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Household Food Security in the United States in 2015

Alisha Coleman-Jensen, Matthew P. Rabbitt, Christian A. Gregory, and Anita Singh

What Is the Issue?

Most U.S. households have consistent, dependable access to enough food for active, healthy living—they are food secure. But some American households experience food insecurity at times during the year, meaning their access to adequate food is limited by a lack of money and other resources. USDA's food and nutrition assistance programs increase food security by providing low-income households access to food, a healthful diet, and nutrition education. USDA monitors the extent and severity of food insecurity in U.S. households through an annual, nationally representative survey sponsored and analyzed by USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS). This report presents statistics from the survey covering households' food security, food expenditures, and use of Federal food and nutrition assistance programs in 2015.

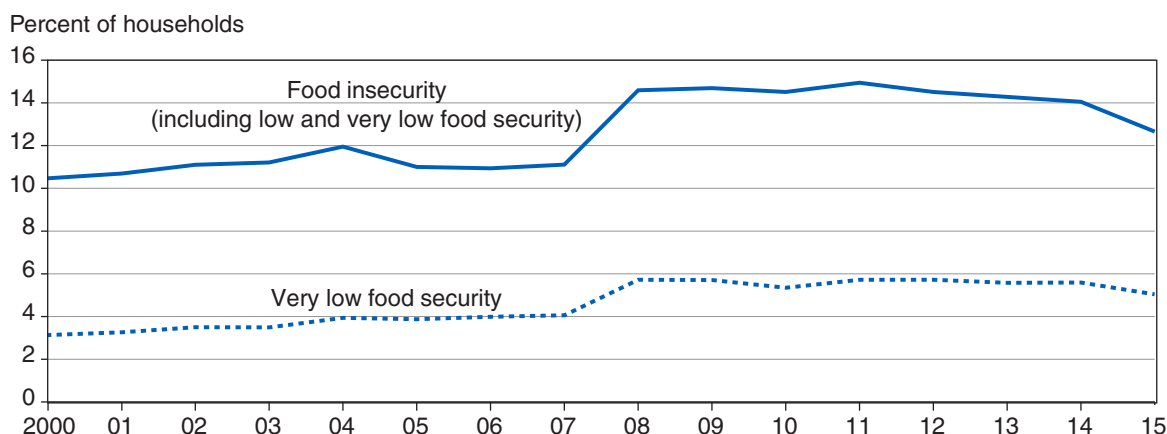
What Did the Study Find?

The estimated percentage of U.S. households that were food insecure in 2015 declined significantly from 2014, to 12.7 percent, continuing a downward trend in food insecurity from a high of 14.9 percent in 2011. The 2015 prevalence of food insecurity was still above the 2007 pre-recessionary level of 11.1 percent. In 2015, the percentage of households with food insecurity in the severe range—very low food security—also declined significantly.

- In 2015, 87.3 percent of U.S. households were food secure throughout the year. The remaining 12.7 percent (15.8 million households) were food insecure. Food-insecure households (those with low and very low food security) had difficulty at some time during the year providing enough food for all their members due to a lack of resources. The decline from 2014 (14.0 percent) was statistically significant.
- In 2015, 5.0 percent of U.S. households (6.3 million households) had *very low food security*, down from 5.6 percent in 2014. In this more severe range of food insecurity, the food intake of some household members was reduced and normal eating patterns were disrupted at times during the year due to limited resources. This decline was also statistically significant.
- Children were food insecure at times during the year in 7.8 percent of U.S. households with children (3.0 million households), down significantly from 9.4 percent in 2014. These households were unable at times during the year to provide adequate, nutritious food for their children.

ERS is a primary source of economic research and analysis from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, providing timely information on economic and policy issues related to agriculture, food, the environment, and rural America.

Prevalence of food insecurity and very low food security in 2015 is down from 2014



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

- While children are usually shielded from the disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake that characterize very low food security, both children and adults experienced instances of very low food security in 0.7 percent of households with children (274,000 households) in 2015. The decline from 2014 (1.1 percent) was statistically significant.
- For households with incomes near or below the Federal poverty line, households with children headed by single women or single men, women and men living alone, and Black- and Hispanic-headed households, the rates of food insecurity were substantially higher than the national average.
- The prevalence of food insecurity varied considerably from State to State. Estimated prevalence of food insecurity in 2013-15 ranged from 8.5 percent in North Dakota to 20.8 percent in Mississippi. (Data for 3 years were combined to provide more reliable State-level statistics.)
- The typical (median) food-secure household spent 27 percent more for food than the typical food-insecure household of the same size and composition, including food purchased with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.
- About 59 percent of food-insecure households in the survey reported that in the previous month, they had participated in one or more of the three largest Federal nutrition assistance programs (SNAP; Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); and National School Lunch Program).

How Was the Study Conducted?

Data for the ERS food security reports come from an annual survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau as a supplement to the monthly Current Population Survey. ERS sponsors the annual survey and compiles and analyzes the responses. The 2015 food security survey covered 39,948 households comprising a representative sample of the U.S. civilian population of 125 million households. The food security survey asked one adult respondent per household questions about experiences and behaviors that indicate food insecurity, such as being unable to afford balanced meals, cutting the size of meals because of too little money for food, or being hungry because of too little money for food. The food security status of the household was assigned based on the number of food-insecure conditions reported.