

Stop the Hunger Games: Ohio should maximize access to federal food aid

By Wendy Patton

The Kasich administration could help more Ohioans become self-sufficient by ensuring the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, or food aid) is used to the fullest extent possible throughout the state. For the past two years, Ohio imposed time limits on food aid for many men and women in most counties, although the entire state qualified for a waiver of such restrictions.

While new initiatives to help job seekers included in the recent state budget bill are getting started, Ohio should aggressively pursue federal resources to reduce hunger throughout the state. This means accepting the federal waiver of food stamps for as many counties and cities as possible, maximizing SNAP employment and training funds and using all backlogged exemptions to help job seekers still struggling in the slow recovery.

For many Ohioans, the recession never ended. Demand in Ohio's food banks rose by 40 percent between 2010 and 2014. We rank 12th among states in food insecurity and tie with Mississippi for 3d in severe food insecurity.

When the economy is strong, the federal government places time limits on food aid for job-seekers who are not disabled, elderly or parents with custody of minor children. These people are eligible for federal food aid in just three out of 36 months unless they get 80 hours of work a month (about 20 hours a week). When a state or local economy is weak and many can't find this much work, federal rules waive the time limits. Ohio has qualified for a federal waiver of time limits since the recession. However, the Kasich administration rejected that waiver for urban counties for the past two years, accepting it for a just a few rural counties. Next year Ohio will no longer be eligible for a statewide waiver, but many counties and cities will remain eligible.

In this report, we identify up to 34 counties that will qualify, and nine additional cities. The Kasich administration should apply for the broadest waiver possible and maximize federal food aid for hungry Ohioans throughout the state.

Key findings

- When the economy is strong, the federal government imposes time limits on food aid for some. Ohio's economy is weak, so federal time limits have been waived for the entire state.
- Ohio accepted that waiver for a few rural counties but rejected the waiver in urban counties, leaving Ohioans hungry.
- Neighboring states and many conservative southern states accepted the statewide waiver.
- In 2016, nine cities and 34 counties, including almost all Appalachian counties, will qualify for the federal waiver. Ohio should request the relief.

Table 1

Counties and cities where food stamp work requirement waiver should be sought for 2016

Minimum number of jurisdictions eligible for waiver		Maximum number of jurisdictions eligible for waiver	
Counties Eligible for a Waiver Based on Unemployment Rates	Unemployment, Jan2013 - Dec2014	Grouping of Counties Eligible for a Waiver Based on Combined Unemployment	Unemployment, Jan2013 - Dec2014
1	Adams County, OH	1	Adams County, OH
2	Pike County, OH	2	Pike County, OH
3	Monroe County, OH	3	Monroe County, OH
4	Meigs County, OH	4	Meigs County, OH
5	Scioto County, OH	5	Scioto County, OH
6	Jackson County, OH	6	Jackson County, OH
7	Jefferson County, OH	7	Jefferson County, OH
8	Vinton County, OH	8	Vinton County, OH
9	Huron County, OH	9	Clinton County, OH
10	Clinton County, OH	10	Highland County, OH
11	Highland County, OH	11	Morgan County, OH
12	Morgan County, OH	12	Brown County, OH
13	Brown County, OH	13	Gallia County, OH
14	Gallia County, OH	14	Noble County, OH
15	Noble County, OH	15	Coshocton County, OH
16	Ottawa County, OH	16	Perry County, OH
17	Coshocton County, OH	17	Ashtabula County, OH
18	Perry County, OH	18	Muskingum County, OH
19	Ashtabula County, OH	19	Trumbull County, OH
20	Muskingum County, OH	20	Athens County, OH
21	Trumbull County, OH	21	Guernsey County, OH
<i>Note: each county's unemployment is 20% over national average</i>		22	Lawrence County, OH
Cities Eligible for a Waiver		23	Mahoning County, OH
1	Cleveland city, OH	24	Ross County, OH
2	Dayton city, OH	25	Belmont County, OH
3	Lima city, OH	26	Columbiana County, OH
4	Lorain city, OH	27	Washington County, OH
5	Mansfield city, OH	28	Hocking County, OH
6	Maple Heights city, OH	29	Carroll County, OH
7	Middletown city, Butler County	30	Harrison County, OH
8	Toledo city, OH	31	Fayette County, OH
9	Trotwood city, OH	Total for Appalachian region	
10	Zanesville city, OH	8.2	
<i>Note: each city's unemployment is 20% over national average</i>		<i>Note: regional total unemployment 20% over national average</i>	
National average unemployment rate		6.8	
20 percent above national average		8.1	
		Grouping of Northern Counties	
		32	Huron County, OH
		33	Crawford County, OH
		34	Morrow County, OH
		Total for north central region	
		8.1	

Source: Policy Matters Ohio, based on CBPP analysis of Census data *Note: Regional total unemployment 20% over national avg.*