

## Webinar Transcript: [Household Food Security in the United States in 2020](#)

Good afternoon everyone, and welcome to our webinar: *Household Food Security in the United States in 2020*. My name is Valerie Negron, and I will be your host for today. As a reminder, this webinar is being recorded and will be posted on the ERS website next week. If at any time during the webinar you have questions, please enter them into the chat feature at the bottom left hand corner of your screen and our speaker will answer them at the end of today's presentation. Today our presenter is Alicia Coleman-Jensen. Alicia earned her PhD in Rural Sociology and Demography from Pennsylvania State University she joined USDA's Economic Research Service in 2009 and is a Social Science Analyst and U.S. Food Security Research Team Lead. In addition to leading ERS's annual report on household food security in the United States, Alicia's work includes research and understanding determinants and outcomes of food insecurity and methodological research on food security measurements. Thank you for joining us today Alicia, the floor is yours.

Thank you, Valerie. Good afternoon everyone, thanks for joining us today. I will be presenting findings from the household food security report released this morning. I'll be presenting today but I'd also like to acknowledge my colleagues on the report: Matthew Rabbit and Christian Gregory of USDA's Economic Research Service and an Anita Singh of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service. The report released this morning describes the food security of U.S. households during calendar year 2020 and is based on USDA's most recent annual food security survey conducted in December 2020. The report provides information on how many U.S. households had difficulty putting enough food on the table.

I'm going to start by going over some key findings and then back up a little bit and talk about food security definitions. The percentage of U.S. households that were food insecure in 2020 was unchanged from 2019. Food insecurity affected 10.5 percent of U.S. households in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic began in the United States in 2020 and affected public health in the economy and there was a substantial increase in assistance, including nutrition assistance and other benefits. These many changes may have affected food insecurity in different ways and the report does not provide an analysis of possible causal impact. We do know from previous research that increases in nutrition assistance and other assistance do help to reduce food insecurity. Moving along with the key findings, in 2020 3.9 percent of U.S. households had very low food security. That is the more severe range of food insecurity characterized by reduced intake and disrupted eating patterns. And that 3.9 percent in 2020 was not significantly different from 4.1 percent in 2019. There were some groups that experienced increases in food insecurity in 2020. The prevalence of food insecurity increased for all households with children from 13.6 percent in 2019 to 14.8 percent in 2020. Children were food insecure in 7.6 percent of U.S. households with children in 2020 and that's up from 6.5 percent in 2019. In these households' parents reported that children were not- were not able to get adequate food. The prevalence of food insecurity also increased for households with Black, non-Hispanic reference persons. And a reference person refers to an adult in the housing unit, in the survey, an adult who owns or rents

the housing unit. So, households with Black, non-Hispanic reference persons uh their food insecurity rate increased from 19.1 percent in 2019 to 21.7 percent in 2020.

So, this is an outline of what we'll be talking about today. So our principal question is: how many U.S. households were consistently able to put adequate food on the table? So first we'll talk about how food security is measured, the food security survey, and then turn to some main findings from our annual food security report. We'll then talk about a special section in our report this year on food insecurity by effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on work activities. And then we'll end with food insufficiency as measured during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Food security means access, at all times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members. We hope that all households are able to maintain food security. Food insecurity means that households are unable, at some time during the year, to provide adequate food for one or more household members because of a lack of resources. So, I want to unpack this definition a little bit. So, when we say it sometime during the year, we're saying that some households may be food insecure during a single occurrence during the year while other households may be more chronically food insecure. But a single occurrence of food insecurity would classify a household as food insecure for the year. Unable to provide adequate food for one or more household members. So, if a single household member is food insecure the entire household would be classified as food insecure. This is important, for example, when we talk about food insecurity in households with children because there are instances where parents report food insecurity, but children are not as directly affected by food insecurity. And then finally because of a lack of resources. So, this is about not having enough money and other resources for food. This is not about dieting or not having enough time to eat or things like that. Very low food security is a subset of food insecurity, it's the more severe range of food insecurity. In these households normal eating patterns of some household members were disrupted at times during the year and their food intake reduced below- reduced because they could not afford enough food. Now what we need mean by normal eating patterns being disrupted is that people are telling us that they're skipping meals or in the most severe situations, going an entire day without eating. And they're telling us that they're just not able to get enough to eat because they can't afford enough food.

We measure food security with a series of survey questions. Like many things, food security is a continuum, and early research showed that food insecurity was a managed process. Meaning that households had some control over how food insecurity is experienced. So at the top of the graph, we have food security where households can afford enough healthy food. As food insecurity deteriorates, households may become anxious about the household food supply and try to stretch their food and their food budget. They may try to juggle household spending to maintain food security. And as food insecurity worsens more, households may reduce the quality and variety of food or rely on low-cost foods, and this is low food security. As food insecurity becomes even more severe adults may reduce their own food intake while trying to ensure that children get

enough to eat. And in the most severe situations, we see reductions in food intake among children, and this reduced food intake means very low food security.

Households are asked a series of 10 questions about food insecurity for the household as a whole, and about adults in the household. Households with children are asked an additional eight items about children's food insecurity. And these questions follow the full range of severity of food insecurity that I talked about on the last slide. Households must respond affirmatively to at least three items, indicating food insecurity, to be considered food insecure. So, these are some examples of these food security survey items. So a less severe item is we worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more. Was that often sometimes or never true for you in the last 12 months? We couldn't afford to eat balanced meals. In the last 12 months did you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food? And finally, the most severe question in the last 12 months. Did you ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food? The food security survey is part of the current population survey.

The current population survey is also the source for federal poverty and unemployment statistics. The U.S. Census Bureau conducts the survey and the USDA's Economic Research Service sponsors the Food Security Supplement. So, the Food Security Supplement is added to the current population survey each December and the survey has been conducted annually since 1995 and the data has been consistently collected in December since 2001. The 2020 food security survey interviewed about 34,330 households and was a representative sample of the U.S. civilian population.

So, I'm going to move on now to the main findings from the report. So, these are showing statistics for all U.S. households. In 2020, 10.5 percent of U.S. households were food insecure that's about 13.8 million households. We measure food insecurity again at two levels of severity. For the majority of food insecure households, they were classified as having low food security which meant that they primarily experienced inadequacies in quality, variety, or desirability of their diet, not in quantity of food. These households reported food acquisition problems but few indications of reduced food intake. So, the 6.6 percent, on the graph, represents households with low food security. The remaining households experienced very low food security. In these households, inadequate food meant not enough food. So, this subset of food insecure households was- was in the more severe range of food insecurity described as very low food security. That 3.9 percent of U.S. households represents about 5.1 million households. And households classified in the report as having had very low food security reported that normal eating patterns of some household members were disrupted at times during the year and their food intake reduced below levels they considered appropriate. Most households with very low food security reported that an adult in the household had been hungry at times, but did not eat, because there wasn't enough money for food.

This slide shows trends in food insecurity from 2001 to 2020. The top blue line represents food insecurity which includes both low and very low food security. In 2008 we saw an increase in food insecurity to 14.6 percent and that peaked at 14.9 percent in 2011. We saw declines in food insecurity since that time. And in 2019, 10.5 percent of U.S. households were food insecure, and it remained unchanged at 10.5 percent in 2020. Very low food security is represented by the red line and we saw an increase in very low food security in 2008 to 5.7 percent. And we saw some decline since that time to 4.1 percent in 2019. In 2020, 3.9 percent of U.S. households experienced very low food security, and that is not a statistically significant difference from 2019.

This slide shows the prevalence of food insecurity by different household characteristics and there's a lot on the slide if you want to see the numbers underlying this chart you can find those in table two in our report. I'm going to talk first about the asterisks that you see on the chart. So, the asterisks indicate statistically significant changes from 2019 to 2020. So, we saw statistically significant increases in food insecurity for households with children. We also saw statistically significant increases for married couples with children. Now I do want to point out that though the percentage of households that are food insecure, among married couple families with children increased from 2019 to 2020, the prevalence is still below the national average. We saw statistically significant declines for women living alone and for men living alone. We also saw a statistically significant decline in food insecurity for households with White non-Hispanic reference persons. We saw a statistically significant increase in food insecurity for households with Black, non-Hispanic reference persons. The other thing I want to talk about, on this chart, is the characteristics that are consistently related to a higher prevalence of food insecurity. So, we consistently find from year to year, that single mother households with children have among the highest food insecurity rates. These are represented on the chart and they're labeled Female Head, No Spouse. We also see higher food insecurity rates among single-father households which are labeled Male Head, No Spouse. We tend to see somewhat higher food insecurity rates among households with Black, non-Hispanic reference persons, and households with Hispanic reference persons. And somewhat lower rates for households with white non-Hispanic reference persons. Household income to poverty ratio is a measure of household- household income relative to the federal poverty line. So, under one means a household's income is below the federal poverty line. We include under 1.3 and 1.85 because those are relevant cut points for federal nutrition assistance programs. We find that all low-income households have much higher food insecurity rates and this is to be expected given that food insecurity is related to a lack of resources for food. We also see that food insecurity was higher in principal cities of metropolitan areas and in non-metropolitan areas outside metropolitan areas. The category labels not in principle cities is referring to the more suburban areas in metropolitan areas and those places tend to have somewhat lower food insecurity rates.

The pattern of findings is similar for very low food security. Again, these asterisks represent statistically significant changes between 2019 and 2020. We saw a statistically significant

increase in very low food security for married couple families with children. We saw a statistically significant decline in very low food security for women living alone and for White non-Hispanic- for households with White non-Hispanic reference persons.

This slide shows the prevalence of food insecurity for the states. You'll notice that at the top of the chart it says average 2018 to 2020. So, all the previous slides have shown single year data, this uses three years of data for these estimates. And we do that we do that to ensure that there are large enough sample sizes for all states. So first I want to orient you to the map. So, states shaded the lighter yellow had food insecurity rates that are below the national average. So, in terms of food insecurities these states are better off because they have lower food insecurity rates. States shaded orange have food insecurity that's near the U.S. average which for this 3.3 year period was 10.7 percent. States shaded the darker orange had higher than average food insecurity rates. So, in terms of food insecurity these states were worse off because they had higher food insecurity rate. And if you're interested in the numbers underlying this map, you can find these in table four in our Annual Food Security Report. So, I've added some information on the right sidebar here. The food insecurity prevalence for this period 2018 through 2020, ranged from a low of 5.7 percent in New Hampshire, to 15.3 percent in Mississippi. We also look at changes in food insecurity across the states from previous time periods. We looked at the most recent three-year period which would be 2015 through 2017 and compared that to 2018 through 2020 and we found statistically significant- significant declines in food insecurity in 17 states. And those are listed there, and we did not see any significant increases. And you can look at that information in more detail in table 5 in the annual food security report. This map does not show very low food security but again you can find that in the report. And the very low food security prevalence for 2018 to 2020 ranged from a low of 2.3 percent in Minnesota to a high of 6.5 percent in Louisiana.

I'm going to turn now and talk about food insecurity among children. And it's a little bit more complex when we look at food insecurity among children. Because we look at food insecurity for adults and for children within the household. So, parents often protect their children from food insecurity to the extent that they can, even when the parents themselves experience reduced dietary quality and intake. So, in some food insecure households, only adults are reported to be food insecure in households. With food insecurity among children the households were unable at some time during the year to provide adequate, nutritious food for their children. We also measure the more severe range of very low food security among children. And in these households' caregivers reported that children were hungry, skipped a meal, or did not eat for a whole day because there was not enough money for food. And this is the most severe category of food insecurity that we measure and report on.

So, there's a lot going on in this slide. This shows the prevalence of food insecurity and households with children. First, I'm going to point out food insecurity in households with children which affected 14.8 percent of U.S. households in 2020, which corresponds to 5.6 million households. So, in these households' adults, or children, or both, were food insecure. So

in about half of these households, only adults were food insecure. That's the food insecure adult adults only label which represents 7.2 percent of U.S. households with children. In 7.6 percent of households with children, or about 2.9 million households, children were also food insecure at times during the year. In this group of households, the quality or quantity of children's diets was affected by food insecurity. And again, we can look at two levels of severity of food insecurity among children. We find that 6.8 percent of households with children had low food security among children. Adults are often able to shield children from experiencing very low food security. Again, that's the more severe range of food insecurity, characterized by disrupted eating patterns and reduced intake. But children, along with adults, experienced very low food security in 0.8 percent of households with children, which is about 322,000 households. And in this group of households' parents reported that children were hungry.

This slide is just to point out which three categories I'm going to explain on the next slide. So I'm going to be focusing on trends in food insecurity in households with children, and then food insecurity among children, and then very low food security among children.

So, the blue line at the top represents food insecurity in households with children. Again, this means that someone in the household is food insecure, adults, or children, or both. In 2008, we saw increases in food insecurity in households with children to 21 percent. We saw declines over time to 13.6 percent in 2019. In 2020, we saw a statistically significant increase in food insecurity in households with children to 14.8 percent. Looking now at the middle purple line, this represents food insecurity among children, where children were reported to have uh inadequate quality or quantity of food, they were reported to be food insecure. In 2008, food insecurity among children increased to 11 percent. We saw declines over time to 6.5 percent in 2019, and we saw a statistically significant increase to 7.6 percent in 2020. The bottom line on the chart shows a very low food security among children, again this is the more severe range of food insecurity. We saw increases to 1.3 percent in 2008. In 2019, 0.6 percent of households have very low food security among children, and there was a statistically significant increase to 0.8 percent in 2020.

The food security report includes statistics on food insecurity by household characteristics. That also includes sections on food security by food spending, and sections on participation in nutrition assistance. So, I'm going to turn now and talk about median weekly food spending by food security status. Taking into account estimated food need, the typical food secure households spend about 18 percent more for food than the typical food insecure households. So, we measure food spending in two ways. One is dollars per person, and we see that food insecure households spend about fifty dollars per person per week on food, while food insecure households spend about sixty dollars per person per week on food. We also measure food spending relative to the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan. This is based on the December 2020 Thrifty Food Plan. The Thrifty Food Plan is the basis for SNAP allotments. It's also a measure of the cost of a healthy, low-cost diet. And so, using the Thrifty Food Plan we can account for household size and composition by looking at gender and age of family members and their estimated food costs for

the Thrifty Food Plan. So, this way accounts for differences in household structure, and composition between food secure and food insecure households. Spending relative to the Thrifty Food Plan was about 1.35 for food secure households and about 1.14 for food insecure households.

This slide shows the use of federal nutrition assistance programs by food insecure households in 2020. And the federal nutrition programs that we're examining here are SNAP, which is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly the food stamp program, free or reduced price school lunch, through the national school lunch program, and then the WIC program, which is this special supplemental nutrition program for women, infants, and children. We found that about 55 percent of food insecure households reported participating in one or more of these programs in 2020. Now there are a few things to note about these percentages, note that these are based on self-reported survey data, and we know that there is some under reporting of program participation in federal surveys. We found that participation in the national free or reduced price school lunch program was lower in 2020 than in 2019. This was likely due to school closures and possibly because parents did not report receipt of grab-and-go school meals, if they were not consumed at school.

We also examined use of community food assistance programs, which include food pantries and soup kitchens. We found that 6.7 percent of all U.S. households reported using a food pantry in 2020, and that is an increase from 2019. Use of food pantries was more common among those that were food insecure, about 37 percent of food insecure households reported using a food pantry, and among those with more severe, very low food security, about 46 percent of those households reported using a food pantry. Use of soup kitchens, or emergency kitchens, was much less common but, similar to food pantries, it was more common among those who were food insecure. About four percent of very low food secure households reported using a soup kitchen. And information on the use of food pantries, in more detail, is available in the statistical supplements to the household food security report.

So all the statistics for this point have represented food insecurity measured over the past year, but we also measure food insecurity in the 30 days before the survey. And when food insecurity is measured over a shorter period, such as 30 days, the prevalence is lower. So, the 30 days before the survey is from about mid-November to mid-December, because our data is collected in mid-December each year. So, in 2020, 5.7 percent of U.S. households reported food insecurity in the 30 days from mid-November to mid-December, and 2.3 percent report a very low food security during that period. And the next couple of slides that I'll be presenting are using these 30-day food security statistics.

So, this slide shows the prevalence of 30-day food insecurity from mid-November to mid-December by participation in selected federal and community food and nutrition assistance programs, and this is comparing 2019 and 2020. So, the bars show the prevalence of 30-day food insecurity by participation in these nutrition assistance programs. And you can find these

percentages in the statistical supplement to the annual food security report in table F15. I've added this slide because it's helpful to see the prevalence of food insecurity among low-income households that use nutrition assistance in 2020 compared with 2019, and similarly compare those that did not receive assistance in 2020 and 2019. So, for example, looking at SNAP on the far left of the slide, in 2019 among SNAP recipients, and these are all low-income households. In 2019, 29 of SNAP recipients reported food insecurity in 2020 about 23.6 percent reported food insecurity. So, we saw somewhat lower food insecurity rates among SNAP recipients in 2020. Among households that did not receive SNAP, 11.5 percent were food insecure in 2019 and 14.6 percent were food insecure in 2020. So, we saw higher food insecurity rates among those that were not receiving assistance in 2020. Similarly, for households that did not receive the free or reduced price school lunch program, 8.8 percent were food insecure in 2019 and 20- and in 2020 17.5 percent were food insecure. So, we saw somewhat higher food insecurity rates among those non-recipients in 2020. Going to the far right of the slide we can look at those who- who received food from a food pantry. In 2019, those that reported receiving food from a food pantry 51.3 percent were food insecure. And we saw lower rates in 2020 for those that reported receiving food from a food pantry, 39.7 percent were food insecure.

In the 2020 food insecurity report, we included a special section that examines 30-day food security by effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on household reference persons work activities. So, as I mentioned, the current population survey is the source for federal employment statistics and there was special questions were added that asked specifically about how the pandemic may have affected employment. We find that households with a reference person who was employed had lower food insecurity rates than those that were not employed. So, if you look along the graph from the left you see that for all households, 5.7 percent were food insecure in the 30 days before the survey in 2020. So again, this is mid-November to mid-December. We use that period because this matches the questions about employment activities which asks about a similar period. And we see that for employed rep households with employed reference persons 4.2 percent were food insecure during that period. Rates were even lower for households with reference persons that reported that they were able to telework due to the pandemic. We found higher food insecurity rates among households with reference persons that reported not being employed. We found that those households had 8 percent food insecurity rate. Among households with a reference person that reported being unable to work due to the pandemic or having their work hours cut, 16.4 percent were food insecure. Among- among those that reported being unable to work or losing work hours but not receiving pay for that lost work, 17.5 percent were food insecure. And finally, on the far right, we see that for those for which the household reference person was prevented from looking for work due to the pandemic, 20.4 percent were food insecure. We have found in previous research that unemployment is related to a higher incidence of food insecurity, and we also found that here with unemployment related to the pandemic.



So, I've been talking all about findings from our annual food security report that were released this morning using the current population survey Food Security Supplements. And those findings were using a measure of food insecurity. You may have heard about findings from the Household Pulse Survey, which was an online survey developed by the U.S. Census Bureau in collaboration with other federal agencies, including ERS. The Household Pulse Survey is intended to provide timely information on the economic and social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on U.S. households. The Household Pulse Survey was in the field quickly, at the onset of the pandemic, and began collecting data in April 2020 with weekly data collections, and it's still ongoing. The Household Pulse Survey included a measure of food insufficiency. This measure of food insufficiency is different from our food insecurity measure that we use in our annual food security survey. The food sufficiency survey question the Household Pulse Survey says "in the last seven days which of these statements best describes the food eaten in your household". "enough of the kinds of food we wanted to eat", "enough but not always the kinds of food we wanted to eat", "sometimes not enough to eat", or "often not enough to eat". Households that reported "sometimes were often not enough to eat" were classified as having food insufficiency which means the household sometimes or often did not have enough to eat in the last seven days.

This graphic that's included on this slide is on the ERS website showing food insufficiency during the COVID-19 pandemic, using the Household Pulse Survey. You can see that on the left side, we have the 2019 food insufficiency rates from the CPS, the current population surveyed Food Security Supplement. We include the food insufficiency question in the survey, but we usually report on the food insecurity estimates, which I've been reporting so far. So, this again, this is a different measure from food insecurity. But we found that food insufficiency increased during the pandemic from about 10 percent to a high of about 13 percent and then dropped to about 8 percent. But in the 2020 CPS Food Security Supplement, we found that the food insufficiency rates were quite similar to the 2019 Food Security Supplement, meaning that we did not find an increase in food insufficiency.

So, you may be wondering why are- we seeing these findings in the Household Pulse Survey on food insufficiency and why might they differ considerably from the CPS Food Security Supplement. There are a number of differences across the survey the response rates are different the mode of data collection is different so the food the Household Pulse Survey collects data online, and the Food Security Supplement uses phone and in-person interviews to collect data. There's also differences in the sampling frames and the methods behind the surveys, and also the content of the surveys is different. In addition, the reference period for the food insufficiency questions in the two surveys is different. So, the Pulse Survey asks about the last seven days, and the Food Security Supplement asks about the last 12 months. And the food insufficiency question asked what best describes your food situation. So, households may believe that food insufficiency is what best describes a seven-day period, but not a longer 12-month period. And

we include a special box in our annual food security report where we talk about some of the differences in these estimates and why we might be seeing some of those differences.

So, in closing, I just want to reiterate that food insecurity was unchanged from 10.5 percent in 2019 and to 10.5 percent in 2020. The prevalence of food insecurity did increase for some households, including for all households with children from 13.6 percent in 2019 to 14.8 percent in 2020. We'll have more updates on the ERS website later today that include updates to our interactive charts for 2020. And I'm going to stop there and turn things over to Valerie for questions, I believe Thank you.

Thank you, Alicia. We'll go ahead and open the floor for questions now. As a reminder, questions can be submitted through the chat feature located at the bottom left hand corner of your screen. First question, Alicia: is the increase in food insecurity among Hispanic families statistically significant?

Thanks for that question, Valerie. The increase for that that is not a statistically significant change for Hispanic families. We saw a statistically significant increase for Black, non-Hispanic families, but the difference for Hispanic families from 2019 to 2020 was not statistically significant.

Okay, next question is: how do you account for the large difference in food insecurity in 2020 and food scarcity as reported in the Household Pulse Survey?

Thank you, Valerie. So, as I mentioned, the Household Pulse Survey was conducted for a specific purpose, which was to understand how the pandemic affected the well-being of the nation. And the survey was meant to measure rapid changes in well-being over time as the survey was in the field quickly and collected data over weekly and bi-weekly periods. The census is fielding the survey as part of its experimental data series, as such the data may not meet some of the Census Bureau's statistical quality standards. Still, food insufficiency is measured, and the Pulse Survey did vary in ways that we might expect from week to week. For example, the Census Bureau has released research showing that food insufficiency in households with children declined after households began receiving the child tax credit, and this is consistent with other research showing that additional assistance benefits can help to reduce food hardship. But as I mentioned there are a number of differences in the Pulse Survey and in the CPS Food Security Supplement. And some of those differences are discussed in the annual report in the box labeled Understanding Differences in 2020 Food Hardship Estimates. More research would be useful to understand both dynamics of food hardships during the pandemic and how differences in the surveys and the survey questions may have affected estimates of food hardships.

Thank you, Alicia. Next question how did the COVID-19 pandemic affect the collection of survey data?

That's an important question. Survey data did see a drop in response rates, especially early on in the pandemic, but by December 2020 the CPS response rates had recovered from the lows that

were seen earlier in the pandemic. Now the Census Bureau does create weights, which are designed to adjust for non-response and to control weighted counts to independent population totals. So- so the magnitude of the increase in non-response related pandemic may have reduced the efficacy of those weights, but the effect was minimized by December of 2020, because the CPS had returned to both in-person and phone interviewing. They were still following some pandemic protocols, but the fact that they were collecting data in-person helped to reduce some of the impacts on non-response that we saw earlier in the pandemic when those in-person data collections were not possible. And in each year, we- we do our own analysis to assess data quality ensure that the food security measure is consistent with the underlying measurement model and those analyses suggested that the food security measure did perform comparably to other years.

All right, here's another question: how does collecting food insecurity surveys in December impact the data since this time of year, referring to holidays, is often a very financially stressful time, especially for families with children?

That's an important question. I mean, so there could be differences in food insecurity related to seasonality. Some of our early food security data was collected in different months, and we did see some differences related to the season or the month in which data was collected. The advantage of collecting in December, is that our questions ask about the last 12 months, and by having the data collection in December it's sort of a natural way to ask about the last calendar year. It's sort of easier in respondents' minds to think about the year, the last 12 months being the calendar year. In addition, since the data collection has been consistently in December since 2001, any of those seasonal effects would in effect be controlled because we're comparing data collected consistently in December for each year. So that we would be able to compare estimates from year to year.

Thank you, Alicia. Next question: is nutrition excuse me, is nutrition security taken into consideration in the uh survey?

That's a good question. So, we've there's been some talk recently and some new research around the concept of nutrition security, as opposed to food security. All of these estimates are based on USDA's concept and definition of food security, which is what we're measuring with the Food Security Supplement um, and which the validated measure is to measure food security. So, we refer to these measures and the definitions as food security, um as that's the valid the questions and the and the measure that was validated.

Thank you, Alicia. Is there a more detailed breakdown of the differences between SNAP and low-income, non-participants? Why would SNAP use among eligible households correlate with lower reported food security? Let me ask that question again Alicia: is there a more detailed breakdown of the differences between SNAP households and low-income non-participants? Why would SNAP use, among eligible households, correlate with lower reported food security?

Thanks, Valerie. So, we do have a section in our uh annual food security report that looks at participation in nutrition assistance and food security, um- and I think what the question is getting at is the self-selection effect into SNAP. So even looking among low-income households, we tend to see higher food insecurity rates for those that are participating in SNAP, compared with those that are not participating. And this is the self-selection effect, because those households that need assistance, that are having more experiencing more hardship, or more trouble getting enough food. Those are the households that are more likely to participate in the program. So that's partly why we see that higher food insecurity rate. Research that has been able to sort of disentangle the self- self-selection effect, has shown that participation in the programs does help to reduce food insecurity, or improve food security. But there's more information on that in the annual report, if you look at tables eight and nine.

Okay, next question: what was the difference in child food insecurity rates among metro and non-metro areas in 2020? How does that compare with 2019?

Sorry, can you say that again?

Of course, what was the difference in child food insecurity rates among metro and non-metro areas in 2020? How does that compare with 2019?

Okay, so in 2020 child food insecurity rates, in metro areas, were 7.5 percent, um I need to flip through to find the 2019 insecurity rate. And in 2019, the child food insecurity rates in non-metro areas with six- or sorry in metro areas with 6.3 percent. And the non-metro food insecurity rate for children was 8.1 percent in 2020, and 7.8 percent in 2019. And you can find those statistics by looking in table three comparing, um the 2020- looking at the 2020 report and the 2019 report.

Thank you, Alicia. Next question: according to your slide on participation in federal and community food and nutrition assistance programs, participants that used food from food pantry saw a lesser percentage of food insecurity. Why wouldn't utilizing food pantries be an indicator of food insecurity as those families likely couldn't afford food on their own?

That's- that's a useful question. So, we- the food security measure relies on a series of questions about behaviors and characteristics that relate to food insecurity. For example, questions about not being able to afford eat balanced meals, relying on low-cost foods for children, skipping meals, or not eating for a whole day, those types of questions. The food security questions that are used for the food security measure themselves do not rely on whether or not people are participating, or using, these nutrition assistance programs. Those are separate from the food security measure. You're right that oftentimes people who are using food pantries are food insecure as we see higher food insecurity rates for those people that are using food pantries compared with uh low-income households who are not using food pantries. But the use of those programs is separate from the measurement of food security.

Thank you, Alicia. How would you summarize, in a few sentences, the impact of covid on food security?

So, it's difficult to describe the impact of covid on food insecurity because um covid meant a lot of things and a lot of changes. So, more analysis is needed to understand- understand how specific factors affected food insecurity in 2020. And what I mean by that, there was a lot of different factors so in 2020, you know, we saw public health and economic impacts of covid, but there were also extra resources available to households through extra unemployment benefits, stimulus payments, and other policy changes such, as the eviction moratorium, that might have affected food insecurity. There was also a significant increase in nutrition assistance benefits in 2020, and we know from previous research, that increases in nutrition assistance benefits and other assistance can help to ameliorate or reduce food insecurity. And if you're interested in more statistics and information on food and nutrition assistance programs in 2020, you can find those in the ERS report the Food and Nutrition Assistance Landscape, which found that total spending on USDA's food and nutrition assistance programs increased 32 percent from fiscal year 2019 to fiscal year 2020.

Thanks, Alicia. Do we know whether respondents received food assistance and what kind SNAP, food bank, etc, but also how did that affect their food security?

The survey asked about a number of different types of food assistance, some I've reported on here including SNAP, free reduced price school lunch through the national school lunch program, WIC- which is for women- women, infants, and children, and food pantries and food banks. So, that information is collected in the social security supplement, and information on those programs is available in the annual food security report, and in what we call our statistical supplement to the annual food security report. And, as I mentioned, we tend to see somewhat higher food insecurity rates among participants, and again, this is because people are seeking out these programs because they're experiencing some food hardships. But we find that for some cases, for example, comparing SNAP participants in 2019 versus 2020, we see that among SNAP participants in 2020 we saw somewhat lower food insecurity rates than we did in 2019.

Great, thank you Alicia. Next question: why use a different term food insufficiency instead of food insecurity? Could you explain the difference between food insufficiency and food insecurity?

Yeah, this is an important question. So, it's not just that we're using a different term, it's that we're measuring a different concept. And food insecurity, and I talked about the definitions earlier, it's based on a series of survey questions. There's a total of 18 survey questions to matter to measure food security. Ten are about adults in the household and eight are about children. We were not able to include 18 survey items on the Household Pulse Survey. Census Bureau was trying to include a lot of information on different aspects of well-being in that survey and so we opted for this single question to measure food sufficiency in the Household Pulse Survey. And as I mentioned the food sufficiency question is included in the current population survey. It's also

included in another federal survey, The National Survey of Children's Health, we include a measure of food sufficiency. And again, we include that in that survey because we weren't able to include all of the food security questions because it would be too much burden for respondents, meaning it's just too much to ask them to complete all those questions with everything else that's in the survey. So, we use the food sufficiency measure as a way to collect information to understand the food situations within these households when we can't collect the full food security measure. So again, the food sufficiency question is really somewhat more severe than food insecurity because, as I mentioned, food insecurity can mean a reduction in dietary quality and variety, and the more severe situations reductions in food intake. But this food insufficiency question, categorized as often or sometimes not enough to eat, that's really more severe than food insufficiency and more similar in concept to very low food security. But I do want to reiterate that food insufficiency and food insecurity are different measures.

Thank you, Alicia. And we're getting close to time, so I'll go ahead and ask a few more questions. Have other studies shown findings similar to this USDA report, showing no increase in food insecurity in 2020? Yes, some other studies have also found that food insecurity did not increase substantially in 2020. And we talk about a few of those studies in the box, Understanding Differences in 2020 Food Hardship Estimates. For example, The Urban Institute released a study that found a decline in food insecurity from December 2019 to 2020, and the authors of that study found that families who lost employment or income because of the pandemic relied on safety net programs, and other relief measures including charitable-charitable food donations to meet their needs. So there have been some other studies that have found similar things to ours and you can read more about them in that box in the report.

Thank you, Alicia. And I think this may be our last question. But have you looked at changes in food insecurity for racial groups beyond those mentioned in the report? For example, Native Americans?

That's an important question. So, we do- we are somewhat limited in the numbers of different racial and ethnic categories we can examine because of sample size. Because when we start looking at some sort of smaller racial ethnic groups, the sample sizes in the survey- survey are a little bit small. So, Native Americans are included in the other non-Hispanic category. Now that category is quite a diverse group and includes Native Americans, it includes Asians, it includes people who identify as multi-race, and so, you know, it is a large category. We have been able to do some analyses in more detail. For example, a few years ago we released a report on Hispanics and food security status where we combined multiple years of data in order to look at more detail within the Hispanic category, which again, is a diverse group where we could look at country of origin and things like that. But that generally requires combining multiple years of data to look at more detail by race and ethnicity- and ethnicity, excuse me,

Thank you, Alicia. And that's all the questions we have time for, unfortunately. I want to again thank you Alicia for sharing the report with us and thank you to our listeners for taking time out

of their day to join us as a reminder a recording and transcript of this webinar will be available on the ERS website. Thank you again and this concludes our webinar.