



United States Department of Agriculture

# Household Food Security in the United States in 2019

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Food Security Study Group  
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“The findings and conclusions in this presentation are those of the author and should not be construed to represent any official USDA or U.S. Government determination or policy.”



# Food Security Definitions

**Food Security:** Access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members.

**Food Insecurity:** Unable, at some time during the year, to provide adequate food for one or more household members due to a lack of resources.

**Very Low Food Security:** Normal eating patterns of some household members were disrupted at times during the year and their food intake reduced below levels they considered appropriate



# How is Food Security Measured?

Worsening food insecurity

**Can afford enough healthy food**

**Food secure**

**Worry, stretch, juggle**

**Food insecure**

**Reduce quality and variety of diet**

**Low food  
security**

**Reduce food intake (adults)**

**Very low**

**Reduce food intake of children**

**food security**



# Examples of Food Security Survey Questions

**“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.” Was that often, sometimes or never true for you in the last 12 months?**

**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?**

**In the last 12 months, did you ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn’t enough money for food?**

Worsening food insecurity ↓

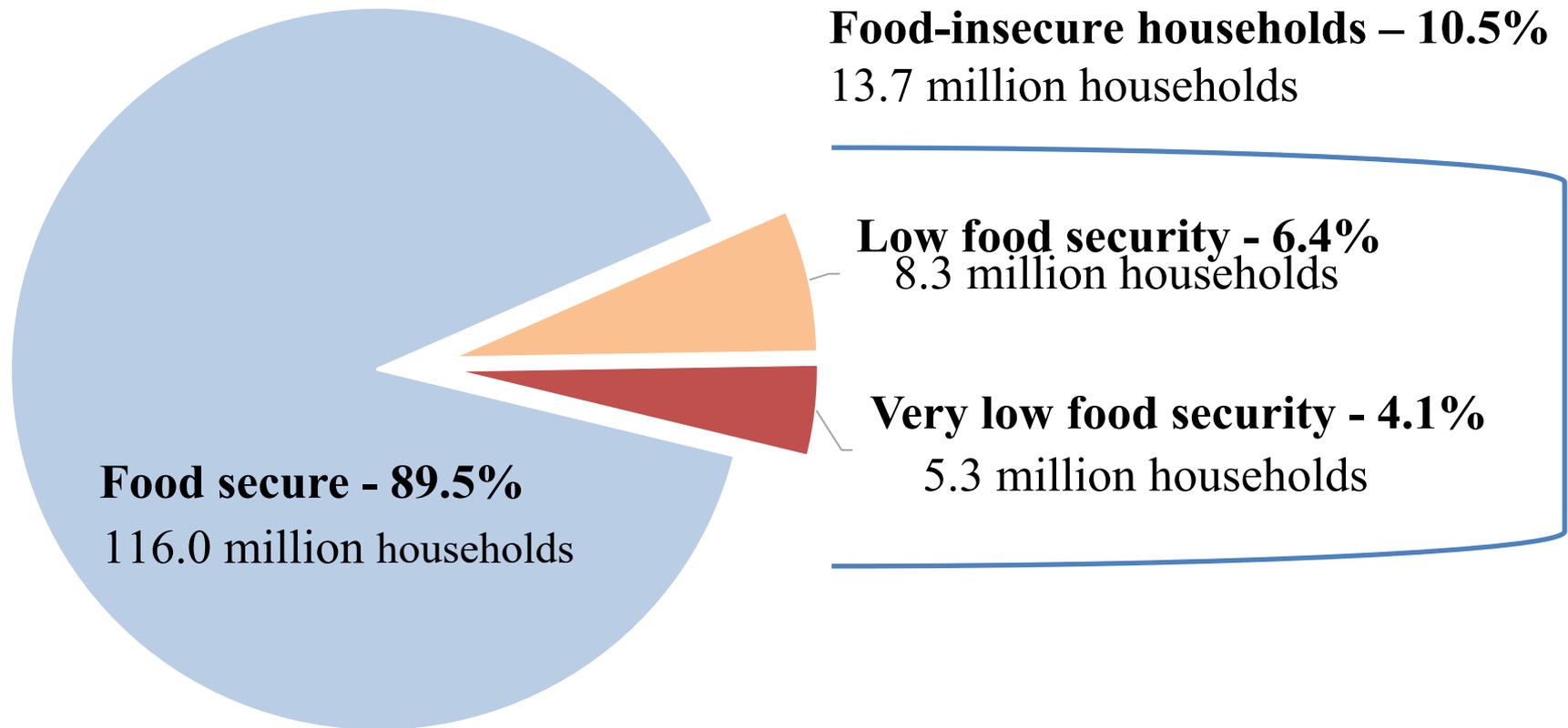


# Annual Food Security Survey

- **Current Population Survey (CPS)**
  - Conducted by Census Bureau
  - About 40,000 households
  - Representative of U.S. civilian households
  - Source of employment and poverty statistics
  - High quality survey: sample, field staff, data management
- **Food Security Supplement of the CPS**
  - Sponsored by ERS
  - Conducted annually in December since 2001 (fielded in other months 1995-2000)



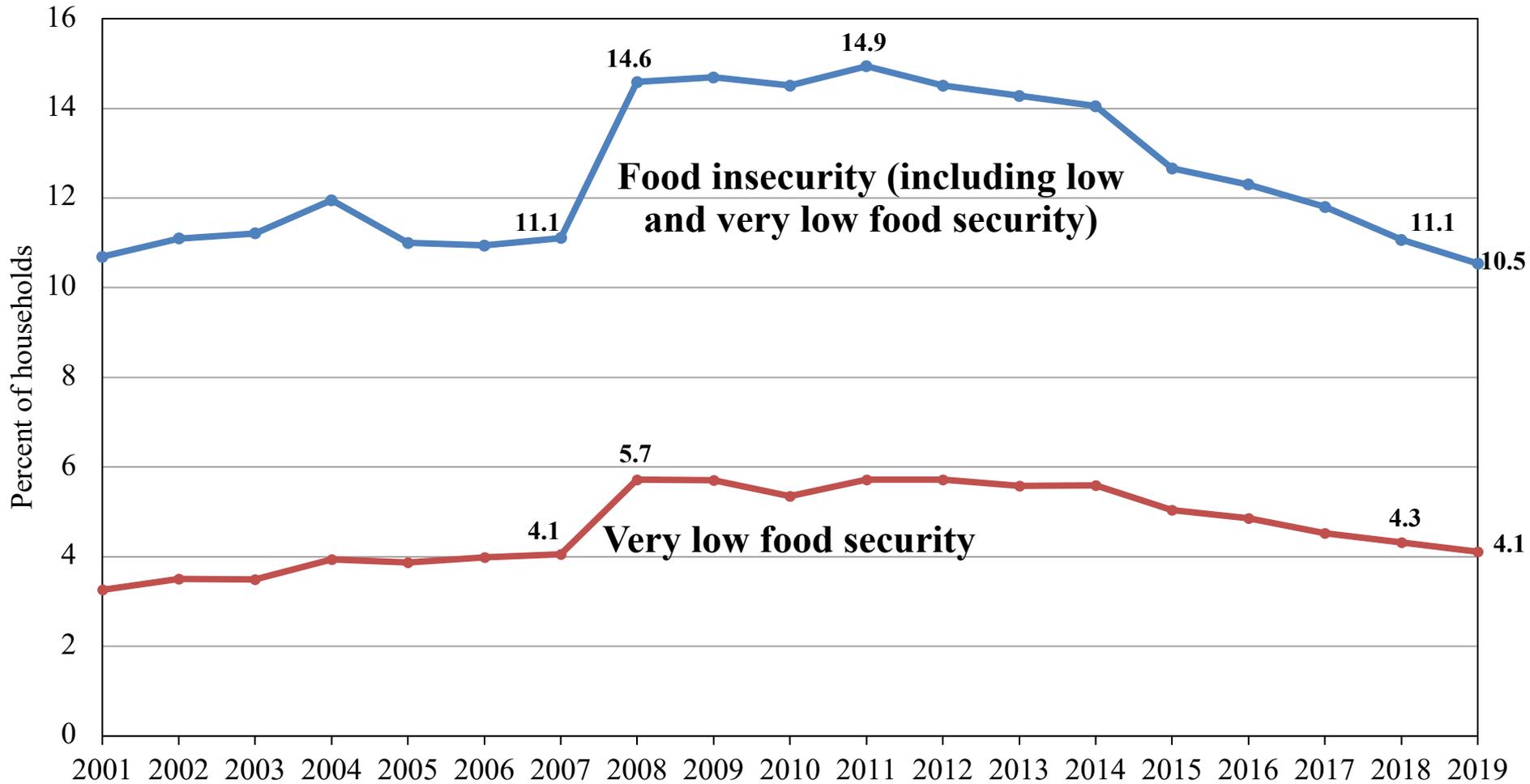
# U.S. Households by Food Security Status, 2019



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the December 2019 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.



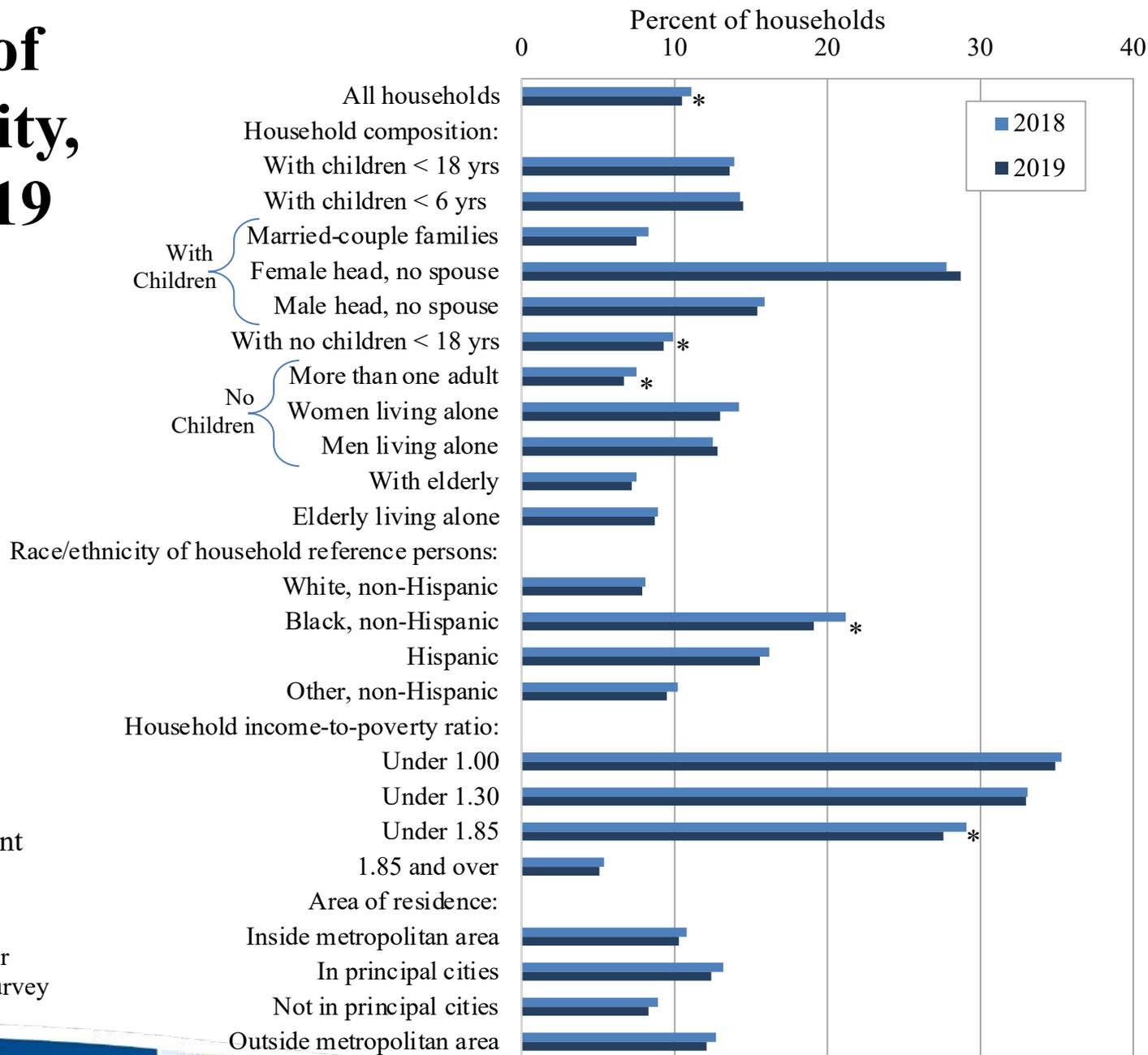
# Trends in Food Insecurity, 2001-2019



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



# Prevalence of Food Insecurity, 2018 and 2019

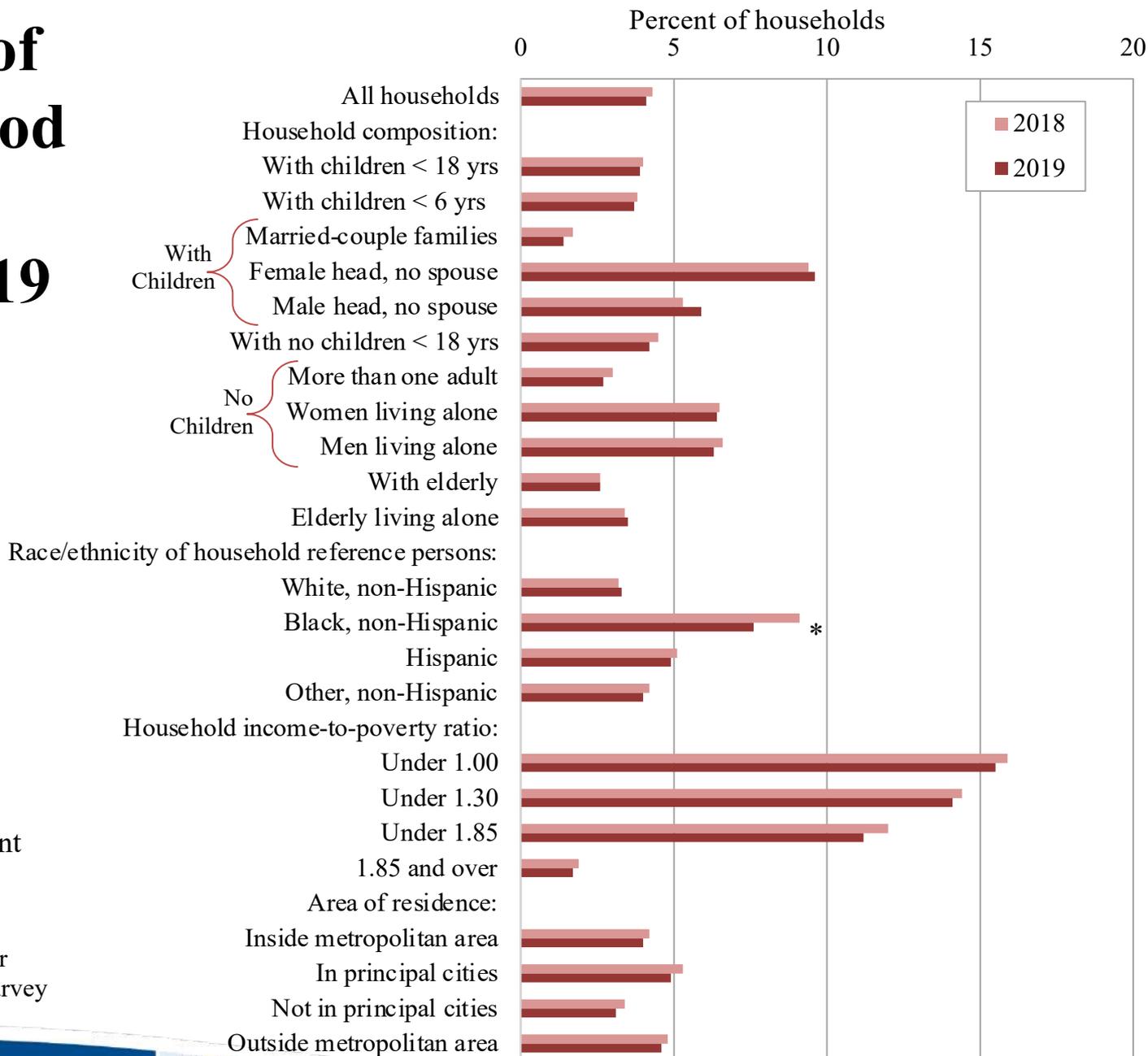


\* Indicates statistically significant change.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the December 2018 and 2019 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.



# Prevalence of Very Low Food Security, 2018 and 2019



\* Indicates statistically significant change.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the December 2018 and 2019 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.





# Factors that account for inter-state differences in food security

## Characteristics of resident households

- Income
- Education
- Home ownership
- Employment
- Disability

## State-level economy and policies

- Average wages
- Cost of housing
- Participation in nutrition assistance programs
- Unemployment rate and unemployment insurance
- Residential stability
- Tax burden on low-income households
- State EITC

Sources: “What Factors Account for State-to-State Differences in Food Security?”, by Judi Bartfeld, Rachel Dunifon, Mark Nord, and Steven Carlson, USDA/ERS, Economic Information Bulletin No. (EIB-20), November 2006.

Bartfeld, Judi, and Fei Men. 2017. “Food Insecurity Among Households with Children: The Role of the State Economic and Policy Context,” *Social Service Review* 91(4):691-732.



USDA ERS - Interactive Charts and Highlights

ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/interactive-charts-and-highlights/#States

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State variation Trends over time

### Very low food security (2016-2018)

Percent of households

Year

- 2016-2018
- 2013-2015
- 2010-2012
- 2007-2009
- 2004-2006
- 2001-2003

Choose food insecurity or very low food security

Very low food se...

2.8 6.8

Null

Click on a State to select it, or hold down CTRL and click on more than one to select a group

From 2016 to 2018, estimated prevalence rates of food insecurity ranged from 7.8 percent in New Hampshire to 18.8 percent in New Mexico, while very low food security ranged from 2.8 percent in New Hampshire to 6.8 percent in Alabama and Louisiana

#### State prevalence rate with 90-percent confidence interval

U.S. national average (vertical bar)

State	Year	Prevalence Rate (%)
Alabama	2016-2018	6.8
Louisiana	2016-2018	6.6
Mississippi	2016-2018	6.5
Kansas	2016-2018	6.2
Arkansas	2016-2018	6.1
Oklahoma	2016-2018	6.1
Moine	2016-2018	5.9
West Virginia	2016-2018	5.9
New Mexico	2016-2018	5.8
Ohio	2016-2018	5.8

Top

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**Choose years and States.**

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/interactive-charts-and-highlights/#States>



# U.S. Food Insecurity during the COVID-19 Pandemic in 2020



# Household Pulse Survey (HPS)

- Household Pulse Survey (HPS)
  - Developed by the U.S. Census Bureau in collaboration with five Federal agencies (including ERS)
  - **Intended to produce timely information on the economic and social effects of COVID-19 pandemic on U.S. households**
  - Collects information about education, employment, health, housing, and food-related outcomes
  - Weekly online survey that began on April 23, 2020 and continued until July 21, 2020 (12 weeks)
  - HPS Phase 2 began August 19, 2020 and will continue until October 26, 2020.



# What is food insufficiency?

**Food Insufficiency:** The household sometimes or often did not have enough to eat in the last 7 days.

Food sufficiency survey question:

In the **last 7 days**, which of these statements best describes the food eaten in your household? *Select only one answer.*

1. Enough of the kinds of food (I/we) wanted to eat
2. Enough, but not always the kinds of food (I/we) wanted to eat
3. Sometimes not enough to eat
4. Often not enough to eat

Scoring of responses:

Adult respondents who respond (3) or (4) are classified as food insufficient.

Responses of (3) are classified as having low food sufficiency.

Responses of (4) are classified as having very low food sufficiency.





# What is child food insufficiency?

**Child Food Insufficiency:** Children were not eating enough because the household could not afford enough food in the last 7 days.

Child food sufficiency survey question:

Please indicate whether the next statement was often true, sometimes true, or never true in the **last 7 days** for the children living in your household who are under 18 years old.

“The children were not eating enough because we just couldn't afford enough food.”

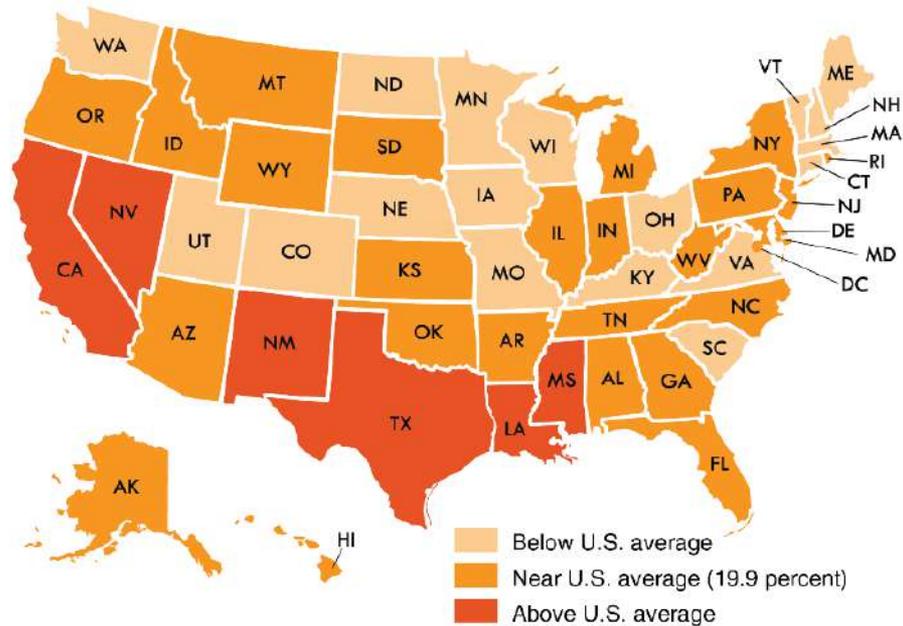
1. Often true
2. Sometimes true
3. Never true

Scoring of responses:

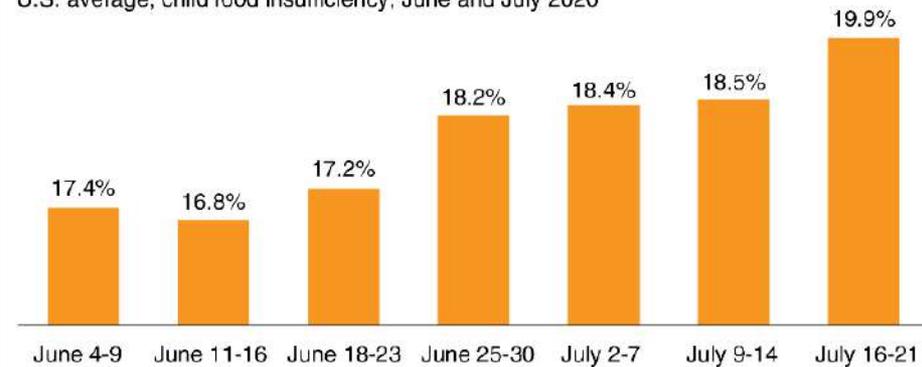
Responses of (1) or (2) are classified as having child food insufficiency.



State child food insufficiency rates, July 16-21, 2020



U.S. average, child food insufficiency, June and July 2020



Notes: Child food insufficiency means a respondent reported that the children in the household sometimes or often did not eat enough in the last 7 days because the household could not afford enough food.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the Household Pulse Survey, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/chart-gallery/gallery/chart-detail/?chartId=99189>



# Closing

- Findings from the annual Food Security Survey show that downward trends in food insecurity continued in 2019, even falling below pre-recession (2007) levels.
- Findings from the Household Pulse Survey show that food insufficiency rates have been relatively high during the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- Food insecurity and food insufficiency in Alaska is near the national average.



**For more information...**

**<https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us.aspx>**

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# Food insufficiency vs. food insecurity

## Food insufficiency

- *Detail* – single item asking whether had enough of the kinds of food wanted
  - Food insufficiency item used here is included in the CPS Food Security Supplement
- *Reference period* – last 7 days
- *Characteristics of food hardship experienced* - Food insufficiency is a **more severe condition than food insecurity and measures whether a household generally has enough to eat.** In this way, food insufficiency is closer in severity to very low food security than to overall food insecurity.

## Food insecurity

- *Detail* – ERS measures food insecurity with 10 (18) items for HH without (with) children
  - These items detail range of experiences from worry about food supply, changes in diet quality or variety, and disruptions in intake
- *Reference period* –12-months or 30-days
- *Characteristics of food hardship experienced* - Food insecurity: unable to acquire adequate food because they had insufficient money and other resources for food.  
Very low food security: **food insecure to the extent that eating patterns were disrupted and food intake reduced** because they could not afford enough food.

