

## Marin Voice: Fight hunger by changing our food systems

By [KARI BEUERMAN](#)

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September is **Hunger Action Month**, a time to raise awareness about hunger and food insecurity locally, across the nation and worldwide.

It's also a good time to come together as a community to understand the root causes of hunger, to find solutions to feed the hungry across the county, and to change our food systems with the goal of eliminating food insecurity entirely.

Hunger impacts millions of Americans annually. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, more than 38 million people live in households that struggle with food insecurity or lack access to an affordable, nutritious diet. Almost 4% of households are facing "very low food security" and regularly skip meals or reduce the amount they eat because they can't afford enough food.

Alarming, households with children fare even worse: One in eight families cannot (12.5%) afford enough food, compared to 9.4% for households without children.

In 2021, food insecurity was double for Latino households (16.2%) and almost triple for Black households (19.8%) compared to White homes (7%). Age and infirmity also have major impacts on hunger and access to sufficient food, all due to lower incomes and rates of poverty.

**Food insecurity is closely linked to employment and income, and it is a key indicator of economic well-being. It is also a social determinant of health — because hunger has distinct physical, mental and social consequences.**

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated food insecurity by increasing poverty, unemployment and isolation. The pandemic caused significant production and supply chain issues and created new barriers to food access for those who were already struggling.

**In Marin County, one in five people are at risk of food insecurity — that's 20% of our population.**

Since Marin is generally thought of as a wealthy and healthy county, many are not aware that food insecurity presents such a significant issue in our communities.

Many households and individuals experiencing food insecurity do not qualify for federal nutrition programs, such as CalFresh. In the case of many older adults, this

could be due to not meeting the income threshold for assistance but not having sufficient funds to consistently purchase affordable, nutritious food.

Many people of all ages and ethnicities struggle daily to make difficult choices—whether to spend limited funds on food or on other essential items such as rent, childcare, transportation and medications.

Fortunately, there are many food assistance programs in Marin that work hard to feed the hungry, providing dry or canned goods to those in need, as well as fresh fruits and vegetables, and in some cases, even hot and cold meals.

But we need upstream solutions. We need to create equitable food systems that will provide consistent and reliable access to affordable food. And we need to address the severe income gap in our county.

**About 7% of Marin residents live at or below the federal poverty level – that’s just \$27,750 for a family of four, and we all know how far that can (and cannot) get you in Marin.** The more accurate measure is the “self-sufficiency standard” and the income required to make ends meet; in Marin, nearly 35% of families with children don’t earn enough to get by without public or private assistance.

It costs a lot of money to feed a family, and it will take serious solutions to feed all the families and all the hungry people in Marin. Be a part of the solutions. Marin can do this.

*If you would like to learn more about the major programs and proposals to improve our food systems, **join the next Marin Communications Forum, “Fighting Hunger and Food Insecurity in Marin,”** on Friday at the Embassy Suites Hotel in San Rafael. The program begins at 9 a.m.; a breakfast buffet will be offered at 8:30 am. This is a free event co-sponsored by First 5 Marin and Marin County Health and Human Services. **To register, email [Michelle@First5Marin.org](mailto:Michelle@First5Marin.org).***

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