



Food Insecurity

In the United States of America



Presentation Overview

**Definition
+
Overview**

History

Current Policy

Policy Options





Definition + Overview



Definition

- Per the USDA, food insecurity is “a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life.”
- Independent of whether a household falls above or below poverty line
- One of a set of interconnected issues that low-income households face
- Is classified as a social detriment of health
- Supports poverty’s cyclical nature in the US





High Food Security

Households had no problems, or anxiety about, consistently accessing adequate food

Marginal Food Security

Households had problems or anxiety at times about accessing adequate food, but the quality, variety, and quantity of their food were not substantially reduced

Low Food Security

Households reduced the quality, variety, and desirability of their diets, but the quantity of food intake and normal eating patterns were not substantially disrupted

Very Low Food Security

At times during the year, eating patterns of one or more household members were disrupted and food intake reduced because the household lacked money or other resources for food.



Food Insecurity and Age

- More than 12 million children experience food insecurity in the US yearly
- These children are more likely to be hospitalized/experience health issues
- Experience issues in school and social situations
- Also an issue that faces 1/15 senior citizens





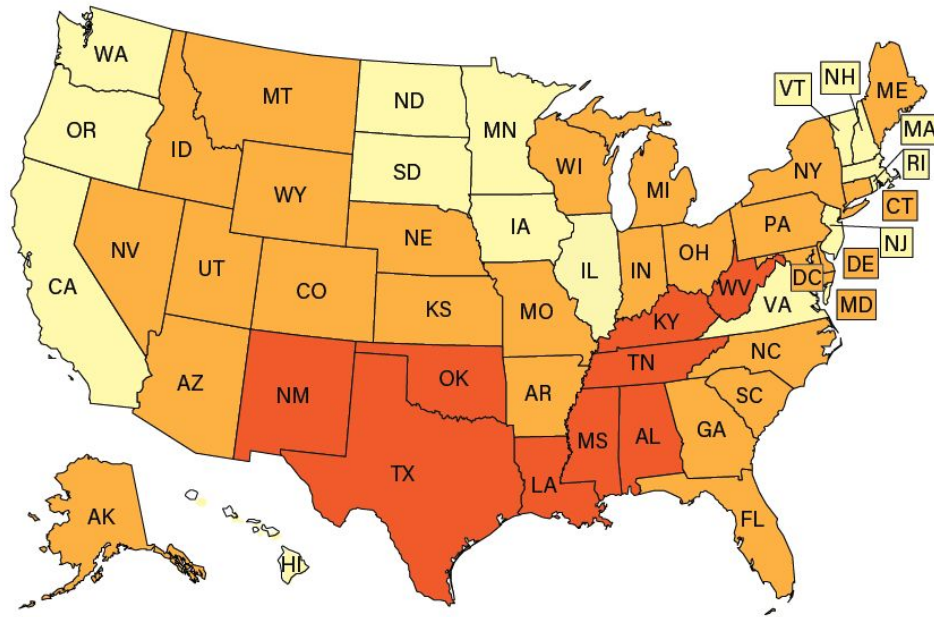
Food Insecurity and Race/Ethnicity

- Latinos are 2.5 times more likely to experience food insecurity than white individuals
- Black children are 3 times more likely to experience food insecurity than white children
- Both groups saw a much greater percentage increase in food insecurity during the pandemic than non-hispanic whites
- Food insecurity is a key part to America's racial wealth gap



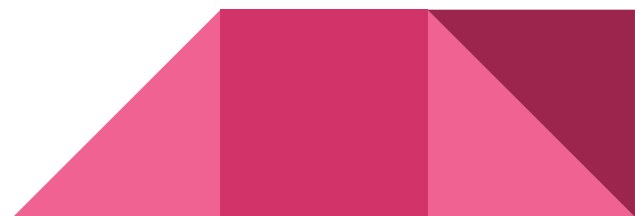


Prevalence of food insecurity, average 2018-20



- Food insecurity below U.S. average
- Food insecurity near U.S. average (10.7 percent)
- Food insecurity above U.S. average

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the December 2018, 2019, and 2020 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements, U.S. Census Bureau.





History



Great Depression

- Food insecurity became a widely noticeable problem in the United States as it transitioned from an agrarian economy to an industrial one
- The first major spike in food insecurity came during the great depression
- Roosevelt's New Deal
 - Food Stamp Program
 - National School Lunch Act
 - First time USDA took on role of combating food insecurity directly
- Eisenhower undid all of these except the NSLA to allow the USDA to refocus on farmers



Kennedy and Johnson

- The economic boom during WWII and food rationing eliminated food insecurity as a large problem in American society
- However it quietly returned during the 50s
- Kennedy's first executive order addressed this issue, re-establishing food stamps and doubling USDA resources to fight food insecurity
- Unlike Eisenhower, Kennedy correctly identified that farm policy and food insecurity policy were linked, as less food insecurity increases consumption
- Johnson continued Kennedy's work, updating the Food Stamp Act in 1964 and introducing a School Breakfast Program



Nixon, Ford and Carter

- The US Senate under president Nixon continued to combat hunger, touring rural America and identifying 280 “hunger counties” to target with policy
- Nixon held the first ever White House Conference on Food and Hunger
- In 1975 the USDA was successfully sued for providing inadequate food stamp levels
- In 1977, Ford helped establish the US’s current Food Stamp Program
- In 1979 Carter incorporated charity Second Harvest into the HUD, which would become the US’s largest hunger relief charity



Reagan, Bush Sr., Clinton

- Economic downturn during the early 80s saw a stagnation in additions to the social security net in general
- During the mid and late 80s Reagan and Bush Sr. largely left food insecurity out of federal policy
- This fueled a massive increase in private charities being formed to combat food insecurity
- Clinton continued this trend by massively slashing the federal food assistance safety net
- Food stamps lost \$23 billion, most other programs saw cutbacks too
- This worsened food insecurity



Summary

- The New Deal showed that even limited federal food support programs could improve the lives of Americans experiencing food insecurity
- During the 60s and 70s Americans enjoyed abundant and largely successful federal food support programs
- During the 80s, 90s and 00s these programs were slowly diminished, with only the school lunch program remaining at its original strength





Current Policy



Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

- Available to households under the poverty line
- 3 month limit for unemployed individuals
- Provides direct financial assistance based on household income- higher income households receive less support
- Total assistance was deemed too low in recent USDA study
- Same study found SNAP to have one of the largest benefits of any social security program in the US
- \$1 spent returns \$1.50 in GDP increase during weak economy period



SNAP for Woman, Infants and Children (WIC)

- Targets pregnant women, and women with infants and children age 5 or under for higher SNAP benefits
- Distributes nutrition education to these individuals
- Also provides healthcare referrals to these women





Child Nutrition Programs

- Federally provided school lunches are mandated country-wide
- Under Obama overall funding for food in schools increased, improving nutritional value and reinstating school breakfasts in many low income counties
- Provides some extra benefits independent from WIC for families
- These are rarely handed out due to incomplete applications, despite large amounts of applications





Special Covid Programs

- Three month limit on SNAP was waived
- SNAP funding was increased by at least \$95 per family
- Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer relief (P-EBT) sent emergency funds to students who were already eligible for reduced price lunches
- Farmers to Family Food Box Program saw the USDA purchase produce from farms and ship over 176 million boxes of healthy produce to families in need



Overall efficacy

- SNAP has one of the highest return on investments for the US government, and does a good job of targeting those most in need with programs like WIC
- Child nutrition programs have improved in recent years, and the school lunch and breakfast programs are effective at combating child hunger
- Both SNAP and school lunch and breakfast programs are underfunded
- This means they can't reach enough people, with SNAP excluding those above the poverty line and school lunches often only being reduced-price to children in need
- Many children do not have access to government funded lunches or breakfast during summer
- SNAP recipients often live in areas where their SNAP funding can't be used to buy healthy foods anyways



Policy Options



Suggested Expansions and Cutbacks to Currently Enacted Policies

- Increase funding to SNAP, especially during times of economic downturn
 - Proven successful policy
 - One of the most efficient places to introduce stimulus
 - Current SNAP funding is inadequate
- End Child Nutrition Programs not ran through schools
 - High cost compared to benefit, especially when compared to SNAP, WIC and School Lunch programs
 - Use extra funding to help expand the above programs
- End special Covid benefits
 - Divert these funds to permanent programs
 - Keep the overall raise in investment in food support programs- they now match the level they were at during the 70s



Suggested Improvements to Currently Enacted Policies

- Improve SNAP eligibility to potentially include those above poverty line
 - Improve SNAP screening system to better identify those experiencing food insecurity
 - Allows SNAP to now help those above the poverty line, but still experiencing food insecurity
- Lower the threshold for students to receive reduced-price or free lunches
 - Childhood food insecurity has the longest lasting impact, and thus should be the first priority for any increase in funding



Suggested New Policies to Enact

- Given food insecurity is both a cause and result of poverty, a wider set of legislation combating poverty is needed to effectively combat food insecurity
- Reinstate summer food assistance program to help feed children when school is out
- Create a structure to easily boost funding to SNAP during economic crisis
- Should the economy experience a recession, reinstate the successful Farmers to Family Food Box Program
- Implement incentives such as tax breaks for grocery stores to move into low income communities to eliminate food deserts that cause SNAP funds to only be usable on unhealthy foods



Recap

- Food insecurity is both a result of poverty and a cause for poverty
- It re-enforces the racial wealth gap
- Higher government spending has historically been successful at combating food insecurity
- Current federal food programs are working, but are still inadequate
- The US should increase overall funding to SNAP and to Child Nutrition Programs
- The US should also make these programs more accessible
- The US should focus on combating food deserts as partner legislation to SNAP
- Overall, a broad piece of legislation attacking poverty as a whole is needed to rectify food insecurity

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