

Government Nutrition Programs for Low-income Families

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Program Name	Locations in Beloit	Service(s) Provided
TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program)	1. Beloit Pentecostal Tabernacle 2. Beloit Salvation Army 3. Caritas Inc. 4. The Clinton Food Pantry (3)	-3-5 days worth of groceries once a month -nutrition guidelines/advice
WIC (Women, Infants, & Children)	1. Nutrition and Health Associates - 655 Third St., Ste. 100, Beloit, WI 53511	-WIC card which can be used to purchase very specific grocery items -Education about food groups and USDA food pyramid
FoodShare Wisconsin	Various grocery stores	-Wisconsin Quest Card which can be used to purchase grocery items

RESULTS

The WIC program provides nutritional advice, however this advice is based on the USDA food pyramid. While this is better than not providing any advice at all, if the WIC program were not affiliated with the government it could provide nutrition advice based on more accurate food pyramids, such as Walter Willet's.

WIC has a very strict list of which foods can and cannot be purchased with the WIC card. Many of these restrictions are in place to make sure recipients are using their WIC cards to get healthy, nutritional foods. For example, the WIC card can not be used to purchase soda or cigarettes and can only be used for cereals high in iron. However other restrictions are put in place for the benefit of government funded groups. For example, many items can be bought organically or from farmers' markets, but the WIC card can not be used to purchase organic milk. The only reason I can see for such a seemingly arbitrary restriction is to support the Dairy Industry.

TEFAP commodities come from the USDA and are based on what is in season and what is profitable for the USDA. Much of these commodities are high quality and they include fruits and veggies, dried fruits and nuts, and some frozen meats. Frozen meats are always in demand, as the USDA is never able to supply enough of them. Distributors for TEFAP are expected to supplement USDA commodities with donations from local farmers and organizations. Also the supply of commodities from the USDA is dependent on environmental factors. For example, there has been less food on pantry shelves as a result of the hurricanes (3).

The USDA provides a commodity fact sheet for the TEFAP program that explains the nutritional quality of their food items and ways to prepare it. While this is useful, their recipes do not always promote well-balanced diets. However, recipients of TEFAP are often in a state of food insecurity. Their primary concern is getting food, not getting a healthy variety of foods.

FoodShare Wisconsin does not provide any nutrition information or advice. However, they do have a list of which foods can and cannot be purchased with the Wisconsin Quest Card. This provides minimal nutrition guidelines.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

WIC, TEFAP, and FoodShare Wisconsin are beneficial programs. However, each of these programs is flawed as a result of its government affiliation. In several instances responsibilities to the USDA and the Dairy Industry prevent these programs from serving recipients' best interests.

I think the most affective way to address this issue is not to change the government aid programs, but to create a non-government program to supplement WIC, TEFAP and FoodShare Wisconsin. This program could evaluate the other three and provide free nutrition advice to low-income families. It could also guide recipients of government aid in how to use government programs most efficiently.

As the program would not be tied to the government, it would be able to provide unbiased advice and information. The program would be able to place recipients as its primary concern and not have to worry serving the interest of other groups. Examples of services the program could provide include: educating recipients about Walter Willet's food pyramid, showing recipients how to create a balanced diet from the foods they are given, and distributing recipes that promote a balanced diet and use the foods that WIC, TEFAP and FoodShare Wisconsin provide.

ABSTRACT

Government programs that provide food for low-income families are inherently flawed. The flaws of three such programs (WIC, FoodShare Wisconsin, and TEFAP), existing in Beloit, are described in the results section. I have suggested actions to fill their gap. I have found that FoodShare Wisconsin does not provide nutrition advice. The advice that the WIC program, and TEFAP provide is based on the USDA food pyramid which is known to be incorrect. While these programs provide a valuable service to low-income families in Beloit, they are limited by the fact that they are government programs. There should be an independent organization that provides free nutritional counseling, so that recipients of government aid can understand how to best utilize their resources.

INTRODUCTION

Since Beloit College is my home for the next four years, it is important for me to be involved in the greater Beloit community. For my poster project, I wanted to do something that would benefit all of Beloit. I have decided that the best way to do this is by evaluating the nutrition resources available to low-income families in Beloit.

Three government programs that provide aid in the form of food to low-income families in Beloit are: WIC, FoodShare Wisconsin, and TEFAP. WIC (Women, Infants, Children) provides a food card for pregnant/breast feeding women, infants, and Children up to five years of age. WIC also provides nutrition information and a list of foods that can be bought with their card that supports this information. FoodShare Wisconsin replaced Wisconsin's food stamp program. FoodShare Wisconsin provides citizens below the poverty line with a Wisconsin Quest card, which they can use to pay for groceries. TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program) distributes supplemental food to low-income families through food banks. I will evaluate these programs by examining their websites and by speaking with officials from the specific programs and from the city of Beloit. I expect to find that each of the programs is limited by the fact that it is a government program. These programs will only be able to provide aid that is in accordance with government organizations, such as the USDA.

METHODS

I began my search by examining the official government websites for each of these programs. On these sites I was able to find basic explanations of each program, applications, a list of eligibility requirements, and statistics about program recipients. I was able to draw many conclusions based solely on these sites. The next step in my research was to speak with Carrick Davis, a Beloit College student who devoted most of his summer to similar research. Carrick's information helped me to confirm many of my suspicions about the flaws of each program. After speaking with Carrick, I interviewed the program coordinator for TEFAP.9786

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