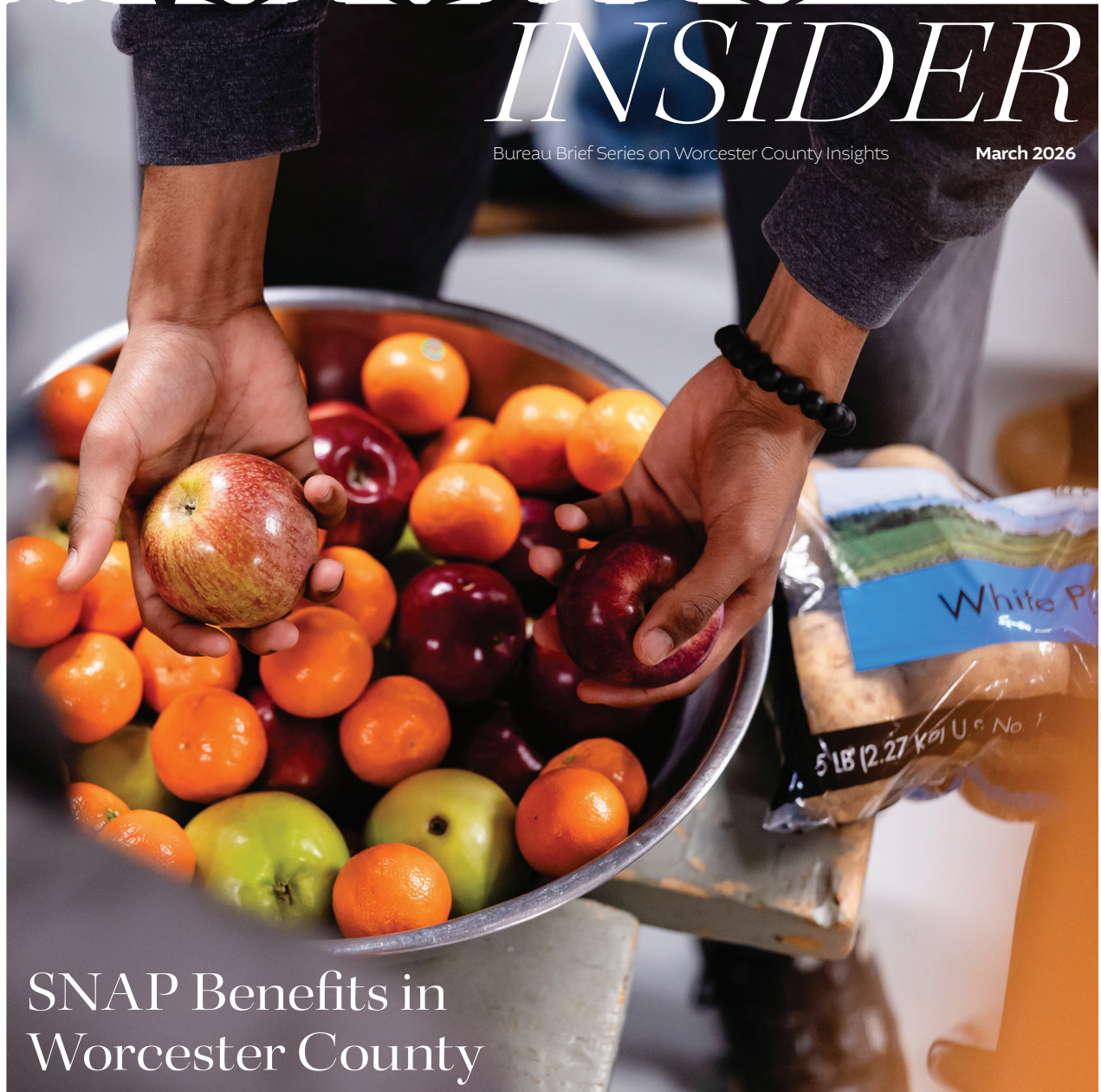


INSIGHTS INSIDER

Bureau Brief Series on Worcester County Insights

March 2026



SNAP Benefits in Worcester County

SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, is a long-standing federal Department of Agriculture program providing funds to feed individuals in the United States living under certain household income thresholds. In Massachusetts, the state Department of Transitional Assistance is responsible for administering the SNAP program.

In Worcester County, about 15.8% of residents utilized SNAP each month in 2025, slightly higher than the statewide rate of 14.94%. In Massachusetts, as of November 2025, SNAP costs an estimated \$240 million a month. (The Research Bureau has written about food insecurity and SNAP previously; see “Is Worcester County Food Insecure? It Depends on Where” originally published in November 2022 and updated in September 2023).

Throughout 2025, **Massachusetts had an average 654,104 households each month receiving SNAP, or more than 1,000,000 residents. Worcester County averaged 81,823 households and 139,197 residents, or 12.51% and 13.06% of the statewide totals, respectively, the fourth highest among Massachusetts’ 14 counties. These numbers (and the numbers throughout this brief) represent both active and closed cases – households that were, at some point in the month, utilizing SNAP.**



The Research Bureau

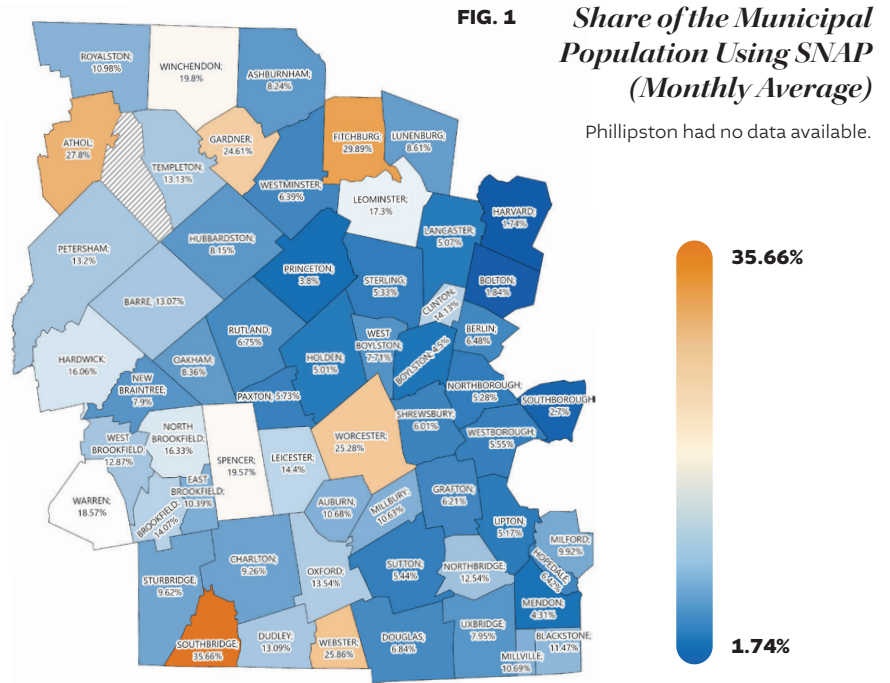


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Where are Worcester County Residents on SNAP Located?

Residents on SNAP are spread throughout the county, with an estimated more than 20% of the population utilizing SNAP on average each month in 2025 (using DTA “client” data divided by 2024 Census Population estimates). There is no data for Phillipston, which may have fewer than 11 cases and is therefore left out by the DTA. Communities in the western half of Worcester County tend to have higher percentages of residents on SNAP than those east of Worcester. Colors go from blue to orange – darker blues mean fewer households, darker oranges mean more households.

Figure 1 shows an estimate of the percent of population utilizing SNAP on average each month in 2025 (using DTA “client” data divided by 2024 Census Population estimates). There is no data for Phillipston, which may have fewer than 11 cases and is therefore left out by the DTA. Communities in the western half of Worcester County tend to have higher percentages of residents on SNAP than those east of Worcester. Colors go from blue to orange – darker blues mean fewer households, darker oranges mean more households.



Understanding SNAP Utilization Since 2019

Between 2019 and 2024, the average number of households and individual clients utilizing SNAP monthly, both statewide and within Worcester County, has grown (See Table 1).

Households are an important metric here, given eligibility for SNAP is based in part on household income. The number of households utilizing SNAP at some point increased by 55.19% in Worcester County and 51.12% statewide. However, the total number of overall households within Worcester County increased only by 7.84%, while statewide it increased by 6.76%. Households making less than \$50,000 decreased by 16.16% over this same period in Worcester County; statewide, they decreased by 12.44%.

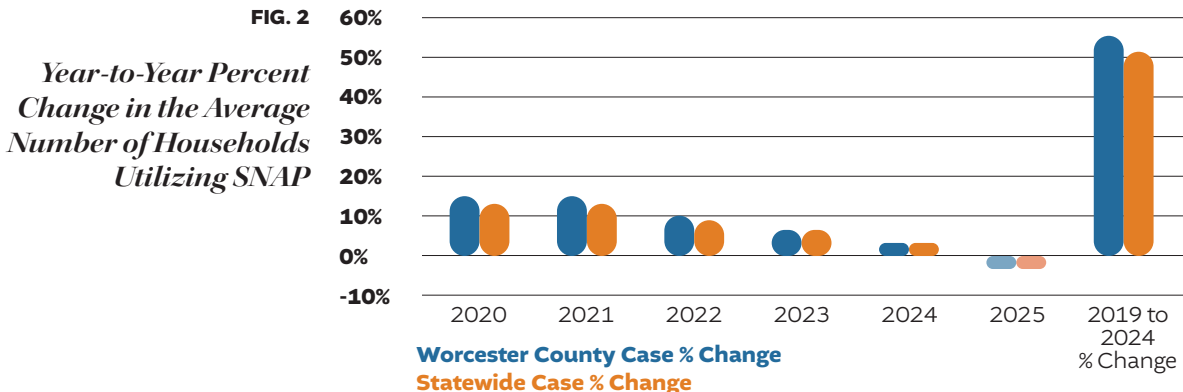
The Federal Government sets a minimum guideline of 130% of the federal poverty level (using gross income) as income eligibility for SNAP – Massachusetts has long used 200% as the threshold. As of February 2020, a household of four was eligible for SNAP in Massachusetts if total gross income was less than \$52,400, while in 2024, eligible gross income for a four-person household was \$62,400. The number of households reporting an income within this range to the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey remained about the same between 2019 and 2024.

While there has been a large increase in the number of households, both in Worcester County and statewide, utilizing

SNAP since 2019, that growth has slowed significantly and has actually begun to decline; the initial growth (especially as concentrated as it was in 2020 and 2021) may have been due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and households choosing to apply for it for the first time.

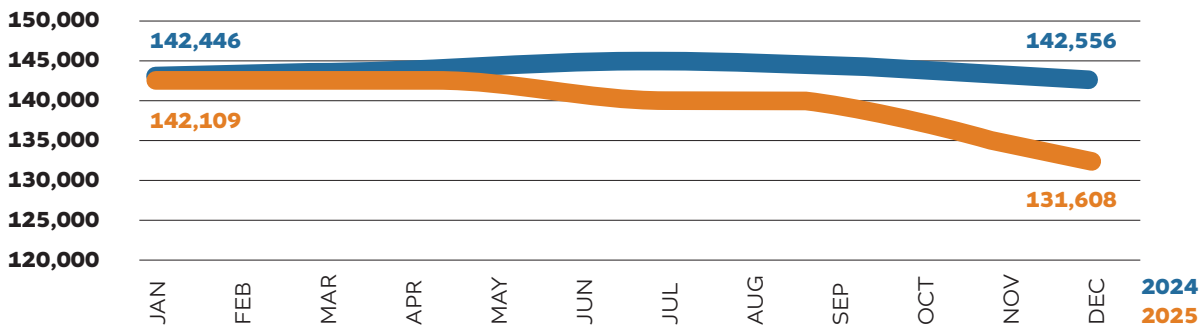
2025 saw a decline in the average number of households on SNAP. While there was a slight decrease before changed eligibility rules following the passage of the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act” in July, its passage saw that trend accelerate; it changed eligibility rules, including extending work requirements for individuals aged 18-54 to 18-64 (living in households without children), and for households with children under 14 (previously, under 18). It also changed rules regarding immigrant eligibility, removing refugees and asylees. The number of households utilizing SNAP in the County decreased by 1,045 between January and July—and decreased by another 4,303 between July and December. Figure 2 showcases these year-to-year changes, again utilizing 2024 as a benchmark to compare to available Census data.

Figure 3 shows the month to month change in individual residents in 2024 and 2025 in Worcester County—there were 10,501 fewer residents utilizing SNAP at some point in December 2025 as there were in January 2024. Compare that to January 2024 to December 2024, which saw an increase of 110.



Data Sources
 Department of Transitional Assistance. (2026, February 3). Department of Transitional Assistance caseload by zip code reports. Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services. <https://www.mass.gov/lists/department-of-transitional-assistance-caseload-by-zip-code-reports>
 Schmeiszer, K. (2025, October 24). Nearly a third of SNAP recipients are children, and 4 more ways food benefits break down in Mass. - The Boston Globe. BostonGlobe.Com. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2025/10/24/metro/snap-massachusetts-by-the-numbers/>
 U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). City and Town Population Totals: 2020-2024 (Minor Civil Divisions). <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/2020s-total-cities-and-towns.html>

FIG. 3 *Number of Residents Utilizing SNAP in Worcester County each month, 2024-25*



Worcester County SNAP Cases (Households)	55.19%
Worcester County SNAP Clients	49.63%
Worcester County Households	7.84%
Worcester County Population	6.38%
Worcester County Households, \$0 to \$49,999	-16.16%
Worcester County Households, \$50,000 to \$99,999	0.52%
Worcester County Households, \$100,00 or more	32.97%
Statewide SNAP Cases (Households)	51.12%
Statewide SNAP Clients	46.85%
Statewide Households	6.76%
Statewide Population	3.51%
Statewide Households, \$0 to \$49,999	-12.44%
Statewide Households, \$50,000 to \$99,999	-6.91%
Statewide Households, \$100,00 or more	28.33%

TABLE 1

2019 to 2024 % Change, Selected Household Characteristics

SNAP Data via Department of Transitional Assistance. Other data via American Community Survey, 2019 and 2024 1-YR Estimates, Table DP03. Although 2025 DTA data is now available, we used 2024 for consistency with the Census data.

Ginny's Helping Hand in Leominster serves clients across North Central Massachusetts and nearby towns. The organization provides food to individuals and also acts as a distribution hub for local soup kitchens and pantries. Its thrift store allows the team to respond quickly to urgent needs for clothing and personal hygiene items.



Nonprofit Insights from Greater Worcester Community Foundation

Local nonprofits are vital lifelines for households experiencing food insecurity throughout Worcester County.

FOOD PANTRIES

Food pantries are a backbone of emergency food access. Worcester County Food Bank distributes donated food through a network of 115 partner agencies, and many additional small pantries operate outside the food bank network for populations in need, such as college students or veterans.

COMMUNITY FRIDGES

Community fridges, including WellStorm's Bridge Fridge in Southbridge and the four Woo Fridges in Worcester, offer around-the-clock access to fresh and shelf-stable foods without documentation requirements.

COMMUNITY MEAL PROGRAMS

Community meal programs provide essential nourishment along with social connection for those in need. Mustard Seed Catholic Worker in Worcester's Piedmont neighborhood operates a soup kitchen and food pantry. It serves hot meals every weekday and supports hundreds of individuals each month.

FOOD DISTRIBUTORS

Food distributors in the region help close the gap between surplus food and organizations serving residents. Rachel's Table rescues unserved prepared foods from restaurants, markets, and bakeries and distributes them to more than 30 shelters, soup kitchens, and pantries.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). DP03 Selected Economic Characteristics, 2019 and 2024 1-YR Estimates [American Community Survey]. <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP1Y2024.DP03?q=DP03:+Selected+Economic+Characteristics>
 WCAC Annual Reports. (n.d.). Worcester Community Action Council. Retrieved February 4, 2026, from <https://wcac.net/annual-reports/>
 Worcester County Insights. (2024). Households Receiving SNAP by Race/Ethnicity. Retrieved February 24, 2026. <https://www.worcestercountyinsights.org/economic-mobility/households-receiving-snap-by-race-ethnicity>

SNAP Demographics on Worcester County Insights

Worcester County Insights includes data on SNAP from the U.S. Census Bureau – specifically, the number and percentage of households by race and ethnicity that participate in SNAP, on a community-by-community basis. This measure compares households receiving SNAP to households of the same type – i.e., Black or African American households to other Black or African American households, etc. The data is from the 2022 American Community Survey, 5-YR estimates, and therefore measures 2018-2022.

Overall, across Worcester County, approximately 12% of Asian households, 25% of Black or African

American households, 12% of White households, and 38% of Hispanic or Latino households received SNAP in that survey. These are only estimates, based on responses to the Census Bureau's surveys. Still, they are a useful metric for understanding the basic demographic characteristics of SNAP households in Worcester County – data that is not otherwise included in the Department of Transitional Assistance's overall releases utilized above.

Conclusion

While the number of households and residents utilizing SNAP in Worcester County has grown since 2019, 2025 saw the first large decrease in these numbers over this time period. Tightened eligibility rules may continue to decrease SNAP utilization through 2026 – and reduced federal funding elsewhere could impact state SNAP programs. For example, Massachusetts' Healthy Incentives Program, which provides additional funds to SNAP beneficiaries buying fruits and vegetables from participating farms, could feel pressure from reduced federal funding in other parts of the Commonwealth's budget.

SNAP is one of many metrics measured across Worcester County Insights' "Economic Mobility" tab, which includes information on household income, housing cost burden, people living in poverty, and more. For more information about these, to read past Insights Insiders, and to view the wealth of other knowledge on this dashboard, please visit www.worcestercountyinsights.org.

Other Household Assistance in Worcester County: Data on LIHEAP

As we move through these winter months, it's important to note that SNAP is not the only assistance relied upon by households in Worcester County. The Federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is another. LIHEAP relies on different eligibility criteria than SNAP – rather than 200% of the Federal poverty level, LIHEAP as administered through local agencies in Massachusetts requires household income below 60% of the state's median income level (so a four-person household is eligible for LIHEAP with an income below \$99,573 in FY2026).

LIHEAP is administered through local agencies spread throughout the state. South-Central Worcester County is covered by the Worcester Community Action Council (WCAC), while North-Central is covered by Making Opportunity Count Inc (MOC). **According to the WCAC's Annual Reports, nearly 13,000 households received LIHEAP assistance in its coverage area in 2024, a growth of about 10% since 2019.** The Federal Department of Energy's "Low-income Energy Affordability Data" tool (LEAD) shows that **average energy burden (the percentage of a household's annual income spent on energy costs) for households making 100% or less of Worcester County's Area Median Income is about 7% in the county. Statewide (using 100% or less of Massachusetts' Area Median Income), it is 6%.**



HOW TO HELP

Donate Money: Financial gifts support daily operations, help restock shelves, and enable quick responses to rising needs.

Donate Products: Non-perishable food, hygiene supplies, and baby essentials are consistently needed.

Give Through a Donor Advised Fund: A donor advised fund at Greater Worcester Community Foundation provides a simple way to support food security efforts.

Learn More: Visit worcestercountyinsights.org and greaterworcester.org for more information about food security in Worcester County.