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## Stimulus Funds Stock Pantries and Soup Kitchens

By [JENNIFER 8. LEE](#)

Thanks to federal stimulus funds, fewer New York City [food pantries and soup kitchens](#) have had to turn people away in the past year, reversing [the trend of the past several years](#), according to [a survey](#) released by the [New York City Coalition Against Hunger](#). However, much of that financing is scheduled to sunset within a year, potentially creating an even greater shortfall as the [demand for food benefits soars](#) in the downturn.

Nationwide, food pantries [received an extra \\$100 million](#) in resources from the stimulus, on top of the \$250 million that was originally budgeted. New York State's financing soared 118 percent to \$45 million, of which \$28.5 million went to New York City, according to the [Food Bank for New York City](#). Last year, New York City received \$13 million; most of the increase came from stimulus money and surplus commodities that the government purchases.

But advocates cautioned that the infusion of aid was temporary.

“When you put your muscle behind this problem, you can make a dent,” said [Áine Duggan, vice president](#) of the [Food Bank for New York City](#). But that ability is limited when the solutions are not permanent.

For example, she said, the food industry itself is a big factor. In 2007, the city received only \$3 million worth of surplus food, compared with \$12.5 million in 2009.

The city's food pantries and soup kitchens report a 20.8 percent increase in demand for services compared with the previous year. A recent survey by [Feeding America](#), a nonprofit network of food banks nationwide, found that requests for emergency food assistance were up by 30 percent over the previous year. “Hunger in the economy is a hurricane that is swamping low-income New Yorkers,” said Joel Berg, the executive director of the Coalition Against Hunger.

More than 55 percent of surveyed emergency food providers reported having a shortfall of food resources in the year ending Sept. 30, down from 68.8 percent in the previous year. The survey includes responses from 287 emergency food providers, out of a list of 1,149 agencies throughout the city that were sent questionnaires.

Federal and local government programs helped cover the increased demand, with 51 percent of respondents saying they had received more money from [the Emergency Food Assistance Program](#), which provides commodities to states. In addition, 48.4 percent reported increased financing through the city's [Emergency Food Assistance Program](#).

Even before last year's financial crisis, food banks had [reported increasing shortages](#), forcing them to ration supplies, distribute staples usually reserved for disaster relief and, in some instances, close.

Food stamp enrollment has [surged more than 30 percent](#) over the last two years in New York City. But food pantries and soup kitchens often serve those who do not receive food stamps, either because they are illegal immigrants or because they failed to finish the complicated paperwork to receive benefits.