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Household Food Security in the United States in 2013

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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 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 also monitors the extent and severity of food insecurity in U.S. households through an annual, nationally representative survey sponsored by USDA's Economic Research Service. Reliable monitoring of food security contributes to the effective operation of the Federal programs as well as private food assistance programs and other government initiatives aimed at reducing food insecurity. This report presents statistics from the survey covering households' food security, food expenditures, and use of food and nutrition assistance programs in 2013.

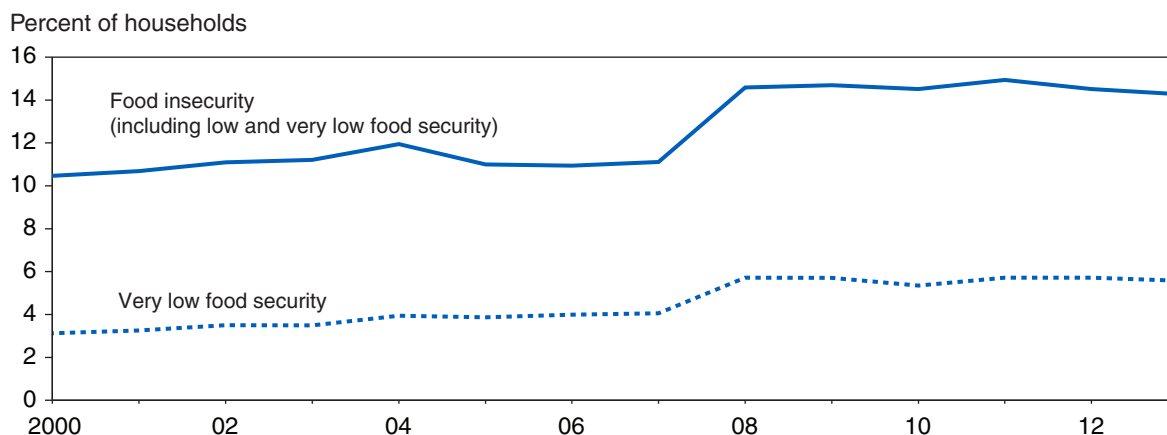
What Did the Study Find?

The percentage of U.S. households that were food insecure remained essentially unchanged from 2012 to 2013; however, food insecurity declined from 2011 to 2013. The percentage of households with food insecurity in the severe range—described as very low food security—was essentially unchanged.

- In 2013, 85.7 percent of U.S. households were food secure throughout the year. The remaining 14.3 percent (17.5 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 due to a lack of resources. The change from 2012 (14.5 percent) was not statistically significant; however, the cumulative decline from 2011 (14.9 percent) was statistically significant.
- In 2013, 5.6 percent of U.S. households (6.8 million households) had *very low food security*, essentially unchanged from 5.7 percent in 2011 and 2012. 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.

Children and adults were food insecure at times during the year in 9.9 percent of households with children. At times during the year, these 3.8 million households were unable to provide adequate, nutritious food for their children. The percentage of households with food-insecure children was essentially unchanged from 2011 and 2012 (10.0 percent in each year).

The prevalence of food insecurity declined from 2011 to 2013



Source: Calculated by USDA, Economic Research Service using Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement data.

- 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 0.9 percent of households with children (360,000 households) in 2013, a statistically significant decline from 1.2 percent of households with children in 2012. The change from 2011 (1.0 percent of households with children) was not statistically significant.
- Rates of food insecurity were substantially higher than the national average for households with incomes near or below the Federal poverty line, households with children headed by single women or single men, and Black- and Hispanic-headed households. Food insecurity was more common in large cities and rural areas than in suburban areas and exurban areas around large cities.
- The prevalence of food insecurity varied considerably from State to State. Estimated prevalence of food insecurity in 2011-13 ranged from 8.7 percent in North Dakota to 21.2 percent in Arkansas; estimated prevalence rates of very low food security ranged from 3.1 percent in North Dakota to 8.4 percent in Arkansas. (Data for 3 years were combined to provide more reliable State-level statistics.)
- The typical food-secure household spent 30 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 (formerly the Food Stamp Program).
- Sixty-two 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 (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. USDA's Economic Research Service sponsors the annual survey and compiles and analyzes the responses. The 2013 food security survey covered 42,147 households comprising a representative sample of the U.S. civilian population of 123 million households. The food security survey asked one adult respondent in each household a series of questions about experiences and behaviors of household members 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.