

# Record demand for food stamps

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*One in eight Oregonians received aid in 2003, and food pantries worry that their supplies won't last through spring*

By **BILL GRAVES**  
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Oregonians seeking food continue to crowd welfare offices and emergency food pantries as the demand for assistance climbs to record highs despite recent signs of economic recovery.

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than the 107,000 additional people turning to food stamps during that period.

That's because people collecting Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or welfare, must search for work and can usually find a job in retail or services that disqualifies them, said Michael Buckley, administrator for the federal welfare program in Oregon. A family of three earning more than \$616 a month does not qualify for welfare, earning more than it would on assistance, which pays \$497 a month, said Buckley.

State officials couldn't say what proportion of the people eating with food stamps were children, but the Oregon Food Bank says about 40 percent of the people getting its emergency food are children. And children account for 72 percent of the people on welfare in Oregon.

One in eight Oregonians, an average 405,622 people, received food stamps during 2003, the most in state history.

About 30 people filled the lobby at the Oregon City office of the state Department of Human Services on Monday to apply for food stamps, said Marge Reinhart, manager for the department's Clackamas County operations.

"We have seen many more families, two-parent families... people who never thought they would be in that position," Reinhart said.

The Oregon Food Bank expects to see

record numbers of people seeking emergency food assistance this fiscal year, too, surpassing the estimated 780,000 people in Oregon and Clark County, Washington, who ate from an emergency food box during the past fiscal year that ends June 30, said Kim Thomas, the bank's director of agency relations.

Food demands vary around the state, but most food pantries are seeing steady, heavy traffic and many worry their stockpiles won't last through spring, Thomas said.

The demand for emergency food has

*"People are working and yet they don't make enough to feed their families."*

**MARGARET GRANT,**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE MARION-  
POLK FOOD SHARE

have been more aggressive about informing people of their eligibility for food stamps, which now brings 34 million federal dollars a month into Oregon. People in Oregon qualify for food stamps if their income falls to less than 185 percent of the poverty line, \$18,400 for a family of four.

Demand also has climbed because of Oregon's substantial population of working poor, those living with less than twice the poverty line or \$36,800 for a family of four, sav food bank and social welfare

"People are working, and yet they don't make enough to feed their families," said Grant of Marion-Polk Food Share.

Oregon in recent years has repeatedly ranked at or near the top in the nation for the proportion of residents, 5 percent to 6 percent, who say they sometimes skip meals and go hungry.

Results of an Oregon State University study released last month show that the percentage of hungry people in Oregon changes only slightly between those living in poverty and those who inch above it.

That's not the case elsewhere in the nation, where research shows that hunger drops when poverty rates decline.

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