

Household Food Security in the United States in 2022 Webinar Transcript

Good afternoon, everyone, my name is Ashley Murdie – your host for today’s webinar. On behalf of USDA’s Economic Research Service, welcome and thank you for joining us. Today’s webinar presents our latest insights into household food security within the United States in 2022. A copy of this annual report can be found in the resources tab at the bottom left-hand corner of your screen along with other related publications and a copy of last year’s report for added context. Before we begin, let me quickly note that this webinar is being recorded and will be posted on the ERS website next week. If you have any questions, please enter them into the chat feature at the bottom, left-hand corner of the screen and our presenter will answer them during a Q&A session after the presentation.

Now, I’d like to introduce Matthew Rabbitt – our speaker today. Matt is an economist with our Food Economics Division where his research focuses on food security measurement and methodology, behavioral responses to food insecurity, and U.S. social safety net program participation. He also has a secondary line of research on measuring other forms of material hardships, such as housing security. Matthew’s primary fields of interest are applied econometrics and psychometrics, health economics, and labor economics. Thank you for joining us today, Matt. I’ll turn it over to you now.

Thank you, Ashley. Good afternoon. Thank you for joining us today to discuss the key findings from this year’s food security report. The statistics in this report provide information on how many U.S. households had difficulty putting enough food on the table in 2022. This report examines the prevalence and severity of and trends in food insecurity among U.S. households in 2022. In addition, this report examines weekly food expenditures and the use of Federal and community nutrition assistance programs by the food security status of U.S. households. Before moving forward, I would like to acknowledge my coauthors, Laura Hales and Alisha Coleman-Jensen of the Economic Research Service, and Michael Burke of USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service. I would also like to acknowledge the many people behind the scenes who helped make the release of this year’s report, and this webinar happen.

I am going to begin today’s webinar by providing a high-level summary of the findings from this year’s food security report before moving into a discussion of the food security measure, survey data, and findings. Food insecurity affected 12.8 percent of U.S. households in 2022, including 5.1 percent with very low food security. The percentage of U.S. households that were food insecure and very low food secure in 2022 increased from 2021 and 2020. The prevalence of food insecurity is determined by many factors, including the economy; Federal, State, and local policies; and the individual circumstances of U.S. households. This report does not provide an analysis of possible causal explanations for the prevalence of or trends in food insecurity.

However, we do know from prior research that increases in nutrition assistance, and other forms of assistance, reduce food insecurity. Additional economic research reports are available on the Economic Research Service website that examine the factors that determine the prevalence of or trends in food insecurity. You are welcome to reach out by e-mail to myself or the ERS communications team if you encounter any issues searching for any related economic research reports. Nearly all subgroups of U.S. households experienced an increase in their food insecurity and very low food security from 2021 to 2022. Children were food insecure at times during 2022 in 8.8 percent of U.S. households, up from 6.2 percent in 2021 and 7.6 percent in 2020.

Today's webinar will be structured as follows.... I will begin providing some background on how food security among U.S households is measured. I will then provide a brief overview of the survey data used to create the food-security statistics in this year's food security report. Then, I will discuss the findings for this year's report and provide a summary of the key findings. Finally, I will address questions from the audience about the report.

USDA defines food security as access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members. Food insecurity occurs when a household is unable, at some time during the year, to provide adequate food for one or more household members because of a lack of resources. Very low food security occurs when the normal eating patterns of some household members is disrupted at times during the year, and their food intake is reduced because they could not afford enough food. Food insecurity is a household level economic and social condition. Hunger is an individual-level physiological condition that is not measured directly within the survey. Very low food security describes the severe range of food insecurity, a condition which may lead to hunger. Very low food security describes the subset of food-insecure households in the severe range of food insecurity.

Food security is conceptualized as a continuum that captures increasing levels of the severity of food insecurity among U.S. households. Early research shows that food insecurity is a "managed process," meaning households have some control over how food insecurity is experienced. As food security deteriorates households may become anxious about the household food supply and try to stretch their food and food budget. They may try to juggle household spending to maintain their food security. As food insecurity worsens, households may reduce the quality and variety of food, or rely on low-cost foods. As food insecurity becomes more severe, adults may reduce their own food intake while trying to ensure children get enough to eat, and in the most severe situations we observe reductions in food intake among children.

U.S. households are asked a series of 10 questions about food security for the household as a whole and adults in the household. Households with children are asked an additional 8 questions about children's food security. These questions capture the

full range of severity of food insecurity. All households must respond affirmatively to at least 3 questions indicating food insecurity to be considered food insecure. To be classified as very low food secure, households without children must respond affirmatively to at least 6 of the food-insecurity questions. Households with children must respond affirmatively to at least 8 of the food-insecurity questions.

The data underlying these food insecurity estimates is drawn from a supplement to the Current Population Survey. The Current Population Survey is also the official source of Federal poverty and unemployment statistics. The U.S. Census Bureau conducts the Food Security Supplement for USDA's Economic Research Service in December each year as a supplement to the monthly Current Population Survey. The 2022 Food Security Supplement surveyed 31,948 households and was a representative sample of the U.S. civilian, noninstitutionalized population. The Economic Research Service implemented a series of enhancements to the Food Security Supplement survey instrument in 2022. Economic Research Service researchers worked with U.S. Census Bureau and USDA's Food and Nutrition Service staff to review the survey content, make revisions, and conduct cognitive interviews to ensure the food security data collected continued to be relevant, current, and useful. Prior to implementing any of these enhancements, Economic Research Staff collaborated with the U.S. Census Bureau to test the impact of these changes on statistics produced based on the Food Security Supplement. A split-ballot test of the Food Security Supplement was conducted in September of 2020. This test data was analyzed by Economic Research Service researchers, and findings from these analyses were published in a Technical Bulletin in September of 2023. These analyses demonstrate that the enhancements to the Food Security Supplement implemented in 2022 did not affect the comparability of statistics based on food spending, food security, and Federal nutrition assistance programs with prior years. The wording of the community nutrition assistance program questions was changed based on cognitive interviews and recommendations by academic researchers and antihunger advocacy groups who also conducted their own cognitive interviews. Therefore, statistics based on the community nutrition assistance program questions are not comparable with statistic from prior years. Additional details about the testing of these changes by the Economic Research Service and their impact on statistics based on the Food Security Supplement are available in the Technical Bulletin titled, "Analysis of the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement Split-Panel Test." This technical bulletin is available on the Economic Research Service website. A summary of these changes is also provided in a box titled, "Revisions to the 2022 Food Security Supplement Survey Instrument," in the report released this morning.

Now that we have covered some background on the food security measure and underlying survey data, we can move into a discussion of the findings from this year's food security report. 87.2 percent of U.S. households were food secure throughout the year in 2022. "Food secure" means they had consistent access to adequate food for an

active healthy living for all household members throughout the year. We examine the range of the severity of food insecurity experienced by U.S. households in this report using two categories. These are food insecurity and very low food security, which is a more severe form of food insecurity. Note, food insecurity includes both low food security and very low food security. Twelve-point eight percent of U.S. households were food insecure in 2022. Food-insecure households were unable, at some time during the year, to provide adequate quantity or quality of food for one or more household members due to a lack of resources. For most food-insecure households, “inadequate” food meant primarily inadequate in quality, variety, or desirability, not in quantity of food. These households reported acquisition problems, but few, if any, indications of reduced food intake. These 7.7 percent of all households are labeled “low food security” on the chart and are represented by the dark blue slice. For roughly a third of food-insecure households, “inadequate” food meant not enough food. This subset of food-insecure households was in the more severe range of food insecurity described as very low food security, represented by the light blue slice in the chart. Five-point 1 percent of all U.S. households experienced very low food security in 2022. Households classified as having very low food security reported that the 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 a household adult had been hungry at times but did not eat because there wasn’t enough money for food.

Turning to trends in food insecurity and very low food security, we observe the following. In 2022, food insecurity increased to 12.8 percent of all U.S. households. Looking back food insecurity increased from 11.1 percent in 2007 to 14.6 percent in 2008 with the onset of the Great Recession. In 2011, food insecurity rates peaked at 14.9 percent of all U.S. households. By 2021 food insecurity declined to 10.2 percent of all U.S. households. In 2022, 5.1 percent of U.S. households were very low food secure. Previously, the percentage of U.S. households classified as very low food secure increased during the Great Recession, from 4.1 percent in 2007 to 5.7 percent in 2008. By 2021, very low food security declined to 3.8 percent.

The following chart shows the prevalence of food insecurity by household characteristics. There are two key takeaways from this chart. First, the chart shows which household characteristics are related to a higher prevalence of food insecurity. The patterns of groups with a relatively high prevalence of food insecurity are generally the same from year to year. These statistics are displayed separately for 2021 and 2022 in the columns labeled “Percent of Households.” Rates of food insecurity in 2022 were statistically significantly higher than the national average for the following types of households: all households with children, women living alone, households with a Black, non-Hispanic and Hispanic reference person, households with incomes below 185 percent of the Federal poverty line, and households in principal cities and

nonmetropolitan areas. Conversely, rates of food insecurity in 2022 were statistically significantly below the national average for the following types of households: married couples with children, households without children, households with adults aged 65 and older and adults aged 65 and older living alone, households with a White, non-Hispanic reference person, and households with incomes at or above 185 percent of the Federal poverty threshold. Second, this chart shows changes in the prevalence of food insecurity by household characteristics between 2021 and 2022. Changes in the prevalence of food insecurity are listed for each type of household in the column labeled “Percentage Point Change.” The asterisk after the percentage point change indicates which year to year changes are statistically significant. Notable large and statistically significant changes in food insecurity between 2021 and 2022 are listed to the right of this chart. Note, statistical significance is related both to the size of the change and the margins of error around the prevalence estimates. Food insecurity among nearly all subgroups of U.S. households increased between 2021 and 2022. If you are interested in reviewing any of the food-security statistics discussed in this chart in more detail, you can find these in Table 2 of the report released this morning. Detailed food-security statistics for households with children are available in Table 3 of the report.

Up to this point, all food insecurity prevalence estimates have been based on a single year of data. However, the Economic Research Service combines 3 years of survey data to provide more reliable state-level prevalence estimates. In this year’s food security report, data was combined from 2020 to 2022 to produce state-level food insecurity and very low food security prevalence estimates. On the map shown, states shaded in dark orange had higher than average food insecurity rates. In terms of food insecurity, these states were worse off. States shaded in orange had food insecurity rates that were near the national average. For these states, the difference from the national average was not statistically different. States shaded in yellow had food insecurity rates below the national average. In terms of food insecurity, these states were better off. Research has shown that several factors account for inter-state differences in food insecurity. These include the characteristics of households residing in each state, and a state’s economy and policies. The prevalence of food insecurity ranged from 6.2 percent in New Hampshire to 16.6 percent in Arkansas between 2020 and 2022. There were significant increases and decreases in the prevalence of food insecurity, when compared to the previous 3-year period, for several states. The prevalence of very low food security ranged from 2.1 percent in New Hampshire to 6.8 percent in Arkansas between 2020 and 2022.

Food insecurity can also impact children. USDA defines food insecurity among children as households that were unable, at some time during the year, to provide adequate, nutritious food for their children. Food insecurity in households with children is more complex than it is in households without children because food insecurity is measured

for the household overall and then among adults and children, separately. Very low food security among children occurs when a respondent reports that children were hungry, skipped a meal, or did not eat for a whole day because there was not enough money for food.

In 2022, 17.3 percent of households with children were food insecure. In about half of these households only adults were food insecure. For the remaining food-insecure households with children, 8.8 percent had children who are also food insecure at times during the year in 2022. The quality or quantity of children's diets was affected by food insecurity among these households. Adults often shield children from experiencing very low food security; however, children and adults experienced very low food security in 1.0 percent of households with children in 2022. Respondents in these households reported that children were hungry.

This trend chart show food insecurity in households with children at the top of the chart. The middle dashed dark purple line shows food insecurity among children, and the bottom dashed light purple line shows very low food security among children. Like overall trends in food insecurity among U.S. households, food insecurity in households with children increased with the onset of the Great Recession and then declined until 2019. All three of these categories increased in 2020 and decreased in 2021, except for very low food security among children. Food insecurity among children increased from 6.2 percent in 2021 to 8.8 percent in 2022. The prevalence of very low food security among children also increased from 0.7 percent in 2021 to 1.0 percent in 2022.

The Food Security Supplement also collects information on U.S. households' weekly food expenditures, and their use of Federal and community nutrition assistance programs. These data provide further context for understanding the food security of U.S. households in 2022. This table describes median weekly food expenditures by the food security status of U.S. households. Food expenditure was measured using two different methods: median weekly food expenditures per person and food expenditure relative to the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan. The Thrifty Food Plan serves as a national standard for a nutritious, practical, cost-effective diet. It represents a set of "market baskets" of foods and beverages that people in specific age and sex groups commonly consume at home that are lower in price and of higher nutritional quality to maintain a healthful diet that meets current dietary standards, considering the food consumption patterns of U.S households. After accounting for the estimated food need of U.S. households, the typical food-secure household spent 15 percent more for food than the typical food-insecure household. These statistics show that food-secure households spend more on food than do food-insecure households.

The annual food security report also jointly considers Federal nutrition assistance programs and food security. Roughly 55 percent of food-insecure households participated in one of the three largest Federal nutrition assistance programs in 2022.

About 40 percent utilized SNAP. Note, these are based off self-reported survey data, which is known to be impacted by underreporting of program participation.

Note, as I mentioned earlier, the community nutrition assistance program questions were revised in 2022. Therefore, these statistics are not comparable with statistics from previous years. 6.3 percent of U.S. households received free groceries in 2022, and this was more common among food-insecure households. Nearly 30 percent of food-insecure households received free groceries, and about 10 percent received free meals.

All the food security statistics up to this point are measured over previous 12 months. However, the Food Security Supplement also collects information on food security during the 30-days prior to the survey, covering mid-November to mid-December 2022. This chart provides estimates of the prevalence of food insecurity and very low food security in 2022 by reference period. Annual or “12-month” food-security statistics are represented by the columns to the left and labeled “any time during the year.” Thirty-day food-security statistics are represented by the columns to the right and labeled “any time during the 30 days prior to the survey.” The dark blue columns represent food insecurity, and the light blue columns represent very low food security. When food insecurity is measured over a shorter period, such as 30 days, the prevalence is lower. The prevalence of food insecurity and very low food security in the 30-day period—from mid-November to mid-December 2022—increased from 2021. In 2022, 7.0 percent of U.S. households were food insecure in the 30 days before the survey, statistically significantly up from 5.5 percent in 2021. Very low food security affected 2.8 percent of U.S. households in the 30 days before the survey, statistically significantly up from 2.2 percent in 2021. If you are interested in detailed 30-day food-security statistics by selected household characteristics, then these are available in Table S-4 of the statistical supplement to this report. This supplement can be accessed on the Economic Research Service website.

There are several key takeaways from this year’s food security report. Food insecurity increased from 10.2 percent in 2021 to 12.8 percent in 2022. The prevalence of food insecurity and very low food security increased from 2021 to 22 for most subgroups of U.S. households. Child food insecurity increased from 6.2 percent in 2021 to 8.8 percent in 2022. Additional information and resources for food security are available on the ERS website. The food security data visualizations will be updated later today. These visualizations include additional statistics on food insecurity by education attainment, and employment and disability status. We will now open the webinar for questions, and I will turn things back over to Ashley. Thank you.

Thanks Matt...uh let's go ahead and open the floor for questions now as you noted. Just a quick reminder that questions can be submitted through the chat feature located at the bottom-left-hand corner of your screen. For our first question, does the report provide county level estimates of food insecurity?

No, the report does not provide county level estimates because the particular data we're relying on in the current population survey um has a sample that's only nationally representative of the state and of the nation as a whole.

Got it...uh another question asks did the prevalence of food insecurity decline for any types of households from 2021 to 22?

No, the prevalence of food insecurity did not decline for any types of houses between 2021 and 2022.

Alright, um let's see here.... Another question asks uh how do the revisions to the supplement impact rates of food security or should they be comparable to 2021?

As mentioned during the webinar presentation, the Economic Research Service conducted extensive testing before implementing any changes to the food security supplement survey instrument and then carefully assessed those changes using an experimental data set. Um our findings indicated that there were no um issues with comparability of the food security statistics between 2021 in prior years and more information on this can be made available in our technical bulletin on the topic as well.

Thanks Matt. For our next question...um regionally, how does food insecurity defer regionally?

The prevalence of food insecurity in the Northeast, Midwest and West was statistically significantly lower than the prevalence in the South, and compared with the national average, food insecurity was statistically significantly lower in the Northeast and west but statistically significantly higher in the South.

Okay, good to know. Is there an...um sorry let me start over...Is there an estimated margin of error for the survey results?

Yes, there is. All of the statistics that are reported in this report do have corresponding levels of uncertainty around them, um however we do not report those within the report. We only talk about statistically significant changes.

Okay for the next question, what could possibly explain the increase in food insecurity from 21 to 22?

The annual prevalence of food insecurity is determined by many factors including the economy, federal state and local policies, and the individual circumstances of U.S. households. This report does not provide an analysis of the possible causal explanation for changes in food insecurity from year to year; however, we do know from prior research that increases in nutrition assistance and other forms of assistance do lead to reductions in food insecurity.

Alright, for our next question, is there a way to break out the data timeline to better understand the impact of scaled back food assistance resources?

There's certainly many other opportunities that can be undertaken for research and the Economic Research Service as well as other researchers across the country um will likely take up that topic depending on the...the resources available to those organizations.

Alright for our next question um do the food spending estimates include purchases made through snap um that being the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program?

Yes, the food expenditure questions within the current...current population survey food security supplement include all of the purchases made by households regardless of what type of resources were utilized in the previous week.

Okay next uh...when will the food and security data for 2023 be available and do you provide any future projections?

The um the 2022 data is available right now on the...the US Census Bureau website. The 2023 data will not be collected until December of this year and then we will release a report following that for 2023.

Okay our next question asks, is this food and security level in 2022 a high since before the pandemic time and since what year? Um what about a very low food security level?

The...the food and security rate for this particular year is statistically significantly different from 2020 and 2021.

Alright, are we seeing this trend in the pulse data?

Yes, we do observe an increase in uh food hardship as measured by the food sufficiency question within the Household Pulse Survey.

Thanks Matt. Another question asks, how does food spending as a whole compare to last year?

Food spending as a whole is relatively similar compared to last year; um however we do not provide as detailed an analysis based on that data within this report.

Okay next up, uh is there any data that allow for understanding how much inflation affected food security?

The Economic Research Service has conducted previous research examining um the factors that determine food insecurity, and I'm happy to refer you to those resources if you reach out to myself or to the ERS Communications team. We can connect you with those resources.

Great thank you. Another question is asking in um reference to figure five, what qualifies one's area of residence as a principal city or not a principal city?

The particular metropolitan status classifications are based off of the US Census Bureau guidelines for the CPS.

Okay, next up...Are there plans to continue these important household food security surveys annually into the next decade?

We are...we are working currently on um collecting the 2023 data. We...we do not have any particular um plans to... to discuss long-term, but obviously we've been collecting data since 1995 so there's a long-term commitment.

Thanks Matt, next up...um is there free groceries uh I'm sorry...Is the free groceries variable a proxy measure of food pantry utilization?

The free groceries variable is based off of cognitive interviewing and assessments based on from academic researchers on the potential best ways to...to measure utilization of food pantries and other types of food.... free food resources, um and after testing, we decided to implement that change this past year.

Got it. Alright another question...um what has the rate of inflation been for food prices over the same time period?

In this particular report we do not focus on anything beyond the food security statistics, um however if you look at the IRS website, um you can refer to our food price team that would provide you with key insights into food price inflation over the previous years.

Thanks Matt. Next question...Was the Covid-19 pandemic a factor in household food insecurity during the past three years?

We do not analyze the impact of Covid-19 on food security in this particular report.

Alright, and for our next question...Is a household's food security status based solely on their survey responses or are other economic factors and conditions taken into account?

Classification of a household into a particular food security status category is based on their responses to the 18 food security questions in the household food security survey module and their number of affirmative responses to those questions.

Okay and then our next question asks are there similarities between the increase in food insecurity now and during the 2008 recession?

We do not make direct comparisons between the increase of food insecurity between the Great Recession and the increase in food insecurity between 2021 in this particular report.

Okay, next one... um what are the main factors considered affecting food insecurity in the US in 2022?

This particular report is driven towards providing high quality and objective research on the food security of U.S. households in 2022 so that we can provide information that informs and enhances public and private decision making. Um we do not um examine the causal determinants of food insecurity in this particular report.

Okay next up...um is a household's food security status based solely on their...oh actually disregard. I already asked that one. Skip that...just one moment. Um next question asks, um do you have any information on changes in the response rates to the food security supplement of the survey?

Yes, within the data section of our report we do discuss um the response rate to the CPS food security supplement for this past year and we also include response rates for previous years as well. In addition, we also have uh contracted and collaborated with the US Census Bureau to look at examining non-response bias within the CPS food security supplement.

Alright uh that's all we have for today. Matt, thank you for sharing these insights on the prevalence and severity of food and Security in U.S. households in 2022. And thank you to our listeners for your interest in ERS research on this topic and for joining us today.

Before closing, I'd like to quickly note that in addition to our website ERS continues to deliver timely relevant research through our Charts of Note mobile app, which is free and available on Apple and Android devices. You can also follow us on social through LinkedIn and X (formerly known as Twitter). Uh thank you all, this concludes our webinar.