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LONG ISLAND

# Household hunger on Long Island rising and getting worse, advocates say

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## 'It is working class families, not just the unemployed'

A growing number of Long Islanders are facing food insecurity, according to two new reports. NewsdayTV's Virginia Huie reports. Credit: Newsday/Kendall Rodriguez

By **Nicholas Spangler**

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Hunger's warning signs are flashing in households across Long Island.

A 2024 survey by Hauppauge-based food bank [Long Island Cares](#) found that 8% of respondents using food bank programs from Hampton Bays to Freeport come from households with incomes of \$50,000 to \$75,000 — good pay

in much of the country but barely enough to get by here. Leaders of another major food bank, Melville-based [Island Harvest](#), say they are on track to deliver 20 million pounds of food in 2025, a 9% increase from last year.

A [report](#) this month from Feeding America, a national network of food banks and meal services, counted food-insecure Long Islanders — people who live with limited or uncertain access to adequate food — at 240,470 for 2023, the latest year for which data was available, a 10% jump from 2022.

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### Increased food insecurity

Food insecurity has increased since the pandemic, worsened this year by price increases related to President Donald Trump's global trade war, local advocates said. Now there is another factor to contend with: cuts since Trump returned to the White House to federal aid programs that have helped feed hungry families.

#### WHAT NEWSDAY FOUND

- **Hungry households are on the rise across** Long Island as food bank shortages climb.
- **Food insecurity has increased since the pandemic**, worsened by price increases related to President Donald Trump's global trade war, local advocates said.
- **Household incomes that would be sustainable** elsewhere are also driving the demand at food banks.

They include [the elimination](#) of \$1 billion in U.S. Department of Agriculture programs that had funded food banks as well as schools buying food for lunch and breakfast programs from local farmers.

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Deeper cuts could be on the way. Republicans in Congress are discussing [budget plans](#) calling for \$1 trillion in spending reductions for Medicaid and food stamps. Much of the savings would come from stiffer work requirements to use those programs, meaning fewer people would qualify for help. Additionally, the USDA is reviewing \$500 million allocated last fall for [The Emergency Food Assistance Program](#), or TEFAP.

"The problem we're experiencing right now is at the federal level — government is pulling back its support and investment in the emergency food system," said Gregory May, Island Harvest's director of government and community relations.

Island Harvest this year is spending \$2 million on vegetables and fruit at Long Island and New York State farms through the USDA's [Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program](#). But that program has been

cut, May said. Trump's 2026 budget proposal would also cut the [Commodity Supplemental Food Program](#), another USDA program, from which the food bank is drawing \$1.2 million this year to deliver meal packages to needy seniors.

### 'No need for new programs'

The USDA's press office did not make anyone available for an interview but said in a statement the department in March provided states nearly \$1 billion for local food purchasing. In New York State, \$39 million in Local Food Purchase Assistance funds remain unspent.

"There is no need for new programs, but perhaps more efficient and effective use of current programs," the statement concluded.

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Cuts to the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#), or SNAP, formerly known as food stamps, the nation's biggest anti-hunger program, could also increase demand for food bank services, May said. SNAP sends about \$477 million in electronic benefits to 184,000 Long Islanders, who can use them to buy food.

TEFAP cuts, if they come, would be difficult to absorb, said Long Island Cares CEO Paule Pachter. "We anticipated for 2025 we'd be able to access about 4 million pounds of USDA foods," he said. "We have to assume that might be reduced to 2 million pounds. That's a very high number for any one food bank to try and make up through other sources."

### Trade war troubles

The [trade wars](#) kicked off by Trump's tariffs increased food prices by 2.3%, according to the nonpartisan Budget Lab at Yale.

They are also making it hard "to make decisions about what we can receive from the USDA in relation to government commodity food," Pachter said, adding that there might be reason for some optimism if Trump follows his previous administration's playbook. In 2018, after tariffs made it difficult for American farmers to sell crops like wheat and corn abroad, the federal government bought some of the crops and distributed them to hungry Americans through the nation's food banks.

Antoinette Holloway, liaison for the food pantry at [Westbury United Methodist Church](#), which distributes food from both big Long Island food banks, said in an interview Thursday she was nervous about the upcoming year.

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"We know that people we serve are going to be impacted," Holloway said. She's already seen one unsettling change in the makeup of the clients who visit the church every Saturday morning, she said: They're driving in not just from the surrounding area but from as far away as Suffolk and Queens.

"This is what they're doing, to have enough food," she said. "The basic cost of living is rising and it doesn't leave much room for the necessities like food and clothing."

*With AP*

**By Nicholas Spangler**

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