

FOOD SECURITY

Food security is defined as having access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food security status is determined based on individuals' responses to questions about experiences and behaviors related to food insecurity, such as being unable to afford balanced meals, cutting the size of meals because of too little money for food, or being hungry because of too little money for food.⁶

Households or persons experiencing food insecurity may be categorized as experiencing "low food security" or "very low food security." Low food security generally indicates multiple food access issues but little if any reduced food intake, while very low food security indicates re-

duced food intake and disrupted eating patterns due to inadequate resources for food. Periods of low or very low food security are usually recurrent and episodic rather than chronic. Nonetheless, nutritional risk due to poor dietary quality can persist across periods of food insecurity, and may increase the risk of nutritional deficiencies and diet sensitive conditions like hypertension and diabetes.⁷

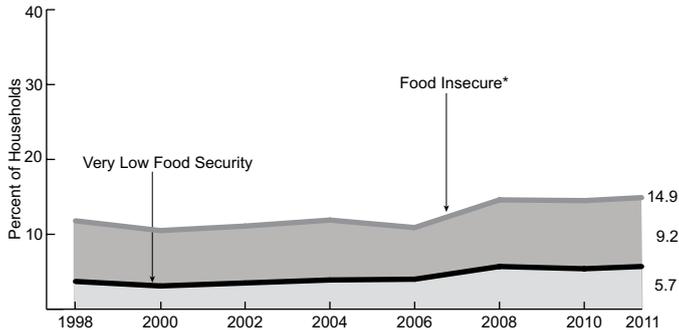
In 2011, an estimated 17.9 million or 14.9 percent of all households experienced food insecurity for one or more household members at some point in the past year; this rate did not change significantly from 2010. However, the prevalence of very low food security increased from 5.4 percent in 2010 to 5.7 percent in

2011, marking a return to levels seen in 2008 and 2009.

Food security status varies by household composition. While adult men and women living alone had similar rates of food insecurity in 2011 (15.5 and 15.6 percent, respectively), female-headed households with children and no spouse present were more likely than male-headed households with no spouse present to experience food insecurity (36.8 versus 24.9 percent, respectively). Female-headed households with children were also more likely than male-headed households with children to experience very low food security (11.5 versus 7.5 percent, respectively).

Household Food Insecurity, 1998–2011

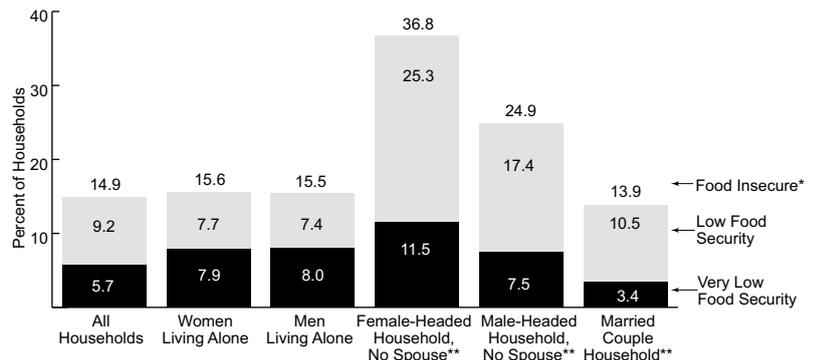
Source I.5: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Food Security Supplement



*Food insecure includes very low and low food security. Percentages may not add to totals due to rounding.

Food Security Status, by Household Composition, 2011

Source I.5: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Food Security Supplement



*Food insecure includes very low and low food security. Percentages may not add to totals due to rounding. **With children less than 18 years old.