

Appendix D—Food Security During 30 Days Prior to the Food Security Survey

The annual food security survey was designed with the primary objective of assessing households' food security during the 12-month period prior to the survey, but information is also collected with reference to the 30-day period prior to the survey. From 1995-2004, information on 30-day food security was collected for only a subset of the food security questions—those indicating more severe levels of food insecurity. Beginning with the 2005 survey, information on the full set of food security questions has been collected for both the 30 days and 12 months prior to the survey. Households that responded affirmatively to each 12-month question were asked whether the same behavior, experience, or condition occurred during the last 30 days. Responses to these questions were used to assess the food security status of households during the 30 days prior to the survey, following the same protocols that were used for the 12-month measure. The 30-day statistics for 2008 are, therefore, comparable with those for 2005 and later years, but not with those reported for 2004 and earlier years.

About 91 percent of households were food secure throughout the 30-day period from mid-November to mid-December 2008 (table D-1).¹ About 10.4 million households (8.8 percent) were food insecure at some time during that 30-day period, including 4.2 million (3.6 percent) with very low food security. The prevalence rates of food insecurity and very low food security during this period were higher than during the same period in 2007 (6.3 and 2.4 percent, respectively).

The number of households that were food insecure at some time during the 30 days from mid-November to mid-December was 60 percent of the number that were food insecure at some time during the entire 12 months prior to the survey; the corresponding statistic for very low food security was 63 percent. If food insecurity during this 30-day period was similar to that for other 30-day periods throughout the year, then these comparisons imply that the average household that was food insecure at some time during the year experienced this condition in 7 months of the year, while the average household with very low food security experienced that condition in 7 or 8 months of the year.² However, analysis of food insecurity in different months suggests that food insecurity is somewhat more prevalent in the summer months (July-September) than in March-April and November-December (Cohen et al., 2002a; Nord and Romig, 2006; Nord and Kantor, 2006), so typical frequencies may be somewhat higher than the 7 or 8 months implied by the December data.

The prevalence rates of food insecurity and very low food security during the 30 days prior to the survey varied across household types following the same general pattern as the 12-month measure. Prevalence rates were lowest for married-couple families with children, households with two or more adults without children, households that included an elderly person, White non-Hispanic households, and households with incomes higher than 185 percent of the poverty line. Prevalence rates were highest for households with children headed by a single parent, households headed by Blacks and Hispanics, and households with low incomes. Relationships between 30-day and 12-month

¹The food security survey was conducted during the week of December 14-20, 2008.

²The implied frequency of very low food security (7.5 months on average) for those experiencing the condition at any time during the year is consistent with that reported in 2005-07, but is lower than that estimated in 2004 and earlier years (8 to 9 months). This is a result of the new methodology for measuring food security during the 30 days prior to the survey, which includes 30-day-referenced questions corresponding to each question in the 12-month measure.

Table D-1

Households by food security status during the 30 days prior to the food security survey and selected household characteristics, 2008¹

Category	Total ¹ 1,000	Food secure		Food insecure					
		1,000	Percent	All 1,000	Percent	With low food security		With very low food security	
						1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent
All households	117,565	107,208	91.2	10,357	8.8	6,137	5.2	4,220	3.6
Household composition:									
With children < 18 yrs	39,699	34,797	87.7	4,902	12.3	3,245	8.2	1,657	4.2
With children < 6 yrs	17,503	15,296	87.4	2,207	12.6	1,546	8.8	661	3.8
Married-couple families	26,705	24,508	91.8	2,197	8.2	1,489	5.6	708	2.7
Female head, no spouse	9,639	7,468	77.5	2,171	22.5	1,393	14.5	778	8.1
Male head, no spouse	2,782	2,355	84.7	427	15.3	287	10.3	140	5.0
Other household with child ²	572	465	81.3	107	18.7	76	13.3	31	5.4
With no children < 18 yrs	77,866	72,411	93.0	5,455	7.0	2,892	3.7	2,563	3.3
More than one adult	45,772	43,147	94.3	2,625	5.7	1,464	3.2	1,161	2.5
Women living alone	17,934	16,287	90.8	1,647	9.2	836	4.7	811	4.5
Men living alone	14,160	12,977	91.6	1,183	8.4	592	4.2	591	4.2
With elderly	28,211	26,929	95.5	1,282	4.5	792	2.8	490	1.7
Elderly living alone	11,148	10,639	95.4	509	4.6	279	2.5	230	2.1
Race/ethnicity of households:									
White non-Hispanic	82,935	77,477	93.4	5,458	6.6	3,134	3.8	2,324	2.8
Black non-Hispanic	14,441	12,360	85.6	2,081	14.4	1,164	8.1	917	6.3
Hispanic ³	13,504	11,204	83.0	2,300	17.0	1,497	11.1	803	5.9
Other	6,686	6,167	92.2	519	7.8	342	5.1	177	2.6
Household income-to-poverty ratio:									
Under 1.00	13,117	9,557	72.9	3,560	27.1	1,957	14.9	1,603	12.2
Under 1.30	20,383	15,297	75.0	5,086	25.0	2,807	13.8	2,279	11.2
Under 1.85	29,680	23,321	78.6	6,359	21.4	3,643	12.3	2,716	9.2
1.85 and over	70,433	67,402	95.7	3,031	4.3	1,893	2.7	1,138	1.6
Income unknown	17,452	16,483	94.4	969	5.6	602	3.4	367	2.1
Area of residence: ⁴									
Inside metropolitan area	98,189	89,378	91.0	8,811	9.0	5,204	5.3	3,607	3.7
In principal cities ⁵	32,808	29,331	89.4	3,477	10.6	2,125	6.5	1,352	4.1
Not in principal cities	48,239	44,485	92.2	3,754	7.8	2,161	4.5	1,593	3.3
Outside metropolitan area	19,375	17,829	92.0	1,546	8.0	933	4.8	613	3.2
Census geographic region:									
Northeast	21,341	19,695	92.3	1,646	7.7	920	4.3	726	3.4
Midwest	26,370	24,168	91.6	2,202	8.4	1,297	4.9	905	3.4
South	43,542	39,394	90.5	4,148	9.5	2,551	5.9	1,597	3.7
West	26,311	23,950	91.0	2,361	9.0	1,369	5.2	992	3.8

¹The 30-day prevalence rates refer to the 30-day period from mid-November to mid-December; the survey was conducted during the week of December 14-20, 2008. Totals exclude households whose food security status is unknown because they did not give a valid response to any of the questions in the 30-day food security scale. In 2008, these represented 366,000 households (0.3 percent of all households.) The 30-day statistics for 2004 and earlier years were based on a different methodology and are not comparable with these statistics.

²Households with children in complex living arrangements (e.g., children of other relatives or unrelated roommate or boarder).

³Hispanics may be of any race.

⁴Metropolitan area residence is based on the 2003 Office of Management and Budget delineation.

⁵Households within incorporated areas of the largest cities in each metropolitan area. Residence inside or outside of principal cities is not identified for about 17 percent of households in metropolitan statistical areas.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2008 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

prevalence rates did not differ greatly across the categories of households listed in table D-1.

The 30-day food security measure facilitates a more temporally precise analysis of the relationship between households' food insecurity and their use of Federal and community food and nutrition assistance programs than does the 12-month measure. Measured food insecurity and reported use of food and nutrition assistance programs are more likely to refer to contemporaneous conditions when both are referenced to the previous 30 days than when one or both is referenced to the previous 12 months. For households that left SNAP (the Food Stamp Program) during the year, the 30-day measure of food security can also provide information about their food security status after they left the program.

The 30-day prevalence of food insecurity (44.3 percent) and very low food security (24.5 percent) among households that left SNAP during the year were more than twice the corresponding rates for households in the same low-income range that did not receive SNAP benefits at any time during the year (20.0 percent food insecurity and 8.9 percent very low food security; table D-2). Prevalence rates among SNAP leavers were somewhat higher than those among households that received SNAP benefits during the 30 days prior to the survey. This implies that not all households that left the program did so because their economic situations had improved to a level that ensured access to enough food without assistance. Associations of 30-day prevalence rates of food insecurity and very low food security with use of other food and nutrition assistance programs were similar to those of the 12-month measure reported in table 12.

Table D-2

Prevalence of food insecurity during the 30 days prior to the food security survey, by participation in selected Federal and community food assistance programs, 2008¹

Category	Food insecurity (low or very low food security)	Very low food security
	<i>Percent</i>	
Income less than 130 percent of poverty line:		
Received SNAP ² benefits previous 30 days	33.5	14.4
Received SNAP ² benefits in every month during the previous 12 months	33.4	15.2
Received SNAP ² benefits previous 12 months but not previous 30 days (SNAP leavers)	44.3	24.5
Did not receive SNAP ² benefits previous 12 months	20.0	8.9
Income less than 185 percent of poverty line; school-age children in household:		
Received free or reduced-price school lunch previous 30 days	31.7	11.4
Did not receive free or reduced-price school lunch previous 30 days	17.3	7.3
Income less than 185 percent of poverty line; children under age 5 in household:		
Received WIC previous 30 days	26.9	9.2
Did not receive WIC previous 30 days	22.4	6.1
Income less than 185 percent of poverty line:		
Received emergency food from food pantry previous 30 days	54.4	32.7
Did not receive emergency food from food pantry previous 30 days	19.1	7.5

¹The 30-day prevalence rates refer to the 30-day period from mid-November to mid-December; the survey was conducted during the week of December 14-20, 2008. The number of interviewed households reporting use of emergency kitchens during the previous 30 days was too small to provide reliable food security prevalence estimates.

²SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) is the new name for the Food Stamp Program, effective as of October 2008.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2008 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.