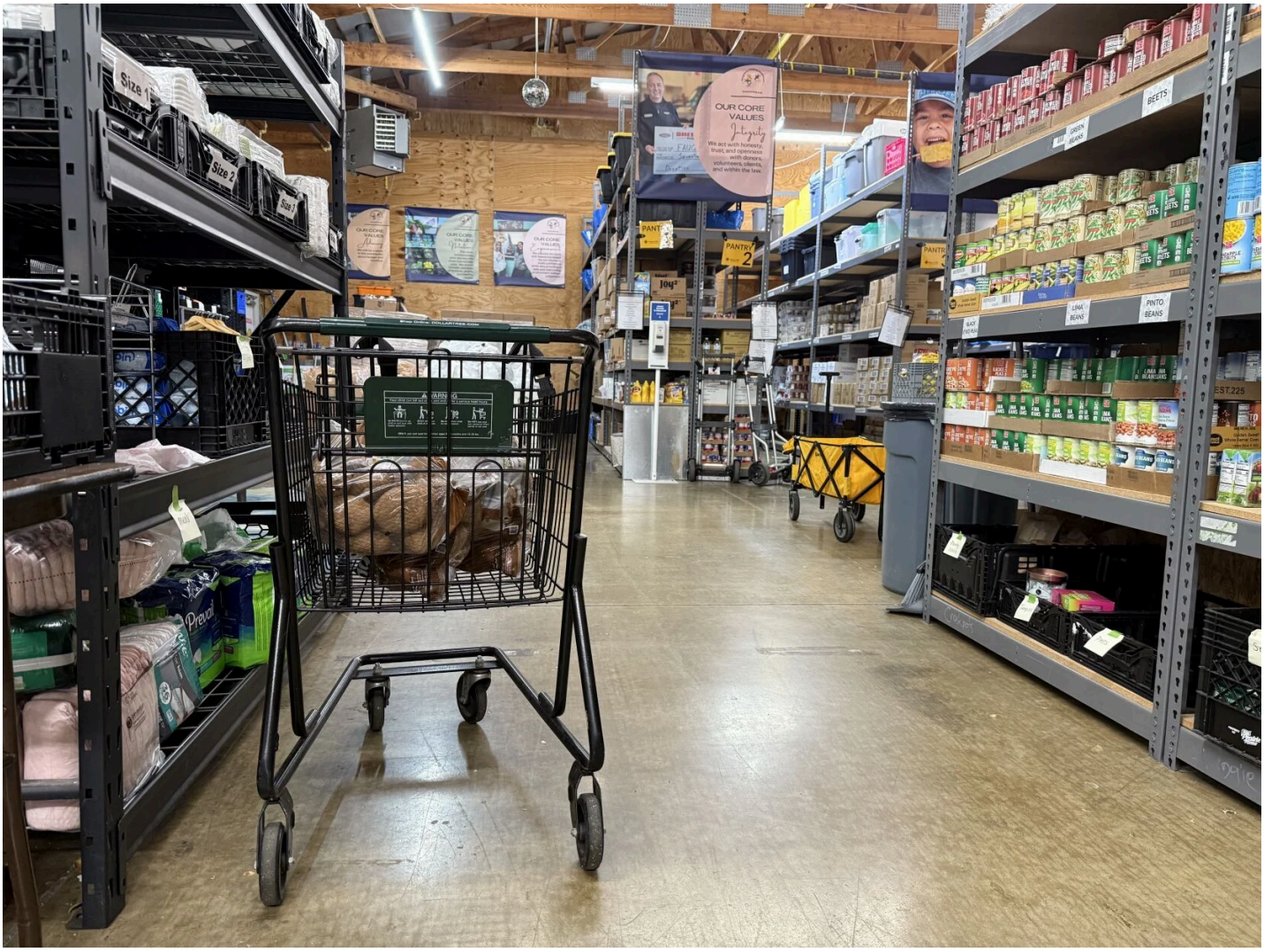
https://www.fauquier.com/news/food-insecurity-is-on-the-rise-in-fauquier-county/article_2fe13695-9320-4403-b54b-b793023fc0f8.html

Food insecurity is on the rise in Fauquier County

Local pantries report a surge greater than pandemic levels

By Sarah Dolgin Staff Writer
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Fauquier FISH (pictured) is one of several organizations that provides food assistance in Fauquier County.
Staff photo by Sarah Dolgin

Looking out across the loading dock, Sharon Ames recalled a day early in the summer when 100 families filled the parking lot and began to line up at the Fauquier Community Food Bank and Thrift Store.

“We were swallowing real hard,” Ames, the food bank’s executive director, said in an interview, “but we try very hard to stay above it.”

Local food banks are working to deal with an increase in need that they say is even greater than the surge during the COVID-19 pandemic. Volunteers haven’t been able to pinpoint a reason for the surge but mainly attribute it to inflated grocery prices and seasonal strains.



Fauquier Community Food Bank executive director Sharon Ames (center) is worried about balancing increasing demand for the nonprofit’s aid with funding cuts.

Photo by Coy Ferrell

More families seek support

A busy day at the food bank used to mean 50 or 60 families, Ames said. Now, that’s just a regular day.

“A lot of what we are seeing is older married children moving in with their parents,” Ames said, “so it becomes two families in one household.”

While many new faces are coming to the food bank, volunteers are also recognizing faces from years past, according to Mary Crigler, the organization's treasurer.

"Some people haven't been here in 10 years," Crigler said.



Charity Furness has served as executive director of Fauquier FISH since 2021.
Staff photo by Sarah Dolgin

Fauquier FISH, a food pantry in Warrenton, has served more people in the first six months of 2025 than it did in all of 2020, the year the pandemic began, according to Charity Furness, the organization's executive director.

Rising grocery costs continue to drive local food insecurity, Furness said.

From 2020 to 2024, **food prices rose 23.6%**, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and are **expected to rise** another 3% percent.

"It seems like there's just various reasons," Ames said, "why we're having the uptick."

In the summer, Ames says more teachers, teachers' aides and bus drivers visit the food bank while they're out of work, and in the winter, she sees the same trend with landscapers.

Children who typically rely on school meals also tend to increase family needs in the summer months.

Higher volume

At Peas and Grace, a food pantry at Grace Episcopal Church in The Plains, visitor numbers have remained steady, but the volume of food people need has increased, according to April Gaines, volunteer chair of the church's outreach programs.

"The people coming through need more," Gaines said, "as if whatever they were eating or living on before has somehow decreased."

Some visitors who used to supplement their family's food gaps with the pantry have started to need more from the supply **because of rising grocery prices,** Gaines said.

Other pantry visitors from the immigrant community have told Gaines they are too scared to show up, in case immigration enforcement officers are out in the area.

"What you're ending up with," Gaines said, "is people shopping for themselves and the family next door."

Looking forward

Fauquier FISH had a 50% increase in visitors in 2023 after pandemic-era food stamp benefits expired. Furness said she expects a similar trend once the details of President Trump's newly passed tax- and spending-cut law are implemented.

The law includes **new work requirements** for Americans up to age 65 if they want to receive food stamps, a 10-year age increase from current requirements. The new work requirements have not gone into effect and do not have a specified start date.

Starting in 2028, states will be required to foot some of the food aid bills previously covered by the federal government, according to the **law's text**.

Once the new law takes full effect, 3 million more Americans may not qualify for food assistance, according to **an estimate** by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office.

“Unfortunately,” Furness said in an interview, “we’re in a ‘wait and see.’”

FIND HELP

Visit **PiedmontFeeds.org** to connect with local food assistance resources and read about what to expect if visiting a pantry for the first time.

How to find resources

Residents from across Fauquier, Culpeper, Madison, Orange and Rappahannock counties can now visit **PiedmontFeeds.org** to connect with local food assistance resources and read about what to expect if visiting a pantry for the first time.

The website was recently launched by Blue Ridge Area Food Bank and Piedmont Action Coalition on Hunger.

“We know that food insecurity remains a significant challenge in the Piedmont Region,” said Katie Moffit, partner engagement manager for the regional food bank, “and know that 19,000 or more of our neighbors in the region are experiencing food insecurity and have trouble accessing nutritious food.”



Staff photo by Sarah Dolgin

The website was in the works before the federal spending bill passed, but Moffitt said she thought the timing of its launch was great.

“That way,” Moffitt said, “people get familiar with the resource so they can utilize it when they’re in need.”

Sarah Dolgin is a Report for America corps member writing about rural life in Fauquier County. You can reach her at ***sdolgin@fauquier.com****.*

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