



Food Security and Scarcity of Resources

How Employers Can Help

With Jenna O'Donnell and Connie Beal
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Vermont Department of Health - Worksite Wellness Conference



**United Way of
Northwest Vermont**

Food Security

How do you define food security?

What are some of the reasons people may not be able to have the food they want and need?



Food Security in Vermont

Pre-COVID:

Approximately 1 in 10 Vermonters were experiencing food insecurity.

Current Status:

According to the most recent data from the [University of Vermont](#), **1 in 4 Vermonters are experiencing food insecurity.**

The Census Pulse Survey shows that households are struggling to pay for usual expenses like food, mortgage, rent, etc. In VT, 23% of households are struggling to pay for these basic needs.

As of June 2020, over 68,000 people are using 3SquaresVT to help access food:

- 32% of participants are children
- 30% are people with a disability
- 22% are 60+
- **19% of participating households are working**

“45% of respondents with jobs experienced some type of job disruption or loss. 19.7% had a reduction in hours or income, 9.3% had been furloughed, and 15.5% had lost their job since the coronavirus outbreak.”

“[Respondents] with job loss or disruption were...significantly more likely to express anxiety and concern over a number of issues related to food and coronavirus including quantity, cost, and safety of food.”

Hunger Free Vermont's approach and response

4 prongs:

- advocacy
- community organizing and convening
- outreach and public education
- technical assistance



Response and Needs

There have been many new (or expanded) programs to meet the unprecedented need:

- Farmers to Families Food boxes
- Enhanced unemployment
- Maximum benefits for 3SquaresVT recipients
- *Universally available school meals*

Most of these programs are timing out.

We need to focus on the programs that will continue to be there for us whenever we need them.

- WIC
- Meals on Wheels
- CACFP (meals at childcare)
- 3SquaresVT
 - working household average benefit = \$435/month (June 2020)



Farmers to Families distribution in Burlington
source: Burlington Free Press

Needs

Current challenges in supporting our community:

- Information overload
- “New population”

How do we share needed information with the people who need it, in a way they already use?

STRETCH YOUR BUDGET with Vermont Food Programs.

updated 9/8/20

Keeping yourself and your whole family well nourished is one important way to support your health and our whole community. In this stressful time, no one should be stressed about having enough food at home. Hunger Free Vermont wants you to know that there are a number of food resources available to help you and your neighbors—we're all in this together!

■ **3SquaresVT:** The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting all of us across Vermont and 3SquaresVT is here to help you put food on the table. It is an important program that helps households buy food from grocery and convenience stores, farmers markets, and co-ops. 3SquaresVT benefits are given to you each month on an EBT (electronic benefits transfer) card, which works like a debit card.

If you and your family were receiving the additional unemployment benefit that ended in July, you may now be eligible for 3SquaresVT, even if you weren't eligible before. Individuals who are unemployed, or who have experienced a partial or total decrease in their work hours during the COVID-19 outbreak do not need to meet a work or work training requirement. To find out more and get help applying visit www.vermontfoodhelp.com or text **VFBMAP** to **855-11**.

■ **Meals for Kids:** Wholesome food is important for children's ability to learn and grow. This fall, meals are available for kids through local schools, no matter where your child is learning. Meals are also available through some childcare providers. These meals are nutritious and are prepared following strict health and safety guidelines. Contact your child's school or childcare provider to learn more! If you're asked to complete a school meal application, please fill it out. Filling out the application helps our communities run meal programs throughout the year and helps make sure schools can get important federal funding.

■ **WIC:** WIC gives you access to healthy foods, nutrition education and counseling, breastfeeding support, and community referrals. If you're pregnant, a caregiver, or a parent with a child under five, WIC is right for you! Vermont WIC is open and most services are being done by phone appointment to align with social distancing efforts. To find out more and get help applying dial **2-1-1** or text **"VTWIC"** to **855-11**.

■ **Meal Programs for Older Vermonters:** People age 60 and older are especially encouraged to stay at home in order to protect themselves from COVID-19, but staying well nourished is also critical for your health. To help, you may be able to pick up meals to go or have meals delivered to your home. For more information about meals for older adults, please call the Helpline at **1-800-642-5119**.

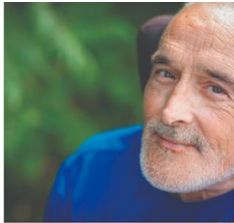
■ **Food assistance through the Vermont Foodbank network:** The Vermont Foodbank is dedicated to supporting Vermonters during all times of need. To get help during this time of crisis, visit vfoodbank.org/gethelp or call **1-800-555-2265**.

This message is funded in part by the USDA. This institution is an equal opportunity provider.



United Way of Northwest Vermont

Our mission is to build a stronger Northwest Vermont by mobilizing our community to improve people's lives. United Way isn't just our name – it's how we work. We bring together individuals, nonprofits, businesses, and government entities to fight for a strong, vibrant, and healthy community. We fight for the education, financial stability and health of every person in Chittenden, Franklin and Grand Isle counties.



What is Working Bridges?



Working Bridges is an employer collaborative that helps employees with low-to-moderate wages navigate life issues, increasing employee retention and productivity.

Okay, so what does that mean?

- A good, steady, reliable job helps put people on a path to financial stability.
 - Life issues can overwhelm a good employee's ability to get to work, be fully present at work and succeed at work.
 - A group of employers can design and test innovative workplace policies and practices that help employees.
-

Our Philosophy

- Rooted in concepts from *Bridges Out of Poverty* and *Scarcity*
- “Meet people where they are.”
The workplace is a platform for services
- 3-way benefit: employer, employee, & community
- Relationships are central to the work at all levels
- Innovation and opportunity to _____elevate partnership is essential

Working Bridges Employer Network

Boosts the bottom line:

- Improves employee retention
- Increases productivity
- Reduces recruitment & training costs
- Cultivates employee engagement
- Builds capacity for lean HR units
- Saves time for supervisors & managers

It's good for business, good for people.



Working Bridges Strategies

Onsite Resource Coordination

- One-on-one, confidential, onsite Resource Coordination provides employees help with life issues and support navigating community resources.

Financial Coaching

- A way of complimenting financial education, allows employees to set financial goals, take action, and find support at the workplace to deal with such things as debt, credit issues, tax problems, savings goals, etc.

Income Advance Loan

- Partnership with local credit unions, provides small dollar loan to employees in need of financial resources, no credit check, no questions asked. A tool to build credit.

The Collaboratory

- Quarterly convening of the WB network to explore, learn, innovate, design, test, and pilot new and emerging strategies and partnerships.

Working Bridges Concepts

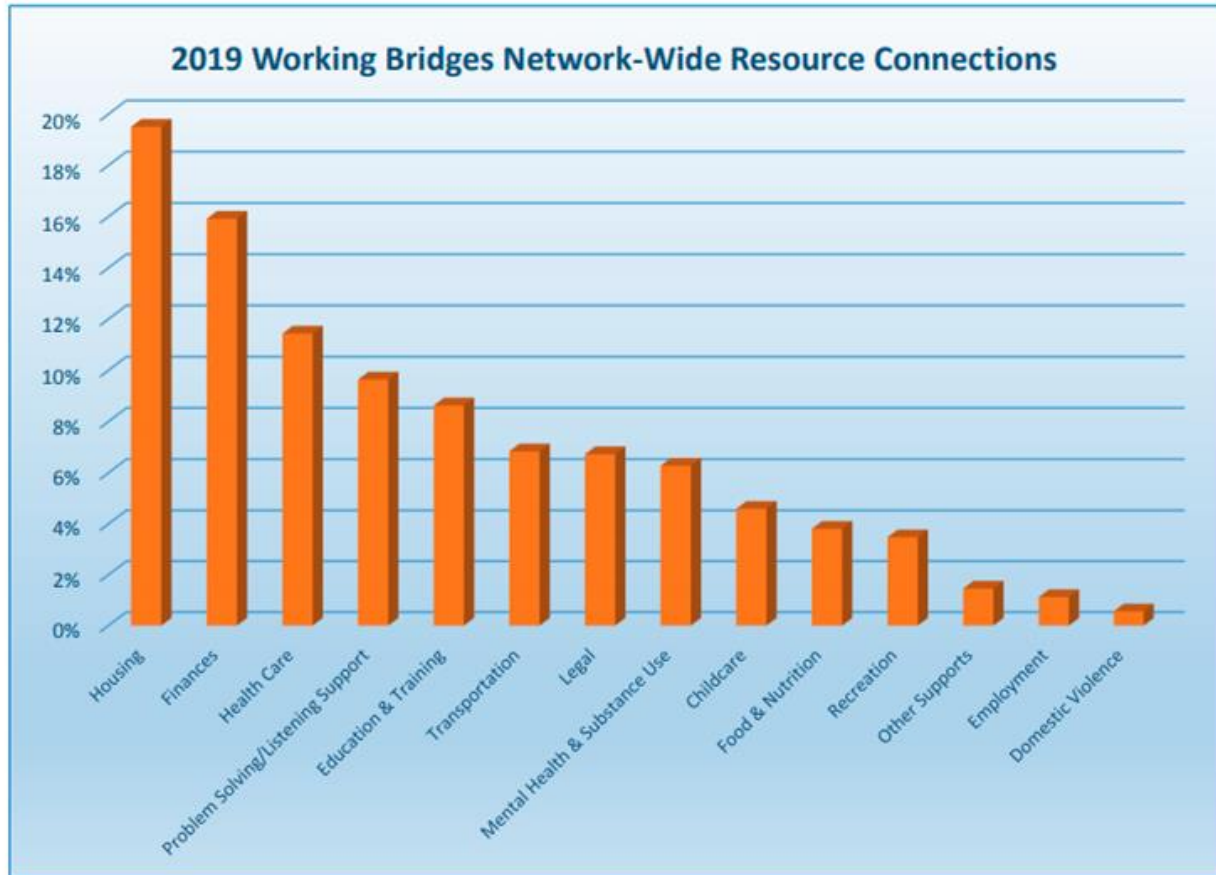
- Fully customizable training for teams, HR partners, leads, managers, and supervisors.

Shared Resource Coordination

How it works

- One-on-one, **confidential**, on-site Resource Coordination provides employees help with life issues and gives support navigating community resources during work hours.
- Resource Coordinators (RCs) are certified Community Resource Specialists (CRS) and trained Financial Coaches.
- Referrals can come from supervisors and HR, but many employees self-refer.
- Typically 3 to 4-hour onsite blocks weekly, customizable to employer's size & needs.
- Available across shifts for employers with 24-7 workforce.

Resource Connections with Employees

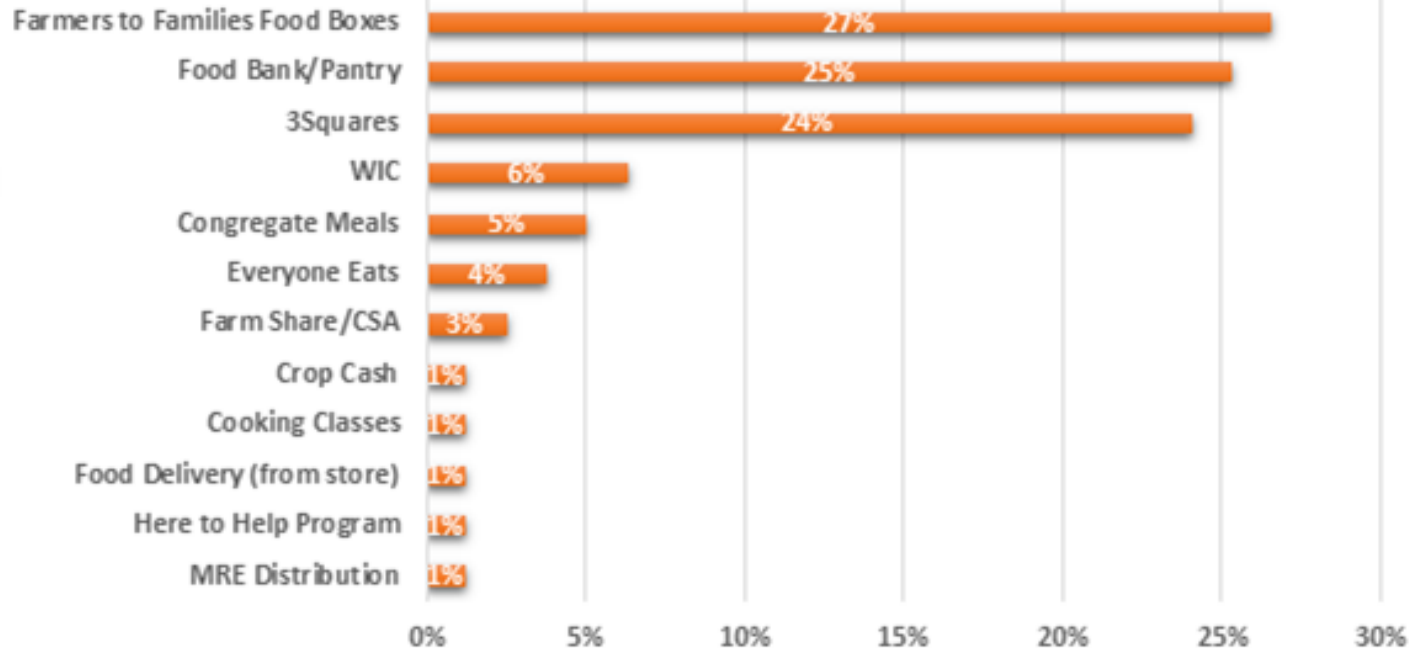


Employees and Food Resources



Working Bridges Food Resource Connections

1/1 - 11/18/2020



Increase Food Security at Work

Various ways employers can support food security at work:

- Be informed - be an advocate for food access
- Provide meals for work meetings
- Engage with local farms to provide onsite, delivered CSA option
- “Pay it Forward” meal options for onsite cafeteria
- Provide grocery cards as incentives for performance
- Apply for a Community Garden plot through Vermont Garden Network
- Working Bridges - Resource Coordination
 - Everyone Eats through December 2020
- Post accurate & current information (e.g. Vermont 2-1-1)
- Others?





Small Group Discussion

*In small groups, spend time talking about these questions and learn from each other.
When you return to the large group, please share what resonates in the chat.*

- 1) How do you see issues of **food security** and **scarcity of resources** impacting your workforce?

- 1) Where and how are you **learning** about food resources and community supports?

- 1) What ways do you share resource information with employees?

- 1) What are some ways you are already helping employees with life resources at your worksite?