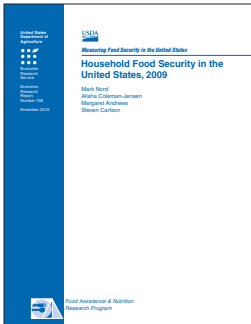


ERS *Report Summary*

Economic Research Service

November 2010

U.S. Department of Agriculture



This is a summary
of an ERS report.

Find the full report at
[www.ers.usda.gov/
publications/err108](http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err108)

Household Food Security in the United States, 2009

Mark Nord, Alisha Coleman-Jensen, Margaret Andrews, and Steven Carlson

What Is the Issue?

Most U.S. households have consistent, dependable access to enough food for active, healthy living—they are food secure. But a minority of American households experience food insecurity at times during the year, meaning that their access to adequate food is limited by lack of money and other resources. Food and nutrition assistance programs of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) increase food security by providing low-income households access to food, a healthful diet, and nutrition education. Reliable monitoring of food security contributes to the effective operation of these programs and other government initiatives aimed at reducing food insecurity, as well as private food assistance programs. USDA monitors the extent and severity of food insecurity in U.S. households through an annual, nationally representative survey. This report presents results from the survey—statistics on households' food security, food expenditures, and use of food and nutrition assistance programs in 2009.

What Did the Study Find?

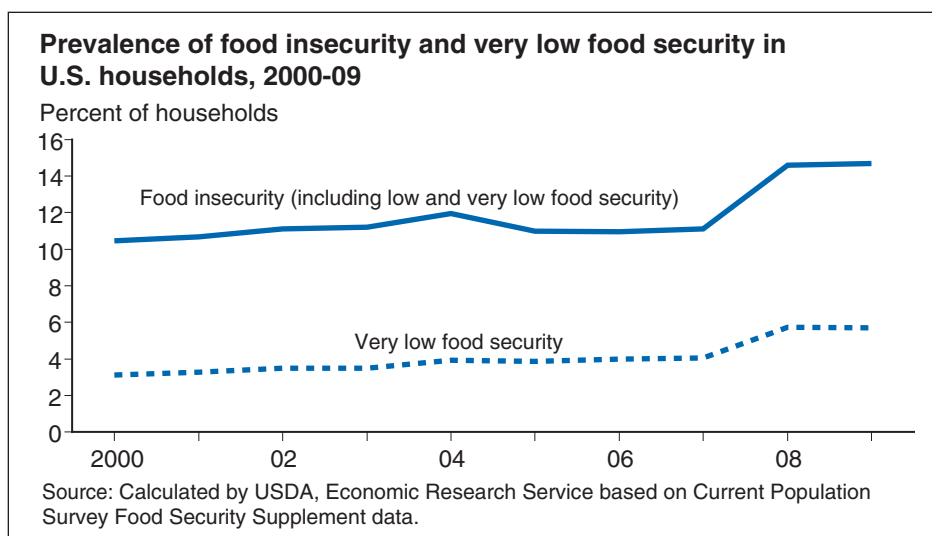
The food security of U.S. households, when measured over the entire year, remained essentially unchanged from 2008 to 2009, with the prevalence of food insecurity at each level of severity remaining at the highest percentage observed since nationally representative food security surveys began in 1995. However, during the final 30 days covered by the 2009 survey, food insecurity in the severe range (described as very low food security) was somewhat less prevalent than during the corresponding period in 2008. Following are some of the main findings of the report:

- In 2009, 85.3 percent of U.S. households were food secure throughout the year. The remaining 14.7 percent (17.4 million households) were food insecure, essentially unchanged from 14.6 percent in 2008. Food-insecure households had difficulty at some time during the year providing enough food for all their members due to a lack of resources. About a third of food-insecure households (6.8 million households, or 5.7 percent of all U.S. households) had very low food security, a severe range of food insecurity in which the food intake of some household members was reduced and normal eating patterns were disrupted due to limited resources. The prevalence of very low food security was unchanged from 2008.
- In the final 30-day period covered by the 2009 survey—from mid-November to mid-December—3.3 percent of households had very low food security, down from 3.6 percent during the corresponding period in 2008. Improvements were most notable for low-income households, households with children, Black non-Hispanic households, and households in the Northeast Census region.

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.

www.ers.usda.gov

- Children were food insecure at times during the year in 4.2 million households (10.6 percent of households with children). Although children are usually shielded from disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake, children along with adults experienced instances of very low food security in 469,000 households (1.2 percent of households with children) in 2009, essentially unchanged from 1.3 percent in 2008.
- On a given day, the number of households with very low food security was a small fraction of the number that experienced this condition “at some time during the year.” Typically, households classified as having very low food security experienced the condition in 7 months of the year, for a few days in each of those months.
- Rates of food insecurity were substantially higher than the national average among households with incomes near or below the Federal poverty line, among households with children headed by single parents, and among Black and Hispanic households.
- Food insecurity was more common in large cities than in rural areas and in suburbs and other outlying areas around large cities.
- The typical (median) food-secure household spent 33 percent more for food than the typical food-insecure household of the same size and composition.
- Fifty-seven 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 food and nutrition assistance programs.



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. USDA sponsors the annual survey, and USDA’s Economic Research Service (ERS) compiles and analyzes the responses. The 2009 food security survey covered about 46,000 households comprising a representative sample of the U.S. civilian population of 118 million households. The food security survey asked one adult respondent in each household a series of questions about experiences and behaviors that indicate food insecurity, such as being unable, at times, 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.