CFS, and could include the authority to collaborate with local and nonprofit organizations to magnify the reach of existing networks in Nevada.
- **Enhancement of e-WIC and Online SNAP.** Evidence-based studies have shown that using online shopping, app-based, and two-way texting programs leads to higher redemption rates, less stigma associated with benefit use, and better retention of eligible participants (Crespo-Bellido, Ong, Yarocho, & Byker Shanks, 2024). While Nevada uses e-WIC and online SNAP services, and is undertaking programs to expand e-shopping, the state does not monitor online usage by participants. Consequently, the extent of program utilization and optimal ways to maximize their use remain unclear. Given the underuse of WIC benefits and reports of stigma linked to WIC and SNAP, Nevada has an opportunity to expand existing programs to better serve populations that face greater

access challenges. A state-level policy option to enhance utilization would be eliminating fees imposed by online ordering services.

- **Generate Rx Pilot Associated with Home Feeds Nevada.** Fruit and vegetable prescriptions could be instituted at Federally Qualified Health Centers in Clark, Lyon, and Nye Counties, sourcing produce through Home Feeds Nevada contracts. This project would align with the Council's local procurement goals and may reduce diet-related emergency room visits among SNAP beneficiaries.
- **Cross-Program Data Dashboard.** Assign the Office of Analytics to integrate SNAP, WIC, Medicaid, and school-meal data into a public dashboard to meet the transparency requirements of AB 345. This initiative would monitor dual participation, track maternal mental health outcomes, and help inform funding decisions.

BEST PRACTICES IN NEVADA COMMUNITIES

In the absence of such a system-wide approach to food security in Nevada, local communities across the state have stepped in to fill the gap. A few examples include:

- Various community partners in Nevada have instituted independently run Produce Rx programs. The **Food Bank of Northern Nevada** operates a **Prescription Pantry** program, where medical professionals screen patients to see if they have access to the food they need; if not, they provide them with a prescription to match the patient's diagnosis. The **Community Health Alliance** similarly operates a **Prescription Food Pantry** for patients who lack consistent access to enough food for a healthy life. **Dignity Health – St. Rose Dominican** in Las Vegas has launched **FVRx**, a fruit and vegetable prescription program, partnering with **Cluck It Farm** to deliver local produce twice a month to eligible participants.
- **Mario's Westside Market**, serving the Las Vegas Historic Westside since 1977, harnessed a public-private partnership between the City of Las Vegas, Clark County, and the Las Vegas Community Investment Corporation (created under the Nevada New Markets Jobs Act), to increase their square footage from 10,000 square feet to over 15,000 square feet, expanding their inventory of health food options. This expansion also allowed Mario's to expand their SNAP benefits to better serve community needs. (City of Las Vegas, 2024). Mario's Westside Market is a direct solution to the 19.2 percent of food-insecure residents in the 89106 zip code (Three Square Food Bank, 2022).
- The **Southern Nevada Food Council** serves as a venue for food system stakeholders to collaborate on emerging food policy issues. SNFC's achievements include the [2025 Food Access Map](#), an interactive GIS platform that displays data related to healthy food access in Clark County, including grocery stores, farmers markets, food pantries, SNAP retailers, food insecurity rates, vehicle access percentages, and more. This tool helps policymakers and community members navigate food insecurity issues and interventions in Clark County. The **Northern Nevada Food Council** is developing a similar Healthy Food Access Map with the **Food Bank of Northern Nevada**.
- The **University of Nevada Extension** runs a "Master Gardener" program to teach community volunteers research-based Nevada gardening techniques to share with their

local communities. In 2024, the Extension trained 336 volunteers, who completed 31,772 hours of service and produced 13,344 pounds of produce, which was then donated back into Nevada communities.

- [Soulful Seeds](#), a non-profit in northern Nevada, began as a small garden project at St. Mary's Hospital and has grown into a grassroots organization that operates multiple USDA Certified People's Gardens across Washoe County. Through these neighborhood gardens, Soulful Seeds cultivates a hyper-local food system by distributing food to garden neighbors and pantry partners. In 2024, the organization distributed 6,591 pounds of food.
- In southern Nevada, [Three Square](#) is a nonprofit organization and a member of Feeding America, which serves Lincoln, Nye, Esmeralda, and Clark Counties by distributing meals to residents at risk of hunger. In 2024, Three Square worked with a service network of community partners, including non-profit and faith-based organizations, to distribute 41 million meals, or 49 million pounds of food and groceries.

BEST PRACTICES FROM OTHER COMMUNITIES

Nevada is not alone in its efforts to reduce food insecurity, and other jurisdictions may offer helpful case studies to inform policy solutions. The USDA created the National Institute of Food and Agriculture's Community Food Projects Competitive Grant Program (CFPCGP) in an effort to fund innovative interventions that increase food security. Examples of successes from this grant program include:

- An **Atlanta, Georgia**, market expanded from 2,400 to 3,600 square feet, increased its produce, meat, and dairy inventory, created two additional job opportunities, and thereby increased its sales by 90 percent for meat and 85 percent for dairy. The revenue growth allowed the market to operate with less assistance from philanthropic support.
- The **Georgia** Global Growers Network (GGN) has utilized grant funds to register 173 families at community gardens, hosted workshops for growers, and piloted an apartment garden program.
- In **Oregon**, Adelante Mujeres is a women-led nonprofit that focuses on the needs of immigrant Latina women. Through their CFPCGP grant, they have been able to improve food security in communities of color by connecting 3,700 low-income families to produce at eight local farmers markets and food pantries, assisting 785 families in redeeming SNAP, WIC, or Senior Farm Direct Nutrition Program vouchers, and connecting seven Latinx farmers to new market opportunities.

Outside of the USDA grant programs, communities have found innovative approaches to address food insecurity.

- In 2015, **Pittsburgh** launched a "Vacant Lot Toolkit" program, which converts unused vacant lots into temporary or permanent lots for food, flower, or rain gardens. This program allows residents to put vacant property back into productive use. Since launching the program, 130 vacant lots have been repurposed by residents (Urban Transitions Alliance, 2019).

- The **City of Baltimore** partnered with Central Maryland Transit Alliance to assess the impact of the Baltimore bus system on food shopping for residents. Based upon their findings, the city then advocated for changes to the bus routes to improve access for residents living in food deserts (Urban Transitions Alliance, 2019).

The City of Baltimore is also an example of a community pursuing a whole system approach to food security. The Food Policy and Planning Division oversees the Baltimore Food Policy Initiative (BFPI), which brings together the Department of Planning, Office of Sustainability, Baltimore City Health Department, and Baltimore Development Corporation to address health, economic, and environmental disparities in Baltimore's Healthy Food Priority Areas.

CONCLUSION

Food insecurity in Nevada remains both widespread and costly, affecting the physical and mental health of residents while straining the state's healthcare and economic systems. Yet despite persistent challenges, especially in rural and low-access urban communities and amid shifting federal funding landscapes, Nevada has built strong coalitions of community networks through the Northern and Southern Nevada Food Councils, which address immediate hunger needs in the state. Additionally, through recent legislation, the leadership of the Governor's Council on Food Security, and the comprehensive State Food Security Strategic Plan, the state has articulated an actionable vision.

Policy options for Nevada include:

- Creating a statewide authority on food insecurity;
- Modernizing and incentivizing benefit delivery through e-WIC and online EBT;
- Integrating nutrition support with Medicaid-funded preventive care;
- Piloting statewide Produce Rx programs; and
- Launching a unified data dashboard would enable state leaders to maximize federal flexibility and innovation.

These approaches could lead to quantifiable outcomes: lower food insecurity rates, healthier pregnancies, reduced healthcare expenditures, and improved academic performance for Nevada's children. Coordinated action across agencies regarding these recommendations will advance the state toward a more equitable and resilient food system designed to enhance public health.

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ABOUT THE GUINN CENTER

The Guinn Center is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, nonpartisan, independent policy center that seeks to advance evidence-based policy solutions for Nevada through research, public engagement, and partnerships.

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Identify and advance sound policies and actionable solutions that support a thriving and prosperous Nevada.



OUR MISSION

Advancing evidence-based policy solutions for Nevada through research, public engagement, and partnerships.