



# Prioritizing Wisconsin Counties for TEFAP Reach and Resilience Funding

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## Background

The **Reach and Resilience Initiative** aims to increase the reach of the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) into **remote, rural, Tribal, and low-income areas** that are **underserved by the program**. The initiative is informed by priorities established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA); coordinated by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS); and guided by a partnership that includes DHS, WISCAP, Feeding Wisconsin, Hunger Task Force, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension. Nineteen counties that met the criteria for consideration to increase TEFAP funding were selected as priorities: Adams, Juneau, Forest, Clark, Jackson, Vilas, Iron, Taylor, Menominee, Shawano, Price, Trempealeau, Rusk, Sawyer, Buffalo, Ashland, Burnett, Oconto, and Washburn.

## How Counties Were Chosen for TEFAP Funding

### Documenting TEFAP availability and need

UW-Madison Division of Extension collected information to document TEFAP availability and need and to support DHS in prioritizing areas for TEFAP expansion. Two resources were developed.

### Information collected

- **Statewide TEFAP and non-TEFAP food pantries, and their service areas** with information collected from WISCAP, Feeding Wisconsin affiliated food banks, and Hunger Task Force
- **County characteristics relevant to the Reach and Resilience grant criteria**, with information collected from U.S. Census Bureau, WISCAP, the Applied Population Lab, the Map the Meal Gap Project, and County Health Rankings

### Resources developed

- **To help identify areas of need within counties: An interactive online state map** shows TEFAP and non-TEFAP sites, their service areas and hours of operation, with various backdrops to depict remote, rural, Tribal, and low-income areas. This allows the viewer to see areas in greatest need.
- **Lists of county rankings**, categorized by remote, rural, Tribal, economic hardship, health and disability, TEFAP availability and access, and demographics allowed for multi-dimensional comparisons.

## Selecting Counties

Selecting counties for potential TEFAP expansion involved adopting final definitions, identifying eligible counties, and choosing the final target list.

## Final definitions

The following definitions were adopted, based on information collected by Division of Extension and input from DHS:

- **Rural: Counties in which more than half of the population lived in a non-urban area, as designated by the Census Bureau.** The Census Bureau differentiates between urban and non-urban areas based on the size and housing density of an area. Broadly, urban areas include towns or cities of at least 5,000 people or 2,000 housing units, while nonurban areas include everywhere else. For this initiative, counties were considered rural if more than half the population is in a non-urban area.
- **Remote: Counties with at least one zip code area with a USDA Frontier and Remote Area (FAR) code of 4, the most remote designation.** FAR code 4 denotes areas that have fewer than 2,500 people, that are at least 15 minutes from a town of 2,500 people, at least a half hour from a city of 10,000, and longer distances from large urban areas. For this initiative, counties with any of these most-remote areas were designated remote.
- **Tribal: Counties with at least one census tract with higher than 5% American Indian population.** This largely but not entirely corresponds to tracts that encompass Tribal nations.
- **Underserved: Counties with one TEFAP pantry.** Because hours of operation vary widely, counties with only one TEFAP site were further divided into those with high or low hours of TEFAP operation relative to the size of their low-income population.
- **Low-income: A county ranking of the percent of the population with income below the TEFAP eligibility threshold of two times the poverty line.**

## Identifying eligible counties

The following steps were used to construct a list of eligible counties, based on the above definitions:

- **Counties were classified as “in scope”** if they were rural, remote, and/or Tribal. Fifty-three counties met one or more of these criteria.
- **In scope counties were classified as “eligible”** if they were underserved and/or Tribal. This includes 33 counties—25 with only one TEFAP pantry, and an additional eight that remained eligible due to a substantial American Indian presence.

## Choosing target counties for potential expansion

By design, the project involved a collaborative process for choosing target counties from among those eligible.

- Team members were provided with a map and a list showing eligible counties, whether they had low TEFAP hours relative to the size of their low-income population, and their low-income ranking in the state.
- Team members accessed detailed county characteristics and rankings and an interactive map of pantry locations within counties.
- Team members ranked the eligible counties using information provided and their local knowledge of communities and conversations with current and potential TEFAP sites.