

## APPENDIX A. Household Responses to Questions in the Food Security Scale

The 18 questions from which the food security scale is calculated ask about conditions, experiences, and behaviors that characterize a wide range of severity of food insecurity and hunger. One way the differences are observed is the percentage of households that respond affirmatively to the various items. For example, the least severe item, *We worried that our food would run out before we got money to buy more*, was reported by 15.1 percent of households in 2000 (table A-1). *Adults cutting the size of meals or skipping meals because there wasn't enough money for food* was reported by 3.8 percent of households. The most severe item, *children not eating for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food*, was reported by 0.2 percent of households with children. (See box on page 2 for the complete wording of these questions.)

The two least severe questions indicate uncertainty about having enough food and the experience of run-

ning out of food. The remaining 16 items indicate increasingly severe disruptions of normal eating patterns and reductions in food intake. Three or more affirmative responses are required for a household to be classified as food insecure, so all households with that classification affirmed at least one item indicating disruption of normal eating patterns or reduction in food intake. Most food-insecure households reported multiple indicators of these conditions (table A-2).

Most food-secure households (72.8 percent of all households with children and 86.1 percent of those without children) reported no problems or concerns in meeting their food needs. However, households that reported only one or two indications of food insecurity (11 percent of households with children and 6.5 percent of households without them) are also classified as food secure. Most of these households affirmed one or both of the first two items, indicating uncertainty about having enough food or about exhausting their food

**Table A-1—Responses to items in the food security scale, 1998, 1999, and 2000<sup>1</sup>**

| Scale item <sup>2</sup>                                          | Households affirming item <sup>3</sup> |      |      |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------|------|
|                                                                  | 1998                                   | 1999 | 2000 |
|                                                                  | <i>Percent</i>                         |      |      |
| <b>Household items:</b>                                          |                                        |      |      |
| Worried food would run out before (I/we) got money to buy more   | 16.6                                   | 14.7 | 15.1 |
| Food bought didn't last and (I/we) didn't have money to get more | 13.3                                   | 12.2 | 12.2 |
| Couldn't afford to eat balanced meals                            | 10.9                                   | 9.5  | 9.9  |
| <b>Adult items:</b>                                              |                                        |      |      |
| Adult(s) cut size of meals or skipped meals                      | 6.6                                    | 5.2  | 5.4  |
| Respondent ate less than felt he/she should                      | 6.2                                    | 4.8  | 5.2  |
| Adult(s) cut size or skipped meals in 3 or more months           | 4.5                                    | 3.6  | 3.8  |
| Respondent hungry but didn't eat because couldn't afford         | 2.8                                    | 2.2  | 2.4  |
| Respondent lost weight                                           | 1.7                                    | 1.2  | 1.5  |
| Adult(s) did not eat for whole day                               | 1.3                                    | 1.0  | 1.0  |
| Adult(s) did not eat for whole day in 3 or more months           | .9                                     | .7   | .7   |
| <b>Child items:</b>                                              |                                        |      |      |
| Relied on few kinds of low-cost food to feed child(ren)          | 16.5                                   | 14.4 | 16.3 |
| Couldn't feed child(ren) balanced meals                          | 9.6                                    | 8.2  | 8.9  |
| Child(ren) were not eating enough                                | 5.0                                    | 4.7  | 4.7  |
| Cut size of child(ren)'s meals                                   | 1.6                                    | 1.0  | 1.2  |
| Child(ren) were hungry                                           | 1.2                                    | .8   | .8   |
| Child(ren) skipped meals                                         | .8                                     | .5   | .6   |
| Child(ren) skipped meals in 3 or more months                     | .5                                     | .4   | .4   |
| Child(ren) did not eat for whole day                             | .2                                     | .1   | .2   |

<sup>1</sup>Item response frequencies weighted to population totals.

<sup>2</sup>The actual wording of each item includes explicit reference to resource limitation, e.g., "...because (I was/we were) running out of money to buy food," or "...because there wasn't enough money for food."

<sup>3</sup>Households not responding to item are excluded from the denominator. Households without children are excluded from the denominator of child-referenced items.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the September 2000 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

supply, but did not indicate actual disruptions of normal eating patterns or reductions in food intake. Although these households are classified as food secure, the food security of some of them may have been tenuous at times, especially in the sense that they lacked “*assured* ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways,” a condition that the Life

Sciences Research Office includes in its definition of food insecurity (Anderson, 1990, p. 1598). Further research is underway on the characteristics and conditions of this least severe range measured by the food security scale, evidenced by households affirming just one or two food insecurity indicators.

**Table A-2—Percentage of households by food security raw score, 2000**

| <i>Panel A: Households with children</i>                     |                                       |                                                  |                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Raw score<br>(number of food security<br>questions affirmed) | Percent of<br>households <sup>1</sup> | Cumulative percent<br>of households <sup>1</sup> | Food security<br>status      |
| 0                                                            | 72.83                                 | 72.83                                            | Food secure                  |
| 1                                                            | 6.46                                  | 79.29                                            |                              |
| 2                                                            | 4.60                                  | 83.89                                            |                              |
| 3                                                            | 3.65                                  | 87.54                                            | Food insecure without hunger |
| 4                                                            | 2.94                                  | 90.48                                            |                              |
| 5                                                            | 2.55                                  | 93.03                                            |                              |
| 6                                                            | 2.13                                  | 95.15                                            |                              |
| 7                                                            | 1.01                                  | 96.17                                            |                              |
| 8                                                            | 1.02                                  | 97.18                                            | Food insecure with hunger    |
| 9                                                            | .64                                   | 97.82                                            |                              |
| 10                                                           | .78                                   | 98.60                                            |                              |
| 11                                                           | .50                                   | 99.10                                            |                              |
| 12                                                           | .29                                   | 99.39                                            |                              |
| 13                                                           | .24                                   | 99.62                                            |                              |
| 14                                                           | .14                                   | 99.76                                            |                              |
| 15                                                           | .09                                   | 99.85                                            |                              |
| 16                                                           | .05                                   | 99.90                                            |                              |
| 17                                                           | .07                                   | 99.98                                            |                              |
| 18                                                           | .02                                   | 100.00                                           |                              |
| <i>Panel B: Households with no children</i>                  |                                       |                                                  |                              |
| Raw score<br>(number of food security<br>questions affirmed) | Percent of<br>households              | Cumulative percent<br>of households              | Food security<br>status      |
| 0                                                            | 86.14                                 | 86.14                                            | Food secure                  |
| 1                                                            | 3.59                                  | 89.73                                            |                              |
| 2                                                            | 2.94                                  | 92.67                                            |                              |
| 3                                                            | 2.52                                  | 95.19                                            | Food insecure without hunger |
| 4                                                            | 1.04                                  | 96.23                                            |                              |
| 5                                                            | 1.09                                  | 97.32                                            |                              |
| 6                                                            | 1.04                                  | 98.36                                            | Food insecure with hunger    |
| 7                                                            | .67                                   | 99.03                                            |                              |
| 8                                                            | .41                                   | 99.44                                            |                              |
| 9                                                            | .24                                   | 99.68                                            |                              |
| 10                                                           | .32                                   | 100.00                                           |                              |

<sup>1</sup>Survey response frequencies weighted to population totals.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the September 2000 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.