

## [Household Food Security in the United States in 2021 – YouTube](#)

Good afternoon, everyone, my name is Valerie Negron your host for today's webinar. On behalf of USDA's Economic Research Service, welcome and thank you for joining us. Before we begin, I'd like to remind you that this webinar is being recorded and will be posted on the ERS website next week. If you have any questions, please enter them into the chat feature at the bottom left-hand corner of your screen and our presenter will answer them during a Q&A session after the presentation. Now, it's a pleasure to introduce Alicia Coleman-Jenson, our speaker today. Alicia earned her PhD in rural sociology and demography from the Pennsylvania State University. She joined USDA's Economic Research Service in 2009 and is a Social Science analyst and U.S. Food security research team leader. In addition to leading ERS's annual report on Household Food Security in the United States, Alicia's work includes research in understanding determinants and outcomes of food insecurity and methodological research on food security measurements. Thank you for joining us today, Alicia. The floor is yours.

Thank you, Valerie. Good afternoon, everyone, and thanks for joining us today. I will be presenting findings from the Household Food Security report released this morning. First, I'd like to acknowledge my colleagues on the report, Matthew Rabbit and Christian Gregory of ERS and Anita Singh of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service. I'd also like to acknowledge my colleague Laura Hales of ERS who created our data visualizations that will be posted later today. Of course, there are many people behind the scenes making the report release, the data release, and this webinar happen, so thanks to all of them as well. The report released this morning describes the food security of U.S households during calendar year 2021 and is based on USDA's most recent annual food security survey conducted in December 2021. The report provides information on how many U.S households had difficulty putting enough food on the table.

So, I'm going to begin going over a summary of the main findings and then I'll go back into more detail. The percentage of U.S. households that were food insecure in 2021 was unchanged from 2020. And in our annual report we include a note in the introduction about the COVID-19 pandemic. So, we all know the Coronavirus pandemic began in the United States in 2020 and continued in 2021. Public health and economic effects of the pandemic, as well as some pandemic related changes to assistance programs continued in 2021. The prevalence of food insecurity is determined by many factors including the economy, federal, state, and local policies, and household circumstances. This report does not provide an analysis of possible causal explanations for the prevalence of or trends in food insecurity. We do know from some other research that ERS has previously- previously published, as well as other research from academics and others, that increases in nutrition assistance and other benefits, other forms of assistance, do help to reduce food insecurity. So, going back to those key findings from the report release this morning, food insecurity affected 10.2 percent of all U.S. households in 2021, including 3.8 percent of U.S. households with very low food security. Very low food security is the more severe range of food insecurity. The prevalence of very low food security was also not significantly different from 2020. The prevalence of food insecurity did increase for some household groups, including households with no children, so these are adult only households, and the prevalence of food insecurity for these households with no children changed from 8.8 percent in 2020 to 9.4 percent in 2021. Within these households with no children, food insecurity increased significantly for women living alone from 11 percent in 2020 to 13.2 percent in 2021. There was also a statistically significant increase for elderly people living alone, these are adults aged 65 plus living alone and that increased from 8.3 percent in 2020 to 9.5 percent in 2021. The

prevalence of food insecurity declined for some groups including households with children from 14.8 percent in 2020 to 12.5 percent in 2021.

So, the question that we're trying to answer with these statistics is: how many U.S. households were consistently able to put adequate food on the table? So, today we'll talk about how food security is measured, the food security survey, and then go into more detail and findings from the annual food security report. We'll close and then open- open the floor to some Q&A.

So, to make sure that we're all on the same page to begin with, here are USDA's food security definitions. We hope all U.S. households are food secure, meaning they have access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members. Food insecurity refers to households that were unable, at some time during the year, to provide adequate food for one or more household members because of a lack of resources. So, I want to unpack this definition a little bit. So, you see, its sometime during the year, this means that some households may have a single occurrence of food insecurity. For example, if they experience unemployment or something to that nature, whereas other households might be more consistently or more chronically food insecure. But a single occurrence of food insecurity would classify a household as food insecure for the year. To provide adequate food from one or more household members. So, if a single person in the household is food insecure that entire household is food insecure and then because of a lack of resources. So, this is about not having enough food or other- excuse me, not having enough money, or other resources for food, this is not about things like dieting, or not having enough time to eat. Very low food security is a subset of food insecurity. So, this is the more severe range of food insecure households. And very low food security means that normal eating patterns of some household members were disrupted at times during the year and their food intake reduced because they could not afford enough food. So, when we talk about disruptions and normal eating patterns, we're referring to things like households skipping meals, or respondents reporting that they're going an entire day without eating. Households with very low food security are telling us that they're just not able to afford enough food.

Sorry about that. So, like many things, food security is a continuum. Early research showed that food insecurity was a managed process, meaning they had some control over how food insecurity is experienced, and that households tend to experience similar conditions as they moved through food security and food insecurity. So, we hope that all households are at the top of this graphic, that they are food secure and can afford enough healthy food. But as food security deteriorates, households may become a- full food supply and try to stretch their food and food budget. They may try to juggle household spending to maintain food security. As food insecurity, worsens households may reduce the quality and variety of food, or rely on low-cost foods. And if food insecurity becomes more severe, down toward the bottom of the graphic represented by the dark orange pinkish and reddish colors, adults may reduce their own food intake while trying to ensure that children get enough to eat. And in the most severe situations, we see reduced food intake among children.

This slide shows examples of the food security survey items that are included in the survey. Households are asked a series of 10 questions about food insecurity for the household as a whole, and adults in the household. Households with children are asked in additional eight items about children's food insecurity. These questions follow the full range of severity of food insecurity that we discussed on the next slide. Households must respond, on the previous slide excuse me. Households must respond affirmatively to at least three items indicating food

insecurity to be considered food insecure. So, for example: “we worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more”. Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 12 months? So, a couple of things I want to point out here, these follow sort of the definition of food insecurity, so they're talking about being worried about whether you have enough food before you got money to buy more. And they ask about frequency in the last 12 months. So, the response of often or sometimes would be considered affirmative. Another example: “we couldn't afford to eat balanced meals”. Was that often, sometimes, are never true for you in the last 12 months? “In the last 12 months did you ever cut the size of your meals, or skip meals, because there wasn't enough money for food”? A response of yes to this question would be considered affirmative. And “in the last 12 months did you ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food”? So, again these questions follow the- the full continuum of food security status representing both low and very low food security. And you can find the full range of questions included in the Annual Food Security Report as well as on the ERS website.

Now, I'm going to turn and talk about the data. So, the current population survey is conducted monthly by the U.S Census Bureau. About 40,000 households are interviewed each month. It's representative of the U.S. civilian population. The CPS is also the source of federal employment statistics and unemployment statistics, as well as poverty statistics. The food security supplement to the CPS is sponsored by USDA's Economic Research Service. The food security supplement has been conducted annually since 1995 and has been fielded consistently in December since 2001. So, the data is collected each year in mid-December, and the questions asked about food security in the prior 12 months. So, the- the survey responses cover the calendar year for 2021. The 2021 food security survey interviewed about 34,343 households and was representative- a representative sample of the U.S. civilian population.

Excuse me, I think I said that number wrong it's 30,343 households. So, this slide shows the main findings from the Annual Food Security Report. In 2021, 10.2 percent of U.S households were food insecure that's equivalent to about 13.5 million households. And within that, 6.4 percent of U.S. households experienced low food security. Low food security typically means reductions in dietary quality and variety. Very low food security is the more severe range of food insecurity that affected 3.8 percent of U.S. households in 2021. Households with very low food security report reductions in dietary quality and variety as well as reduced intake. And very low food security affected 5.1 million households in 2021.

Turning now to trends in food insecurity and very low food security, over time. This graph shows the prevalence of food insecurity, which includes low and very low food security, and the blue bar- or the blue Line near the top of the graph. And very low food security is represented by the red line, towards the bottom of the graph. And I've included some key numbers on the graph to help orient you. In 2007, 11.1 percent of U.S households were food insecure. We saw an increase in food insecurity with the onset of the Great Recession in 2008 when 14.6 percent of U.S households were food insecure. And that prevalence peaked at 14.9 percent in 2011. Since that time, we saw declines in food insecurity. And both 2019 and 2020 10.5 percent of U.S households were food insecure. And in 2021, 10.2 percent of U.S households were food insecure. The difference between 10.5 percent in 2019 and 2020, and 10.2 in 2021 was not statistically significant. That means that difference could have resulted from sampling variation. The prevalence of very low food security shows that in 2007, 4.1 percent of U.S. households experienced very low food security, and that increased to 5.7 percent in 2008. We saw a decline

since that time and in 2019 4.1 percent of U.S. households experienced very low food security. And in 2020 the prevalence was 3.9 percent and in 2021 the prevalence was 3.8 percent. The 2021 prevalence of 3.8 percent is not statistically different from the 2019 or the 2020 prevalence of very low food security.

The next four- four slides have a series of bar charts showing the prevalence of food insecurity and very low food security by household characteristics. If you're interested in looking at the underlying statistics in more detail, you can find those in table two of the report released this morning. So, overall there were there are two things to take away from these charts. First, they show those household characteristics related to a higher prevalence of food insecurity. And we find that the patterns of groups with a relatively higher prevalence of food insecurity tend to be the same from year to year. Second, these graphs show changes in the prevalence of food insecurity by household characteristics between 2020 and 2021. Bars marked with an asterisk show a statistically significant change in the prevalence rates between years. Statistical significance is related both to the size of the change and the margins of error around the estimate. Upward arrows indicate statistically significant increases from 2020 to 2021. So, this first chart shows the prevalence of food insecurity by household composition. First, let's look at the 2021 prevalence. In 2021, food insecurity rates were higher for all households with children, especially single mother families and single father families. So now, I'm going to talk about the changes from 2020 to 2021. And again, those are marked with asterisks. Food insecurity declined significantly for all households with children, including those with young children under age six, married couples with children, and single mothers with children. Food insecurity increased significantly for all households with no children, so these are adult only households. And food insecurity increased especially for women living alone and elderly adults living alone. Elderly here is defined as adults aged 65.

And over this chart shows the prevalence of food insecurity by race and ethnicity, by income, and by metropolitan residence. Again, let's look at the 2021 prevalence levels first. Food insecurity rates were higher for households with a reference person who was Black, non-Hispanic, or a reference person who was Hispanic. A reference person refers to an adult household member in the survey who owns, or rents, the housing unit sample. So, you can think of a reference person as sort of a head of household. Food insecurity is also higher for low-income households. This is to be expected, given that food insecurity is related to constrained resources. Income here is represented by household income-to-poverty ratios. So, under one means a household income the household's income is below the federal poverty line. We also include under 1.3, or 130 percent, of the federal poverty line and then under 1.85, or 185 percent, of the federal poverty line. And we include those thresholds because they're relevant for eligibility for participation in federal nutrition assistance programs. Food insecurity was also higher in principal cities within metropolitan areas and in non-metropolitan areas outside of metro areas. Looking at changes, statistically significant changes from 2020 to 2021, you can see that food insecurity declined for households with Black, non-Hispanic reference persons and also declined for low-income households.

These next two charts are formatted similarly to the previous two but focus on the more severe range of very low food security. So, this first chart shows the prevalence of very low food security by household composition. The pattern of findings here for very low food security is similar to the patterns of findings that we see for food insecurity. The highest prevalence of very low food security but for single mothers with children. From 2020 to 2021, the prevalence of

food a very low food security increased significantly for only one group, that's elderly adults living alone. And very low food security declined significantly for households with more than one adult and no children.

This shows the prevalence of very low food security in 2020 and 2021 for race and ethnicity of the household reference person, household income, and by area of residence. Very low food security tends to be higher for households with Black, non-Hispanic reference persons and low-income households. Very low food security declined significantly from 2020 to 2021 for households with White, non-Hispanic reference persons.

To this point, all the estimates have shown have been based on a single year of data, but these state level estimates combine data from 2019 through 2021. Data for three years are combined to provide more reliable state level statistics. On the map shown, states shaded darker orange had higher than average food insecurity rates. So, in terms of food insecurity these states were worse off because food insecurity was more prevalent. States shaded medium orange had food insecurity rates that were near the national average. That's to say the difference from the national average for these states was not statistically significant. States shaded yellow had food insecurity rates that were below the national average. So, in terms of food insecurity these states were better off because they had lower food insecurity rates. You can find the actual statistics for the prevalence of food insecurity and very low food security in the report in *Table Four*. There are a number of factors that account for interstate differences in food insecurity. For example, characteristics of households within the state are related to state food insecurity rates. So, example- for example, households that had higher poverty rates, or higher unemployment rates, are likely to have higher food insecurity rates as well. The state level economy also matters. For example, average wages at the state level and costs of housing play a role in state level food insecurity rates. As well as state level policies. So policies that may affect participation in nutrition assistance programs or things like the state Earned Income Tax Credit.

The prevalence of household food insecurity by states for the current period 2019-2021, ranges from 5.4 percent in New Hampshire to 15.3 percent in Mississippi. In the food security report, in *Table Five*, we present changes over time in state level. Food security rates we can compare the current three-year period, 2019-2021, for the previous three-year period, 2016-18, as well as the previous period 10 years earlier, so 2009 to 2011. There were significant declines in food insecurity from the 2016-18 period to 2019-21 and 14 states, and those are listed on the slide. There were no statistically significant increases in the state level prevalence of food insecurity from 2016-18 to 2019-21. The prevalence of very low food security, during the period 2019-21, ranges from 1.8 percent in North Dakota to 6.3 percent in Arkansas.

I'm going to turn now and talk about food security among children. Food insecurity in households with children is somewhat more complex than it is in households without children because food insecurity is measured for the household overall, and then among adults and children separately. Studies have shown that parents will try to protect their children from food insecurity even when the parents themselves experience reduced diet quality and intake. So, in some food insecure households, only adults are reported to be food insecure. Food insecurity among children means that households were unable, at some time during the year, to provide

adequate nutritious food for their children. Very low food security among children means that caregivers reported that children were hungry, skipped a meal, or did not eat for a whole day because there was not enough money for food. Very low food security is indented under food insecurity among children because again this is the more severe range of food insecurity. And very low food security among children is the most severe level of food insecurity that we measure and report on for the USDA statistics.

This slide shows the percent of U.S. households, with children, by household food security status. There's a lot going on in the slide, I'm going to start at the top right and work down through. In 2021, 12.5 percent of U.S. households with children were food insecure. That's about 4.6 million households. And about half of these households, only adults were food insecure, that's represented by the blue slice of the chart labeled the food insecure adults only. And the rest, 6.2 percent of households with children, or about 2.3 million households, children were also food insecure at times during the year. In this group of households, the quality or quantity of children's diets was affected by food insecurity. And then within food insecurity among children we have low food security among children and very low food security among children. Very low food security among children affected 0.7 percent of households with children, or about 274,000 households. And this group of households parents reported that children were hungry. So, on the next slide I'm going to be showing the trends in food insecurity in U.S. households with children. And I'm using this slide just to point out which three categories we're going to be talking about. So, food insecurity in households with children, where adults or children or both were food insecure, food insecurity among children where parents are reporting that children are directly affected by food insecurity, and then very low food security among children. And I will say that I'm- in households with food insecurity among children parents are also affected, we're using these labels to point to the impacts on children.

So, this top blue line represents food insecurity in households with children, where adults or children are both are affected by food insecurity. The middle purple line represents food insecurity among children, where children are having impacts of food insecurity and reduced dietary quality, variety, or reduced intake. And then very low food security among children near the bottom of the graph, where children aren't getting enough to eat. So, similar to overall food insecurity trends, food insecurity in households with children increased in 2008, and then declined. And I'm going to focus on the most- three most recent years, the numbers are included on the slide here. So, in 2019, 13.6 percent of U.S. households with children were food insecure, and that increased to 14.8 percent in 2020. And that change was statistically significant. From 2020 to 2021, we had a statistically significant decline in food insecurity, from 14.8 percent to 12.5 percent. The 12.5 percent prevalence in 2021, is statistically significantly below both the 2019 prevalence and the 2020 prevalence. I'm going to turn now and talk about the middle purple line food insecurity among children and I'm going to focus on the last three years. So, in 2019, 6.5 percent of U.S households with children had food insecurity among children, and that increased in 2020 to 7.6 percent. From 2020 to 2021, there was a statistically significant decline in food insecurity among children from 7.6 percent to 6.2 percent. The prevalence of food insecurity among children in 2021, of 6.2 percent, is not statistically different from the 2019 prevalence of 6.5 percent. And then finally, looking at very low food security among children, near the bottom of the graph. In 2019, 0.6 percent of households with children reported very low food security among children. In 2020, 0.8 percent, and in 2021 0.7 percent of households with

children have very low food security among children. And those differences are not statistically significant, 0.7 percent is not statistically different from 0.6 or 0.8 percent.

There are three sections of the *Household Food Security Report*. We just covered the main section which is the first one about food insecurity by household characteristics and state level estimates. We also examine food spending and participation in nutrition assistance programs. So, this slide shows median weekly food spending by food security status. So, we report median weekly food spending in two ways. One, is dollars per person in the household and one is relative to the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan. So, let's look first at dollars per person. In December of 2021, food secure households were reported to spend about 65 dollars per person per week. And food insecure households reported spending about 53 dollars per person per week. So, this is what we would expect given that food insecurity is related to not being able to afford enough food, we would expect that food insecure households would spend less on food. We also examine food spending relative to the Thrifty Food Plan. The Thrifty Food Plan, or the TFP, serves as a national standard for a nutritious, practical, cost-effective diet that represents a set of market baskets of foods and beverages that people in specific age and sex categories could commonly consume at home, that are lower in price and of higher nutritional quality to maintain a healthful diet that meets current dietary standards. The TFP was revised in 2021, so the estimates of food spending, relative to the TFP, are not comparable with estimates from earlier years. The TFP is able to take into account estimated food needs of households, given the age and sex composition of household members. So, considering the estimated food needs, the typical food secure household spent about 16 percent more for food than the typical food insecure household.

A section of the report considers federal nutrition assistance programs and food security. This slide shows the share of food insecure households that participated in these federal nutrition assistance programs during the 30 days before the survey. These are the three largest federal nutrition assistance programs: the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, the Free or Reduced Price School Lunch Program, and the WIC program, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women Infants and Children. Excuse me, I just had to get a drink of water. So, we see that the majority of food insecure households, about 56 percent, report participation- participating in one of these three federal programs. There are some caveats about these estimates. One is that these are self-reported data. We know that participation in nutrition assistance programs is underreported in federal surveys, so there's likely some degree of underreporting in these estimates. Another caveat regarding the free or reduced preschool lunch is that most U.S. school children were eligible to receive school meals because of COVID-19 waivers, in December 2021. And we did not ask specifically about participation in COVID era programs like Pandemic EBT. So, these percentages represent the percent of food and secure households that participated in the program. Some food insecure households may not have been eligible for any of these programs. For example, if households were not low income or did not have children, or pregnant women they may not have been eligible for any of these programs. So about 42 percent of food insecure households reported participating in SNAP 25 reported receiving free reduced price school meals, and eight percent reported receiving WIC. About 44 percent received- reported receiving none of these programs. They may have been ineligible for the program, there may have been some misreporting of program participation, or they may have not- chosen not to participate for other reasons.

We also ask about use of community nutrition assistance programs, like food pantries and emergency kitchens, or soup kitchens. Participation in these programs is lower than it is for federal nutrition assistance programs, but it's more common for households that are experiencing food insecurity, especially for those that are experiencing very low food security. And the statistics on participation in community nutrition assistance programs is available in the statistical supplement to the *Household Food Security Report*. So, in 2021, about 5.6 percent of U.S. households reported receiving food from a food pantry. And then about 31 percent of food insecure households reported receiving food from a food pantry and about 40 percent of very low food secure households reported receiving food from a food pantry. Participation or received of meals from soup kitchens was much lower, but again, more common for those that were food insecure. So, about two and a half percent of food insecure households reported receiving meals from food pantry or- excuse me, a soup kitchen and 3.8 percent reported- 3.8 percent of very low food secure households reported receiving meals from a soup kitchen.

So, all the statistics, so far, presented represented food insecurity measured over the past year. When food insecurity is measured over a shorter period, such as 30 days, the prevalence is lower. So, this slide shows the prevalence of food insecurity and any time during the year. So, in the calendar year 2021. As well as in the 30 days before the survey. Again, the survey is conducted in mid-December. So, these represent food and security statistics from mid-November to mid-December 2021. In 2021, 5.5 percent of households were food insecure in the 30 days before the survey. And very low food security affected 2.2 percent of households from mid-November to mid-December. And these are not significantly different from the 2020 rates of 30 day food insecurity.

So, in closing, just to recap some of the things we discussed today. Food insecurity was unchanged from 10.5 percent in 2020 to 10.2 percent in 2021. The prevalence of food insecurity increased for households with no children in 2021, especially for women living alone and elderly people living alone. The prevalence of food insecurity decreased for some groups in 2021, including households with children. You can find a great deal of information and resources about food security on the ERS website. And I did want to mention that we'll have more updates posted later today when the data visualizations are posted. And they include statistics on food security, food insecurity by education, employment, and disability status, as well as the new data visualization on state level food insecurity rates. Thank you, I believe we'll open the webinar for questions now so I'll turn things over to Valerie.

Thank you, Alicia. We'll go ahead and open the floor for questions now. As a reminder, questions can be submitted through the chat feature located at the bottom left hand corner of your screen.

All right. Now, for our first question: elderly adults living alone was the only category that had increases in both food insecurity and very low food security from 2020 to 2021. Do you know why?

Thanks for that question. So, it's difficult to say exactly what it- may have caused increases in food insecurity and very low food security for elderly adults living alone. Previous research has shown that nutrition assistance programs, and other form of assistance, can help to ameliorate or reduce food insecurity. And in 2021, elderly adults living alone may not have qualified for some of those programs. For example, the child's tax credit and the pandemic EBT, those were only available to households with children. So, that may be some factors, but we really need more

research to understand how age and household composition have affected food insecurity in recent years, especially since the pandemic.

Great, thanks Alicia. Another question related to that group: do you have the trends over time comparing the elderly households?

I don't have those off the top of my head. That information is available in all of the annual food security reports and we could look at that in more detail.

Up next, Alicia: the annual report this year did not include any information on food insufficiency from the household pulse survey. Is that information still available?

Yes, statistics from the household pulse survey are continuing to be updated and that is on the ERS website. So, we have information on food insufficiency during 2021 and 2022. We have a page specifically on COVID-19 and effects on food and consumers. The estimates for the household pulse survey show that food insufficiency has been increasing in 2020- 2022, um those trends could be related to inflation, especially food prices as previous research has found that inflation and food prices, in particular, were related to trends in food hardships.

Okay, next question is food insecurity increased from 2020 to 2021 for households with no children. How many more of those households were food insecure in 2021?

That's right. Food insecurity increased for all households with no children from 8.8 percent to 9.4 percent. And those numbers- for the number of food insecure households are included in *Table Two* in the *Annual Food Security Report*. The number of households with no children that were food insecure increased from about 8.1 million to 8.9 million. So, about 800,000 more households with no children were food insecure in 2021. Now that increase was concentrated among women living alone, where the prevalence of food insecurity increased from 11 percent in 2020 to 13.2 percent in 2021. And that translates to about 600,000 more women living alone who were food insecure in 2021.

All right, here's another question: is it fair to say that food insecurity for households with children reached the lowest rate in two decades?

Yes, let me pull up that chart. So, you can see here that the prevalence of food insecurity in households with children, this top blue line, is below the rates that we've seen back to 2001 at 12.5 percent.

Next question, Alicia. Is food security solely based on serving households and asking them directly? Is there any economic data to define what a food secure household looks like in terms of income or any other economic indicators?

For these statistics, food security status is based solely on the household's responses to the food security measure. That measure has been validated in a number of ways. As I mentioned, we've been collecting data on food security since 1995 and even before that with the development of the food security measure. And since that time, the food security measure has been validated in terms of understanding that food insecure households tend to have lower incomes, they tend to have a poorer dietary outcome, or lower nutrition nutritional status and food secure household, they tend to have poorer health outcomes. So, this is a survey-based measure, it's referred to as an experiential measure, asking about people's experiences of food insecurity. But it does track with a number of other economic as well as health indicators.

Next question: do you have any statistics on food providers and emergency food resources?

The only statistics we have in our *Annual Food Security Report* are based on asking the respondents in the survey whether they received food from emergency food providers, especially food pantries and- and soup kitchens. We don't have statistics on the providers themselves.

Thanks, Alicia. What role does transportation play in food security?

That's an interesting question. So, we don't ask specific questions about the role of transportation and food insecurity. Some- there are statistics on food access in U.S. households that ERS produces, and they look, in particular, for example at households that are low income and have low access to food resources. Some ways that transportation may affect food insecurity is through household resources. For example, if a household can't travel to a store that may provide lower prices, or has to rely on public transit, or paying out of pocket for transportation. Those may increase costs of accessing food and may impact food insecurity in those ways.

All right, here's another question related to the term soup kitchens: Alicia, do soup kitchens include Meals on Wheels and / or community senior centers?

We have a separate question in the survey that asks about receiving of meals, particularly for seniors related to Meals on Wheels and soup kitchens or senior centers. So, these statistics do not include those other providers, this is focused more on- on soup kitchens that are available to- to all people, not just seniors.

Next question, Alicia: does ERS look at immigration status or ability to be included or enrolled in federal nutrition programs as it relates to food security?

We do not consider eligibility for nutrition assistance programs for these statistics. The only sort of way that we consider eligibility is by looking specifically at low-income households. But we don't try to estimate eligibility more specifically than that. The current population survey does ask whether respondents are immigrants or U.S. citizens, but we do not examine those data in the *Annual Food Security Report*.

Thanks, Alicia. For your next question: why do you think food insecurity declined in 2020 for households with children but increased for households with no children?

So, again I think we need to do more research to understand specifically those trends in recent years. The Census Bureau did some research with the household pulse survey that suggests that, for example, the child tax credit helped to reduce food insufficiency which is a related form of food hardship for households with children. So, that may have been a factor here, that households with children had access to resources such as the child tax credit, preschool meals, and Pandemic EBT- that one has been available to households without children, so that could play a role but we can't say definitively what caused those trends.

Next question, Alicia: were seniors asked if they are the primary caregiver for a grandchild? This listener is curious if this population is broken out and if so, what their food insecurity rates are?

That's an interesting question so I pulled up this slide by household composition. So, the category with children and with no children are mutually exclusive, meaning a household can't be in both of those categories. But this category of with children and with elderly are not mutually exclusive. So, you could have a household that includes both elderly and children. That

does not apply to elderly living alone, these are truly elderly adults living alone, by themselves, so they would not have children in their household. In the current population survey data you can identify whether an elderly adult is a caregiver or has children living with them. So, you could examine the impacts on caregivers, but we did not look at those statistics specifically for this *Annual Food Security Report*. Thank you, Alicia. Up next: how do rates of participation in federal nutrition programs, such as SNAP and WIC in 2021, compare to 2020?

Let me, oops- that's not it. Okay, here's the slide- let me just pull up these. We don't examine statistical significance for changes for this- for these statistics specifically because some of the issues I mentioned earlier, with regard to under-reporting of nutrition assistance programs. But I'm pulling up the statistics from 2020, so you can see here these are 2021 statistics on the slide, 56 percent of food insecure households participated in one of these three programs. In 2020 that figure was 54.6 percent so about 55 percent. So, they're, you know, there's not a lot of difference in those estimates.

All right, here's another question: how does inflation affect food insecurity?

Yeah, this is another good question, thank you. So, research has shown that inflation, especially changes in food price, do impact food insecurity trends and research by ERS authors has also shown that food prices, or changes in food prices, can affect food insecurity for SNAP participants. It's important to note here that these data cover food insecurity in 2021 and food price inflation was larger in 2021 and 2022 than in 2020. So, ERS produces a Food Price Outlook, and they find that food price inflation is much larger in 2022 than it was in 2021.

Next question, Alicia: how does the rate of food insecurity for households without children in 2021 compare to in 2019 and other years before the pandemic? Okay, you guys are keeping me on my toes. So, and- and I don't have the statistics off the top of my head to look at to show- to tell you the actual numbers, but we did find that in 2020 where we saw increases in food insecurity it was for households with children. And when we saw decreases in food insecurity from 2019 to 2020, it was for men and women living alone and we basically find the opposite this year. So, from 2019 to 2020 we saw that food insecurity in households with children increased, and then from 2020 to 2021 it declined. For- and then, for example, looking specifically at women living alone food insecurity decreased from 2019 to 2020, and then increased from 2020 to 2021.

Thank you, Alicia, and we're running close to time so let's see how many questions we can fit in here. Your next question: is there any correlation or studies done with food insecurities, or food- and food deserts. Let me repeat that question. Is there any correlation. or studies. done with food insecurities and food deserts?

So, there has been research looking at food access geographic, food access and food insecurity. I would say that research has generally shown that economic access to a food- to food plays a bigger role in food insecurity than geographic access. For example, even if someone lives in an area with- with lots of full-service grocery stores if they don't have enough money to spend at those grocery stores, they're still going to be food insecure. But there's a whole line of research on- on geographic food access at ERS. For example, with the Food Access Research Atlas that interested people might want to look at.

All right, Alicia, I think this may be our last question. Has anything been asked about families receiving the child tax credit?

No, and that's a good question as well. So, unfortunately, we didn't add any specific questions related to specific COVID era programs, we asked the same questions in the food security supplement in 2021 that we've been asking in previous years. But there is the household pulse survey which is another data product available from the Census Bureau and ERS has been collaborating with them on adding a food insufficiency question. So, food insufficiency is related to food security but it's just a single survey item so it's easier to include in a survey. And they do ask about receipt of specific benefits related to COVID like the child tax credit, so that's another data source to understand food hardships during the pandemic.

All right, we received many great questions but that's all the time we have for today. Alicia, thank you for a great presentation on the prevalence and severity of food insecurity in U.S. households in 2021 and thank you to our listeners for taking time out of your day to join us. We hope this has been helpful. Lastly, if you haven't done so already, we'd like to invite you all to download the new ERS charts of note mobile app. With this app, available free of charge on Apple and Android devices, you can receive digital snapshots of ERS research delivered straight to your mobile device. In addition to our website and charts of note app, you can find more ERS content on our social media sites, like Twitter and LinkedIn. Again, thank you for joining us today. This concludes our webinar.