

A STUDY OF FOOD INSECURITY IN HOUSEHOLDS WITH SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN ATTENDING CHAMA VALLEY INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS



**Chama Valley Independent Schools serves the Frontier Rural Area of
Northern Rio Arriba County**

Funded by the New Mexico Foundation and the Rural Resources Group

March 2021

FOOD SECURITY DEFINITIONS FOR CVIS SURVEY

FOOD SECURITY Sufficient food for the household during the week.

SERIOUS FOOD INSECURITY: Insufficient food for the weekend

SEVERE FOOD INSECURITY: Insufficient food throughout the week (week and weekend)

Note: Serious and Severe Food Insecurity are not found in the ERS/USDA definitions, which most of the literature on Food Insecurity utilizes. For the purposes of this survey, the categories of Serious and Severe food insecurity can be located within the USDA category called VERY LOW FOOD SECURITY:

“Very low food security—At times during the year, eating patterns of one or more household members were disrupted and food intake reduced because the household lacked money and other resources for food.”

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/measurement.aspx#insecurity>

NEW MEXICO FOUNDATION

8 Calle Medico, Santa Fe NM 87505

info@newmexicofoundation.org

THE RURAL RESOURCES GROUP

Maria Varela, Principal

Mevz@juno.com

Summary Findings of a 2020 Food Insecurity Survey from a Sampling of 111 Households in the Chama Valley Independent School District

The survey, conducted the summer and fall of 2020, was to ascertain levels of food insecurity related to the Corona Virus Pandemic within Chama Valley Independent Schools households. **111 randomly selected households, representing 209 students were queried about food security between mid-2019 and mid-2020.**

Students in the sampled households represent 54% of the total number of students enrolled in the 2019-2020 CVIS school year. Of these 209 students a total of 62 students (over 29%) resided in households experiencing Severe and Serious food hardships. **Both Severe and Serious food insecurity were three times higher in 2020 than in 2019.**

Generalized to the 2019-2020 CVIS student body, nearly 115 of all students would be expected to be facing Severe and/or Serious food insecurity. (30% +/- 6.1% with 99% confidence).

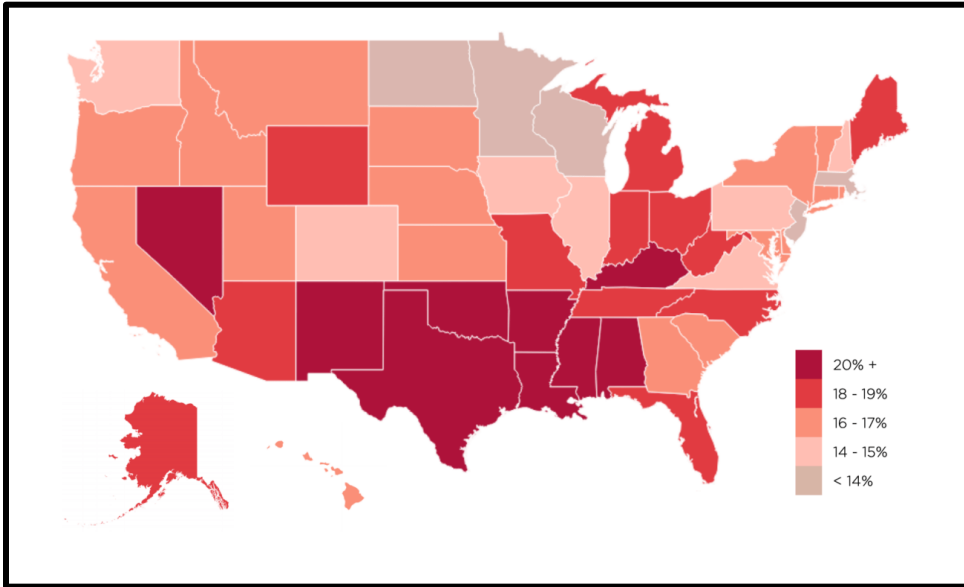
The Covid 19 Pandemic further weakened an already fragile economy in Northern Rio Arriba County. UNM's Bureau of Business and Economic Research" projected it would be sometime in 2023 or 2024 when employment levels approach pre-pandemic figures. As economic recovery reaches Frontier rural areas later than the rest of the state, **this crisis in food insecurity in families with school age children may persist into 2025-26.**

FOCUS OF SURVEY

Northern Rio Arriba Area (NORA) is a **Frontier Area*** at the very northern end of Rio Arriba County. The Chama Valley Independent School (CVIS) District serves most communities within NORA. From July-October 2020, a survey was undertaken to address the following questions: What has been the food security impact of the COVID pandemic on households with students enrolled in the Chama Valley Independent Schools district? **Are pandemic impacts on food security worse in NORA than Rio Arriba county as a whole?**

*(*Frontier areas are sparsely populated regions with ≤ 6 people per square mile, isolated from population centers and services.)*

NATIONAL CONTEXT



MAP: Projected rates of food insecurity among the overall population in 2020 by state. (Source: Feeding America)

Rural areas make up a disproportionate share of U.S. counties where residents experience very low food security defined by the USDA Department of Agriculture:

“Very low food security—At times during the year, eating patterns of one or more household members were disrupted and food intake reduced because the

household lacked money and other resources for food.”

Research from Feeding America, a national hunger-relief organization, shows that while 63% of counties in the U.S. are rural, 87% of rural counties have the highest rates of overall food insecurity.

“People who live in rural areas often face hunger at higher rates, in part because of the unique challenges living remotely presents,” according to Feeding America.

“These challenges include an increased likelihood of food deserts with the nearest food pantry or food bank potentially hours away, job opportunities that are more concentrated in low-wage industries, and higher rates of unemployment and underemployment.”

Food Insecurity was lessening in 2019. According to Feeding America, in a report released in February 2020, only 1 in 10 Americans faced food insecurity, down from 1 in 9 the previous year. But the trend reversed during the Covid-19 pandemic, and according to the Food Research and Action Council, one in four American adults reported experiencing food insecurity.

https://dailyonder.com/research-food-insecurity-is-worse-for-rural-residents-during-the-pandemic/2020/11/05/?utm_source=Center+for+Rural+Strategies&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=11-6-2020&utm_medium=email&mc_cid=182270b1de&mc_eid=7391c96282

SURVEY RATIONALE

The New Mexico Foundation (NMF) is a philanthropic first-responder organization that addresses family and community hardships primarily within rural areas and tribal nations in the state. In the Spring of 2020, NMF was responsible for a collaboration that raised over \$1 million dollars to help mitigate pandemic-induced food and water shortages within New Mexico’s Native Nations.

However, isolated non-indigenous Frontier rural areas in New Mexico have also been hard hit by these pandemic-related shortages. Therefore, a subcommittee of the NMF Board began investigating

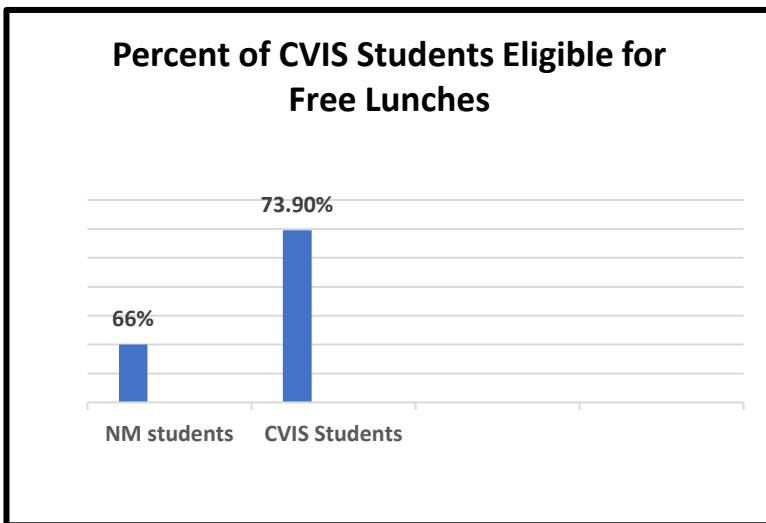
pandemic-related issues in Northern and Southern New Mexico Frontier areas. One such investigation focused on Northern Rio Arriba County because a subcommittee member had ongoing relationships with the regional clinic (La Clinica del Pueblo de Rio Arriba), senior citizen centers, and the Chama Valley Independent Schools (CVIS). Because of the area's high poverty rate and large number of elders with diabetes, the initial focus of the inquiry was on the food security of senior citizens. Preliminary investigations however, turned up surprising results: Staff of La Clinica, CVIS and local senior citizens meal/food programs reported concern about families with children, especially those not eligible for food stamps. These advisors are in daily contact with the needs of community people. The CVIS Cafeteria Nutritionist and School Health Coordinator in charge of getting summer meals to student households noted "Children at home all day [because of the pandemic], eat all day. Some households have lost jobs. Food costs at the local supermarket are beyond what many families can afford. For some, transportation is an issue."

These discussions made clear that both La Clinica and CVIS would benefit from better data on food insecurity among households with children. Food insecurity has a direct impact on student academic performance and the health status of young people.

New Mexico Department of Health Data on food insecurity in Rio Arriba County were last collected in 2017; hence, only *estimates* were available for 2020. In 2017, 13.2% or 1,671 Rio Arriba County households were found to be food insecure, meaning they could not put enough food on the table for all days of the week. Based on these data, it was *projected* that 16.8% of households in Rio Arriba County were food insecure in 2020. <https://ibis.health.state.nm.us/community/highlight/profile/FoodInsec.Overall.Cnty/geocnty/39.html>
<https://www.rafb.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/2018-Pre-Pandemic-Hunger-Rates-and-2020-Pandemic-Hunger-Estimates-New-Mexico-Overall-Population.pdf>

In discussion with community advisors from CVIS, La Clinica and senior citizen centers, some felt this was probably an underestimate of actual levels of food insecurity among households with school-age children in the Northern Rio Arriba area of the county.

Some Demographics of the CVIS student Body



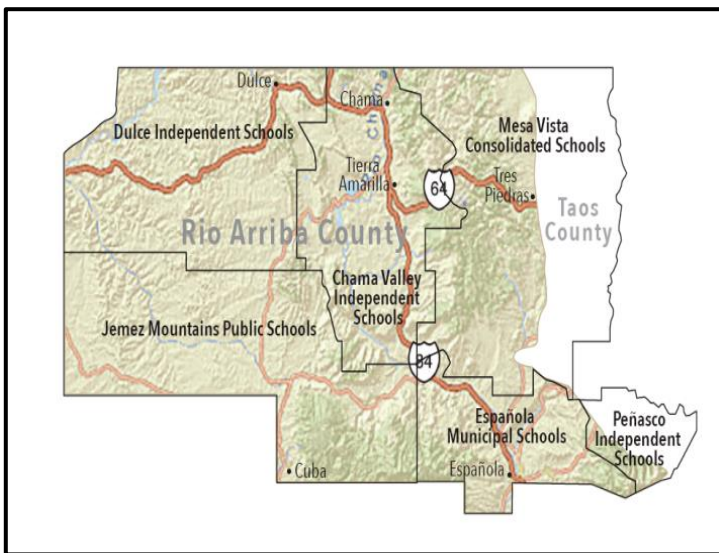
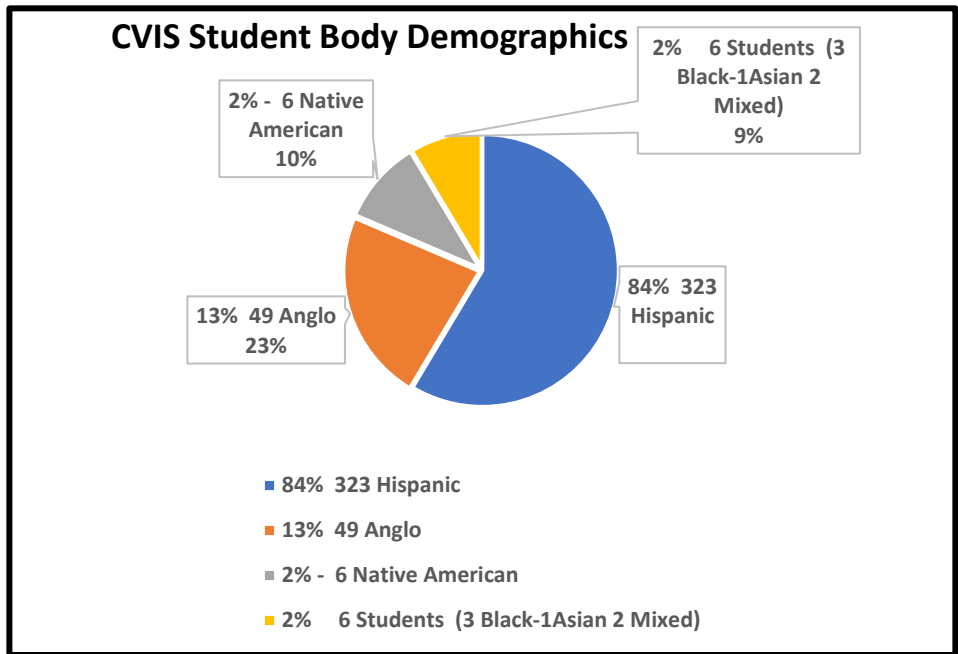
CVIS is a Title I School, meaning that at least 40% of students are from households with incomes at or below 185% of the poverty level, (\$43,568 for a family of four). All students in Title 1 schools are eligible for free or reduced-price meals.

(U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service).

https://cyfd.org/docs/Rio_Arriba_County_Profile.pdf

The accompanying chart displays the racial and ethnic composition of the total CVIS student body in 2019-2020.

If these demographics were applied to the 209 students in CVIS households surveyed, 176 students would be Hispanic, 27 Anglo, 4 Native American and 4 other.



CVIS Response to The Covid 19 Pandemic

In March 2020, when schools closed, CVIS began delivering meals Monday through Thursday to 11 sites in its 300 square-mile service area. For many households, this was a food lifeline that would hopefully keep food insecurity from worsening. And while to a degree it did, the Pandemic’s impact on food insecurity outpaced the provision of meals. Without current local data, it was not possible to understand the true status of food insecurity in households with school age children.

SURVEY METHODS

The survey of households with school-age children was conducted from August to October 2020. Respondents were asked to compare their experiences in the summer of 2019 to the summer of 2020. The comparison of these two periods has several advantages: 1) Enough time had elapsed in 2020 for the effects of the pandemic to be felt; 2) The pandemic was ongoing, so respondents were reporting their real-time experiences; 3) In a normal year, employment in NORA tends to be higher in the summer, as the local economy is fueled by tourism, fishing, and other forms of outdoor recreation. Comparing trends from midyear 2019 through midyear 2020 would be more likely to identify any impact of the pandemic (e.g., lockdowns, travel restrictions, curtailing of retail and restaurant capacities etc.) on CVIS households’ employment and food security.

CVIS Superintendent Anthony Casados authorized the survey and made available CVIS staff with experience in conducting surveys. Staff were compensated for their time from a NMF grant, and a volunteer from the NM Foundation Board subcommittee (Maria Varela, of The Rural Resources Group) helped coordinate the development of the survey, orientation of staff, data analysis, and writeup of the findings.

The survey was conducted by telephone as past experiences with mail-in or online surveys had resulted in low participation—few households would return paper surveys, and many were disinclined to take online surveys because of limited or no internet or technical capacity. These barriers would have led to under-representation of important populations, including digitally disadvantaged households, economically disadvantaged households, and those whose first language was not English.

Also important was phrasing the questions in an accessible and understandable way. As CVIS staff had experience with administering telephone surveys to CVIS households, their contribution to the construction of questions was invaluable. In all, 37 open-ended and yes-or-no questions including employment status, family profiles, availability of food, usage of various food benefit programs etc., were developed.

Respondents were selected as follows: From a list of 245 CVIS households, a Microsoft Excel random number generator sequence was used to select 133 households to survey. The number of households to survey was determined by assessing that a minimum sample size of 99 would be sufficient to generalize survey responses to the CVIS student population. (*99% confidence level with +/-10% confidence interval*) 133 were chosen because the experience of CVIS staff took into account how difficult it would be to reach enough households to have confidence in the results.

Out of the 133 selected Households, 111 surveys were completed and 22 were not. (*111 household responses enable at minimum that these results are generalizable to all CVIS households with 99% confidence and a +/-6.7% confidence interval.*) Each telephone number was tried three times. Reasons for uncompleted surveys ranged from the death of family members due to COVID, to students having dropped out or moved to another school, several non-working numbers, and/ or all three calls going unanswered. The survey took approximately 30-45 minutes to complete. All comments were recorded as respondents made them. Respondents were informed that their responses would be kept anonymous.

A SAMPLING OF CVIS SURVEY RESULTS

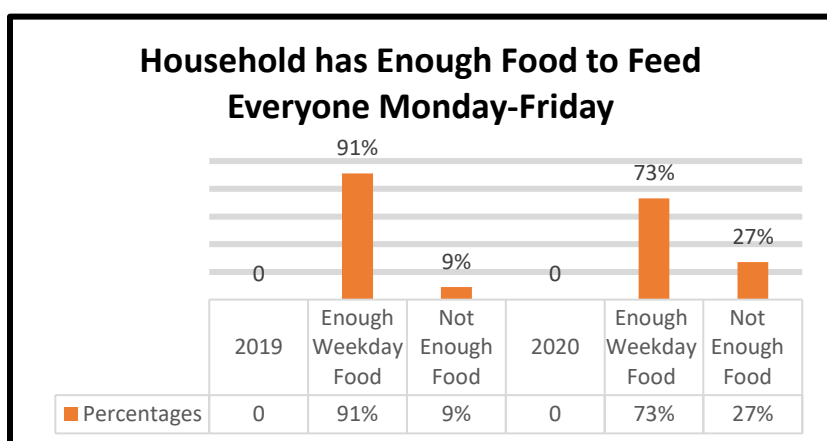
How Much Hunger?

The 111 households totaled 209 students or 54% of the entire CVIS student body (384). Of these 209 students, 49 resided in households experiencing severe food hardships (*not enough food available for all weekdays and weekends*) and 13 in households with serious food hardships (*not enough food available for weekends*). The total of 62 students experiencing hunger issues represents 30 percent of students within 111 households. If these same percentages were extended to the total CVIS student population for 2020, 115 students (30%) of all students would be expected to be facing food insecurity. This level of food hardship would have a significant impact on student health and academic performance in the district.

“Studies published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, Pediatrics, and the Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry document the negative effects of hunger on children’s academic performance and behavior in school. Hungry children have lower math scores, and are more likely to repeat a grade, come to school late, or miss school entirely.”

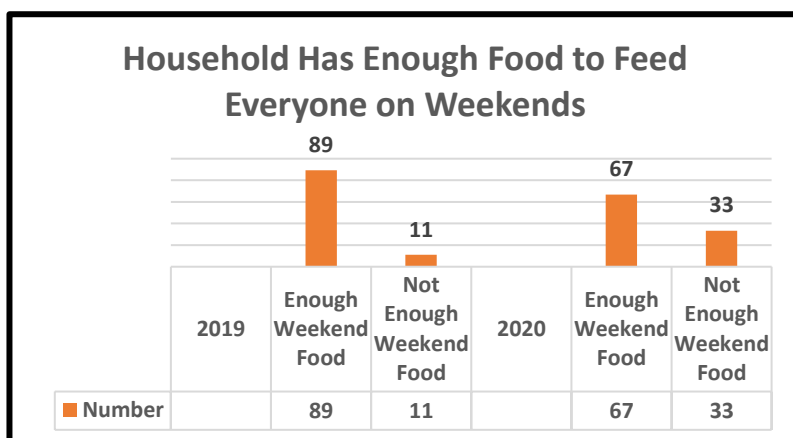
<https://www.nea.org/student-success/smart-just-policies/funding-public-schools/nutrition-programs#:~:text=Hungry%20children%20have%20lower%20math,school%20helps%20children%20perform%20bette>

Both Severe and Serious Food Insecurity were three times higher in 2020 than in 2019.

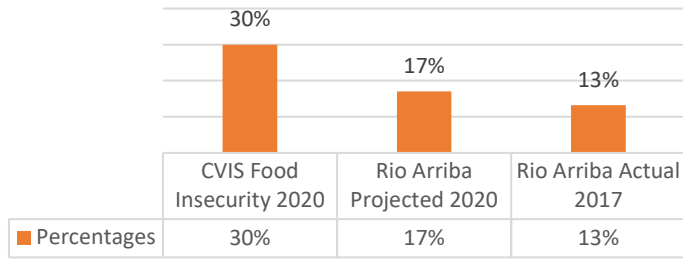


The percentage of households experiencing severe food insecurity, (not enough food for the week), increased from 9% in 2019 to 27% in 2020.

The percentage facing serious food insecurity (not enough food for the weekend) rose from 11% in 2019 to 33% in 2020.



Comparisons of CVIS Household Food Insecurity to Rio Arriba County Household Food Insecurity Data.



Food Insecurity in CVIS Households is almost 50% higher than the projected or actual Food Insecurity of Rio Arriba County.

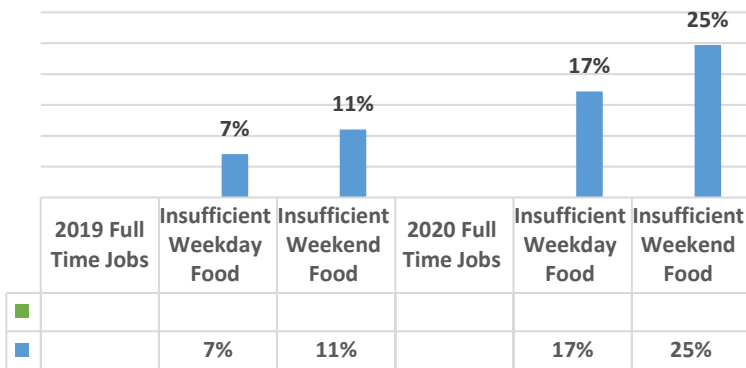
These findings indicate that isolated Frontier Rural Area populations do in fact experience more severe food insecurity than the county-wide data suggests.

ibis.health.state.nm.us/indicator/complete_profile/FoodInsec.html
<https://www.feedingamericaaction.org/the-impact-of-coronavirus-on-food-insecurity/>

IMPACT OF EMPLOYMENT ON FOOD SECURITY

Severe and Serious Food Insecurity more than doubled in households with only full-time jobs.

2019 v. 2020 Food Insecurity Households with Full Time Jobs



In 2019, households with full-time only employed persons, 7% did not have enough food on weekdays and 11% did not have enough food on the weekends.

In 111 households there were 95 full time jobs held by all individuals in 2019.

In 2020, households with full-time only employed persons, 17% did not have enough food on weekdays: 25% did not have enough food on weekends.

Full time jobs held in 111 households in 2019 dropped from 95 to 88 in 2020.

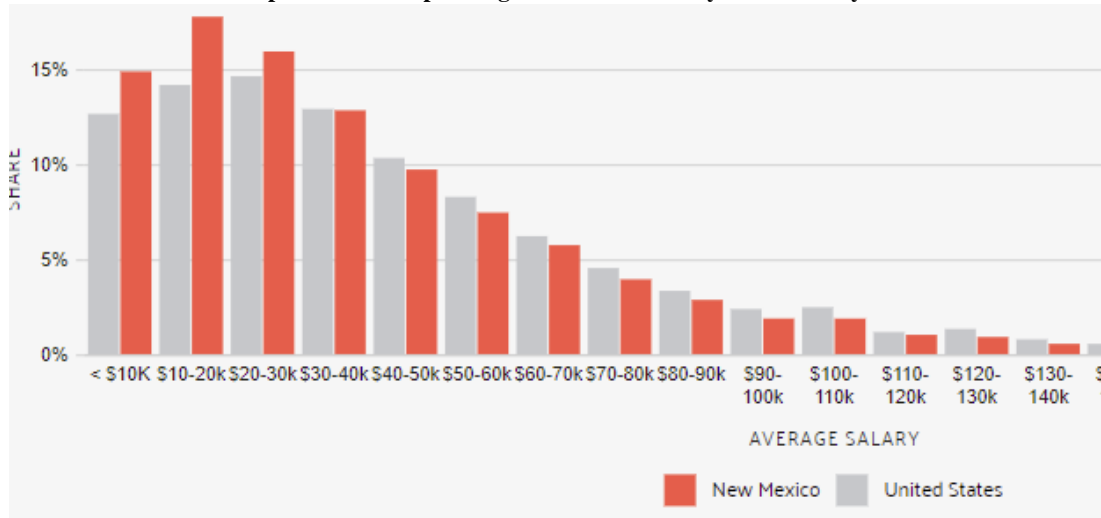
In 2019, 14% of households reported having **no one** with a full-time job. In 2020, 21% of households reported having **no one** with a full-time job. This was a 44% increase of households with *no full-time jobs*.

In households where two people held full time jobs, the number dropped from 34 households to 25 households: a reduction of 27% of households with two full time job holders.

Among households reporting some level of food insecurity, 74%, had one or two members who were employed full-time in 2020. However, among households with severe (weeklong) food insecurity, most faced underemployment—less than a third (28%) had a member who was employed full time. In all, 23% of food-insecure households had no employed members, but only 7% of households reported at least one person drawing unemployment.

WAGE DISTRIBUTION FOR RIO ARRIBA COUNTY (2017)

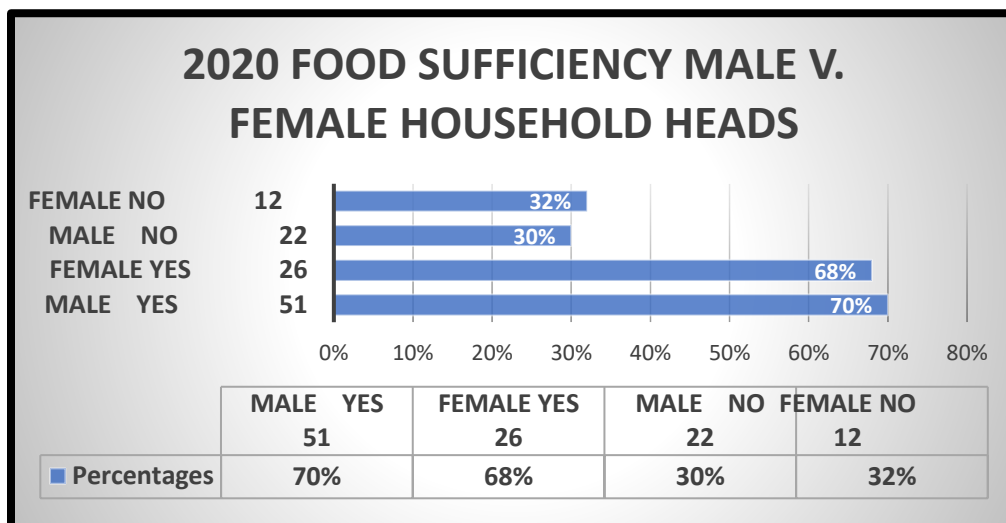
<https://datausa.io/profile/geo/rio-arriba-county-nm#economy#>



Of all the wages earned in Rio Arriba County, more than 35% of workers earn between \$10,000-\$20,000 a year. The economy of Northern Rio Arriba County is characterized by one tier of relatively stable employment (not necessarily high wage jobs) held by employees of government, school district, non-profits and utilities. Another tier of the economy is dominated by mostly low-wage jobs: on-call, temporary, seasonal, and part-time workers in jobs often without benefits. It appears that while both tiers have their share of food insecurity, the lower tier experiences more as evidenced by 29% of the 111 households qualifying for Food Stamps (SNAP)

MALE V. FEMALE HEADED HOUSEHOLD

The head of household for a large majority of surveyed CVIS households (66%) were married men. (In comparison, the percentage of Rio Arriba County households with male heads was 77%; and New Mexico is 79%).

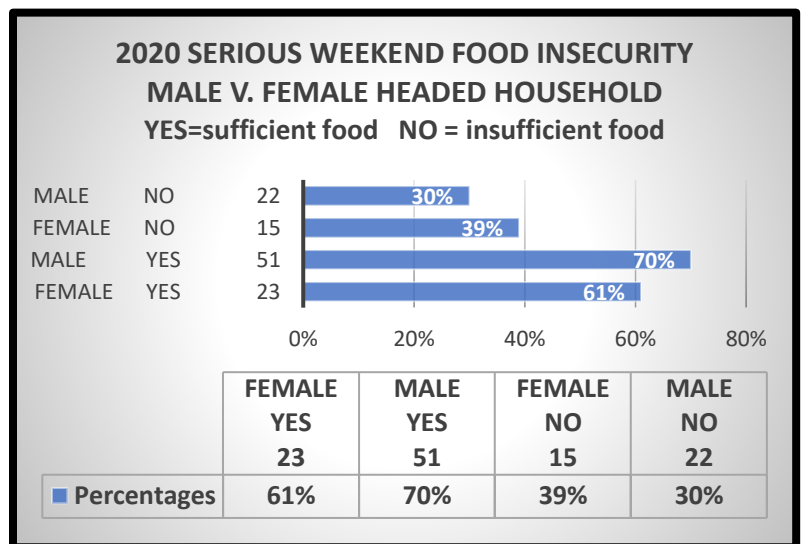


Both male and female-headed households experienced severe food insecurity on both weekdays and weekends.

In all, 30% of male-headed households reported being unable to put food on the table every day of the week, as did 32% of female-headed households.

Between 2019 and 2020, there was a tripling of severe (weekday) and serious (weekend) insecurity in both male and female headed households.

Between 2019 and 2020, male-headed households experienced an 11% loss of full-time jobs while in female HOH it was 5%. In all, 37% of female-headed households and 34% of male-headed households were SNAP (food stamp) recipients.



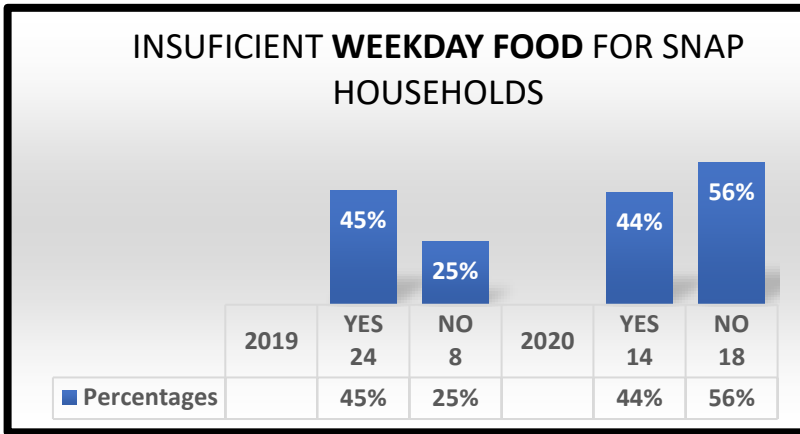
In 2019, “ (Nationally) households with children had a substantially higher rate of food insecurity (13.6 percent) than those without children (9.3 percent). (In 2019) **Among households with children, married couple families had the lowest rate of food insecurity (7.5 percent).**” (USDA ERS) [https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/key-statistics-graphics.aspx#:~:text=Overall%2C%20households%20with%20children%20had,food%20insecurity%20\(7.5%20percent\)](https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/key-statistics-graphics.aspx#:~:text=Overall%2C%20households%20with%20children%20had,food%20insecurity%20(7.5%20percent))

It should be noted that the 30% food insecurity rate among married head of household (male head of household) families in the CVIS survey is four times higher than the national rate (7.5%) for such families. This drastically higher rate likely results from higher unemployment rates, lower paying jobs and seasonal/part-time jobs without unemployment benefits in this Frontier rural area.

IMPACT OF FOOD BENEFIT PROGRAMS ON FOOD INSECURITY

CVIS survey respondents were asked about their participation in two food benefit programs: the ‘Food Stamp’ or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the NM Human Services Department P-EBT Program. SNAP provides EBT charge cards to low-income people. These cards can be used for qualifying food purchases. SNAP eligibility is assessed annually and the benefit is available for a full year. **38 households out of 111 CVIS households were eligible for food stamps.**

The P-EBT program provided electronic food charge cards to families with school children. This benefit was awarded during the summer of 2020 in lieu of student school meals during a period when students were in a remote learning mode. **100% of CVIS 111 households were eligible for the P-EBT Program but only 104 (at the time of the survey) had received cards.**



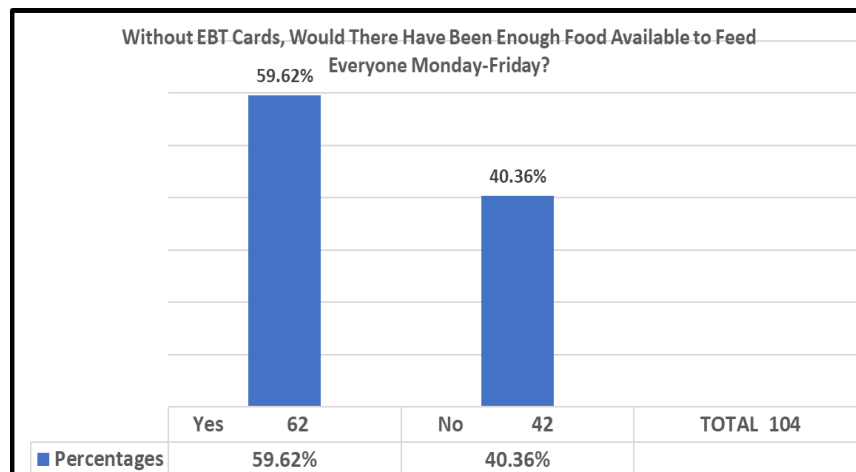
When compared to 2019, weekday or severe food insecurity in 2020 more than doubled from 25% to 56% in SNAP households surveyed. ((NO = insufficient food)

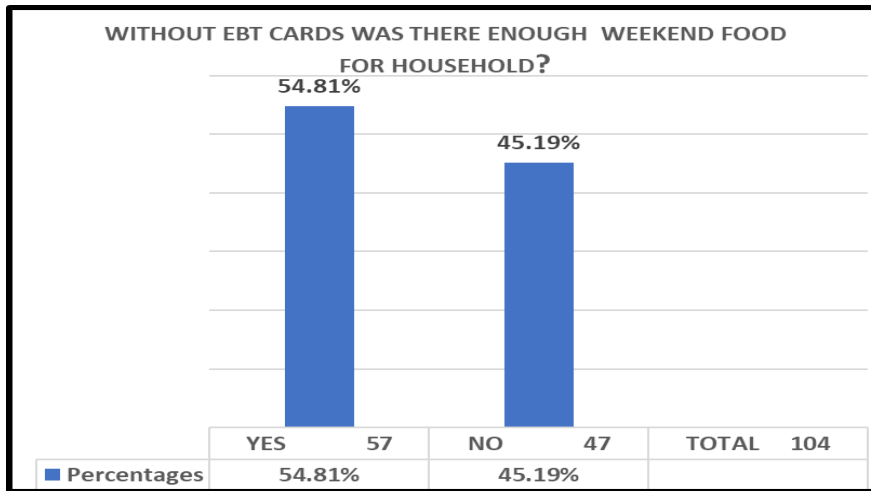
In 2020, serious **weekend** food insecurity increased by over 50% in SNAP households.

2020 NM Health and Human Services P-EBT Cards

The only qualification for the P-EBT card was that each child receiving the card needed to be enrolled in the Chama Valley Independent Schools. “This **one-time** benefit was calculated monthly for each eligible student in the household. It is equal to the daily reimbursement for free breakfast and lunch (\$5.70), multiplied by the average number of days school was canceled during the month. It equated to a dollar amount of approximately \$399 per student covering the period from March 16, to June 19, 2020.” <https://www.newmexico.gov/2020/07/07/67-million-in-pandemic-ebt-cards-to-be-issued-this-week/>

A significant percentage (40%) of surveyed households reported that they would not have had enough food for the week without the EBT cards. It seems apparent that this kind of assistance, without having to meet bureaucratic criteria, made a significant difference in the ability of CVIS households to put food on the table. (Note: 7 surveyed households had not received the EBT cards)

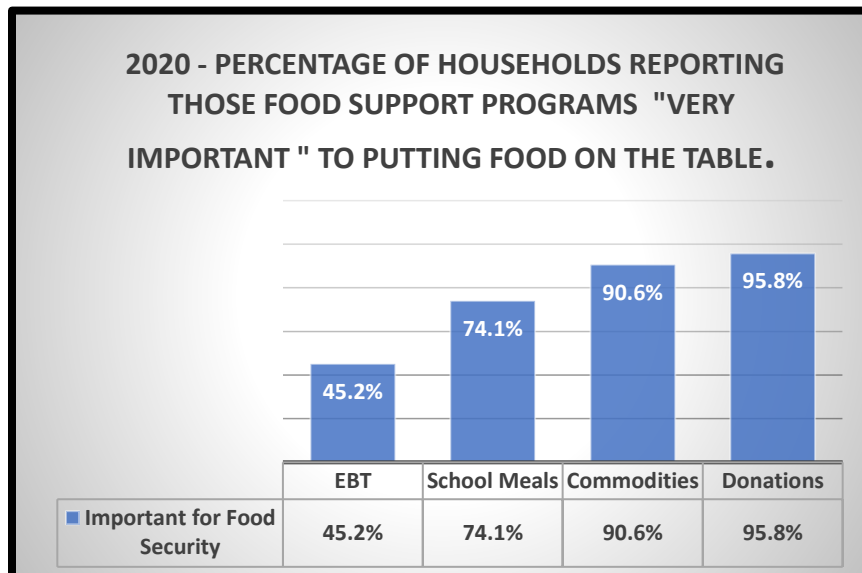




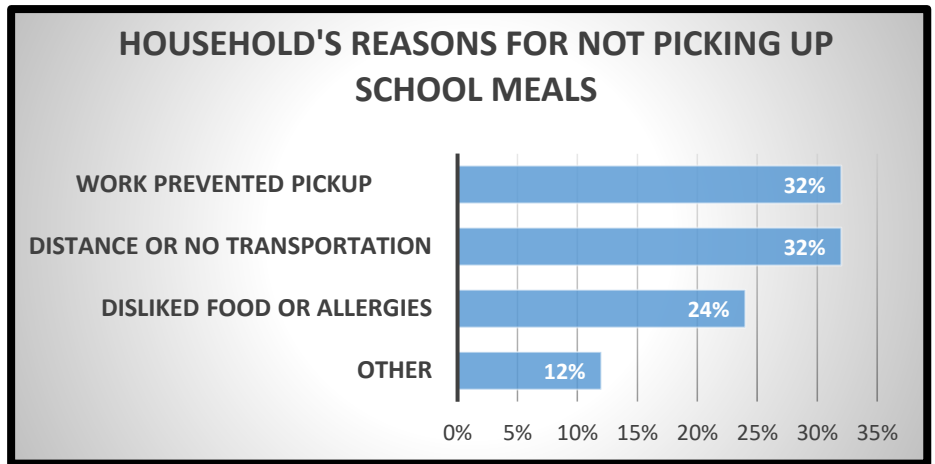
IMPACT of OTHER NUTRITION SUPPORT EFFORTS ON FOOD INSECURITY

CVIS survey respondents were asked about the importance of three other nutrition support efforts:

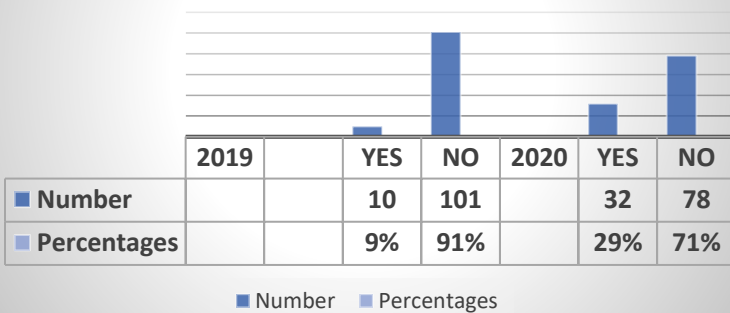
- School Meal Pickups: Throughout the Summer, CVIS made pre-packed student meals available for pickup at 11 sites throughout the district. Meals could be picked up by eligible households from Monday through Thursday.
- Commodity and other Food Boxes: Food Banks make available food boxes to area families.
- Food/Money Donations: A significant percentage of surveyed households received donated food or monetary support from friends or family.



While 74% of those surveyed felt the school meals were very important to their households in putting food on the table, **23% of respondents did not participate in the school meal program for a variety of reasons.**



2019 V. 2020 INCREASE IN HOUSEHOLDS RECEIVING FOOD BOXES



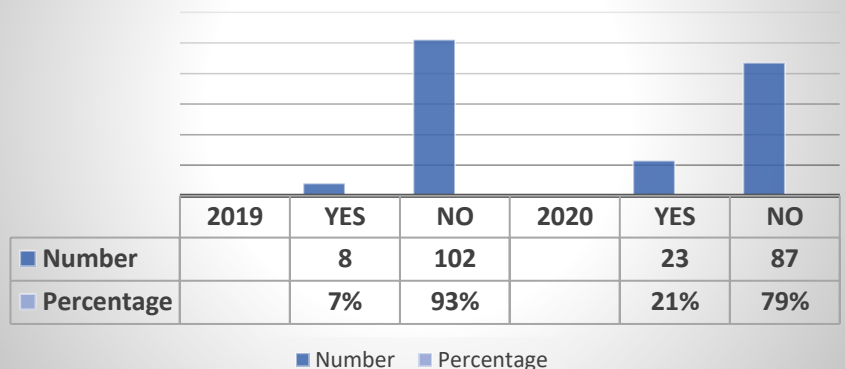
Comparing 2019 to 2020, the percentage of surveyed households receiving commodity/ food boxes increased three times, from 9% to 29%.

The increase would have been more as nearly 32% of the comments made during the survey indicated that many respondents did not know about the food box donations program. They requested that more advertisements of day and time be made community wide.

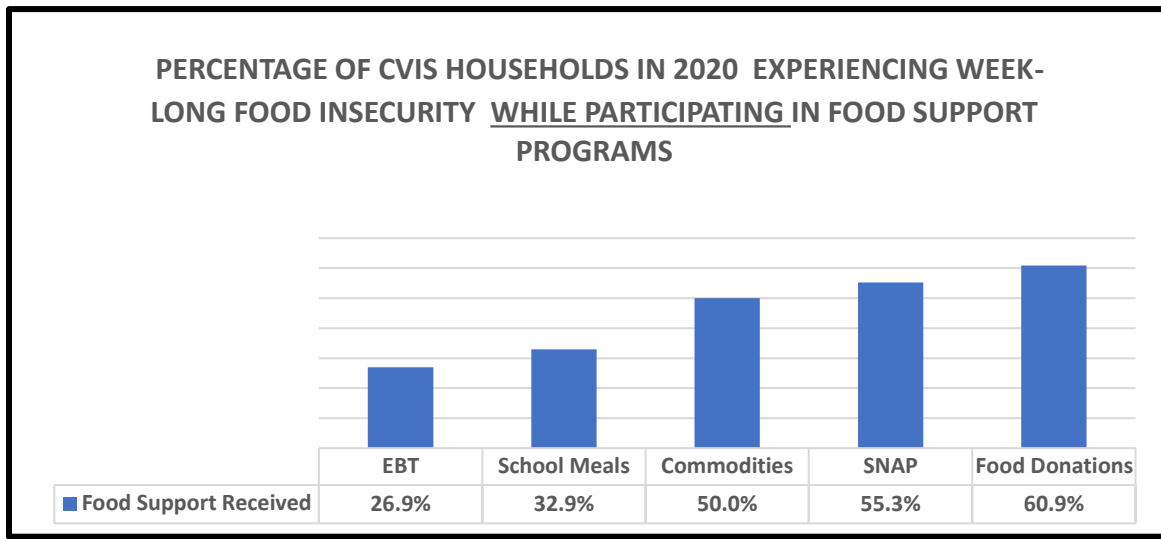
In 2020, there were three times as many households receiving donations from family and friends as were in 2019.

While this indicates a high level of need, it also reveals a strong effort from within the local community to help meet the needs of households with children.

2019v.2020 INCREASE IN HOUSEHOLDS RECEIVING FOOD/MONEY DONATIONS FROM FAMILY/FRIENDS



SUMMARY- 2020 PARTICIPATION IN FOOD SUPPORT PROGRAMS



In 2020, there were marked increases in the percentages of CVIS households participating in many types of food support programs, including Food Stamps (SNAP), NM PED EBT Cards, Commodities, Food Boxes and cash or food from family and friends. These high rates of participation reflect the marked increase in serious and severe food insecurity reported by many CVIS households brought on by the pandemic.

More than half of SNAP households also receiving food donations still reported severe or weeklong food insecurity during the summer and fall of 2020.

Fully half of surveyed households receiving Commodities/Food Boxes reported severe or weeklong Food Insecurity.

Despite the important contribution of food support programs, there is substantial remaining severe or weeklong food insecurity among surveyed households participating in these programs.

. **POST PANDEMIC RECOVERY: “HELP IS ON THE WAY”**

The CVIS study of 111 CVIS households revealed that 30% of those surveyed struggled with putting enough food on the table every day of the week for the 209 students living in these households. The number of households surveyed has statistically a *99% confidence level with +/-10% confidence interval* which means that the outcome of this study can be confidently applied to 30% of the entire CVIS student body.

All too often, county level data obscures the real conditions of children, youth and families in remote areas which can be worse off due to ailing economies, low wages, underemployment, poor health, and distance to market centers. **This study did show that Food Insecurity in CVIS Households is almost 50% higher than the projected or actual Food Insecurity data of Rio Arriba County.**

This study on Food Insecurity is not only about CVIS households in Northern Rio Arriba County. There are many remote rural areas in NM and nationally which reflect similar economic conditions as noted above. This study can be a model of how other Frontier Areas can ascertain the real economic conditions of households with school age children.

The CVIS study on Food Insecurity was completed before Congress passed the American Rescue Plan Act. (ARP Act). There is no doubt that the provisions in the Act will benefit low to moderate income households such as the ones surveyed in this study.

Some of the individual benefits provided by the ARP Act include:

- Maintaining the 15% increase in food stamp (SNAP) benefits until September 2021.
- Continuing the Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) program in the summer of 2021 which provides food purchase cards for each school age child in the household.
- Providing until the end of 2021, a one-time, direct payment of \$1,400 per person for individuals making under \$75,000 and \$1,400 per dependent. Eligible qualifying dependents include full-time students under the age of 24 and adult dependents.
- Expanding the child tax credit, previously worth up to \$2,000 per child under the age of 17. The expanded tax credit would be worth up to \$3,600 for children up to age 5 and up to \$3,000 for children 6 to 17 years old.

<https://www.mondaq.com/unitedstates/financing/1046686/summary-of-the-american-rescue-plan-act-of-2021>

Many of the provisions in the ARP Act will continue food support that was available to families in Northern Rio Arriba County during the 2019-2020 study period. It should be remembered that the study shows that significant numbers of CVIS households remained Food Insecure while utilizing those resources. While the ARP Act will provide some additional financial and food resources to families, will these additional resources over time, significantly decrease the food insecurity of the area?

The injection of ARP Act funds into budgets of Northern Rio Arriba Area households should help families consistently put more food on the table. When schools re-open, students will have two meals available four days a week. Equally important is the ability of households to pay off debts incurred by gas, utility, propane and rent charges. Food Insecurity is also the result of undependable transportation, constraining households from being able to travel to less expensive grocery and retail outlets. Increased household funding can improve vehicles and help family food budgets stretch further.

There are also provisions in the ARA Act that would benefit low to moderate income households including rental assistance, mortgage assistance, expansion of the WIC program for pregnant women and infants, lowering health insurance payments and aid to small businesses. Many of these benefits are available in a short window of time and information on how to access them is not easily available especially to isolated rural populations and those without internet. These challenges can result in the loss of hundreds of thousands of ARA Act dollars for rural households.

Capturing these benefits requires county and city government, nonprofits, health care providers, school districts, religious organizations, and others to reach out to their clientele and assist in the application for these benefits so that the opportunities for households to better their conditions will not be lost.

Barring another virus wave triggered by variant strains, tourism and recreational travel will probably rebound in 2021, helping restore some of the jobs lost in Northern Rio Arriba County during 2020. But some businesses will not re-open and as noted by NMSU economist Dr. James Peach, “the pandemic may exacerbate New Mexico’s high poverty rate for years to come...we have a long road to recovery...” (*Full US Recovery at Least a Year Off, ABQ Journal/ 2-12-2021*).

Frontier Areas are no stranger to ‘boom and bust’ economies. When a boom goes bust, left in its wake is a weakened business sector, unemployment, significant inequality and endemic poverty. The ‘boom’ of federal monies into the NORA economy will no doubt provide very real assistance to low to moderate income families. **But when the ‘boom’ ends, will hundreds of thousands of dollars be left on the table? Will the infusion of federal monies result in permanent improvements to Frontier Area households? Will Food Insecurity be defeated?**

Mil Gracias

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