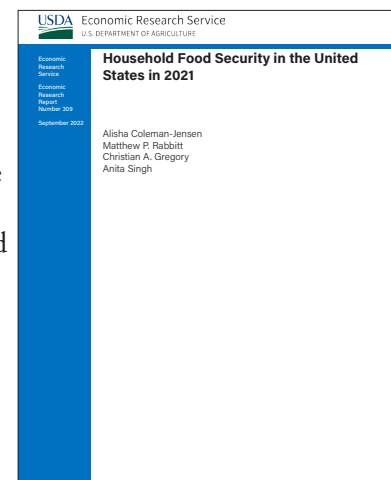


Household Food Security in the United States in 2021

Alisha Coleman-Jensen, Matthew P. Rabbitt, Christian A. Gregory, 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. However, some households experience food insecurity at times during the year, meaning their ability to acquire adequate food is limited by a lack of money and other resources. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) food and nutrition assistance programs aim to increase food security by providing low-income households access to food for a healthful diet, as well as 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 that cover household food security, food expenditures, and the use of Federal nutrition assistance programs in 2021. The prevalence of food insecurity is determined by many factors, including household circumstances, the economy, and Federal, State, and local policies. This report does not provide an analysis of possible causal explanations for prevalence or trends in food insecurity.



What Did the Study Find?

- In 2021, 89.8 percent of U.S. households were food secure. The remaining 10.2 percent (13.5 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 because of a lack of resources. The 2021 prevalence of food insecurity was not significantly different from the 10.5 percent recorded in 2020 (13.8 million households) and 2019 (13.7 million households).
- In 2021, 3.8 percent of U.S. households (5.1 million households) had *very low food security*, not significantly different from the 3.9 percent in 2020 or 4.1 percent in 2019. 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 because of limited resources.

Findings for households with children:

- Children were food insecure at times during 2021 in 6.2 percent of U.S. households with children (2.3 million households), down from 7.6 percent in 2020 and not significantly different from the 6.5 percent in 2019. These households with *food insecurity among children* were unable at times to provide adequate, nutritious food for their children.

- While children are usually shielded from the disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake that characterize very low food security, in 2021, children along with adults suffered instances of very low food security in 0.7 percent of households with children (274,000 households), not significantly different from the 0.8 percent in 2020. These households with *very low food security* among children reported that children were hungry, skipped a meal, or did not eat for a whole day because there was not enough money for food.

Findings for specific population subgroups that experienced significant changes in food insecurity:

- The prevalence of food insecurity increased from 2020 to 2021 for households with no children, especially for women living alone. Food insecurity also increased for elderly people living alone.
- The prevalence of food insecurity declined from 2020 to 2021 for a few population subgroups, including households with children under age 18 and with children under age 6, married couples with children, and single mothers with children. Food insecurity also declined for households with Black, non-Hispanic reference persons (an adult household member in whose name the housing unit is owned or rented), all low-income households, and households in the South.

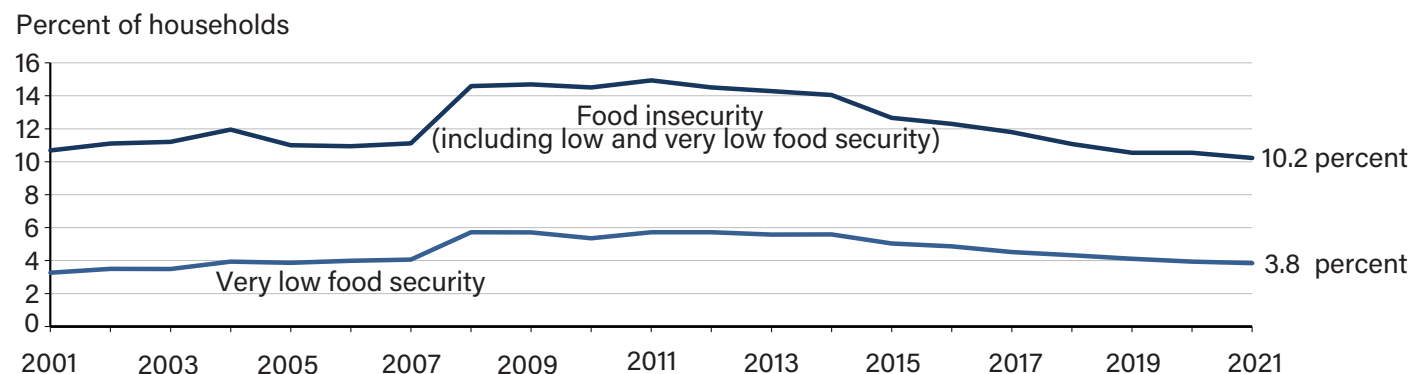
Findings for food spending and Federal nutrition assistance participation:

- The typical (median) food-secure household spent 16 percent more for food than the typical food-insecure household of the same size and composition. These estimates include food purchases made with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.
- About 56 percent of food-insecure households in the survey reported that in the previous month, they participated in one or more of the three largest Federal nutrition assistance programs: SNAP; the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); and the National School Lunch Program.

How Was the Study Conducted?

Data for the USDA, ERS food security reports come from an annual survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census as the December supplement to the monthly Current Population Survey. USDA, ERS sponsors the annual Food Security Supplement and compiles and analyzes the responses. The 2021 Food Security Supplement survey included 30,343 households that comprise a representative sample of the U.S. civilian population of about 132 million households. The food security survey asked one adult respondent per household about experiences and behaviors that indicate food insecurity during calendar year 2021, such as being unable to afford balanced meals, cutting the size of meals, 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.

Prevalence of food insecurity in 2021 is unchanged from 2020



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