

HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY IN THE UNITED STATES 1995-1998 (ADVANCE REPORT)

Office of Research and Analysis

July 1999

Background

New data from USDA's food security measurement project suggests that the strongest economy in a generation and the continued strength of the nation's nutrition assistance programs have helped most American households achieve or maintain food security. At the same time, the problem of hunger in this country still persists.

Food security is defined as access to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food insecurity occurs when access is limited or uncertain. Hunger – the inability, even occasionally, to obtain enough food – is a severe form of food insecurity.

Findings

Between 1995 and 1998, we find:

- Virtually no overall change in the prevalence of food insecurity. Food insecure households were 10.3 percent of all households in 1995 and 10.2 percent in 1998.

- Some improvement in more severe range of food insecurity. Evidence of hunger was found in 3.9 percent of all households in 1995 and 3.6 percent in 1998.
- Substantial numbers of people in households in which at least some members experienced hunger. In 1998, nearly 10 million people, over a third of them children, lived in such households.
- Some households at much greater risk of hunger than others. The prevalence of hunger was higher than average among households with children, especially those led by single women, minorities, and households with income below the official poverty line.

These estimates are based on answers to a set of questions that ask about a variety of household conditions, ranging from anxiety about the adequacy of the household food supply to reported reductions in food intake by adults and children. These questions were asked of about 45,000 households as part of the Current Population Survey (a nationally representative sample selected and interviewed by the Bureau of the Census).

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