

# Oregon food insecurity levels spike

LAUREN E HERNANDEZ  
STATESMAN JOURNAL

Oregon recorded its sharpest increase in food insecurity of any state in the nation during the past three years, despite the state's steady economic growth.

The Oregon Center for Public Policy released a report analyzing United States Department of Agriculture data showing one in six Oregon households were food insecure between 2013 and 2015. The USDA defines food insecurity as having reduced or disrupted eating patterns due to lack of money or other resources for food.

"We are very agriculturally based in the valley and I don't know why there are so many food insecure communities," said Elise Bauman, executive director of Salem Harvest, a nonprofit organization that connects volunteer pickers with farmers to harvest food that would otherwise go to waste.

## By the numbers

Food insecurity households in Oregon spiked to 18.4 percent between 2013 and 2015 compared to data collected from 2010 to 2012, when the nation was recovering from the Great Recession.

As food insecurity increased, the state experienced economic growth and additions to the job

market on a monthly basis.

In September, Governor Kate Brown said Oregon was in its 50th straight month of job growth, with nearly 5,000 jobs added per month in various markets since 2014.

Despite this job growth, Oregon is ranked the sixth worst in food insecurity and eighth worst in hunger, according to the Oregon Center for Public Policy.

While nationwide hunger decreased by 3.6 percent between 2010 and 2015, Oregon hunger increased by 13.8 percent during that same period.

John Burt, executive director of Farmers Ending Hunger, a partnership of farmers, food processors and Oregon Food Bank focused on eliminating hunger, said it's hard to understand how a state that produces a good portion of the nation's food could still remain so hungry.

Burt points to the cost of housing and unlivable wages as factors in households being unable to eat on a regular basis.

"If you're faced between rent and buying food, you have to pay rent, utilities and gas for the car," Burt said. "If the car needs repair, or you need to pay a co-pay for doctors appointment, the thing you can't buy is food."

Although Oregon has seen a boost in job growth in recent months, leading

the nation with an increase of 3.5 percent in September, paired with a plateau of unemployment rate at 4.5 percent as of March of this year, Burt said many of these jobs are low-paying and don't provide livable wages for people to afford food.

"There will always be people by circumstance who lose their jobs, divorce, are single parents or they come back to their jobs after the Great Recession that doesn't pay as well," Burt said. "There is a record number of new jobs in Oregon, but in my perception, those jobs don't pay as much."

According to American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample compiled in 2014, Oregon families who are considered to be working poor families, those with at least one parent working, increased from 10 percent to 12.7 percent from 2007 to 2014.

## Minimum wage's potential effects

Oregon's recently enacted three-tier minimum wage rate, Senate Bill 1532, a series of annual minimum wage increases that began in July of this year and lasts through July 1, 2022, may help families suffering from food insecurity, said Matt Newell-Ching, public affairs director of Partners for a Hunger Free Oregon. Partners for a Hunger Free Oregon is a non-

profit organization that tries to connect families in need with food assistance programs like Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP.

The three-tier system breaks the state into rural counties, economically stable counties referred to as "standard" counties and the Portland Metro area.

On July 1, 2017, standard counties (like Marion and Polk counties) will increase from the current \$9.75 wage to \$10.25, Portland Metro will increase from \$9.75 to \$11.25, and rural counties will increase from \$9.50 to \$10.00.

"It's going to take a while to see what the minimum wage impacts will be, but the fact is that people experience hunger because they don't have enough income to cover their basic needs," Newell-Ching said. "With the minimum wage increase I think we'll see more families being able to cover those basic needs."

SNAP provided \$85.6 million in benefits to 697,560 persons in 394,517 households in Oregon in October of this month alone, according to the Oregon Department of Human Services.

Newell-Ching said although SNAP and other food assistance programs do cover a portion of food purchases for the month, it's not nearly enough, especially for families who

have children.

"For a lot of folks, they're getting back to work, which is great, but there are folks out on those margins that still have great need but they are just above the cut-off to qualify for SNAP," Newell-Ching said. "So we are seeing families that are turning to food pantries earlier and earlier in the month."

In 2014, there were 75,000 Oregonians in households with at least one full time worker yet still were below the poverty line, according to the American Community Survey.

## Farmers sow seeds of giving

Burt said Farmers Ending Hungers partners with Oregon farmers and producers to ensure families in need have access to locally grown food in an effort to remedy food insecurity. The organization provides food boxes to various food banks and hunger-relief agencies through a partnership with the Oregon Food Bank.

Oregon provides the majority of the nation's blackberry supply, including 100 percent of the nation's

blackberries, boysenberries, black raspberries and hazelnuts, according to US Census of Agriculture data compiled in 2012. Field crops like corn, wheat, oats and potatoes follow close behind berry production, valuing more than \$300 million in 2015, according to an Oregon State University estimate.

Burt said farmers and producers carry a responsibility to provide food goods to communities in need, citing agricultural abundance as a source for families suffering from food insecurity.

"We donated 4 million-plus pounds of food last year," Burt said, referring to the network of farmers, ranchers, producers, processors and handlers that donate food to the statewide network of 20 regional food banks with Oregon and Clark County, Washington.

Bauman joins Burt in believing the food insecurity and hunger issues in Oregon will not be solved as long as the underlying socio-economic issues are tackled at the state level.

"It's just alleviating the problem, but it's not solving the problem," Bauman said.

# Get crafty at Silver Falls festival

CARLEE WRIGHT  
STATESMAN JOURNAL

The Christmas Festival at Silver Falls State Park is a holiday tradition attracting visitors from throughout the valley. Celebrating its 39th year, the annual family-friendly event transforms the forest into a wonderland illuminated with thousands of lights and decorated trees.

Unlike past years, the festival will only be one day, taking place 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday but visitors can expect some traditional favorites, including seasonal stories accompanied by cookies and cocoa, plus entertainment by local musicians. The Roundhouse Band will perform noon to 2:30 p.m. in the tent followed by The Livingston Adventist Academy Handbell Players 3 to 4 p.m. In the lodge, The Muller Family Choir will sing 2 to 3 p.m.

Get hands on with a make-and-take project creating holiday cards, gingerbread houses, festive ornaments, wreaths, nature crafts and more. Make Mother Nature a gift by building a bird nest box for a \$5 material fee. The Salem Audubon Society will have the supplies and tools and will offer help. Other crafts and activities are free.

The South Falls Nature Store will



Kids can take part in the fun at the 39th Annual Christmas Festival at Silver Falls State Park 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday.

be open, selling one-of-a-kind gifts and souvenirs from handmade hats, pens and ornaments to field guides and nature toys, and the cafe at the lodge will be open.

Festivities take place in the South Falls Historic District. Silver Falls State Park is at 20024 Silver Falls Highway SE in Sublimity.

COURTESY OF FRIENDS OF SILVER FALLS STATE PARK

A day-use parking permit is required. Cost is \$5 for a one-day visitors permit. Purchase a one-year permit for \$25. For information, call 503-874-0201 or go to Silver FallsStatePark.wordpress.com.

Email [cwright2@statesman-journal.com](mailto:cwright2@statesman-journal.com), call 503-399-6671, or follow on Twitter @CarleeWrightSJ

## CANYON VIEWS

# Partnership improves the Santiam wilderness area

BY JENNIFER PAULSON  
COMMENTARY

West Cascade Back Country Horsemen decided to do something different in 2016 at Big Meadows Horse Camp, south-east of Marion Forks in the heard of the Middle Santiam Wilderness Area of the Willamette National Forest.

The wooden pole and post corrals are always being repaired because of heavy snow loads, tree falls, rot, and horses chewing poles. Oregon Equestrian Trails and some other Chapters of Back Country Horsemen were starting to replace old corrals with steel 12-gauge corrals in other horse camps in Oregon so that more time could be spent clearing trails in national forest and wilderness areas.

West Cascade applied for a grant called "Boots on the Ground" from Nature Wilderness Stewardship Alliance.

The group was awarded a \$1,500 grant but only received \$750 to start until the project was completed. A set of four corrals were \$2,045.20. Our chapter did not have the funds to cover the rest. I called Josh Weathers of Detroit Forest Service. He had told me before he could help us. I told him that we did not have the funds needed to pay for the rest of corrals and would probably have to cancel this project.

Josh amazed me and asked how much was needed and he made it happen. We paid \$762 and USFS paid \$1,283.20. I was doing a major happy dance after our conversation. So we put in our order to Noble. We had to wait for next build date and bundle our order with another organization. These are special made corrals to

Forest Service specs with horsemen input for safety and durability. They are not off the shelf like other corrals.

Our order was processed and in September our corrals were built. One of West Cascades members, Eric Dahl and his son Ben, volunteered to drive to Milton-Freewater and retrieve the corrals, driving 12 hours round trip. Another member, Arden Corey, volunteered to take the lead on corral installation and he coordinated with members and Forest Service for gravel and cement.

Of course this all falls in hunting season so we had to plan around members' hunting trips.

The install was planned for Oct. 21. Corrals were brought up to horse camp, a tractor was brought by Bert Morris to remove old corrals, and level site as much as possible, and haul gravel.

Josh Weathers, developed recreation manager for Willamette National Forest, came with cement and helped pack the heavy corral panels. It took a while for us to determine the best way to install because of trees, their roots and slight slope. But once we decided how to do it the outcome was great.

We were all very proud. Without the Boots on the Ground grant and the Detroit Forest Service this would not have happened.

We have eight more sites we would like to install corrals in at Big Meadows Horse Camp in the coming years. Our future is bright.

Jennifer Paulson is President of West Cascade Back Country Horsemen. She can be reached at 541-971-5317 or [mxranch@comcast.net](mailto:mxranch@comcast.net)

## CRIME LOG

### SILVERTON POLICE DEPARTMENT

Received calls from Nov. 21 to 27.

#### Nov. 26

Motor vehicle crash, 2:11 p.m., N 2nd St. and Oak St.

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