How Have Welfare Reforms Affected Access to Food Assistance Programs Among Two High Needs Groups at Northern Cheyenne: Young Families and Families Depending on Seasonal Employment?

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Abstract

Food assistance is an integral part of the assistance programs available to the Northern Cheyenne but our previous research has shown that eligibility for food assistance as well as other benefits is becoming more difficult. Northern Cheyenne currently have a poverty rate of 47% and an unemployment rate of 71% which have implications for food assistance and other programs. Because the Cheyenne are relatively representative of Plains and other tribal populations in its circumstances and relationship to the federal government, they offer a good opportunity for analysis of the impact of food assistance programs on reservations.

Using both qualitative and quantitative methods of research, the purpose of this project was to address some new questions regarding food assistance programs on the reservation. We have identified two subgroups within the reservation population that seem particularly vulnerable to the problems associated with poverty and are very likely to have special needs: seasonal workers and their families and young families in which the adults have little or no job skills or minimal educational credentials. Qualitative data collection included 32 in-depth, unstructured interviews with members of these groups which provide detailed accounts of individual and family experiences with and perceptions of receiving food and other types of assistance and indicate how these persons perceive and have adapted to the changes in program requirements. In addition, data were collected from the major food programs for the purpose of updating information about program participation patterns. Secondary analyses of these data compare new patterns with program data collected in previous research projects. Additionally, the survey questionnaire developed for last year’s (2000-2001) project will be administered to the sample of seasonal and young families in order to compare the patterns of program use, food insecurity, stress levels and health problems found for our previous sample from the Northern Cheyenne population.

The research was conducted as a team, with the Chief Dull Knife College researchers taking the lead and coordinating with Brigham Young University staff and graduate students for appropriate tasks. The new data identifies some important implications of seasonal work for meeting basic food and nutrition needs. In particular, these data reinforce the 2001 Northern Cheyenne survey findings that seasonal workers are at greater risk for food insecurity, nutritional and diabetes risk than other types of workers. While they are able to provide for the needs of their families during the part of the year that they are employed, the income they receive does not permit saving for the remainder of the year. Therefore, when their seasonal employment ends, these workers must either find new work or other sources of assistance. Unfortunately, because of the limitations of the local economy most cannot find alternative employment. Additionally, because of their seasonal work income, these workers must wait several months before they qualify for any type of food assistance. Both young families and seasonal workers have difficulties meeting eligibility requirements. Therefore, many have no alternative but to depend on extended family members for support.

This has profound effects on both the immediate families of these workers and their extended family members. As noted in our previous project reports, in this reservation context, there is a cultural imperative to share food and help family members when they are in need. However, in a community in which the poverty and unemployment rates are so high, this dependence on extended family stretches the resources of most families very thin. Thus, while a relatively small proportion (35%) experience persistent hunger, a very large proportion of the population (70%) experience food insecurity. Because of the fluctuations in their income, seasonal workers and their families experience significant periods in which they do not have access to adequate amounts and the quality of food needed to support a healthy life. Consequently, this group of workers experiences almost as high levels of food insecurity and nutritional risk as the unemployed and even higher levels of stress than the unemployed. In sum, seasonal workers are among the most likely in this reservation community to experience food insecurity and the poor nutrition and health problems that often accompany this condition.
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Introduction: Background

The Northern Cheyenne reservation was established in southeastern Montana in 1884 by Executive Order. The reservation now includes 447,000 acres spanning 36 miles from east to west and 23 miles from north to south. It is the home of approximately 4,500 people, including about 82 percent of whom are Northern Cheyenne, 13 percent are members of other tribes, and 6 percent are non-Indian. Poverty is a reality for the Northern Cheyenne, especially in comparison with their non-Indian neighbors. Poverty on the reservation increased between the years of 1979 and 1989 as the poverty rate for the surrounding areas dropped. Census data show that over the decade, 1979 to 1989, the poverty rate increased for American Indians in Rosebud County where the majority of Cheyenne live, especially among families. The gap between white and Indian families grew by 1989: the percentage of white families with minor children who were in poverty fell by almost 25 percent, from 90 percent in 1979 to 65 percent, while among Indian families in poverty the percentage with minor children increased by almost 14 percent, from 86 percent to 100 percent. Similarly, the poverty rate of white, female-headed families with minor children declined from 6.1 percent in 1979 to 5.7 percent 1989, while the poverty rate of Indian female-headed families rose from 42 percent in 1979 to 44 percent in 1989. By 2000, the percentage of Northern Cheyenne families with minor children who had incomes at or below the poverty level had increased to 47%. Thus, the Indian population in this rural area saw their economic conditions worsen over the decades from 1979 to 2000 while the economic changes for whites were considerably more positive.

The unemployment rate for the Northern Cheyenne Nation increased to 65% in 1996 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1996) and then to 71% in 2002 (Northern Cheyenne Tribal Services). Moreover, Northern Cheyenne ranked fifth and sixth among Montana reservations in per capita and household income. Given the poverty rate at Northern Cheyenne, food assistance and other sources of food have great importance for the well-being of the reservation community.

Food assistance is an integral part of the range of assistance programs available to the Northern Cheyenne, which now include cash assistance, health care, job training and other social services. While some persons avoid any form of welfare, for others it has become increasingly necessary for survival. According to representatives of an inter-agency task force currently attempting to work on issues related to service provision and coordination, the Northern Cheyenne Social Services Advisory Committee and our recent research on food assistance programs (1998-2001), changes in eligibility for food assistance as well as other benefits has made access more difficult for many people. Therefore, more reservation residents are experiencing and will continue to experience the stresses associated with food insecurity as well as poor nutrition and increasing health problems.

Data collected from previous research projects (1998-2001) show that food and other assistance programs form a complex system on the Northern Cheyenne reservation. An examination of the impacts of recent welfare reform on food assistance programs at Northern
Cheyenne indicated that patterns of acquisition and use of assistance have changed over time, especially in relation to policy changes affecting eligibility and duration of benefits. Through analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data collected from programs and clients, we have identified key elements of this complex system as well as how recipients are adapting to policy changes which have reduced eligibility and services. For example, our research findings indicate that the number of American Indians in Rosebud County served by the Food Stamps program has been declining since 1996 while the number of Cheyenne served by tribal food programs (both commodities and emergency food sources) has been steadily increasing during that same time period. This indicates that despite the decline in Food Stamps participants in general, food assistance needs among the poorest reservation residents remain high. As a result, local food sources are strained. This pattern has been experienced in other Montana communities as well. Thus, the state of Montana has initiated a major effort to replenish food banks and increase the efficiency of food bank service to those in need across the state (Montana Advisory Committee on Food and Nutrition, 1999).

Such developments suggest that food security, especially in reservation communities, is an issue that needs clarification. For this reason, in our previous project we administered the USDA food security module to a sample of about 500 reservation residents. Our results show that more than two thirds of the households included in the study experienced some level of food insecurity, with more than a third experiencing food security with hunger. Other issues have also emerged from the data collected in previous research involving Food Stamps program participants. Although Food Stamps recipients appreciate the benefits they receive, they have also identified numerous obstacles in obtaining these benefits. These are primarily related to difficulties with completing the paperwork needed for meeting new eligibility requirements and maintaining benefits, the lack of transportation and phones needed to keep appointments with program personnel, and childcare needs. Of particular concern were the needs for information on nutrition and food preparation, and the insufficient value of the Food Stamps for meeting family needs. Other concerns are related to completing the work hours required by the TANF/FAIM program. The most common problems include transportation to work sites and to look for jobs, childcare needs, and confusion about these new requirements.

Additional data regarding experience with fulfilling the work hours indicate that clients do not feel their work experience provides them with new skills, although some point to the benefits of being able to include their FAIM work experience on job applications. Virtually, every respondent in this research said they would prefer to have a job and would take almost any job offered, despite the fact that they would most likely still have problems with transportation and childcare. Another concern with acquiring a job is that it would not pay sufficient wages to improve their quality of life. Nevertheless, client interviews generally indicate that they would take any job paying a minimum wage ($5.25 per hour). The only exceptions were skilled technicians (electricians and carpenters) who said they would settle for $10 to $12 per hour in order to take a local job. All expected that the benefits they currently receive would be cut back, and they worried about how this might affect their ability to feed their families.

These findings suggest that an important dimension of the lives of most food assistance recipients includes multiple forms of stress. Recent research on health conditions, such as diabetes and other chronic conditions, suggests that high levels of stress may contribute to or aggravate health problems (Holmes and Rahe, 1967; www.holisticonline.com/stress, 1999).
Researchers in a number of disciplines are currently attempting to understand the effects of stress on both urban and rural families, women and children in particular, who are coping with the challenges and conditions of poverty (e.g., Atkins and Rantz, 1993; Bibbee; 1987; Walker, Walker and Walker, 1994). Given the numerous examples of stress-producing circumstances discussed by our research participants, our recent data collection efforts also included both in-depth interviews and focus groups through which we explored in more detail the types and sources of stress experienced by reservation residents who are recipients of welfare benefits such as food assistance. These data contributed to the development of the survey questionnaire administered to the reservation residents during 2001-2002. In addition to ascertaining food insecurity levels among the population in general this instrument was designed to identify the use of alternative food sources, the incidence of a range of stresses linked to poverty and food insecurity as well as health concerns such as diabetes, an increasing problem on the Northern Cheyenne and other reservations. Analyses of the survey results indicate that not only are those who have less stable or no employment and living at poverty level at higher risk for food insecurity, they are vulnerable to a wide range of stresses, and many experience health concerns associated with stress, including hyper-tension and pre-conditions for diabetes (See Final Project Report, 2001). These stresses and health concerns are also found among reservation residents who are working but whose income is only slightly above the poverty level.

Within this reservation population we have identified two subgroups that seem particularly vulnerable to the problems associated with poverty and are very likely to have special needs. These include seasonal workers and their families as well as single parents and young families in which the adults have little or no job skills or minimal educational credentials. The Northern Cheyenne Food Security survey (Davis, et al., 2001) findings show that young families as well as seasonal workers are at greater risk for food insecurity, nutritional risk and health risks such as the early symptoms for diabetes (See Appendix A for a summary of relevant findings).

Previous research on Northern Cheyenne youth, young adults and single parents (Ward, 1985; Ward and Wilson, 1985) provides some relevant information about this group. For example, while the dropout rate is higher for males, females also drop out at substantial rates but for different reasons. In particular, young women most often drop out to start families. Although some marry or receive assistance with childcare from their child’s father, many teenage mothers turn to their families for help in caring for their babies. Others face the challenges of motherhood on their own. While many young mothers return to school to get a high school diploma or GED, there is often a delay in finishing school. During this time, these young mothers must rely on a variety of resources, both informal help and formal programs, to support their children. Young fathers also face unique challenges. For example, research on employment rates shows that young males are the most likely group within this reservation population to be unemployed. Given the scarcity of employment opportunities even for adults with higher skill levels and education, these young adults and their families are at high risk for poverty and the stresses associated with it. The children of young families, therefore, may also have special needs for services and assistance that need to be clarified. For example, recent data from the Northern Cheyenne Diabetes treatment program (Buffalo, 2001) show that children are increasingly at risk for development of diabetes: more than a third of the 1,100 Northern Cheyenne school children tested showed at least two pre-conditions for the development of Type
II diabetes. Very little data exist about the special problems, nutrition and other needs of reservation families in which these children live.

The second high needs subgroup includes seasonal workers and their families. The experiences of seasonal workers is particularly important in this reservation population since a large proportion of workers are involved in and depend on seasonal work to help support their families. Data from the 1980 and 1990 censuses (Ward 1998) show some relevant changes in the employment patterns for Rosebud County (where the majority of Northern Cheyenne reside) that help to explain why seasonal work has become such an important part of reservation life. In 1990 the majority of whites (72 percent) and Indians (60 percent) sixteen years old or more worked primarily in wage and salaried jobs. The figure for Indians represents an increase of 16 percent since 1980. However, the proportion of Indian adults working in local, state and federal government jobs in Rosebud County declined, while the proportion of whites working in state jobs increased during the decade. These changes reflect the recent decline of public sector employment in many reservation communities. Additionally, census data show that while the proportion of white workers holding jobs throughout the year increased (from 57 percent to 63 percent) between 1980 and 1990, the proportion of Indian workers holding jobs throughout the year fell slightly. It is important to note that in 1990 less than half of Indian workers had jobs for 50 weeks or more compared to almost two thirds of white workers. These figures suggest both the importance of seasonal employment for Indian workers and the decreasing availability of part-time work. Data from the state of Montana for 2000 (US Census Bureau, Census 2000) confirms that seasonal work continues to be a particularly important source of work during specific months of the year: May through September. In other months, the unemployment rates for Big Horn and Rosebud counties are typically at least twice the unemployment rate of Montana as a whole.

Recent research provides additional information about seasonal workers and their circumstances. For example, Slesinger and Ofstead (1996) estimate that “. . . about four million people in the United States are hired farmworkers. Most are seasonal employees.” (p.57). Another scholar states that “. . . most short-term domestic seasonal workers are local workers. When not doing farm work many are attending school. Most of the remainder are primarily employed as nonfarm workers or are voluntarily out of the labor force when not doing farm work” (Fritsch 1984, p. 85). Problems faced by these workers, which include poorer health and less access to health care, are discussed by Schenker (1995) who also points out that “. . . the health of the migrant and seasonal farmworker population has not been adequately addressed” (p. 471). Slesinger and Pfeffer (1992) confirm the vulnerability of seasonal and migrant workers, asserting that, “Safety nets available to most of the urban and rural poor usually are unavailable to the migrant workers.” While these scholars point to seasonal workers as a small but stable part of the rural workforce in general, there is a different pattern emerging in American Indian reservation communities. Although there has been little research on American Indian seasonal workers, two recent analyses (Ward 1998; Pickering 2000) show that for many American Indian families living in rural reservation communities, seasonal employment provides an increasingly important source of income. Given the large proportion of Northern Cheyenne workers involved in such seasonal work as ranch work, construction and firefighting, the needs of the families of these workers for food assistance and problems or challenges to accessing these resources must be better understood.
Research Premises, Purposes and Organization

The goal of this research project included further clarification and evaluation of access to food assistance programs by two high needs groups on the Northern Cheyenne reservation of southeastern Montana. Drawing on knowledge obtained in the previous research on effects of welfare reform on food assistance programs serving this population, this project was based on the following premises:

1. New data collection efforts are needed which will provide sufficient information for understanding the access of seasonal workers and young families to Food Stamps and other food assistance programs as a central part of the safety net available to people in poverty and the working poor on the Northern Cheyenne reservation. We also need to determine how access to these programs have changed over time, especially in relation to policy changes affecting eligibility and duration of benefits, both at the federal and state levels.

Data from previous research project indicated that the ability of the Food Stamps program to meet the needs of reservation residents has declined with the changes in eligibility requirements and the amount and duration of benefits as well as new requirements for work hours for FAIM participants. Additionally, Food Stamps and other TANF services in this rural location do not provide adequately for childcare needs, transportation and communication needs and appropriate work settings for those trying to maintain eligibility for Food Stamps and other FAIM benefits. In essence, recent regulatory changes in the Foods Stamps program have created what appear to be major holes in the safety net operating on this reservation. Essentially, these holes require other agencies and resources to increase or change the services they provide in order to maintain a viable safety net. Additionally, both Food Stamps recipients and other reservation community members must shoulder a greater proportion of the responsibility for meeting the food needs of that segment of the population that is in greatest need and has the least resources.

2. Although previous research showed that food assistance programs, Food Stamps, in particular, plays an important role among the formal program services which have a significant impact on clients’ well-being, the research also indicates that a range of informal sources and strategies add important resources are important to the survival of most program participants. This research will address to how and to what extent young families and seasonal workers access these alternative sources of support and food assistance.

3. Analyses of food program data provide important pieces of information about the patterns of program use and the impacts of changes in policy regulating assistance over the past several years. To further clarify the effects of policy changes, additional program data are need to identify patterns and impacts over the next year when a number of clients will be reaching the end of their eligibility for services. Also, the state of Montana has responded to information about the obstacles faced by welfare recipients by making a series of changes in the services and benefits provided as well as eligibility requirements. Data reflecting these changes is important to obtain in order to fully understand changes in welfare program participation.
Additional qualitative data are needed as well to address the need for more complete analysis of the strategies and resources that Northern Cheyenne seasonal workers and young families draw on to cope with recent program changes. In particular, qualitative data are needed which will clarify the experiences of these subgroups with the full range of resources they use, both formal and informal. These data are important for clarifying the conditions under which these two high needs groups receive services from formal programs such as Food Stamps and when these programs fall short or fail to meet client needs, thus requiring them to turn to informal resources. Such data will also indicate the implications of program changes and deficiencies for other programs in the public sector (such as agencies where FAIM participants meet work hour requirements, childcare programs and adult education programs) and resources in the community (such as tribal programs, and church and school feeding programs) which may now be strained by their efforts to meet the increasing demand for assistance.

The purpose of the research is threefold:

1. To assess the ability of two high needs groups, seasonal workers and young families, to access food assistance programs, given the changes in eligibility requirements and/or duration of benefits associated with welfare reform.
2. To clarify how well food assistance programs and other services meet the needs of these two high needs groups relative to the informal services and resources to which economically vulnerable Cheyenne have access.
3. Such analyses, based on both qualitative and quantitative data, are needed to identify how tribal, community, county, and state agencies contribute to the safety net intended to serve these particularly vulnerable Cheyenne families, and how each of these resources relate to the larger social and cultural context in which clients are struggling to adapt to new food assistance program requirements.

Again this year, the research proposed was conducted as a team, with the Dull Knife faculty and staff taking the lead and coordinating with BYU staff for appropriate tasks. The BYU staff spent four weeks on-site. Coordination also occurred over the phone as needed. We have found this arrangement has been beneficial for all involved in terms of sharing responsibility and expertise and in coordinating research activities for their timely and effective completion.

Methods and Data: Research Questions, Data Collection Strategies, Sources and Tasks

The design of the proposed research includes both quantitative and qualitative data collection strategies. The purposes and research questions pursued through these strategies as well as data sources are outlined below.

Qualitative data collection included 32 in-depth, unstructured interviews with young families, single parents and seasonal workers which provided detailed accounts of individual and family experiences with and perceptions of receiving assistance and indicate how these persons perceive and have adapted to the changes in program requirements. Most important, this activity
provided Northern Cheyenne residents with the opportunity to voice their concerns and have their experiences documented by Northern Cheyenne researchers who can appropriately interpret their meanings. This aspect of the research is designed to address the following questions:

What are the high needs families’ experiences with Food Stamps and other food assistance programs and their evaluation of the success of these programs in helping to meet food needs? Which programs are most successful, and why are they perceived this way? How have families depending on seasonal work and young families coped with meeting program requirements related to meeting their food needs? What is the role of paperwork requirements in the perceived success of food programs? How does food assistance relate to other (government or private) resources used? What alternative resources have high needs families turned to when food assistance has become less available? How effective are these in meeting individual and family needs? What are the implications of program changes for families of seasonal worker and young families? How have these changes varied for those with different levels of human capital (e.g., education and/or work experience) and other types of resources or skills? How do program changes affect high needs families at different stages of the life cycle or ages, and households and families with different structures? Do program changes differentially affect men and women?

Interviews with food assistance program clients were entirely confidential. Procedures for protection of the data collected were made clear to all members of the research staff. Potential interviewees were provided information about the project and the voluntary nature of their participation as well as their right to end the interview or address only the questions they choose. Interviews were taped on approval by interviewees, and tapes and transcripts were kept in a secure space provided for the project at CDKC and BYU.

Quantitative analyses have two purposes: (1) assess to how survey responses of high needs families compare to previous survey findings, and (2) determine food program participation changes. Related research questions include the following:

1. What role does food assistance play in the welfare assistance received by Northern Cheyenne high needs families? How do the high needs groups compare to other groups of reservation residents? How do survey results for these groups compare to the previous sample or reservation residents?
2. What are the food program usage patterns of Northern Cheyenne families since 1996?
3. What are the effects of recent program adjustments on individual and family ability to meet food needs and to meet essential financial needs?

A central feature of the collection of individual-level data is to assess the extent to which the new sample is at risk for food insecurity, poor nutrition, stress and diabetes. Updated data were also collected from food programs serving the reservation. The purpose was to clarify recent adjustments in their program requirements as well as to help gauge the impact of these changes on clients.
Northern Cheyenne Context

The Northern Cheyenne reservation context provides for a unique opportunity to examine the impact of changes in food assistance programs on the specific needs of American Indians living in reservation communities. While providing data for a single case study, this case study population is reasonably representative of the seven reservation populations in Montana as well as the Plains tribes of the upper mid-west and west. Findings from this project, based on both quantitative and qualitative data, provide important information for understanding the needs of this and other similar populations as well as implications for future policy and program design.

Additional data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis (Regional Economic Information System, 2001) are useful for understanding the economic opportunity structure of the Northern Cheyenne Nation. These data show changes in employment by industry for both Rosebud and Big Horn counties, the two counties on which the Northern Cheyenne Nation is located, from 1990 to 1999. These data demonstrate the availability of jobs for each year, suggesting the difficulty that welfare program participants face in trying to make the transition to work. Earlier analyses of employment by industry for 1980 and 1990 (See Ward 1998) indicated declines over the decade in jobs in agricultural, forestry and fishing industries among both whites and Indian workers. These declines, experienced by Indian workers to a much larger extent than whites, were also seen in manufacturing. Other changes include a substantial decrease in public administration jobs among Indian workers along with moderate increases in professional positions, construction jobs, and positions in communications and retail trade. These patterns generally continued into the 1990s with a few exceptions. For example, there were small increases in agricultural, forestry, fishing and mining jobs during this ten-year period. However, jobs in manufacturing, transportation, and wholesale trade continued to decline. Similarly, government jobs generally declined although there was a very slight increase in federal jobs. In contrast, jobs in retail trade, finance, insurance and real estate as well as services saw sizeable increases. As suggested by the previous analysis, these data help to clarify the high rate of poverty among American Indians: the increasing number of jobs in the service occupations and retail trade along with substantial job losses in manufacturing, farming, and forestry compared to earlier decades as well as fewer jobs overall in the public sector means that Indian workers are more concentrated in lower paying jobs than ever before. Thus, lower paying jobs contributes to a greater proportion of the working poor while the loss of work opportunities in some industries contributes to the higher unemployment rate and higher rate of poverty.

Research Findings

The following sections present the findings of the research project involving, first, an analysis of participation data from the main food assistance programs serving the reservation and, second, interviews with young adults, families and seasonal workers. In the latter section, we will begin with a discussion of characteristics of the research participants. Then we will present results concerning the range of food assistance resources used, the effects of recent program eligibility changes experienced by research participants, the strengths of programs and
challenges perceived by program participants, and recommendations for changes that might solve problems they have experienced.

**Food Assistance Program Participation Data: Food Stamps and Commodities**

Information concerning participation in food assistance programs was obtained from monthly and annual program statistics generated by the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services. These data show the number of recipients of Food Stamps and other services. The tables presented below show a comparison of households participating by year in FAIM, Food Stamps, and childcare in Rosebud County where most of the Northern Cheyenne Nation is located. Rosebud County officials estimate that about 80% of the total are Northern Cheyenne reservation residents. Table 1 shows the number of recipients of FAIM and Food Stamps from Rosebud County. Figures shown in Table 1 indicate that the average number of FAIM recipients declined between 1997 and 2001, from 7.15% to 3.58%. This decline is consistent with changing eligibility requirements. The percentage of the Rosebud County population receiving Food Stamps declined slightly from 11.84% to 10.46%.

Table 2 shows information for FAIM clients as well as Food Stamp recipients for February 1999, February 2000, and February 2001. These figures confirm the decline in the number of cases over both a two-year period and a five-year period. The FAIM caseload in February 1999 was 52% of what it was in 1994. Similarly, the caseload for February 2000 was even lower at 43% of what it was in 1995, and the caseload for February 2001 was 47% of what it was in 1996. Note that while the caseloads declined dramatically over the last four years, the poverty rate has not declined. In fact, it increased to 47% of families in 2000.

Table 3 shows the number of households eligible for and participating in the Tribal Commodities program during two one-year time periods: June 1999 through May 2000 and October 2001 through September 2002. These data show that the numbers fluctuate with the season, with the summer and winter months generally seeing increases in participation rates. In the summer, increased food needs are related to children being home from school while the increases in winter are related to increased demands on households when sources of cash for food, such as seasonal work, are scarcer.

**Characteristics of research participants**

Interviews were conducted with 32 members of the Northern Cheyenne Nation, of whom there were 19 males and 13 females. The majority of participants (16) live in Lame Deer, the largest community on the reservation while five are from Birney, four from Ashland, four from Busby and three from Muddy Creek. The majority of households (18) of the research participants include only one family. However, three interviewees have three families living in the household, 10 have two families, and one had four families sharing the household.
Primary Sources of Food Assistance

The most frequently used food assistance resource reported was Food Stamps, and the second used the Tribal Food Distribution program ("commodities"). Other resources used include scholarships and other types of financial assistance for students (e.g., PELL, school to work mileage), General Assistance, WIC, unemployment benefits, social security, as well as income from odd jobs, seasonal and other employment. The length of time research participants had been receiving assistance ranged from recently (or currently applying) to two years (or "a long time"). The most common length of time was between two and eight months.

Other resources used by research participants include the food bank, food vouchers and other assistance from the tribal charities program, WIC and family. However, although about half of the research participants were aware of other sources of food, the overwhelming majority (20) reported that they do not use any of the main food programs or community sources of emergency food. When comparing research participants who were young families, single parents and seasonal workers, seasonal workers and young families tended to be less aware of community sources of food assistance while single parents were more aware of these resources. When asked if they used these resources, most seasonal workers and participants with families reported that they did not use them. On the other hand, single parents were more likely to use a range of community resources and were particularly likely to report family as an important source of assistance.

When asked why they chose Food Stamps, research participants reported primarily that they get more and better food from this program, and they can purchase types of food they want while using their income for bills and other needs. However, more general responses include that it was the only resource with which they were familiar, that the program was there when they needed help, or they aren’t quite sure.

Among the research participants who chose not to use Food Stamps, the main reason was that they did not need the program because of their work income. However, other reasons included that applicants cannot meet program requirements, or they were cut off after reviews of their income and other eligibility criteria such as age and income. Finally, some believed that the Food Stamps program is too limited, either in terms of the amount of benefits or the duration of benefits.

Reponses to Program Changes in Eligibility

Many of the research participants did not perceive any changes in eligibility. However, others reported that there were more requirements to meet now, including the need for more detailed information about applicants’ age, income, assets, family, child support, etc. These information needs were seen as resulting in much more paperwork. Some also reported that changes in their work situations had resulted in unexpected losses of benefits; that is, the benefits from the Food Stamps program were declining. Although some research participants reported that it was easier to apply for Food Stamps now than in the past, many believed that it was easier
to get Commodities than Food Stamps, especially if there were changes or fluctuations in their income.

Many of the research participants reported that their use of the food assistance programs was related to dramatic changes in their life circumstances. Such changes primarily included increased responsibilities such as starting a family or having more children, becoming a single parent, starting work, college or both, losing a job, income or unemployment benefits, facing unstable living arrangement and unusually high expenses, and needing supplemental help with feeding their children. These shifts in personal and family situations prompted a variety of responses, such as wanting more schooling, work or income to support their families. But for many getting a better job, more income or better training also required some temporary help to make sure that their family had enough food and could survive.

Strengths of the Food Assistance Programs Used

Interviewees identified a number of strengths of the food assistance programs in which they participated. Those who use Food Stamps liked the fact that they can purchase the kinds of food they want, that they can now use debit cards, and that the program is available to help families when they need food assistance. One former recipient of Food Stamps summed up what many said about the help they get from Food Stamps:

And a lot of times after the bills were paid and the money was gone, I mean, that’s all there was, the Food Stamps. And like I said, I mean, they were a godsend, and we would [have] a lot of hungry nights if we didn’t have those, and they just put the food on the table. And it’s just amazing how much food you can get, and how they just help people.

One single mother who is a former food stamp recipient appreciated the way the staff helped with meeting the eligibility and paperwork requirements,

They helped me . . . out a lot, where they were helping me, like fill out my paperwork, get things together for me, telling me, sending me letters telling me, you know, I have this much in my account and so on. And that really helped me out, just letting me know what I need to do.

Another single mother commented that the program,

. . . helped me work harder and look hard for jobs all over. And it helped me get a house and . . . pay my bills. And I work at [a local business] now which is good. Hopefully, I’ll get hired permanently so I can get off welfare. And it kind of helped my daughter get used to being with a babysitter and not always with me.

Those using the Commodities program appreciated how well the program is organized, the amount and selection of food available, and the help they receive with the application process
and paperwork. Similarly, WIC, LIEAP (Tribal Charities) and Social Security program participants appreciated the availability of these resources in providing food for their families. In general, these research participants were happy they could rely on the food assistance programs to provide supplemental food for their families.

College students reported that PELL and scholarship programs provide their families with help in surviving and meeting their needs. One college student summed up the feelings expressed by a number of students:

If you apply to those scholarships and you get them, and they’re great wonders for a student who is fulltime here, and they have no other way of getting any kind of income, and it helps. Every little bit helps. And it’s too bad we couldn’t get more. I mean, you’re a student, and you don’t have too much money, but then that’s what school is all about. So tough times, but then it’s all how much you want it. And it all pays off in the end.

Challenges and Problems in Meeting Food Needs with the Programs

The research participants who use Food Stamps reported that while the staff helps with the paperwork, it often takes longer to apply and meet the requirements. For example, single parents and young families both discussed the paperwork and reporting problems they faced:

I didn’t have any problems with the paperwork, and dealing with, you know, different federal agencies or state agencies in the past; you’re used to having all your paperwork in on place. I could see how it would be a problem for people who didn’t have social security cards, birth certificates and whatnot. But already had a lot of that stuff complete. So the hardest part was taking the time to fill out all the applications.

It’s just well, we usually when your benefits end or whatever, you have to do the same paperwork over, and it’s like, one month you might work, and then you get cut off, and two months later you have to do the same paperwork again. I think there should be a shorter route to do that, since you’ve already been on then before. Because the paperwork is kind of long.

You have to report like a lot of things, a lot of changes. Like I think if you apply for a loan or something, you have to let them know. And then, if you moved in a new place, because I think one you tell them, sometimes they can reduce [your benefits], and that’s what’s not too good about it. Sometimes like I kind of get scared to tell them things; otherwise if I don’t tell the, they’ll sanction me.

A young father in a family of six also commented on the paperwork and new work requirements:
papers get lost, and you're on the bottom of somebody's desk. Like when you turn in your hours and they can't find it. And, you know, they don't believe that you did your hours, and that's the biggest hassle. But I think for the most part, when you first go in and sign up, that all goes pretty smooth. But then when they set up a meeting and you have to decide where you're going to work your hours at, and what hours you're going to work, it kind of gets pretty complicated.

Additionally, Food Stamps benefits have changed along with the new eligibility requirements, and many have had to get used to having less food. In fact, a number of the Food Stamps clients indicated that this program does not provide sufficient food assistance to last the whole month. Similarly, when they get part-time or seasonal work, benefits decline, producing problems in meeting the family's food needs. Especially seasonal workers and single mothers often depend on family for help when they don't have enough food. For example, a single mother reported how finding work changes her benefits:

Working, it goes down. When I work it goes way down, and then now that I'm in school, I guess it's supposed to stay the same... but when it drops, it's harder for me to supply my family. And sometimes I have to go, you know, elsewhere, to my grandmother, and I'll borrow or get commodities from her to eat.

One young father made the following comments about the sufficiency of Food Stamps and strategies for making Food Stamps last for the whole month:

Well, one thing is, they give you enough Food Stamps to make it if you shop right. Like we go to Billings, and we buy a lot of stuff. Like we buy ramen noodles by the case, and it helps out a lot that way, because if you have to go to the Lame Deer store every day and buy a meal a day, your card's used up in about two weeks. So we had to learn how to adjust our shopping habits... if a person is able to shop at a good warehouse shopping place, that money's going to be plenty. But like we, my wife has friends who can't make it to Billings to buy their groceries. They have to buy them down here at Lame Deer Trading. And it's kind of, it's too bad... And I don't know what the deal is, but it seems to me like they have bad meat over here. Maybe it's cheaper or something. But you can spend a hundred dollars on meat over here, and go to Billings and spend a hundred dollars on meat, and you got four times more.

Finally, updating their paperwork and putting in their work hours are difficult for those without transportation or childcare. For example, one single mother indicated that meeting the new work requirement presents some real challenges:

I have to find my own babysitters [who are available] to work for eight hours to make sure that I get my eight hours in. And I have to find rides to get my daughter, to take her out there and to bring her home.
A father commented on the difficulties related to the requirement for both he and his wife to put in work hours:

[We’ve struggled] mostly just getting our hours done. . . . So just, well it puts a strain on our vehicles and gas money that we don’t normally, wouldn’t normally have, you know? . . . It just seems to me that they have you work too many hours. . . . If you could narrow it down to say, twenty or thirty hours where you could do three ten hour days, and then you’re done for the week, that would save the cost of gas and everything to get down here. So that’s probably the biggest hassle we’re having with it is transportation and working. . . . And when my wife goes and does her hours, I’m babysitting, and when I go do my hours, she’s babysitting.

Although most commodities clients appreciated the help staff give them with paperwork to establish their eligibility and believed the application process was easier than for Food Stamps, a few complained about the waiting period. One commodities client expressed an opinion typical of a number of the commodities program participants:

. . . and with the commodities, they’re more easier to understand. The paperwork’s different from each other. And I, with the commodity application, they’re more simple. But the food stamp program, you have to, they ask for a lot of stuff that you can’t get right away. It takes longer to get Food Stamps.

Others did not like the lack of fresh produce while still others reported they had problems with transportation to pick up food supplies, and having to pick up food during business hours when they needed to put in their work hours.

While college student appreciated the financial assistance they receive, often scholarships are not enough to cover their food and other needs. These research participants often turn to their families for help. Two research participants expressed the types of problems college students often experience:

Well, like certain scholarships, they only give you a payment once every three months, and between those three months when you don’t have the money, you try to get a job. And it’s kind of hard. Like right now, I have a job, and it goes way into the night. And it’s kind of hard for me to get up and make it to school on time, and do everything at once.

Well, . . . just by the time your money comes, I mean, it’s gone before you have anything to do with it. I mean, there’s just a lot of being broke and every day to day without having no money. And there’s countless problems. But there’s positives and there’s negatives to everything. So I mean, there’s a lot of things that could be worked on, I guess.
Solutions and Recommendations for Food Programs

In general the research participants suggested that food programs should improve their communication with their clients, and find about more about their needs. They were also interested in shorter application processes and paperwork. Although they were concerned about becoming too dependent on food programs, these participants wanted adequate food supplies and assistance (e.g., classes in food preparation) in using the food well to meet their needs. Some participants would like programs to be a little more accommodating about their hours and access to the food programs. For example, one father said, “The only thing I see as an obstacle is if I have to work, trying to get time off... during the business hours. If they could have a drop box instead, that would help...”

Program participants living in Big Horn County discussed the problems related to meeting with FAIM program staff from the office in Hardin who come to Busby once a month. One recipient suggested,

Maybe if they came down more than just once a month and everybody had to go there. Because it’s hard to go all the way to Hardin, and when they come down here, it takes a long time to meet with them.

To address the need for more assistance while they’re in school, one college student suggested,

... maybe they should change the criteria, like to qualify for it. Because I’m like,... you may be living under your mom’s roof, but then she don’t make as much as it looks like on paper.

Seasonal Employment

Although the majority of the participants in this study are seasonal workers, the types of work in which they are engaged are diverse. The type of work most frequently reported was firefighting. Additional forms of seasonal employment include construction, selling firewood, babysitting, housework, teaching or substitute teaching, and driving a school bus.

Seasonal employment not only varies by job but also varies by the time of the year. School-related employment, such as teaching and driving a school bus, provide employment during the school year but leave these employees struggling to find work and benefits during the summer. The converse is true for the other participants. That is, they are able to find work during the summer but they have difficulty securing work during the school year.

The obvious challenge of seasonal employment is finding a job. This is especially difficult since the unemployment rate among the Northern Cheyenne is nearly 71% (Tribal Services 2002). The difficulty in securing seasonal employment is reflected in a statement made by one man from Lame Deer:
Well, the seasonal employment, it's tough. There's not any jobs, not too many jobs around here, I mean, for anyone, I mean just for being seasonal. I mean you got to start applying before school is over and if you get one you're very lucky.

Despite the financial benefits of seasonal employment, it also has drawbacks. On one hand, seasonal employment provides a much-needed, temporary salary. One the other hand, receiving too much money can disqualify those in need of government assistance when they are unemployed. Various participants commented on this dilemma. One man says,

Being a seasonal worker seems to have its ups and downs. During the summertime when jobs are good, we don't, you know, have to look at any programs like food banks or anything like that, or supplement. The only thing really that we have to worry about is childcare. But during the winter months when I'm not working, stay home not making any money, it's tough to make ends meet, because I'm not always eligible for unemployment. So that influences whether or not we're going to participate in programs like Commodities or Food Stamps.

Seasonal work not only affects whether or not seasonal workers qualify for government assistance, it also affects programs that afford opportunities for continued education. One student discusses the possibility of being disqualified for a PELL Grant as a result of seasonal work:

If you make too much money you might not qualify for your PELL, or you might make too much money. And so there's just a log of things you have to be careful of and the guidelines of everything you're applying for and just making sure you're ok within the boundaries of everything.

Assistance programs are an important supplement to seasonal employment. For instance, a school teacher remarks, "Summer time is a pain not to be working. But we have to make ends meet during the summertime. But with the Commodities, they really come in handy." This comment reflects the importance of supplementing seasonal work with food assistance programs, especially during the times of unemployment.

Preference: Full-Time Employment

Full-time employment is preferred over seasonal employment by three fourths of those who were interviewed. Of the remaining participants, one was currently working full-time, three preferred seasonal work, and three preferred seasonal work so they could finish school.

Most of the participants did not state reasons for preferring a full-time job rather than seasonal employment. However, the main reason given by participants who did state why they preferred a full-time job was job security and a steady income. One man says, "I would love a
full-time job. I would love a steady income.” A woman from Lame Deer gives another reason for wanting a steady income: to become independent of food assistance programs. She explains,

And full-time would be like you know you have a job, you know you’ve got security there. And you probably wouldn’t really have to depend upon Food Stamp program, or welfare program.

The level of income and type of available full-time jobs differ from the income and type of seasonal employment. Seasonal employment often pays better than full-time jobs. Consequently, the benefits of finding security in a year-round job can be negated by the need for a higher-paying, seasonal job. In response to whether or not he would prefer full-time work one, person replies,

Probably in terms of job security, however, the pay rates would fluctuate I guess. Because I know you can make more firefighting and working on a road construction than you could just by being a janitor somewhere for five years and only getting maybe a dollar raise.

The most common reason for not preferring a full-time job was to focus on school. Nevertheless, the financial benefits of full-time work were still considered. When asked if he would prefer a full-time job, one participant responded “Somewhat, yeah, but then no, because I want to further my education. But money-wise, yes.”

Of the other participants who did not prefer full-time jobs, one of the participants responded that he works most of the year and wants the additional time to spend with his family. He says, “...I work about ten months out of the year, and I prefer it this way so I can have some time with family...” Another participant who says she does not want full-time work remarks, however, that she wants to get hired permanently at her current job so she can stop relying on welfare. She states, “Hopefully, I’ll get hired permanently so I can get off of welfare.”

Preliminary Analysis of Food Security Questions

A preliminary analysis was done of the answers to selected questions in the USDA Food Security Module completed by 25 of the research participants. In response to the question, “Which statement best describes the food eaten in your household in the last 12 months, that is since (current month) of last year,” 45% responded that they have enough and the kinds of food they need. However, another 45% reported that they have “Enough, but not always the kinds of food wanted;” and 9% responded, “Sometimes not enough.”

When given a list of reasons why people don’t always have enough to eat, 36% affirmed there was, “Not enough money for food;” 14% they were on a diet, and 5% said they had health problems that prevented their eating. A list of reasons people don’t always have the kinds of food they want or need produced the following responses: 32% said there was, “Not enough money for food;” 18% said it was, “Too hard to get to the store;” 23% said the, “Kinds of food
(I/We) want not available;” and 36% said that, “Good quality of food not available.”

Additional data regarding these patterns are shown in Table 4. The percentage distributions of responses to six follow-up questions show that approximately 82% reported that it was either “sometimes” or “often true” that they worried whether their food would run out before they got money to buy more. Seventy-three percent reported that it was sometimes or often true that, “The food that (I/we) bought just didn’t last, and (I/we) didn’t have money to get more [in the last 12 months]” (brackets added). Fifty-four percent or more of the sample responded “sometimes” or “often true” to the first three questions concerning problems with accessing enough and good quality food while a smaller proportion (23 to 54%) indicated that they often or sometimes have problems with feeding their children enough and good quality foods.

One of the most tragic aspects of hunger and food insecurity concerns the effect on children. Although these responses pertaining to children indicated that most households adequately provide for their children, the large percentage reporting problems with accessing food indicate it was likely that adults ate less or fed their children first.

Although these percentages are taken from a small sample selected to represent all the different districts on the reservation and the circumstances of seasonal workers, young families and single parents, the proportions are still high enough to cause concern. The next step of the analysis will involve computation of the food security scores and comparison of this sub-sample with the previous survey data.

Summary and Conclusions

The data collected for this project both support the findings of our previous research and add some new understandings of two high needs groups, seasonal workers and their families as well as single parents and young adults, and how they access basic resources they need such as food assistance. For example, many of the research participants reported similar experiences with the needs for and access to food assistance: they are very happy to have both Food Stamps and Commodities available to help those struggling to meet their food needs. Many also appreciate the help they get from the program staff in completing the paperwork needed to meet eligibility requirements, and some reported that their required work hours made it possible to obtain part-time jobs. While Food Stamps recipients also enjoy the new debit card and the flexibility they have to purchase the kinds of food they want, Commodities program participants like the amounts and kinds of foods they received which ensures that their families can eat well through the whole month. WIC and scholarship program participants also reported that they appreciate the benefits they receive which helps provide food for their children.

Nevertheless, many of the research participants also identified obstacles or serious challenges to using the programs. These include many of the same problems identified by program participants interviewed in previous projects: for example, Food Stamps recipients reported problems with the effort and length of time it takes to complete paperwork, and lack of
transportation and childcare needed to meet with program staff and to put in the required hours at
their work sites. However, few expected that these work hours would lead to better paying jobs.
Some felt the required work hours placed burdens on their family’s resources and time that
actually made it more difficult to improve their circumstance. Others found the eligibility
requirements too restrictive, especially in terms of age and family assets. This was especially
true for young adults and parents. Most importantly, some reported that the current allocations
of Food Stamps do not allow families to buy food for the whole month while others reported that
their benefits declined with welfare reform, making it more difficult to feed their families.
Survey data for this sample support this finding: 73% report that their food sometimes or often
does not last, and they do not have money to buy more. Student scholarship recipients also
reported difficulties in meeting their needs with the level of benefits they receive. Problems
cited by Commodities recipients include difficulties in picking up food during business hours
and getting the types of fresh produce they would like while WIC recipients also indicated some
problems in meeting their children’s food needs with this resource.

In addition to reporting the same types of problems identified by earlier research with
food assistance participants, seasonal workers included in the sample provided details on special
problems that affect their access to food assistance. To begin with, while the types of work
reported by many in this sample include those typically thought of as seasonal jobs, such as
ranch and farm work, construction and firefighting, seasonal work is also defined as any job that
cannot be kept for the entire year. These include working for local educational programs during
the school year (e.g., Head start workers and school aides, cooks, etc.) as well as babysitting,
selling firewood, housework and college students on scholarships, student interns and those
holding part-time jobs on campus.

The new interview data also indicate that seasonal workers and young families are
particularly likely to depend on their extended family for help with meeting their basic needs
because of their difficulties in meeting the eligibility requirements of food programs. These
interviewees also were less aware of the range of food assistance sources available in the
community. In contrast, single parents were well aware of the major food assistance programs as
well as community programs such as Tribal Charities, the food bank and church food programs.

Unlike previous welfare recipients interviewed who were resigned to their need for
welfare, younger interviewees had higher hopes for leaving welfare. In other words, not only did
they see problems and challenges to using welfare and food assistance programs, many also did
not want to depend on these programs for very long. While these recipients of assistance
recognized the value and need for food programs for their family and community, many wanted
their own use of the programs to be limited to the time it took for them to graduate from school
or get a job with an income that would meet their family’s needs.

Finally, the new data collected by this project identifies some important implications of
seasonal work for meeting basic food and nutrition needs. In particular, these data reinforce the
2001 Northern Cheyenne survey findings that seasonal workers are at greater risk for food
insecurity, nutritional and diabetes risk than other types of workers. A preliminary analysis of
the food security data for this sample of seasonal workers and young families indicates that 82% sometimes or often worry whether they will run out of food before they get money to buy more. While seasonal workers are able to provide for the needs of their families during the part of the year that they are employed, the income they receive does not permit saving for the remainder of the year. Therefore, when their seasonal employment ends, these workers lack the resources they need to support their families, and must either find new work or other sources of assistance. Unfortunately, because of the limitations of the local economy most cannot find alternative employment. Additionally, because of their seasonal work income, these workers must wait several months before they qualify for any type of food assistance. Since their eligibility changes frequently throughout the year as they obtain “spot jobs,” they also must frequently update their applications and wait for eligibility to be reinstated. During this period, many have no alternative but to depend on family members for support.

This has profound effects on both the immediate families of these workers and their extended family members. As noted in our previous project reports, in this reservation context, there is a cultural imperative to share food and help family members when they are in need. However, in a community in which the poverty and unemployment rates are so high, this dependence on extended family stretches the resources of most families very thin. Thus, while a relatively small proportion (35%) experience persistent hunger, a very large proportion of the population (70%) experience food insecurity. Because of the fluctuations in their income, seasonal workers and their families experience significant periods in which they do not have access to adequate amounts and the quality of food needed to support a healthy life. Consequently, this group of workers experiences almost as high levels of food insecurity and nutritional risk as the unemployed and even higher levels of stress than the unemployed. In sum, seasonal workers are among the most likely in this reservation community to experience food insecurity and the poor nutrition and health problems that often accompany this condition.
References


Buffalo, Kathy. 2000. Personal telephone communication regarding findings of the Northern Cheyenne Diabetes screening.


### Table 1 Changes in Program Recipients for Public Assistance for Rosebud County Public Assistance Programs: 1997-2001

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<td>FAIM</td>
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<tr>
<td>average # of cases monthly</td>
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<td>178.5</td>
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<td>545</td>
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<td>% of pop receiving</td>
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<td>% of pop receiving</td>
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<td>average $ per case</td>
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<td>recipients</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>145</td>
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<td>heat assist cases</td>
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<td>60</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>58</td>
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<td># of children helped</td>
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<td>102</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>62</td>
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<td>$62,169</td>
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*Fiscal Year (FY) ending in June

** Data not available

### Table 2. Program Recipient Statistics for Rosebud Counties in February 1999, February 2000, and February 2001

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<th></th>
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<tr>
<td>Cases</td>
<td>132</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recipients</td>
<td>402</td>
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<td>335</td>
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<td>Percent of population</td>
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<td>Total $</td>
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<td>Cases this month last year</td>
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<td>100</td>
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<td>Average $ per case last year</td>
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<td>Cases this month five years ago</td>
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<td>Average $ per case five years ago</td>
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<td>Percent of population</td>
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<td>222</td>
<td>787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>866</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 4. Responses to Selected Food Security Module Questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>No Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worried whether food would run out before they got money to buy more</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food bought just didn’t last, and didn’t have money to get more</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couldn’t afford balanced meals</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few kinds of low cost food to feed children</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couldn’t afford to feed children balanced meal</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children weren’t eating because couldn’t afford enough food</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix A

Findings from the Northern Cheyenne Survey, 2001 indicate the following patterns concerning food security, nutritional risk, nutritional health, stress and diabetes risk:

1. When asked about employment during the last six months, about 36% of the respondents reported they work full-time, 17% part-time and 15% in seasonal or contract work. Twenty-five percent reported being unemployed, while 8% reported being retired. A much smaller proportion of males (31%) reported working full-time than females (40%) while about half as many women (10%) reported seasonal or contract work as men (20%). Similar proportions of men and women, however, reported working part-time (17%), being unemployed (25%) and retired (8%). A larger proportion of respondents in Muddy Creek (48%) reported full-time employment, followed by Busby (39%), and Ashland (38%). However, a third or less of the respondents in Lame Deer (33%) and Birney (26%) reported full-time work. Part-time work was most prevalent among respondents in Birney (26%), Ashland (19%), and Muddy Creek (17%), followed by Busby (16%) and Lame Deer (15%). Seasonal and contract work were reported most often by respondents from Ashland (19%), Lame Deer (16%) and Busby (14%) and least often by respondents in Muddy Creek (10%) and Birney (5%). The largest proportion of respondents who reported being unemployed resided in Birney (37%), followed by Lame Deer (26%), and Busby (25%) compared to residents of Muddy Creek (19%) and Ashland (16%).

2. In contrast to the proportions of persons reporting full and part-time work, when asked the average number of hours worked per week, a much larger percentage, about 56%, reported that they work up to 30 hours per week, and 36% work from 31 to 40 hours per week. Another 8% reported working more than 41 hours per week. Males and females reported very similar numbers of hours worked. The largest proportions of respondents reporting working 31 hours or more per week were residents of Ashland (58%), Muddy Creek (52%), and Busby (46%). These figures most likely reflect the intensive workloads of persons doing seasonal and contract work as well as those having full-time jobs. Respondents in Birney (37%) and Lame Deer (31%) were somewhat less likely to report working more than 31 hours per week. Larger percentages of respondents from these communities (58% and 55%, respectively) reported working 20 hours or less per week.

3. Figures for diabetes risk categories by age indicate that in all of the age groups the largest percentages of respondents are in the medium risk level: for example, almost half of the first four age groups (18-24, 25-34, 35-44, and 45-54) are in the medium risk level. Those in the high risk category comprise the second largest concentration of these age groups (from 16% to 24%). In the oldest age groups (55-64 and 65+), larger proportions of the respondents are in the very low and low categories of risk. These figures show that except for the oldest age group, each of the age groups has more than 25% of the respondents at high or very high risk for diabetes.

4. Almost a third of respondents who work full-time have a high level of diabetes risk. A similar proportion of those at high risk are unemployed (29%), followed by retired persons (25%), part-time (24%) and seasonal/contract workers (23%). The group with the largest proportion at medium risk for diabetes is part-time workers (61%), followed by seasonal/contract workers (45%), full-time workers (43%) and the unemployed (40%). The groups with the lowest risk level for diabetes are retired persons (39%), seasonal workers (33%) and unemployed persons (32%).

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5. Patterns of nutritional risk also vary considerably by employment status. For example, respondents who work full-time tend to be concentrated in the low (34%) and moderate (35%) risk levels. As employment status moves from full-time to unemployed or retired (i.e., a decline in stable full-time work), however, the proportions of respondents in the two lower risk levels declines. Interestingly, the proportions of respondents in the high risk level increases as well. Thus, part-time workers as well as seasonal workers have 29% and 30% respectively in the low risk group while those who are unemployed and retired have 28% and 11% in the low risk group. Similarly, 31% of full-time workers are in the high risk group while 41% of part-time workers, 45% of seasonal workers and unemployed respondents, and 56% of retired respondents are in the high risk group. These figures suggest that respondents with full-time work are less likely to have health and eating obstacles that put them at nutritional risk than those who work less or have less stable incomes.

6. The distribution of nutritional health by employment status supports the pattern revealed above concerning the effects of employment status on nutritional risk: these data show that respondents with full-time (47%), part-time (55%) and seasonal work (58%) are more likely to have good nutritional health. However, respondents who are unemployed (45%) and retired (33%) are less likely to have good nutrition and more likely to have poor nutrition (35% and 50% respectively). On the other hand, 36% of respondents who work full-time and 34% of those who have seasonal work also have poor nutrition, suggesting that more than a third of these two groups of workers also face challenges to maintaining a good, balanced diet.

7. Distributions of the stress levels by household size and number of children also show that stress increases with family and household size. For example, among households with no or only one child, respondents are evenly distributed between the low stress category (50%) and medium to high stress levels (50%). However, as the number of children increases the proportion of respondents with medium to high stress levels increases.

8. Stress levels also vary by employment status and the number of hours worked per week. For example, approximately 60% of respondents who work full-time or part-time and who do seasonal or contract work reported medium to high stress levels. Those who are unemployed (48%) and are retired (64%), by comparison, have low stress levels. Similarly, 60% of those who work more than 21 hours per week are more likely to have medium to high stress levels compared to those working 20 hours per week (53%).

9. The proportion of respondents who are food secure also declines with the change in employment status from full-time to part-time, seasonal, unemployed and retired: 41% of respondents with full-time employment are food secure compared to 34% of those working part-time, 22% of the seasonal/contract workers, 20% of the unemployed, and 19% of the retired. Examining those who are food insecure, 50% of both the unemployed and retired are food insecure with hunger. Again, these figures dramatically show the difficulties of accessing food by reservation residents who are not employed. However, even employment does not prevent food insecurity for those who work less than full-time: 78% of those attached to the labor force through seasonal and contract work and 66% of part-time workers experience food insecurity, with a third and just over a quarter of these groups, respectively, experiencing food insecurity with hunger. Comparing households with and without children, the general pattern holds with the exception of part-time workers in households without children who experience more food security (45%) than the general pattern for all households (34%) and households with children.
(30%). However, part-time workers in households without children also experience a somewhat higher proportion of food insecurity without hunger (45%) and less food insecurity with hunger (10%) than part-time workers in households with children (36% and 34% respectively).