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Measuring Food Security in the United States

Household Food Security in the United States, 2006

Mark Nord
Margaret Andrews
Steven Carlson



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Household Food Security in the United States, 2006

**Mark Nord, Margaret Andrews,
and Steven Carlson**

Abstract

Eighty-nine percent of American households were food secure throughout the entire year in 2006, meaning that they had access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members. The remaining households (10.9 percent) were food insecure at least some time during the year. About one-third of food insecure households (4.0 percent of all U.S. households) had very low food security—meaning that the food intake of one or more adults was reduced and their eating patterns were disrupted at times during the year because the household lacked money and other resources for food. Prevalence rates of food insecurity and very low food security were essentially unchanged from those in 2005. The typical food-secure household spent 31 percent more on food than the typical food-insecure household of the same size and household composition. Just over half of all food-insecure households participated in one or more of the three largest Federal food and nutrition assistance programs during the month prior to USDA's annual Food Security Survey.

Keywords: Food security, food insecurity, food spending, food pantry, soup kitchen, emergency kitchen, material well-being, Food Stamp Program, National School Lunch Program, WIC

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Summary

Most U.S. households have consistent, dependable access to enough food for active, healthy living—they are food secure. But a minority of American households experience food insecurity at times during the year, meaning that their access to adequate food is limited by a lack of money and other resources. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) monitors the extent and severity of food insecurity in U.S. households through an annual, nationally representative survey and has published statistical reports on household food security in the United States for each year since 1995. This report presents statistics on households' food security, food expenditures, and use of food and nutrition assistance programs for 2006.

What Is the Issue?

USDA's domestic food and nutrition assistance programs increase food security by providing low-income households access to food, a healthful diet, and nutrition education. Reliable monitoring of food security contributes to the effective operation of these programs as well as private food assistance programs and other government initiatives aimed at reducing food insecurity. This annual food security report provides statistics that guide planning for Federal, State, and community food assistance programs.

What Did the Study Find?

In 2006, 89.1 percent of U.S. households were food secure, essentially unchanged from 2005 (89.0 percent). Food-secure households had consistent access to enough food for active healthy lives for all household members at all times during the year. The remaining 10.9 percent (12.6 million households) were food insecure. These households, at some time during the year, had difficulty providing enough food for all their members due to a lack of resources.

About one-third of food-insecure households (4.6 million, or 4.0 percent of all U.S. households) had very low food security, essentially unchanged from 2005 (3.9 percent). In households with very low food security, the food intake of some household members was reduced, and their normal eating patterns were disrupted because of the household's food insecurity. The other two-thirds of food-insecure households obtained enough food to avoid substantial disruptions in eating patterns and food intake, using a variety of coping strategies, such as eating less varied diets, participating in Federal food and nutrition assistance programs, or obtaining emergency food from community food pantries or emergency kitchens.

Prior to 2006, households with low food security were described as "food insecure without hunger" and households with very low food security were described as "food insecure with hunger." Changes in these descriptions were made in 2006 at the recommendation of the National Research Council's Committee on National Statistics, in order to distinguish the physiological state of hunger from indicators of food availability. The criteria by which households were classified remained unchanged.

Even when resources are inadequate to provide food for the entire family, children are usually shielded from the disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake that characterize very low food security. Children, as well as adults, experienced very low food security in 221,000 households (0.6 percent of households with children). This rate has remained between 0.5 and 0.7 percent (statistically unchanged) since 1999.

The number of households with very low food security on a given day was a small fraction of the number that experienced this condition “at some time during the year.” On average, households classified as having very low food security experienced the condition in 7 months of the year and for a few days in each of those months. On an average day in November 2006, for example, an estimated 600,000 to 877,000 households (0.5-0.8 percent of all U.S. households) experienced very low food security, and children experienced these conditions in 29,000 to 33,000 households (0.07 to 0.08 percent of all U.S. households with children).

The prevalence of food insecurity varied considerably among different types of households. Rates of food insecurity were substantially higher than the national average for households with incomes near or below the Federal poverty line, households with children headed by single women, and Black and Hispanic households. Geographically, food insecurity was more common in large cities and rural areas and, regionally, more prevalent in the South.

Food-secure households spent more for food than food-insecure households. In 2006, the median U.S. household spent \$41.67 per person for food each week—about 28 percent more than the cost of USDA’s Thrifty Food Plan (a low-cost food “market basket” that meets dietary standards, taking into account household size and the age and gender of household members). The median food-insecure household spent 1 percent more than the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan, while the median food-secure household spent 32 percent more than the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan.

Some food-insecure households turn to Federal food and nutrition assistance programs or emergency food providers in their communities when they are unable to obtain enough food. Just over half of the food-insecure households surveyed in 2006 said that in the previous month they had participated in one or more of the three largest Federal food and nutrition assistance programs—the National School Lunch Program, the Food Stamp Program, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). About 21 percent of food-insecure households obtained emergency food from a food pantry at some time during the year, and 2.2 percent ate one or more meals at an emergency kitchen in their community.

How Was the Study Conducted?

Data for the ERS food security reports come from an annual survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau as a supplement to the monthly Current Population Survey. USDA sponsors the survey, and ERS compiles and analyzes the responses. The 2006 food security survey covered about 46,500 households and was a representative sample of the U.S. civilian population of 115 million households. The food security survey asked one adult respondent in each household a series of questions about experiences

and behaviors that indicate food insecurity. The food security status of the household was assessed based on the number of food-insecure conditions reported (such as being unable to afford balanced meals, cutting the size of meals because there was too little money for food, or being hungry because there was too little money for food). Households with very low food security among children were identified by responses to a subset of questions about the conditions and experiences of children. Survey respondents also reported the amounts their households had spent on food and whether they had used public or private food and nutrition assistance programs.

Introduction

Since 1995, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has collected information annually on food spending, food access and adequacy, and sources of food assistance for the U.S. population. The information is collected in an annual food security survey, conducted as a supplement to the nationally representative Current Population Survey (CPS). A major impetus for this data collection is to provide information about the prevalence and severity of food insecurity in U.S. households. USDA reports have summarized the findings of this research for each year from 1995 to 2005. (See appendix B for background on the development of the food security measures and a list of the reports.)

This report updates the national statistics on food security, household food spending, the use of Federal and community food and nutrition assistance by food-insecure households, and the numbers of households using community food pantries and emergency kitchens, using data collected in the December 2006 food security survey. The report also includes information on the food security of households during the 30-day period prior to the survey—from mid-November to mid-December 2006.

Unless otherwise noted, statistical differences described in the text are significant at the 90-percent confidence level.¹

¹Standard errors of estimates, except for State-level estimates, are based on a design factor of 1.6 due to the complex sampling design of the CPS. That is, the standard error of an estimated proportion is calculated as the square root of $[P \times Q \times 1.6 / N]$, where P is the estimated proportion, Q is 1-P, and N is the unweighted number of households in the denominator. The design factor of 1.6 is consistent with estimates based on more complex balanced repeated replication (BRR) methods (Cohen et al., 2002b; Hamilton et al., 1997b). Standard errors of State-level estimates were calculated using jackknife replication methods with “month-in-sample” groups considered as separate, independent samples (see Nord et al., 1999).

Household Food Security

Food security—access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life—is one of several conditions necessary for a population to be healthy and well nourished. This section provides information on food security and food insecurity in U.S. households based on the December 2006 food security survey—the 12th annual survey in the Nation’s food security monitoring system.

Methods

The statistics presented in this report are based on data collected in the Current Population Surveys’ (CPS) food security surveys for 1995-2006. The CPS includes about 55,000 households² and is representative, at State and national levels, of the civilian, noninstitutionalized population of the United States. About 46,500 households completed the food security section of the survey in December 2006; the remainder were unable or unwilling to do so. Weighting factors were calculated by the U.S. Census Bureau so that, when properly weighted, responses to the food security questions are representative at State and national levels.³ All statistics in this report were calculated by applying the food security supplement weights to responses of the surveyed households to obtain nationally representative prevalence estimates. Household supplement weights were used to calculate household-level statistics and person supplement weights were used to calculate statistics for all individuals, for adults, and for children.

The household food security statistics presented in this report are based on a measure of food security calculated from responses to a series of questions about conditions and behaviors known to characterize households having difficulty meeting basic food needs.⁴ Each question asks whether the condition or behavior occurred at any time during the previous 12 months and specifies a lack of money or other resources to obtain food as the reason. Voluntary fasting or dieting to lose weight are thereby excluded from the measure. The series includes 10 questions about food conditions of the household as a whole and of adults in the household and, if there are children present in the household, an additional 8 questions about their food conditions (see box, “Questions Used To Assess the Food Security of Households in the CPS Food Security Survey”). Responses to the 18 items used to classify households are reported in appendix A.

The food security status of each interviewed household is determined by the number of food-insecure conditions and behaviors the household reports. Households are classified as *food secure* if they report no food-insecure conditions or if they report only one or two food-insecure conditions. (Food-insecure conditions are indicated by responses of “often” or “sometimes” to questions 1-3 and 11-13, “almost every month” or “some months but not every month” to questions 5, 10, and 17, and “yes” to the other questions.) They are classified as food insecure if they report three or more food-insecure conditions.⁵

²The size of the CPS sample was increased in 2001; it had been around 50,000 households during the 1990s.

³Reweighting of the Supplement takes into consideration income and other information about households that completed the labor-force portion of the survey but not the Food Security Supplement. This corrects, to some extent, biases that could result from nonresponse to the Supplement by households that completed only the labor-force part of the survey.

⁴The methods used to measure the extent and severity of food insecurity have been described in several places (Hamilton et al., 1997a, 1997b; Andrews et al., 1998; Bickel et al., 1998; Carlson et al., 1999; Bickel et al., 2000; Nord and Bickel, 2002). See also the recent assessment of the measurement methods by a panel of the Committee on National Statistics (National Research Council, 2006). Further details on the development of the measure are provided in appendix B.

⁵To reduce the burden on higher income respondents, households with incomes above 185 percent of the Federal poverty line who give no indication of food-access problems on either of two preliminary screening questions are deemed to be food secure and are not asked the questions in the food security assessment series. The preliminary screening questions are as follows:

- People do different things when they are running out of money for food in order to make their food or their food money go further. In the last 12 months, since December of last year, did you ever run short of money and try to make your food or your food money go further?
- Which of these statements best describes the food eaten in your household—enough of the kinds of food we want to eat, enough but not always the kinds of food we want to eat, sometimes not enough to eat, or often not enough to eat?

Questions Used To Assess the Food Security of Households in the CPS Food Security Survey

1. “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?
2. “The food that we bought just didn’t last and we didn’t have money to get more.” Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 12 months?
3. “We couldn’t afford to eat balanced meals.” Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 12 months?
4. In the last 12 months, did you or other adults in the household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)
5. (If yes to Question 4) How often did this happen—almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only 1 or 2 months?
6. In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)
7. In the last 12 months, were you ever hungry, but didn’t eat, because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)
8. In the last 12 months, did you lose weight because because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)
9. In the last 12 months, did you or other adults in your household ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)
10. (If yes to Question 9) How often did this happen—almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only 1 or 2 months?

(Questions 11-18 are asked only if the household included children age 0-18)

11. “We relied on only a few kinds of low-cost food to feed our children because we were running out of money to buy food.” Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 12 months?
12. “We couldn’t feed our children a balanced meal, because we couldn’t afford that.” Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 12 months?
13. “The children were not eating enough because we just couldn’t afford enough food.” Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 12 months?
14. In the last 12 months, did you ever cut the size of any of the children’s meals because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)
15. In the last 12 months, were the children ever hungry but you just couldn’t afford more food? (Yes/No)
16. In the last 12 months, did any of the children ever skip a meal because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)
17. (If yes to Question 16) How often did this happen—almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only 1 or 2 months?
18. In the last 12 months, did any of the children ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)

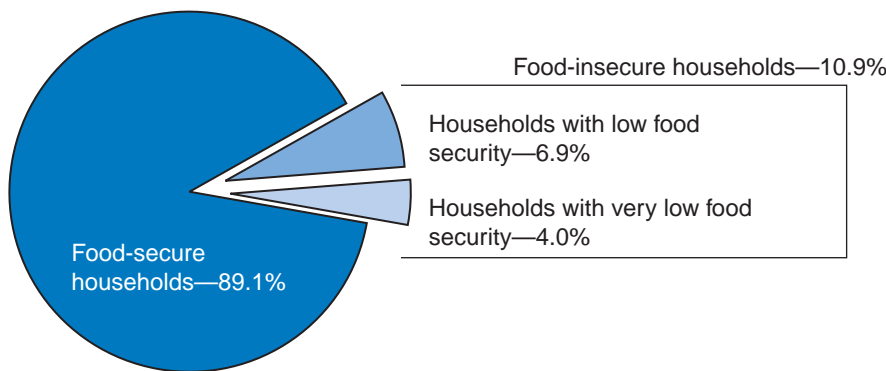
Food-insecure households are further classified as having either *low food security* or *very low food security*.⁶ The very low food security category identifies households in which food intake of one or more members was reduced and eating patterns disrupted because of insufficient money and other resources for food. Households without children are classified as having *very low food security* if they report six or more food-insecure conditions. Households with children are classified as having very low food security if they report eight or more food-insecure conditions, including conditions among both adults and children. Households with children are further classified as having *very low food security among children* if they report 5 or more food-insecure conditions among the children (that is, if they respond affirmatively to 5 or more of questions 11-18).

Households classified as having *low food security* have reported multiple indications of food access problems, but typically have reported few, if any, indications of reduced food intake. Households classified as having *very low food security* have reported multiple indications of reduced food intake and disrupted eating patterns due to inadequate resources for food. In most, but not all households with very low food security, the survey respondent reported that he or she was hungry but did not eat at some time during the year because there was not enough money for food.

Prevalence of Food Insecurity— National Conditions and Trends

Slightly more than 89 percent of U.S. households were food secure throughout the entire year 2006 (fig. 1, table 1A). “Food secure” means that all household members had access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.⁷ The remaining 12.6 million U.S. households (10.9 percent of all households) were food insecure at some time during the year. That is, they were, at times, uncertain of having, or unable to acquire, enough food for all household members because they had insufficient money and other resources for food. About two-thirds of food-insecure households avoided substantial reductions or disruptions in food intake, in many cases by relying on a few basic foods and reducing variety in their diets. But 4.6 million households

Figure 1
U.S. households by food security status, 2006



Source: Calculated by ERS using data from December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

⁶Prior to 2006, households with low food security were described as “food insecure without hunger” and households with very low food security were described as “food insecure with hunger.” Changes in these descriptions were made in 2006 at the recommendation of the Committee on National Statistics (National Research Council, 2006), in order to distinguish the physiological state of hunger from indicators of food availability. The criteria by which households were classified remained unchanged. See box “What Is ‘Very Low Food Security’?” on page 5 for further information on these changes.

⁷Food security and insecurity, as measured for this report, are based on respondent perceptions of whether the household was able to obtain enough food to meet their needs. The measure does not specifically address whether the household’s food intake was sufficient for active, healthy lives. Nonetheless, research based on other surveys has found food security, measured as in this report, to be associated with health, nutrition, and children’s development in a manner that generally supports the conceptualized link with sufficiency for active, healthy lives.

What Is “Very Low Food Security”?

The defining characteristic of very low food security (described as food insecurity with hunger prior to 2006) is that, at times during the year, the food intake of household members was reduced and their normal eating patterns were disrupted because the household lacked money and other resources for food. Very low food security can be characterized in terms of the conditions that households in this category reported in the food security survey. In the 2006 survey, **households classified as having very low food security** (representing an estimated 4.6 million households nationwide) reported the following specific conditions:

- 98 percent reported having worried that their food would run out before they got money to buy more.
- 96 percent reported that the food they bought just did not last and they did not have money to get more.
- 94 percent reported that they could not afford to eat balanced meals.
- 95 percent reported that an adult had cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there was not enough money for food.
- 85 percent reported that this had occurred in 3 or more months.
- In 95 percent, respondents reported that they had eaten less than they felt they should because there was not enough money for food.
- In 69 percent, respondents reported that they had been hungry but did not eat because they could not afford enough food.
- In 46 percent, respondents reported having lost weight because they did not have enough money for food.
- 33 percent reported that an adult did not eat for a whole day because there was not enough money for food.
- 24 percent reported that this had occurred in 3 or more months.
- All of those without children reported at least six of these conditions, and 71 percent reported seven or more. (Conditions in households with children were similar, but the reported food insecure conditions of both adults and children were taken into account.)

USDA introduced the terminology “very low food security” to replace “food insecurity with hunger” in 2006 in response to recommendations by the Committee on National Statistics (CNSTAT) of the National Academies. The expert panel convened by CNSTAT recommended that USDA make a clear and explicit distinction between food insecurity, which is a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food, and hunger, which is an individual-level physiological condition that may result from food insecurity. The CNSTAT panel recommended that USDA consider alternate labels to convey the severity of food insecurity without using the word “hunger,” since hunger is not adequately assessed in the food security survey.

Additional information about the CNSTAT assessment of the food security measure is provided in appendix B. A summary of the CNSTAT panel’s report, *Food Insecurity and Hunger in the United States: An Assessment of the Measure*, and link to the full text are available at: www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/FoodSecurity/NASsummary.htm.

Households reporting each indicator of food insecurity, by food security status, 2006



Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

Table 1A

Households and individuals by food security status of household, 1998-2006

Unit	Total ¹	Food secure		Food insecure						
				All		With low food security		With very low food security		
				1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent	1,000
Households:										
2006	115,609	102,961	89.1	12,648	10.9	8,031	6.9	4,617	4.0	
2005	114,437	101,851	89.0	12,586	11.0	8,158	7.1	4,428	3.9	
2004	112,967	99,473	88.1	13,494	11.9	9,045	8.0	4,449	3.9	
2003	112,214	99,631	88.8	12,583	11.2	8,663	7.7	3,920	3.5	
2002	108,601	96,543	88.9	12,058	11.1	8,259	7.6	3,799	3.5	
2001	107,824	96,303	89.3	11,521	10.7	8,010	7.4	3,511	3.3	
2000	106,043	94,942	89.5	11,101	10.5	7,786	7.3	3,315	3.1	
1999	104,684	94,154	89.9	10,529	10.1	7,420	7.1	3,109	3.0	
1998	103,309	91,121	88.2	12,188	11.8	8,353	8.1	3,835	3.7	
All individuals (by food security status of household): ²										
2006	294,010	258,495	87.9	35,515	12.1	24,395	8.3	11,120	3.8	
2005	291,501	256,373	87.9	35,128	12.1	24,349	8.4	10,779	3.7	
2004	288,603	250,407	86.8	38,196	13.2	27,535	9.5	10,661	3.7	
2003	286,410	250,155	87.3	36,255	12.7	26,622	9.3	9,633	3.4	
2002	279,035	244,133	87.5	34,902	12.5	25,517	9.1	9,385	3.4	
2001	276,661	243,019	87.8	33,642	12.2	24,628	8.9	9,014	3.3	
2000	273,685	240,454	87.9	33,231	12.1	24,708	9.0	8,523	3.1	
1999	270,318	239,304	88.5	31,015	11.5	23,237	8.6	7,779	2.9	
1998	268,366	232,219	86.5	36,147	13.5	26,290	9.8	9,857	3.7	
Adults (by food security status of household): ²										
2006	220,423	197,536	89.6	22,887	10.4	15,193	6.9	7,694	3.5	
2005	217,897	195,172	89.6	22,725	10.4	15,146	7.0	7,579	3.5	
2004	215,564	191,236	88.7	24,328	11.3	16,946	7.9	7,382	3.4	
2003	213,441	190,451	89.2	22,990	10.8	16,358	7.7	6,632	3.1	
2002	206,493	184,718	89.5	21,775	10.5	15,486	7.5	6,289	3.0	
2001	204,340	183,398	89.8	20,942	10.2	14,879	7.3	6,063	3.0	
2000	201,922	181,586	89.9	20,336	10.1	14,763	7.3	5,573	2.8	
1999	198,900	179,960	90.5	18,941	9.5	13,869	7.0	5,072	2.5	
1998	197,084	174,964	88.8	22,120	11.2	15,632	7.9	6,488	3.3	

¹Totals exclude households whose food security status is unknown because they did not give a valid response to any of the questions in the food security scale. In 2006, these represented 377,000 households (0.3 percent of all households.)

²The food security survey measures food security status at the household level. Not all individuals residing in food-insecure households were directly affected by the households' food insecurity. Similarly, not all individuals in households classified as having very low food security were subject to the reductions in food intake and disruptions in eating patterns that characterize this condition. Young children, in particular, are often protected from effects of the households' food insecurity.

Sources: Calculated by ERS using data from the August 1998, April 1999, September 2000, December 2001, December 2002, December 2003, December 2004, December 2005, and December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements.

(4.0 percent of all U.S. households) had *very low food security*—that is, they were food insecure to the extent that eating patterns of one or more household members were disrupted and their food intake reduced, at least some time during the year, because they couldn't afford enough food.

Children in most food-insecure households—even in households with very low food security—were protected from substantial reductions in food intake. However, in about 221,000 households (0.6 percent of households with children) one or more children were also subject to reduced food intake and disrupted eating patterns at some time during the year (table 1B). In some households with very low food security among children, only older children may have been subjected to the more severe effects of food insecurity while younger children were protected from those effects.

When interpreting food security statistics, it is important to keep in mind that households are classified as having low or very low food security if they experienced the condition at any time during the previous 12 months. The prevalence of these conditions on any given day is far below the corresponding annual prevalence. For example, the prevalence of very low food security on an average day during the 30-day period from mid-November to mid-December 2006 is estimated to have been between 0.5 and 0.8 percent

Table 1B

Households with children, and children, by food security status of household, 1998-2006

	Total ¹	Food secure		With low or very low food security among adults or children		With very low food security among children	
		1,000	1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent	1,000
Households with children:							
2006	39,436	33,279	84.4	6,157	15.6	221	0.6
2005	39,601	33,404	84.4	6,197	15.6	270	.7
2004	39,990	32,967	82.4	7,023	17.6	274	.7
2003	40,286	33,575	83.3	6,711	16.7	207	.5
2002	38,647	32,267	83.5	6,380	16.5	265	.7
2001	38,330	32,141	83.9	6,189	16.1	211	.6
2000	38,113	31,942	83.8	6,171	16.2	255	.7
1999	37,884	32,290	85.2	5,594	14.8	219	.6
1998	38,036	31,335	82.4	6,701	17.6	331	.9
Children (by food security status of household): ²							
2006	73,587	60,959	82.8	12,628	17.2	430	0.6
2005	73,604	61,201	83.1	12,403	16.9	606	.8
2004	73,039	59,171	81.0	13,868	19.0	545	.7
2003	72,969	59,704	81.8	13,265	18.2	420	.6
2002	72,542	59,415	81.9	13,127	18.1	567	.8
2001	72,321	59,620	82.4	12,701	17.6	467	.6
2000	71,763	58,867	82.0	12,896	18.0	562	.8
1999	71,418	59,344	83.1	12,074	16.9	511	.7
1998	71,282	57,255	80.3	14,027	19.7	716	1.0

¹Totals exclude households whose food security status is unknown because they did not give a valid response to any of the questions in the food security scale. In 2006, these represented 167,000 households (0.4 percent of all households with children.)

²The food security survey measures food security status at the household level. Not all children residing in food-insecure households were directly affected by the households' food insecurity. Similarly, not all children in households classified as having very low food security among children were subject to the reductions in food intake and disruptions in eating patterns that characterize this condition. Young children, in particular, are often protected from effects of the households' food insecurity.

Sources: Calculated by ERS using data from the August 1998, April 1999, September 2000, December 2001, December 2002, December 2003, December 2004, December 2005, and December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements.

of households (600,000 to 877,000 households), or about 13 to 19 percent of the annual rate (see box, “When Food Insecurity Occurs in U.S. Households, It Is Usually Recurrent but not Chronic”).

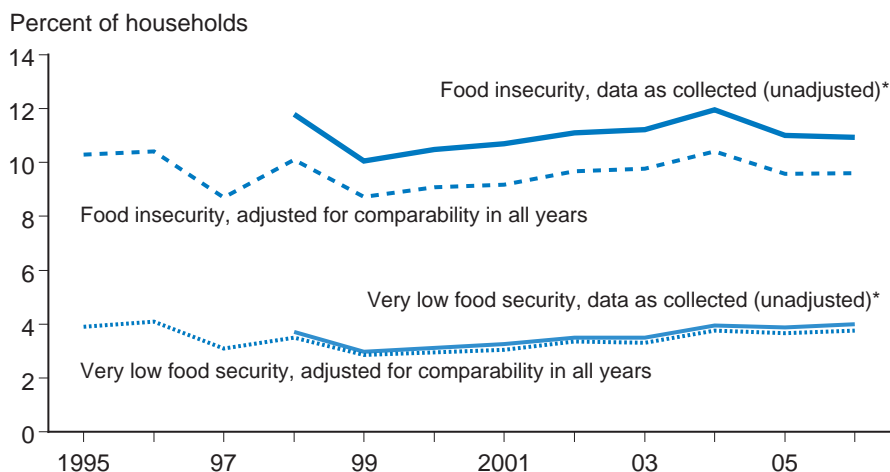
The prevalence of food insecurity in 2006 (10.9 percent of households) was essentially the same as in 2005 (11.0 percent) and lower than in 2004 (11.9 percent). The difference in the estimates for 2005 and 2006 is within the range that could have resulted from sampling variation. The prevalence of very low food security in 2006 (4.0 percent of households) was not significantly different from either 2005 or 2004 (both 3.9 percent). The prevalence of very low food security among children (0.6 percent) was also essentially unchanged from that in 2005 (0.7 percent). This rate has remained in the range of 0.5 to 0.7 percent (with no statistically significant changes) since 1999.

The prevalence of food insecurity in 2005 and 2006 was lower than in 2004, similar to the prevalence in 2001-03, and higher than the prevalence in 1999 and 2000 (fig. 2).⁸ The prevalence of very low food security has remained essentially unchanged since 2004 and is higher than during the period 1999-2003. From 1995-2000, the prevalence rates reflect an overall decline in food insecurity but also a 2-year cyclical component that is associated with data collection schedules (Cohen et al., 2002a). The CPS food security surveys over this period were conducted in April in odd-numbered years and August or September in even-numbered years. The measured prevalence of food insecurity was higher in the August/September collections, suggesting a seasonal response effect. Since 2001, the survey has been conducted in early December, which avoids further problems of seasonality effects in interpreting annual changes.⁹

Prevalence of Food Insecurity—Conditions and Trends by Selected Household Characteristics

The prevalence of food insecurity varied considerably among household types (table 2). Rates of food insecurity were well below the national average

Figure 2
Trends in the prevalence of food insecurity in U.S. households, 1995-2006



*Data as collected in 1995-97 are not directly comparable with data collected in 1998-2006.
Source: Calculated by ERS based on Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement data.

⁸Because of changes in screening procedures used to reduce respondent burden, food security statistics from 1995-97 are not directly comparable with those from 1998-2006. Figure 2 presents statistics for the years 1995-2006, adjusted to be comparable across all years, as well as statistics for 1998-2006 based on data as collected. See Andrews et al. (2000) and Ohls et al. (2001) for detailed information about questionnaire screening and adjustments for comparability.

⁹A smaller food security survey was also conducted in April 2001 to provide a baseline for assessing seasonal effects of data collection in December. Comparison of food security statistics from the April 2001 survey with those from April 1999 and December 2001 suggest that seasonal effects in early December were similar to those in April (Nord et al., 2002a).

When Food Insecurity Occurs in U.S. Households, It Is Usually Recurrent but not Chronic

When households experience very low food security in the United States, the resulting instances of reduced food intake and disrupted eating patterns are usually occasional or episodic but are not usually chronic. The food security measurement methods used in this report are designed to register these occasional or episodic occurrences. The questions used to assess households' food security status ask whether a condition, experience, or behavior occurred at any time in the past 12 months, and households can be classified as having very low food security based on a single, severe episode during the year. It is important to keep this aspect of the scale in mind when interpreting food insecurity statistics. Analysis of additional information collected in the food security survey on how frequently various food-insecure conditions occurred during the year, whether they occurred during the 30 days prior to the survey, and, if so, in how many days provide insight into the frequency and duration of food insecurity in U.S. households. These analyses reveal that in 2006:

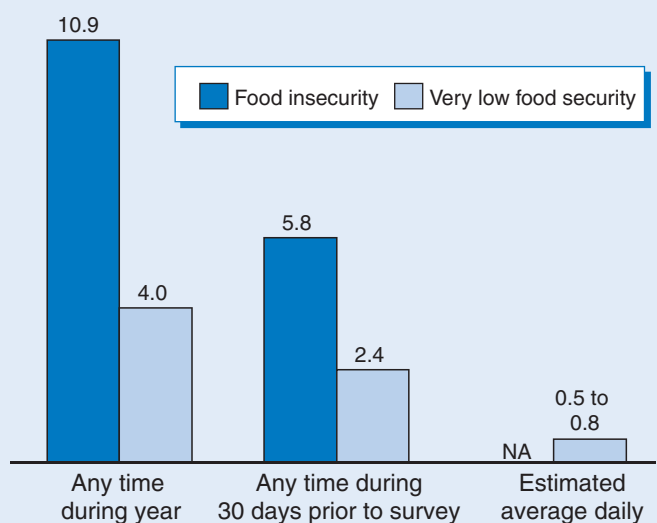
- About one-third of the households with very low food security at any time during the year experienced the associated conditions rarely or occasionally—in only 1 or 2 months of the year. For two-thirds, the conditions were recurring, experienced in 3 or more months of the year.
- For about one-fifth of food-insecure households and 30 percent of those with very low food security, occurrence of the associated conditions was frequent or chronic. That is, they occurred often, or in almost every month.
- On average, households that were food insecure at some time during the year were food insecure in 6 months during the year (see appendix E). During the 30-day period ending in mid-December 2006, 6.7 million households (5.8 percent) were food insecure—about 53 percent of the number that were food insecure at any time during the year.
- On average, households with very low food security at some time during the year experienced the associated conditions in 7 months during the year (see appendix E). During the 30-day period ending in mid-December 2006, 2.8 million households (2.4 percent) had very low food security—about 60 percent of the number with very low food security at any time during the year.
- Most households that had very low food security at some time during a month experienced the associated conditions in 1 to 7 days of the month. The average daily prevalence of very low food security during the 30-day period ending in mid-December 2006 was probably between 600,000 and 877,000 households (0.5 to 0.8 percent of all households)—about 13 to 19 percent of the annual prevalence.
- The daily prevalence of very low food security among children during the 30-day period ending in early December 2006 was probably between 29,000 and 33,000 households (0.07 to 0.08 percent of households with children)—about 13 to 15 percent of the annual prevalence.

The omission of homeless families and individuals from these daily statistics biases them downward, and the bias may be substantial relative to the estimates, especially for the most severe conditions.

(Appendix A provides information on how often conditions indicating food insecurity occurred as reported by respondents to the December 2006 food security survey. See Nord et al., 2000, for more information about the frequency of food insecurity.)

Prevalence of food insecurity and very low food security, by reference period

Percent of households



NA=Estimate of average daily occurrence not available.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

Table 2

Households by food security status and selected household characteristics, 2006

Category	Total ¹	Food insecure							
		Food secure		All		With low food security		With very low food security	
		1,000	1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent	1,000
All households	115,609	102,961	89.1	12,648	10.9	8,031	6.9	4,617	4.0
Household composition:									
With children < 18	39,436	33,278	84.4	6,158	15.6	4,481	11.4	1,677	4.3
With children < 6	17,161	14,295	83.3	2,866	16.7	2,141	12.5	725	4.2
Married-couple families	26,614	23,916	89.9	2,698	10.1	2,140	8.0	558	2.1
Female head, no spouse	9,572	6,665	69.6	2,907	30.4	1,925	20.1	982	10.3
Male head, no spouse	2,618	2,174	83.0	444	17.0	333	12.7	111	4.2
Other household with child ²	633	522	82.5	111	17.5	84	13.3	27	4.3
With no children < 18	76,173	69,683	91.5	6,490	8.5	3,550	4.7	2,940	3.9
More than one adult	44,742	41,822	93.5	2,920	6.5	1,769	4.0	1,151	2.6
Women living alone	17,587	15,600	88.7	1,987	11.3	971	5.5	1,016	5.8
Men living alone	13,844	12,261	88.6	1,583	11.4	810	5.9	773	5.6
With elderly	26,840	25,242	94.0	1,598	6.0	1,108	4.1	490	1.8
Elderly living alone	10,499	9,880	94.1	619	5.9	394	3.8	225	2.1
Race/ethnicity of households:									
White non-Hispanic	82,268	75,810	92.2	6,458	7.8	3,937	4.8	2,521	3.1
Black non-Hispanic	14,054	10,991	78.2	3,063	21.8	1,944	13.8	1,119	8.0
Hispanic ³	12,879	10,367	80.5	2,512	19.5	1,780	13.8	732	5.7
Other	6,409	5,793	90.4	616	9.6	370	5.8	246	3.8
Household income-to-poverty ratio:									
Under 1.00	11,829	7,533	63.7	4,296	36.3	2,540	21.5	1,756	14.8
Under 1.30	16,830	11,265	66.9	5,565	33.1	3,363	20.0	2,202	13.1
Under 1.85	27,613	20,075	72.7	7,538	27.3	4,593	16.6	2,945	10.7
1.85 and over	64,495	61,059	94.7	3,436	5.3	2,364	3.7	1,072	1.7
Income unknown	23,500	21,826	92.9	1,674	7.1	1,074	4.6	600	2.6
Area of residence: ⁴									
Inside metropolitan area	96,192	85,870	89.3	10,322	10.7	6,557	6.8	3,765	3.9
In principal cities ⁵	32,054	27,832	86.8	4,222	13.2	2,622	8.2	1,600	5.0
Not in principal cities	47,541	43,243	91.0	4,298	9.0	2,793	5.9	1,505	3.2
Outside metropolitan area	19,417	17,091	88.0	2,326	12.0	1,474	7.6	852	4.4
Census geographic region:									
Northeast	21,302	19,343	90.8	1,959	9.2	1,195	5.6	764	3.6
Midwest	26,560	23,717	89.3	2,843	10.7	1,804	6.8	1,039	3.9
South	42,283	37,099	87.7	5,184	12.3	3,361	7.9	1,823	4.3
West	25,464	22,802	89.5	2,662	10.5	1,671	6.6	991	3.9

¹Totals exclude households whose food security status is unknown because they did not give a valid response to any of the questions in the food security scale. In 2006, these represented 377,000 households (0.3 percent of all households)

²Households with children in complex living arrangements, e.g., children of other relatives or unrelated roommate or boarder.

³Hispanics may be of any race.

⁴Metropolitan area residence is based on 2003 Office of Management and Budget delineation. Prevalence rates by area of residence are comparable with those for 2004 and 2005 but are not precisely comparable with those of earlier years.

⁵Households within incorporated areas of the largest cities in each metropolitan area. Residence inside or outside of principal cities is not identified for about 17 percent of households in metropolitan statistical areas.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

of 10.9 percent for households with more than one adult and no children (6.5 percent) and for households with elderly persons (6.0 percent).¹⁰ Rates of food insecurity substantially higher than the national average were registered by the following groups:

- households with incomes below the official poverty line (36.3 percent),¹¹
- households with children, headed by single women (30.4 percent) or single men (17.0 percent),
- Black households (21.8 percent), and
- Hispanic households (19.5 percent).

Overall, households with children reported food insecurity at about double the rate for households without children (15.6 vs. 8.5 percent).¹² Among households with children, those headed by a married couple showed the lowest rate of food insecurity (10.1 percent).

The prevalence rates of food insecurity for households located in principal cities of metropolitan areas (13.2 percent) and in nonmetropolitan areas (12.0 percent) substantially exceeded the rate for households in suburbs and other metropolitan areas outside principal cities (9.0 percent).¹³ Regionally, the prevalence of food insecurity was higher than the national average in the South (12.3 percent) and lower than the national average in the Northeast (9.2 percent), while prevalence rates in the Midwest (10.7 percent) and West (10.5 percent) were near the national average.

The prevalence rates of very low food security in various types of households followed a pattern similar to that observed for food insecurity. Rates were lowest for married couples with children (2.1 percent), multiple-adult households with no children (2.6 percent), and households with elderly persons (1.8 percent). Very low food security was more prevalent than the national average (4.0 percent) among households with children headed by single women (10.3 percent), women living alone (5.8 percent), men living alone (5.6 percent), Black and Hispanic households (8.0 and 5.7 percent, respectively), households with incomes below the poverty line (14.8 percent), and households living in principal cities of metropolitan areas (5.0 percent).

Very low food security among children was least prevalent in married-couple households, White non-Hispanic households, and households with incomes above 185 percent of the poverty line (table 3). Children in households headed by single women were more likely to experience very low food security, as were children in households headed by a Black non-Hispanic person and those in households with incomes below 185 percent of the poverty line.

The prevalence of food insecurity was essentially unchanged from 2005 to 2006 in all categories analyzed for this report (fig. 3). The prevalence of very low food security increased from 2005 to 2006 for households with children headed by single women and for households in the Northeast Census region (fig. 4). Changes in other categories were within a range that could have resulted from sampling variation.

¹⁰“Elderly” in this report refers to persons ages 65 and older.

¹¹The Federal poverty line was \$20,444 for a family of four in 2006.

¹²The higher rate of food insecurity for households with children results, in part, from a difference in the measures applied to households with and without children. Responses to questions about children as well as adults are considered in assessing the food security status of households with children, but for both types of households, a total of three indications of food insecurity is required for classification as food insecure. Even with the child-referenced questions omitted from the scale, however, households with children were 47 percent more likely to be food insecure than were households without children. This measurement issue does not bias comparisons of very low food security because a higher threshold is applied to households with children consistent with the larger number of questions taken into consideration.

¹³Revised metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) and principal cities within them were delineated by the Office of Management and Budget in 2003 based on revised standards developed by the U.S. Census Bureau in collaboration with other Federal agencies. Food security prevalence statistics by area of residence are comparable with those for 2004 and 2005, but are not precisely comparable with those for earlier years. Principal cities include the incorporated areas of the largest city in each MSA and other cities in the MSA that meet specified criteria based on population size and commuting patterns.

Table 3

Prevalence of food security and food insecurity in households with children by selected household characteristics, 2006

Category	Total ¹	Food-secure households		Food-insecure households ²		Households with very low food security among children	
		1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent
All households with children	39,436	33,279	84.4	6,157	15.6	221	0.6
Household composition:							
With children < 6	17,161	14,295	83.3	2,866	16.7	57	.3
Married-couple families	26,614	23,916	89.9	2,698	10.1	81	.3
Female head, no spouse	9,572	6,666	69.6	2,906	30.4	126	1.3
Male head, no spouse	2,618	2,175	83.1	443	16.9	14	.5
Other household with child ³	633	523	82.6	110	17.4	0	0.0
Race/ethnicity of households:							
White non-Hispanic	24,474	21,702	88.7	2,772	11.3	71	.3
Black non-Hispanic	5,515	4,059	73.6	1,456	26.4	77	1.4
Hispanic ⁴	6,924	5,279	76.2	1,645	23.8	57	.8
Other	2,524	2,240	88.7	284	11.3	16	.6
Household income-to-poverty ratio:							
Under 1.00	5,394	3,071	56.9	2,323	43.1	108	2.0
Under 1.30	7,146	4,207	58.9	2,939	41.1	123	1.7
Under 1.85	11,555	7,559	65.4	3,996	34.6	163	1.4
1.85 and over	21,179	19,748	93.2	1,431	6.8	36	.2
Income unknown	6,701	5,971	89.1	730	10.9	22	.3
Area of residence: ⁵							
Inside metropolitan area	33,180	28,118	84.7	5,062	15.3	184	.6
In principal cities ⁶	10,474	8,521	81.4	1,953	18.6	76	.7
Not in principal cities	17,115	14,857	86.8	2,258	13.2	92	.5
Outside metropolitan area	6,256	5,161	82.5	1,095	17.5	37	.6
Census geographic region:							
Northeast	7,024	6,116	87.1	908	12.9	30	.4
Midwest	8,681	7,381	85.0	1,300	15.0	38	.4
South	14,458	11,872	82.1	2,586	17.9	93	.6
West	9,273	7,909	85.3	1,364	14.7	60	.6
Individuals in households with children:							
All individuals in households with children	158,571	133,681	84.3	24,890	15.7	871	.5
Adults in households with children	84,984	72,722	85.6	12,262	14.4	441	.5
Children	73,587	60,959	82.8	12,628	17.2	430	.6

¹Totals exclude households whose food security status is unknown because they did not give a valid response to any of the questions in the food security scale. In 2006, these represented 167,000 households with children (0.4 percent.)

²Food-insecure households are those with low or very low food security among adults or children.

³Households with children in complex living arrangements, e.g., children of other relatives or unrelated roommate or boarder.

⁴Hispanics may be of any race.

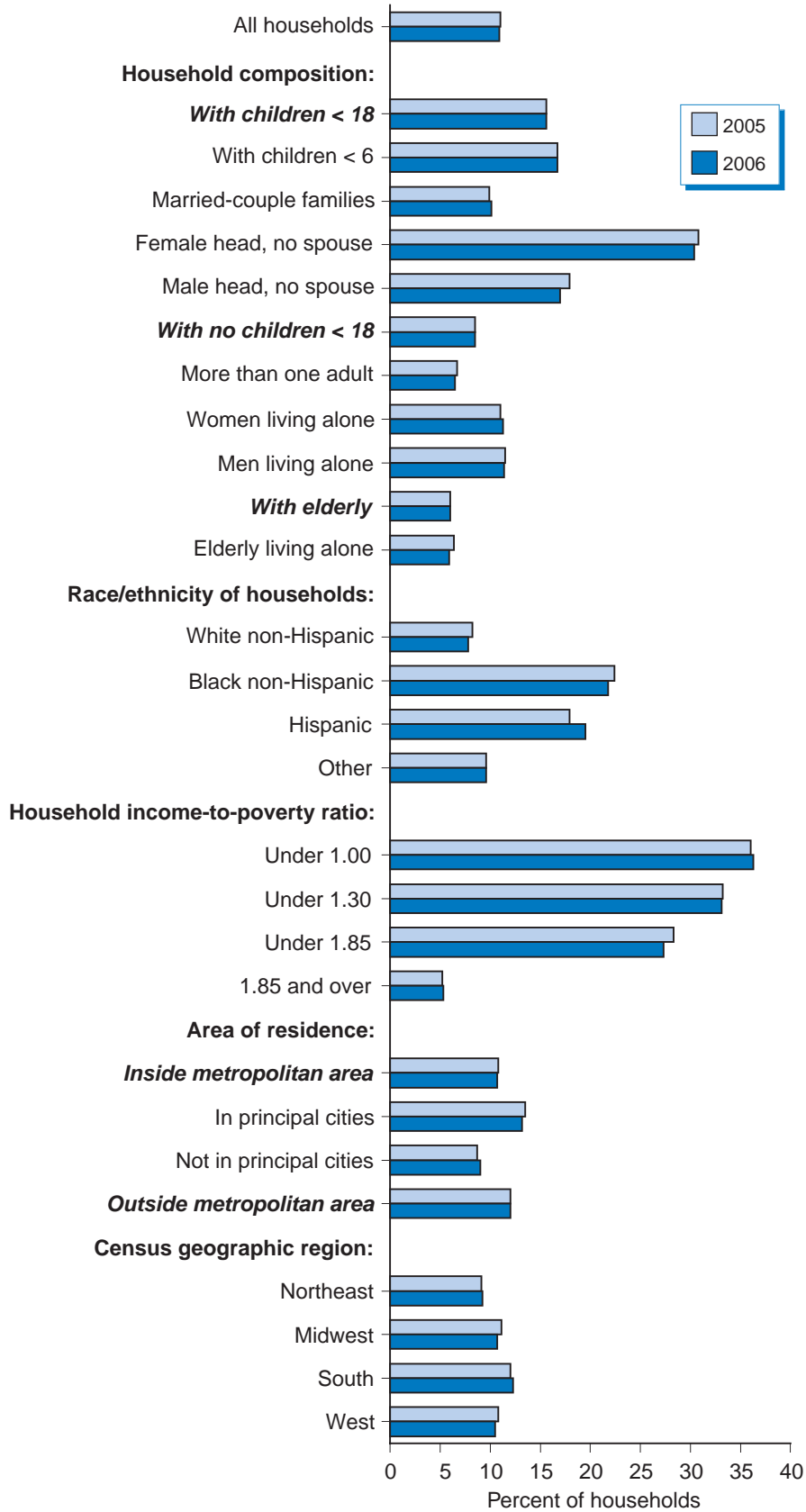
⁵Metropolitan area residence is based on 2003 Office of Management and Budget delineation. Prevalence rates by area of residence are comparable with those for 2004 and 2005 but are not precisely comparable with those of earlier years.

⁶Households within incorporated areas of the largest cities in each metropolitan area. Residence inside or outside of principal cities is not identified for about 17 percent of households in metropolitan statistical areas.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

Figure 3

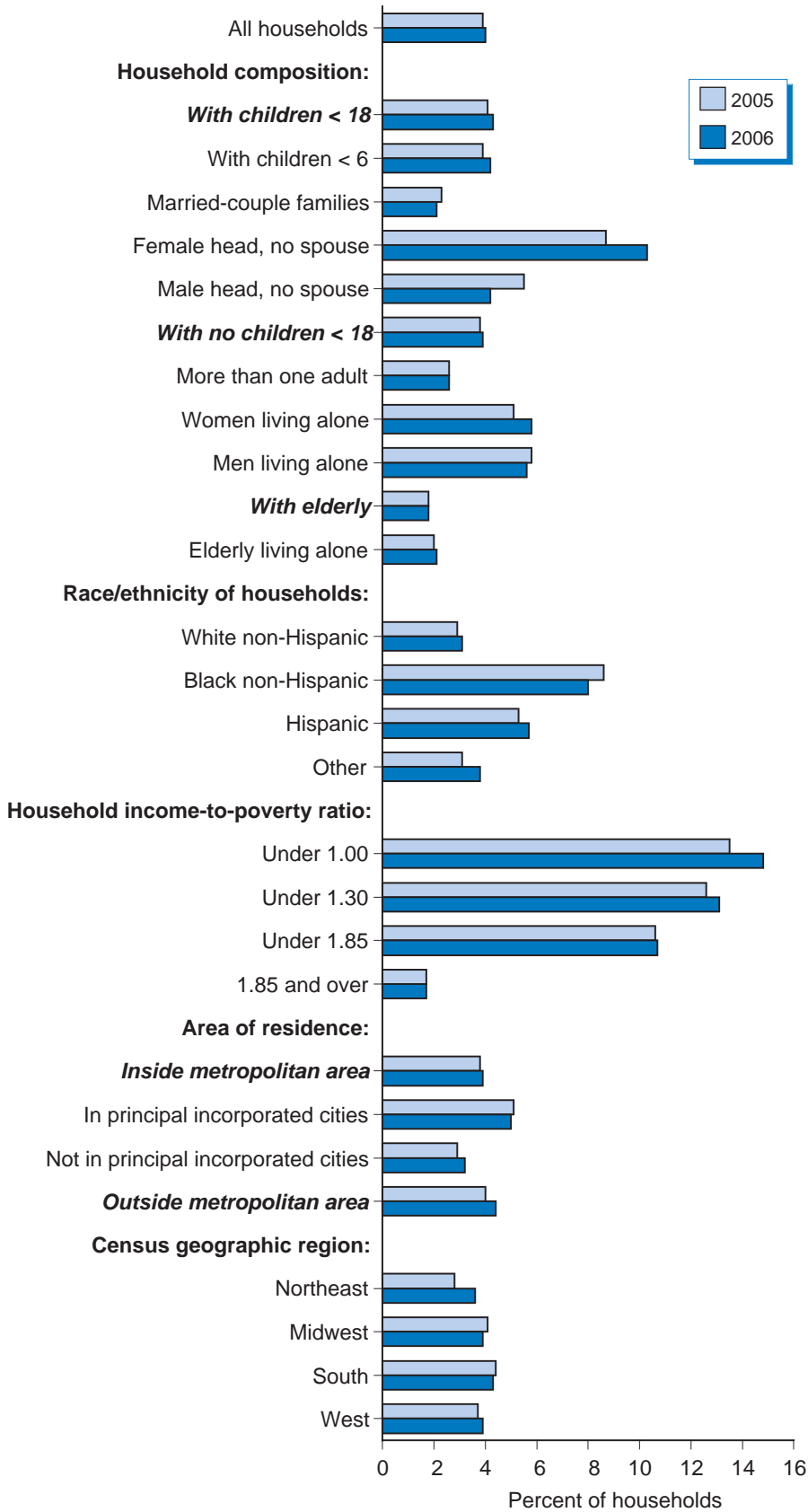
Prevalence of food insecurity, 2005 and 2006



Source: Calculated by ERS based on Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement data, December 2005 and December 2006.

Figure 4

Prevalence of very low food insecurity, 2005 and 2006



Source: Calculated by ERS based on Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement data, December 2005 and December 2006.

Food Insecurity in Low-Income Households

Food insecurity is by definition a condition that results from insufficient household resources. In 2006, food insecurity was more than five times as prevalent in households with annual incomes below 185 percent of the poverty line as it was in households with incomes above that range (table 2). However, many factors that might affect a household's food security (such as job loss, divorce, or other unexpected events) are not captured by an annual income measure. Some households experienced episodes of food insecurity, or even very low food security, even though their annual incomes were well above the poverty line (Nord and Brent, 2002; Gundersen and Gruber, 2001). On the other hand, many low-income households (including almost two-thirds of those with incomes below the official poverty line) were food secure.

Table 4 presents food security statistics for households with annual incomes below 130 percent of the poverty line.¹⁴ One in three of these low-income households was food insecure, including 13.1 percent that had very low food security at times during the year. Low-income households with children were more likely to be food insecure than low-income households without children (41.1 percent vs. 27.1 percent), but were less likely to have very low food security (12.0 percent vs. 13.9 percent). Low-income households with children headed by single women were especially vulnerable to food insecurity (46.0 percent).

Number of Persons, by Household Food Security Status and Selected Household Characteristics

The food security survey is designed to measure food security status at the household level. While it is informative to examine the number of persons residing in food-insecure households, these statistics should be interpreted carefully. In a single food-insecure household, different household members may have been affected differently by the households' food insecurity. Some members—particularly young children—may have experienced only mild effects or none at all, while adults were more severely affected. It is more precise, therefore, to describe these statistics as representing “persons living in food-insecure households” rather than as representing “food-insecure persons.” Similarly, “persons living in households with very low food security” is a more precise description than “persons with very low food security.”

In 2006, 35.5 million people lived in food-insecure households (table 1A). They constituted 12.1 percent of the U.S. civilian noninstitutionalized population and included 22.9 million adults and 12.6 million children. Of these individuals, 7.7 million adults and 3.4 million children lived in households with very low food security, and 430,000 children (0.6 percent of U.S. children) lived in households with very low food security among children (table 1B). Tables 5 and 6 present estimates of the number of people and the number of children in the households in each food security status and household type.

¹⁴Households with income below 130 percent of the poverty line are eligible to receive food stamps, provided they meet other eligibility criteria. Children in these households are eligible for free meals in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs.

Table 4

Households with income below 130 percent of the poverty line by food security status and selected household characteristics, 2006

Category	Total ¹	Food secure		Food insecure					
		1,000	Percent	All	With low food security		With very low food security		
	1,000	1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent
All low-income households	16,830	11,265	66.9	5,565	33.1	3,363	20.0	2,202	13.1
Household composition:									
With children < 18	7,146	4,206	58.9	2,940	41.1	2,083	29.1	857	12.0
With children < 6	3,783	2,319	61.3	1,464	38.7	1,056	27.9	408	10.8
Married-couple families	2,820	1,811	64.2	1,009	35.8	778	27.6	231	8.2
Female head, no spouse	3,661	1,976	54.0	1,685	46.0	1,130	30.9	555	15.2
Male head, no spouse	517	316	61.1	201	38.9	142	27.5	59	11.4
Other household with child ²	147	103	70.1	44	29.9	33	22.4	11	7.5
With no children < 18	9,684	7,058	72.9	2,626	27.1	1,281	13.2	1,345	13.9
More than one adult	3,975	2,927	73.6	1,048	26.4	600	15.1	448	11.3
Women living alone	3,415	2,545	74.5	870	25.5	378	11.1	492	14.4
Men living alone	2,294	1,585	69.1	709	30.9	303	13.2	406	17.7
With elderly	3,938	3,244	82.4	694	17.6	471	12.0	223	5.7
Elderly living alone	2,335	2,050	87.8	285	12.2	175	7.5	110	4.7
Race/ethnicity of households:									
White non-Hispanic	8,685	6,240	71.8	2,445	28.2	1,352	15.6	1,093	12.6
Black non-Hispanic	3,679	2,117	57.5	1,562	42.5	964	26.2	598	16.3
Hispanic ³	3,456	2,177	63.0	1,279	37.0	888	25.7	391	11.3
Other	1,010	731	72.4	279	27.6	159	15.7	120	11.9
Area of residence: ⁴									
Inside metropolitan area	12,873	8,464	65.8	4,409	34.2	2,671	20.7	1,738	13.5
In principal cities ⁵	5,659	3,721	65.8	1,938	34.2	1,172	20.7	766	13.5
Not in principal cities	4,607	2,977	64.6	1,630	35.4	1,011	21.9	619	13.4
Outside metropolitan area	3,957	2,801	70.8	1,156	29.2	692	17.5	464	11.7
Census geographic region:									
Northeast	2,506	1,754	70.0	752	30.0	421	16.8	331	13.2
Midwest	3,648	2,451	67.2	1,197	32.8	697	19.1	500	13.7
South	7,111	4,655	65.5	2,456	34.5	1,558	21.9	898	12.6
West	3,565	2,406	67.5	1,159	32.5	687	19.3	472	13.2
Individuals in low-income households (by food security status of household):									
All individuals in low-income households	44,437	28,342	63.8	16,095	36.2	10,777	24.3	5,318	12.0
Adults in low-income households	28,971	19,329	66.7	9,642	33.3	6,197	21.4	3,445	11.9
Children in low-income households	15,466	9,013	58.3	6,453	41.7	4,580	29.6	1,873	12.1

¹Totals exclude households whose income was not reported (about 20 percent of households), and those whose food security status is unknown because they did not give a valid response to any of the questions in the food security scale (0.8 percent of low-income households).

²Households with children in complex living arrangements, e.g., children of other relatives or unrelated roommate or boarder.

³Hispanics may be of any race.

⁴Metropolitan area residence is based on 2003 Office of Management and Budget delineation. Prevalence rates by area of residence are comparable with those for 2004 and 2005 but are not precisely comparable with those of earlier years.

⁵Households within incorporated areas of the largest cities in each metropolitan area. Residence inside or outside of principal cities is not identified for about 20 percent of low-income households in metropolitan statistical areas.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

Table 5

Number of individuals by food security status of households and selected household characteristics, 2006

Category	Total ¹	In food-insecure households							
		In food-secure households		All		In households with low food security		In households with very low food security	
		1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent
All individuals in households	294,010	258,495	87.9	35,515	12.1	24,395	8.3	11,120	3.8
Household composition:									
With children < 18	158,571	133,681	84.3	24,890	15.7	18,297	11.5	6,593	4.2
With children < 6	73,037	60,416	82.7	12,621	17.3	9,387	12.9	3,234	4.4
Married-couple families	114,138	101,661	89.1	12,477	10.9	9,891	8.7	2,586	2.3
Female head, no spouse	33,210	22,880	68.9	10,330	31.1	6,842	20.6	3,488	10.5
Male head, no spouse	8,941	7,279	81.4	1,662	18.6	1,234	13.8	428	4.8
Other household with child ²	2,283	1,861	81.5	422	18.5	331	14.5	91	4.0
With no children < 18	135,439	124,815	92.2	10,624	7.8	6,097	4.5	4,527	3.3
More than one adult	104,008	96,954	93.2	7,054	6.8	4,316	4.1	2,738	2.6
Women living alone	17,587	15,600	88.7	1,987	11.3	971	5.5	1,016	5.8
Men living alone	13,844	12,261	88.6	1,583	11.4	810	5.9	773	5.6
With elderly	52,014	48,357	93.0	3,657	7.0	2,714	5.2	943	1.8
Elderly living alone	10,499	9,880	94.1	619	5.9	394	3.8	225	2.1
Race/ethnicity of households:									
White non-Hispanic	197,978	181,526	91.7	16,452	8.3	10,955	5.5	5,497	2.8
Black non-Hispanic	35,540	27,396	77.1	8,144	22.9	5,460	15.4	2,684	7.6
Hispanic ³	42,481	33,477	78.8	9,004	21.2	6,825	16.1	2,179	5.1
Other	18,012	16,097	89.4	1,915	10.6	1,154	6.4	761	4.2
Household income-to-poverty ratio:									
Under 1.00	31,811	19,421	61.1	12,390	38.9	8,100	25.5	4,290	13.5
Under 1.30	44,437	28,342	63.8	16,095	36.2	10,777	24.3	5,318	12.0
Under 1.85	73,425	51,566	70.2	21,859	29.8	14,723	20.1	7,136	9.7
1.85 and over	163,620	154,855	94.6	8,765	5.4	6,437	3.9	2,328	1.4
Income unknown	56,966	52,076	91.4	4,890	8.6	3,234	5.7	1,656	2.9
Area of residence: ⁴									
Inside metropolitan area	246,311	217,008	88.1	29,303	11.9	20,178	8.2	9,125	3.7
In principal cities ⁵	78,819	67,157	85.2	11,662	14.8	7,843	10.0	3,819	4.8
Not in principal cities	126,436	113,534	89.8	12,902	10.2	9,062	7.2	3,840	3.0
Outside metropolitan area	47,699	41,487	87.0	6,212	13.0	4,217	8.8	1,995	4.2
Census geographic region:									
Northeast	53,682	48,532	90.4	5,150	9.6	3,497	6.5	1,653	3.1
Midwest	65,246	57,730	88.5	7,516	11.5	5,198	8.0	2,318	3.6
South	106,847	92,245	86.3	14,602	13.7	10,051	9.4	4,551	4.3
West	68,234	59,986	87.9	8,248	12.1	5,649	8.3	2,599	3.8

¹Totals exclude individuals in households whose food security status is unknown because they did not give a valid response to any of the questions in the food security scale. In 2006, these represented 1,048,000 individuals (0.4 percent of all individuals.)

²Households with children in complex living arrangements, e.g., children of other relatives or unrelated roommate or boarder.

³Hispanics may be of any race.

⁴Metropolitan area residence is based on 2003 Office of Management and Budget delineation. Prevalence rates by area of residence are comparable with those for 2004 and 2005 but are not precisely comparable with those of earlier years.

⁵Households within incorporated areas of the largest cities in each metropolitan area. Residence inside or outside of principal cities is not identified for about 17 percent of individuals living in metropolitan statistical areas.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

Table 6

Number of children by food security status of households and selected household characteristics, 2006

Category	Total ¹	In food-secure households		In food-insecure households ²		In households with very low food security among children	
		1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent
All children	73,587	60,959	82.8	12,628	17.2	430	0.6
Household composition:							
With children < 6	36,474	29,675	81.4	6,799	18.6	147	.4
Married-couple families	51,388	45,494	88.5	5,894	11.5	124	.2
Female head, no spouse	17,488	11,672	66.7	5,816	33.3	281	1.6
Male head, no spouse	3,876	3,120	80.5	756	19.5	25	.6
Other household with child ³	836	675	80.7	161	19.3	0	0.0
Race/ethnicity of households:							
White non-Hispanic	44,508	39,258	88.2	5,250	11.8	142	.3
Black non-Hispanic	10,722	7,585	70.7	3,137	29.3	166	1.5
Hispanic ⁴	13,826	10,226	74.0	3,600	26.0	98	.7
Other	4,532	3,891	85.9	641	14.1	24	.5
Household income-to-poverty ratio:							
Under 1.00	11,786	6,643	56.4	5,143	43.6	250	2.1
Under 1.30	15,466	9,013	58.3	6,453	41.7	282	1.8
Under 1.85	24,133	15,609	64.7	8,524	35.3	344	1.4
1.85 and over	37,203	34,731	93.4	2,472	6.6	58	.2
Income unknown	12,251	10,619	86.7	1,632	13.3	28	.2
Area of residence: ⁵							
Inside metropolitan area	62,293	51,736	83.1	10,557	16.9	368	.6
In principal cities ⁶	19,739	15,569	78.9	4,170	21.1	143	.7
Not in principal cities	32,455	27,724	85.4	4,731	14.6	188	.6
Outside metropolitan area	11,294	9,222	81.7	2,072	18.3	63	.6
Census geographic region:							
Northeast	12,611	10,809	85.7	1,802	14.3	64	.5
Midwest	16,057	13,411	83.5	2,646	16.5	89	.6
South	26,909	21,729	80.7	5,180	19.3	160	.6
West	18,009	15,010	83.3	2,999	16.7	117	.6

¹Totals exclude children in households whose food security status is unknown because they did not give a valid response to any of the questions in the food security scale. In 2006, these represented 315,000 children (0.4 percent.)

²Food-insecure households are those with low or very low food security among adults or children.

³Households with children in complex living arrangements, e.g., children of other relatives or unrelated roommate or boarder.

⁴Hispanics may be of any race.

⁵Metropolitan area residence is based on 2003 Office of Management and Budget delineation. Prevalence rates by area of residence are comparable with those for 2004 and 2005, but are not precisely comparable with those of earlier years.

⁶Households within incorporated areas of the largest cities in each metropolitan area. Residence inside or outside of principal cities is not identified for about 16 percent of children living in metropolitan statistical areas.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

Prevalence of Food Insecurity by State, Average 2004-06

The prevalence of food insecurity varied considerably from State to State. Data for 3 years, 2004-06, were combined to provide more reliable statistics at the State level (table 7). Measured prevalence rates of food insecurity during this 3-year period ranged from 6.4 percent in North Dakota to 18.1 percent in Mississippi; measured prevalence rates of very low food security ranged from 2.1 percent in New Jersey to 6.4 percent in Mississippi.

The margin of error for the State prevalence rates should be taken into consideration when interpreting these statistics and especially when comparing prevalence rates across States. The margin of error reflects sampling variation—the uncertainty associated with estimates that are based on information from a limited number of households in each State. The margins of error presented in table 7 indicate the range (above or below the estimated prevalence rate) within which the true prevalence rate is 90 percent likely to fall. For example, considering the margin of error, it is not certain that the rate of very low food insecurity was higher in Mississippi than in the States with the next three highest prevalence rates.

Taking into account the margins of error of the State and U.S. estimates, the prevalence of food insecurity was higher (i.e., statistically significantly higher) than the national average in 15 States and the District of Columbia, and lower than the national average in 20 States. In the remaining 14 States, differences from the national average were not statistically significant. The prevalence of very low food security was higher than the national average in 12 States, lower than the national average in 16 States, and not significantly different from the national average in 22 States and the District of Columbia.

The 2004-06 State-level food security statistics are compared with those for 2001-03 and 1996-98 in appendix D. The 1996-98 statistics originally published by ERS in *Prevalence of Food Insecurity and Hunger, by State, 1996-1998* (Nord et al., 1999) cannot be compared directly with those for later years because of changes over the years in screening procedures used to reduce respondent burden in the food security surveys. The 1996-98 statistics presented in appendix D have been adjusted for these screening differences.

Table 7

Prevalence of household-level food insecurity and very low food security by State, average 2004-06¹

State	Number of households		Food insecurity (low or very low food security)		Very low food security	
	Average 2004-06 ²	Interviewed	Prevalence	Margin of error ³	Prevalence	Margin of error ³
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percentage points</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percentage points</i>
U.S.	114,338,000	141,683	11.3	0.26	3.9	0.14
AK	243,000	1,785	12.6	1.36	5.1*	0.71
AL	1,831,000	1,685	12.1	1.55	3.3	1.10
AR	1,125,000	1,687	14.3*	1.17	5.8*	1.04
AZ	2,216,000	1,868	13.1*	1.55	4.3	0.72
CA	12,807,000	10,155	10.9	0.73	3.7	0.45
CO	1,874,000	2,988	12.0	1.31	4.4	0.65
CT	1,386,000	2,758	8.6*	0.95	2.7*	0.46
DC	266,000	1,970	12.5*	0.90	3.8	0.84
DE	328,000	2,118	7.8*	1.43	2.6*	0.61
FL	7,242,000	5,893	8.9*	0.56	3.1*	0.24
GA	3,523,000	2,844	12.6	1.65	5.0*	0.89
HI	448,000	1,843	7.8*	0.59	2.8*	0.62
IA	1,210,000	2,857	11.4	1.33	3.9	0.58
ID	526,000	1,696	12.7*	0.88	3.5	0.59
IL	4,937,000	4,373	9.8*	0.85	3.5*	0.34
IN	2,480,000	2,453	10.8	1.44	4.0	0.57
KS	1,098,000	2,303	12.5*	0.80	4.5*	0.34
KY	1,690,000	2,064	13.6*	1.66	4.6*	0.66
LA	1,585,000	1,251	14.4*	1.41	5.0	1.24
MA	2,492,000	2,246	8.1*	0.83	3.0*	0.47
MD	2,125,000	3,119	9.5*	1.13	3.9	0.45
ME	545,000	2,945	12.9*	1.04	5.3*	0.79
MI	3,985,000	3,529	12.2	1.19	4.6	0.80
MN	2,043,000	3,415	8.2*	0.94	3.2*	0.48
MO	2,383,000	2,598	12.3	1.12	4.4*	0.46
MS	1,103,000	1,312	18.1*	1.87	6.4*	0.80
MT	412,000	1,697	9.9	1.44	4.3	0.59
NC	3,426,000	2,939	12.9*	1.24	4.4	0.64
ND	262,000	2,048	6.4*	0.94	2.2*	0.53
NE	709,000	2,323	9.5*	1.68	3.8	0.71
NH	509,000	2,889	7.4*	0.94	2.2*	0.38
NJ	3,172,000	2,660	7.7*	0.87	2.1*	0.41
NM	770,000	1,453	16.1*	2.00	5.8*	1.16
NV	923,000	2,232	8.8*	0.66	3.2*	0.41
NY	7,468,000	5,726	9.8*	0.47	3.2*	0.26
OH	4,617,000	4,180	12.7*	0.89	4.1	0.40
OK	1,401,000	1,884	14.6*	1.36	5.3*	0.68
OR	1,434,000	1,997	11.9	1.32	4.4	0.82
PA	4,916,000	4,604	10.0*	0.78	3.3*	0.33
RI	429,000	2,407	11.3	1.26	3.7	0.65
SC	1,703,000	1,991	14.7*	1.58	5.9*	0.69
SD	324,000	2,392	9.5*	0.69	3.3*	0.51
TN	2,418,000	1,967	12.5	1.72	4.3	0.83
TX	8,371,000	6,567	15.9*	0.50	5.3*	0.30
UT	806,000	1,629	14.5*	1.69	5.1	1.65
VA	2,827,000	2,939	7.9*	0.86	2.8*	0.49
VT	261,000	2,116	9.6*	1.29	4.3	0.88
WA	2,492,000	2,523	10.3	1.51	3.6	0.80
WI	2,253,000	2,925	8.9*	0.99	2.7*	0.44
WV	733,000	1,808	9.3*	0.68	3.2	0.77
WY	209,000	2,032	10.6	0.98	3.7	0.87

*Difference from U.S. average was statistically significant with 90 percent confidence ($t > 1.645$).

¹Prevalence rates for 1996-98 reported in *Prevalence of Food Insecurity and Hunger, by State, 1996-1998* (Nord et al., 1999) are not directly comparable with the rates reported here because of differences in screening procedures in the CPS Food Security Supplements from 1995 to 1998. Comparable statistics for the earlier period are presented in appendix D.

²Totals exclude households whose food security status is unknown because they did not give a valid response to any of the questions in the food security scale. These represented about 0.3 percent of all households in each year.

³Margin of error with 90 percent confidence (1.645 times the standard error of the estimated prevalence rate).

Source: Prepared by ERS using data from the December 2004, December 2005, and December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements.

Household Spending on Food

This section provides information on how much households spent on food, as reported in the December 2006 food security survey. Food insecurity is a condition that arises specifically from lack of money and other resources to acquire food. In most households, the majority of food consumed by household members is purchased—either from supermarkets or grocery stores to be eaten at home, or from cafeterias, restaurants, or vending machines to be eaten outside the home. The amount of money that a household spends on food, therefore, provides insight into how adequately it is meeting its food needs.¹⁵ When households reduce food spending below some minimum level because of constrained resources, various aspects of food insecurity such as disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake may result.

Methods

The household food expenditure statistics in this report are based on *usual* weekly spending for food, as reported by respondents after they were given a chance to reflect on the household's actual food spending during the previous week. Respondents were first asked to report the amounts of money their households had spent on food in the week prior to the interview (including any purchases made with food stamps) at:

- supermarkets and grocery stores;
- stores other than supermarkets and grocery stores such as meat markets, produce stands, bakeries, warehouse clubs, and convenience stores;
- restaurants, fast food places, cafeterias, and vending machines;
- any other kind of place.¹⁶

Total spending for food, based on responses to this series of questions, was verified with the respondent, and the respondent was then asked how much the household *usually* spent on food during a week. Earlier analyses by ERS researchers found that food expenditures estimated from data collected by this method were consistent with estimates from the Consumer Expenditure Survey (CES)—the principal source of data on U.S. household expenditures for goods and services (Oliveira and Rose, 1996).

Food spending was adjusted for household size and composition in two ways. The first adjustment was calculated by dividing each household's usual weekly food spending by the number of persons in the household, yielding the "usual weekly food spending per person" for that household. The second adjustment accounts more precisely for the different food needs of households by comparing each household's usual food spending to the estimated cost of the Thrifty Food Plan for that household in December 2006.¹⁷ The Thrifty Food Plan—developed by USDA—serves as a national standard for a nutritious, low-cost diet. It represents a set of "market baskets" of food that people of specific ages and genders could consume at home to maintain a healthful diet that meets current dietary standards, taking into account the food consumption patterns of U.S. households.¹⁸ Each household's reported usual weekly food spending was divided by the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan for that household, calculated based on the age and gender of each household member and the number of persons in the household (see table C-1).¹⁹

¹⁵Food spending is only an indirect indicator of food consumption. It understates food consumption in households that receive food from in-kind programs, such as the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), meal programs for children in child care and for the elderly, and private charitable organizations. (Purchases with food stamps, however, are counted as food spending in the CPS food security survey.) Food spending also understates food consumption in households that acquire a substantial part of their food supply through gardening, hunting, or fishing, as well as in households that eat more meals at friends' or relatives' homes than they provide to friends or relatives. (Food spending overstates food consumption in households with the opposite characteristics.) Food spending also understates food consumption in geographical areas with relatively low food prices and overstates consumption in areas with high food prices.

¹⁶For spending in the first two categories of stores, respondents were also asked how much of the amount was for "nonfood items such as pet food, paper products, alcohol, detergents, or cleaning supplies." These amounts are not included in calculating spending for food.

¹⁷The cost of the Thrifty Food Plan is revised each month to account for inflation in food prices.

¹⁸The Thrifty Food Plan, in addition to its use as a research tool, is used as a basis for setting the maximum benefit amounts of the Food Stamp Program. (See appendix C for further information on the Thrifty Food Plan and estimates of the weekly cost of the Thrifty Food Plan and three other USDA food plans for each age-gender group.)

¹⁹Thrifty Food Plan costs are estimated separately for Alaska and Hawaii using adjustment factors calculated from USDA's Thrifty Food Plan costs for those States for the second half of 2006.

The medians of the two food spending measures (spending per person per week and spending relative to the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan) were estimated at the national level and for households in various categories to represent the usual weekly food spending of the typical household in each category. Medians are reported rather than averages because medians are not unduly affected by the few unexpectedly high values of usual food spending that are believed to be reporting errors or data entry errors. Thus, the median better reflects what a typical household spent.

Data were weighted using food security supplement weights provided by the Census Bureau so that the interviewed households would represent all households in the United States. About 7 percent of households interviewed in the CPS food security survey did not respond to the food spending questions and were excluded from the analysis. As a result, the total number of households represented in tables 8 and 9 is somewhat smaller than that in tables 1 and 2, and food spending estimates may not be fully representative of all households in the United States.²⁰

Food Expenditures, by Selected Household Characteristics

In 2006, the typical U.S. household spent \$41.67 per person each week for food (table 8). Median household food spending relative to the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan—which adjusts more precisely for food needs of persons of different ages—was 1.28. That is, the typical household spent 28 percent more on food than the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan, taking into account the age and gender of the household members. Median spending for food relative to the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan in 2006 was statistically unchanged from the 2005 level (1.26) but was higher than the 2004 level (1.25).

Households with children under age 18 generally spent less for food, relative to the Thrifty Food Plan, than those without children. The typical household with children spent 13 percent more than the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan, while the typical household with no children spent 36 percent more than the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan. Median food expenditure relative to the Thrifty Food Plan was lower for households with children headed by single women (1.03) than for married couples with children (1.17). Median food expenditures relative to the Thrifty Food Plan were highest for men living alone (1.59).

Median food expenditures relative to the Thrifty Food Plan were lower for Black households (1.08) and Hispanic households (1.11) than for non-Hispanic White households (1.34). This pattern is consistent with the lower average incomes and higher poverty rates of these racial and ethnic minorities.

As expected, higher income households spent more money on food than lower income households.²¹ The typical household with income below the poverty line spent about 5 percent less than the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan, while the typical household with income above 185 percent of the poverty line spent 41 percent more than the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan.

Median food spending relative to the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan for households outside metropolitan areas was 1.10, compared with 1.32 for households inside metropolitan areas. Regionally, median spending on food was

²⁰Households that reported food spending were more likely to be food insecure than those that did not report food spending (11.2 percent compared with 7.6 percent). Food spending may, therefore, be slightly underestimated from these data.

²¹However, food spending does not rise proportionately with income increases, so high-income households actually spend a smaller *proportion* of their income on food than do low-income households.

Table 8

Weekly household food spending per person and relative to the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP), 2006

Category	Number of households ¹	Median weekly food spending	
		Per person	Relative to cost of TFP
	<i>1,000</i>	<i>Dollars</i>	<i>Ratio</i>
All households	107,520	41.67	1.28
Household composition:			
With children < 18	37,352	33.33	1.13
At least one child < 6	16,308	30.00	1.13
Married-couple families	25,256	33.75	1.17
Female head, no spouse	9,106	30.00	1.03
Male head, no spouse	2,415	33.33	1.10
Other household with child ²	576	33.33	1.02
With no children < 18	70,168	50.00	1.36
More than one adult	41,261	46.67	1.33
Women living alone	16,030	50.00	1.36
Men living alone	12,876	60.00	1.59
With elderly	23,860	40.00	1.17
Elderly living alone	9,276	45.00	1.22
Race/ethnicity of households:			
White non-Hispanic	76,987	45.00	1.34
Black non-Hispanic	12,689	35.00	1.08
Hispanic ³	12,028	35.00	1.11
Other	5,816	40.00	1.19
Household income-to-poverty ratio:			
Under 1.00	11,195	30.00	.95
Under 1.30	15,968	30.00	.95
Under 1.85	26,257	32.00	.99
1.85 and over	61,996	50.00	1.41
Income unknown	19,267	40.00	1.24
Area of residence: ⁴			
Inside metropolitan area	89,470	44.00	1.32
In principal cities ⁵	29,511	45.00	1.32
Not in principal cities	44,291	45.00	1.35
Outside metropolitan area	18,050	37.50	1.10
Census geographic region:			
Northeast	19,483	43.75	1.32
Midwest	24,674	40.00	1.18
South	39,633	41.67	1.28
West	23,730	45.00	1.36

¹Totals exclude households that did not answer the questions about spending on food. These represented 7.3 percent of all households.

²Households with children in complex living arrangements, e.g., children of other relatives or unrelated roommate or boarder.

³Hispanics may be of any race.

⁴Metropolitan area residence is based on 2003 Office of Management and Budget delineation. Food spending statistics by area of residence are comparable with those for 2004 and 2005, but are not precisely comparable with those of earlier years.

⁵Households within incorporated areas of the largest cities in each metropolitan area. Residence inside or outside of principal cities is not identified for about 17 percent of households in metropolitan statistical areas.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

lowest in the Midwest (1.18 times the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan) and highest in the Northeast (1.32) and West (1.36).

Food Expenditures and Household Food Security

Food-secure households typically spent more on food than food-insecure households. Median food spending relative to the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan was 1.32 among food-secure households, compared with 1.01 among food-insecure households (table 9). Thus, the typical food-secure household spent 31 percent more for food than the typical household of the same size and composition that was food insecure.

The relationship between food expenditures and food security was consistent across household structure, race/ethnicity, income, metropolitan residence, and geographic region (table 10). For every household type, median food spending relative to the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan was higher for food-secure than food-insecure households. This was true even for households within the same income category. For example, among households with incomes below the poverty line, median food spending relative to the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan was 0.90 for food-insecure households compared with 0.95 for food-secure households. Typically, food-secure households with incomes above 130 percent of the poverty line spent more on food than the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan.

Although the *relationship* between food expenditures and food security was consistent, the *levels* of food expenditure varied substantially across household types, even within the same food security status. For food-insecure households, food expenditures of typical households in most categories were close to the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan, but there were some notable exceptions. Individuals living alone—especially men living alone—spent substantially more on food than the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan for their age and gender. Food-insecure households with incomes above 185 percent of the poverty line also registered median food expenditures substantially higher than the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan.²²

Table 9

Weekly household food spending per person and relative to the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) by food security status, 2006

Category	Number of households ¹	Median weekly food spending	
		Per person	Relative to cost of TFP
		Dollars	Ratio
All households	1,000	41.67	1.28
Food security status:			
Food-secure households	95,300	45.00	1.32
Food-insecure households	12,017	32.00	1.01
Households with low food security	7,629	32.00	1.02
Households with very low food security	4,388	31.50	.96

¹Total for all households excludes households that did not answer the questions about spending on food. These represented 7.3 percent of all households. Totals in the bottom section also exclude households that did not answer any of the questions in the food security scale.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

²²ERS analysis has found that the experiences of food insecurity of higher and middle-income households are, disproportionately, occasional and of short duration (Nord et al., 2000). Their food expenditures during those food-insecure periods may have been lower than the amount they reported as their “usual” weekly spending for food.

Table 10

Weekly household food spending relative to the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) by food security status and selected household characteristics, 2006

Category	Median weekly food spending relative to TFP ¹	
	Food secure	Food insecure
	<i>Ratio</i>	
All households	1.32	1.01
Household composition:		
With children < 18	1.17	.95
At least one child < 6	1.15	.98
Married couple families	1.19	.96
Female head, no spouse	1.09	.93
Male head, no spouse	1.13	.95
Other household with child ²	1.02	NA
With no children < 18	1.38	1.07
More than one adult	1.38	1.01
Women living alone	1.36	1.09
Men living alone	1.59	1.20
With elderly	1.19	.90
Elderly living alone	1.22	1.09
Race/ethnicity of households:		
White non-Hispanic	1.36	1.04
Black non-Hispanic	1.10	.95
Hispanic ³	1.15	.99
Other	1.22	.95
Household income-to-poverty ratio:		
Under 1.00	.95	.90
Under 1.30	.97	.89
Under 1.85	1.02	.93
1.85 and over	1.44	1.20
Income unknown	1.27	.96
Area of residence: ⁴		
Inside metropolitan area	1.36	1.02
In principal cities ⁵	1.36	1.01
Not in principal cities	1.37	1.04
Outside metropolitan area	1.11	.96
Census geographic region:		
Northeast	1.34	1.05
Midwest	1.21	.95
South	1.32	1.01
West	1.38	1.01

¹Statistics exclude households that did not answer the questions about spending on food and those that did not provide valid responses to any of the questions on food security. These represented 7.5 percent of all households.

²Households with children in complex living arrangements, e.g., children of other relatives or unrelated roommate or boarder.

³Hispanics may be of any race.

⁴Metropolitan area residence is based on 2003 Office of Management and Budget delineation. Food spending statistics by area of residence are comparable with those for 2004 and 2005 but are not precisely comparable with those of earlier years.

⁵Households within incorporated areas of the largest cities in each metropolitan area. Residence inside or outside of principal cities is not identified for about 17 percent of households in metropolitan statistical areas.

NA=Median not reported; fewer than 100 interviewed households in the category.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

Use of Federal and Community Food and Nutrition Assistance Programs

Households with limited resources employ a variety of methods to help meet their food needs. Some participate in one or more of the Federal food and nutrition assistance programs or obtain food from emergency food providers in their communities to supplement the food they purchase. Households that turn to Federal and community food and nutrition assistance programs typically do so because they are having difficulty in meeting their food needs. The use of such programs by low-income households and the relationship between their food security status and use of food and nutrition assistance programs provide insight into the extent of their difficulties in obtaining enough food and the ways they cope with those difficulties.

This section presents information about the food security status and food expenditures of households that participated in the three largest Federal food and nutrition assistance programs and the two most common community food assistance programs. (See box, “Federal and Community Food and Nutrition Assistance Programs.”) It also provides information about the extent to which food-insecure households participated in these programs and about the characteristics of households that obtained food from community food pantries. Total participation in the Federal food and nutrition assistance programs, participation rates of eligible households in those programs, and characteristics of participants in those programs are not described in this report. Extensive information on those topics is available from the USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service.²³

Methods

The December 2006 CPS food security survey included a number of questions about the use of Federal and community-based food and nutrition assistance programs. All households with incomes below 185 percent of the Federal poverty threshold were asked these questions. In order to minimize the burden on respondents, households with incomes above that range were not asked the questions unless they indicated some level of difficulty in meeting their food needs on preliminary screener questions (listed in footnote 5). The questions analyzed in this section are:

- “During the past 12 months...did anyone in this household get food stamp benefits, that is, either food stamps or a food-stamp benefit card?” Households that responded affirmatively were then asked in which months they received food stamp benefits and on what date they last received them. Information from these 3 questions was combined to identify households that received food stamps in the 30 days prior to the survey.
- “During the past 30 days, did any children in the household...receive free or reduced-cost lunches at school?” (Only households with children between the ages of 5 and 18 were asked this question.)
- “During the past 30 days, did any women or children in this household get food through the WIC program?” (Only households with a child age 0-5 or a woman age 15-45 were asked this question.)

²³Information on Federal food and nutrition assistance programs, including participation rates and characteristics of participants, is available from the Food and Nutrition Service website at www.fns.usda.gov. Additional research findings on the operation and effectiveness of these programs are available from the ERS website at www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/foodnutritionassistance.

Federal and Community Food and Nutrition Assistance Programs

Federal Food and Nutrition Assistance Programs

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) administers 15 domestic food and nutrition assistance programs. The three largest programs are:

- The Food Stamp Program (FSP). The program provides monthly benefits for eligible low-income households to purchase approved food items at authorized food stores. Clients qualify for the program based on available household income, assets, and certain basic expenses. In an average month of fiscal year 2006, the FSP provided benefits to 26.7 million people in the United States. The average benefit was about \$94 per person per month, and total Federal expenditures for the program were \$32.9 billion.
- The National School Lunch Program. The program operates in about 100,000 public and nonprofit private schools and residential child-care institutions. All meals served under the program receive Federal subsidies, and free or reduced-price lunches are available to low-income students. In 2006, the program provided lunches to an average of 30 million children each schoolday. About half of the lunches served in 2006 were free, and an additional 10 percent were provided at reduced prices.
- The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). The program is a federally funded preventive nutrition program that provides grants to States to support distribution of supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and nonbreastfeeding postpartum women, for infants in low-income families, and for children under 5 in low-income families who are found to be at nutritional risk. Most State WIC

programs provide vouchers that participants use to acquire supplemental food packages at authorized foodstores. In fiscal year 2006, WIC served an average 8.1 million participants per month with an average monthly benefit of about \$37 per person.

Community Food-Assistance Providers

Food pantries and emergency kitchens are the main direct providers of emergency food assistance. These agencies are locally based and rely heavily on volunteers. The majority of them are affiliated with faith-based organizations. (See Ohls et al., 2002, for more information.) Most of the food distributed by food pantries and emergency kitchens comes from local resources, but USDA supplements these resources through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). In 2006, TEFAP supplied 360 million pounds of commodities to community emergency food providers. Over half of all food pantries and emergency kitchens received TEFAP commodities in 2000, and these commodities accounted for about 14 percent of all food distributed by them (Ohls et al., 2002). Pantries and kitchens play different roles, as follows:

- Food pantries distribute unprepared foods for offsite use. An estimated 32,737 pantries operated in 2000 (the last year for which nationally representative statistics are available) and distributed, on average, 239 million pounds of food per month. Households using food pantries received an average of 38.2 pounds of food per visit.
- Emergency kitchens (sometimes referred to as soup kitchens) provide individuals with prepared food to eat at the site. In 2000, an estimated 5,262 emergency kitchens served a total of 474,000 meals on an average day.

- “In the last 12 months, did you or other adults in your household ever get emergency food from a church, a food pantry, or food bank?” The use of these resources any time during the last 12 months is referred to in the rest of this section as “food pantry use.” Households that reported using a food pantry in the last 12 months were asked, “How often did this happen—almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only 1 or 2 months?” Households reporting that they did not use a food pantry in the last 12 months were asked, “Is there a church, food pantry, or food bank in your community where you could get emergency food if you needed it?”

- “In the last 12 months, did you or other adults in your household ever eat any meals at a soup kitchen?” The use of this resource is referred to as “use of an emergency kitchen” in the following discussion.

Prevalence rates of food security, food insecurity, and very low food security, as well as median food expenditures relative to the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan, were calculated for households reporting use of each food and nutrition assistance provider and for comparison groups of nonparticipating households with incomes and household compositions similar to those of food assistance recipients. Statistics for participating households excluded households with incomes above the ranges specified for the comparison groups.²⁴ The proportions of food-insecure households participating in each of the three largest Federal food and nutrition assistance programs—the Food Stamp Program, National School Lunch Program, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)—were calculated, as well as the proportion that participated in any of the three programs. These analyses were restricted to households with annual incomes below 185 percent of the poverty line because most households with incomes above this range were not asked whether they participated in these programs.

The numbers and proportions of households using food pantries and emergency kitchens were calculated at the national level and, for food pantries, by selected household characteristics. Households were assumed not to have used these resources if they had incomes above 185 percent of the poverty line and gave no indication of food insecurity on either of two preliminary screener questions (listed in footnote 5). Analysis (not shown) indicated that this assumption resulted in only a negligible underestimate of numbers of households that used these facilities.

Estimates of the proportion of households using emergency kitchens based on the CPS food security surveys almost certainly understate the proportion of the population that actually uses these providers. The CPS selects households to interview from an address-based list and therefore interviews only persons who occupy housing units. People who are homeless at the time of the survey are not included in the sample, and those in tenuous housing arrangements (for instance, temporarily doubled up with another family) also may be missed. These two factors—exclusion of the homeless and underrepresentation of those who are tenuously housed—bias estimates of emergency kitchen use downward, especially among certain subgroups of the population. This is much less true for food pantry users because they need cooking facilities to make use of items from a food pantry.²⁵ Therefore, detailed analyses in this section focus primarily on the use of food pantries.

Finally, among households that participated in the three largest Federal food programs, the proportions who also obtained food from food pantries and emergency kitchens were calculated. This analysis was restricted to households with annual incomes below 185 percent of the poverty line.

Data for all calculations were weighted using food security supplement weights. These weights, provided by the Census Bureau, are based on sampling probabilities and enable the interviewed households to statistically represent all civilian households in the United States.

²⁴Some program participants reported incomes that were higher than the program eligibility criteria. They may have had incomes below the eligibility threshold during part of the year, or subfamilies within the household may have had incomes low enough to have been eligible.

²⁵Previous studies of emergency kitchen users and food pantry users confirm these assumptions. For example, a nationally representative survey of people who use food pantries and emergency kitchens found that about 36 percent of emergency kitchen clients and 8 percent of households that received food from food pantries were homeless in 2001 (Briefel et al., 2003).

Food Security and Food Spending of Households That Received Food and Nutrition Assistance

The relationship between food security and the use of food and nutrition assistance programs is complex. There are reasons to expect that households that report using food and nutrition assistance programs in a one-time survey can either be more food secure or less food secure than low-income households not using those programs. Since the programs provide food and other resources to reduce the severity of food insecurity, households are expected to be more food secure after receiving program benefits than before doing so. On the other hand, it is the more food-insecure households, having greater difficulty meeting their food needs, that seek assistance from the programs.²⁶ Just over half of food stamp households, 44 percent of households that received free or reduced-cost school lunches, and 37 percent of those that received WIC were food insecure (table 11). The prevalence rates of very low food security among households participating in the Food Stamp Program or receiving free or reduced-cost school lunches were about twice those of nonparticipating households in the same income ranges and with similar household composition. About 70 percent of households that obtained emergency food from community food pantries were food insecure, and more than one in three had very low food security. Two out of three households in which someone had eaten at an emergency kitchen were food insecure and 52 percent had very low food security.

A possible complicating factor in the preceding analysis is that food insecurity was measured over a 12-month period. An episode of food insecurity may have occurred at a different time during the year than the use of a specific food and nutrition assistance program. A similar analysis using a 30-day measure of food insecurity largely overcomes this potential problem because measured food insecurity and reported use of food and nutrition assistance programs are more likely to refer to contemporaneous conditions when both are referenced to the previous 30 days. That analysis (see appendix E and table E-2) found associations between prevalence rates of food insecurity and the use of food and nutrition assistance programs that were similar to those in table 11, although 30-day prevalence rates were generally somewhat lower than the corresponding 12-month rates.

Households that received food and nutrition assistance—except for WIC—also spent less for food than nonrecipient households (table 12).²⁷ Typical (median) food expenditures of households that received food stamps were 92 percent of the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan.²⁸ The corresponding statistics were 88 percent for households with children who received free or reduced-price school lunches, and 89 percent for households that received emergency food from food pantries. Typical food expenditures for nonparticipating households in these various programs' eligible income ranges were higher than those of participating households. Food spending in WIC households, however, did not differ significantly from that of non-WIC households with children under age 5 and in the same income range.

²⁶This “self-selection” effect is evident in the association between food security and food program participation that is observed in the food security survey. Participating households were less food secure than similar nonparticipating households. More complex analysis using methods to account for this self-targeting is required to assess the extent to which the programs improve food security (see Wilde and Nord, 2005; Gundersen and Oliveira, 2001; Gundersen and Gruber, 2001; Nelson and Lurie, 1998).

²⁷Food purchased with food stamps is included in household food spending as calculated here. However, the value of school lunches and food obtained with WIC vouchers is not included. Food from these sources supplemented the food purchased by many of these households.

²⁸The maximum benefit for food stamp households is approximately equal to the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan. About 31 percent of the Food Stamp Program caseload receives the maximum benefit. Households with countable income receive less.

Table 11

Percent of households by food security status and participation in selected Federal and community food assistance programs, 2006

Category	Food secure	Food insecure		
		All	With low food security	With very low food security
<i>Percent</i>				
Income less than 130 percent of poverty line:				
Received food stamps previous 12 months	48.5	51.5	30.7	20.7
Received food stamps all 12 months	50.9	49.1	29.6	19.5
Received food stamps 1 to 11 months	43.0	57.0	33.4	23.6
Did not receive food stamps previous 12 months	75.4	24.6	15.0	9.6
Income less than 185 percent of poverty line; school-age children in household:				
Received free or reduced-price school lunch previous 30 days	55.7	44.3	31.5	12.8
Did not receive free or reduced-price school lunch previous 30 days	79.4	20.6	13.2	7.4
Income less than 185 percent of poverty line; children under age 5 in household:				
Received WIC previous 30 days	62.8	37.2	27.9	9.3
Did not receive WIC previous 30 days	68.9	31.1	21.8	9.2
Income less than 185 percent of poverty line:				
Received emergency food from food pantry previous 12 months	29.7	70.3	33.8	36.4
Did not receive emergency food from food pantry previous 12 months	77.9	22.1	14.5	7.5
Ate meal at emergency kitchen previous 12 months	33.7	66.3	14.2	52.1
Did not eat meal at emergency kitchen previous 12 months	73.3	26.7	16.6	10.1

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

Table 12

Weekly household food spending relative to the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) by participation in selected Federal and community food assistance programs, 2006

Category	Median weekly food spending relative to cost of the TFP
<i>Ratio</i>	
Income less than 130 percent of poverty line:	
Received food stamps previous 30 days	0.92
Did not receive food stamps previous 30 days	.96
Income less than 185 percent of poverty line; school-age children in household:	
Received free or reduced-price school lunch previous 30 days	.88
Did not receive free or reduced-price school lunch previous 30 days	.95
Income less than 185 percent of poverty line; children under age 5 in household:	
Received WIC previous 30 days	.94
Did not receive WIC previous 30 days	.95
Income less than 185 percent of poverty line:	
Received emergency food from food pantry previous 12 months	.89
Did not receive emergency food from food pantry previous 12 months	1.01

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

Participation in Federal Food and Nutrition Assistance Programs by Food-Insecure Households

Somewhat more than half (55.5 percent) of food-insecure households received assistance from at least one of the three largest Federal food and nutrition assistance programs during the month prior to the December 2006 food security survey (table 13). The Food Stamp Program reached 34.3 percent, the National School Lunch Program 34.4 percent, and the WIC program 12.0 percent.²⁹ Half of households classified as having very low food security participated in one or more of the three largest Federal food and nutrition assistance programs, and the largest share of these (35.5 percent) participated in the Food Stamp Program.³⁰

Use of Food Pantries and Emergency Kitchens

Some 3.8 million households (3.3 percent of all households) obtained emergency food from food pantries one or more times during the 12-month period ending in December 2006 (table 14). A smaller number—422,000 households (0.4 percent)—had members who ate one or more meals at an emergency kitchen. (See box on page 27 for descriptions of these facilities.) Households that obtained food from food pantries included 6.6 million adults and 4 million children. Of the households that reported having obtained food from a food pantry in the last 12 months, 45 percent reported that this had occurred in only 1 or 2 months; 23 percent reported that it had occurred in almost every month; and the remaining 32 percent reported that it had occurred in “some months, but not every month” (analysis not shown).

Use of Food Pantries and Emergency Kitchens, by Food Security Status

Use of food pantries and emergency kitchens was strongly associated with food insecurity. Food-insecure households were 19 times as likely as food-secure households to have obtained food from a food pantry, and 15 times as likely as food-secure households to have eaten a meal at an emergency kitchen (table 14). Furthermore, among food-insecure households, those with very low food security were much more likely to have used a food pantry or emergency kitchen than were those with low food security.

²⁹These statistics may be biased downward somewhat. It is known from comparisons between household survey data and administrative records that food program participation is underreported by household survey respondents, including those in the CPS. This is probably true for food-insecure households as well, although the extent of underreporting by these households is not known. Statistics are based on the subsample of households with annual incomes below 185 percent of the poverty line. Not all these households were eligible for certain of the programs. (For example, those without pregnant women or children and with incomes above 130 percent of poverty would not have been eligible for any of the programs.)

³⁰The statistics in table 13 were also calculated for households that were food insecure during the 30-day period prior to the survey. In principle, that analysis is preferable because food security status and use of programs are more certainly contemporaneous than when food insecurity is assessed over a 12-month period. However, the results differed only slightly from those in table 13 and are not presented separately.

Table 13

Participation of food-insecure households in selected Federal food assistance programs, 2006

Program	Share of food-insecure households that participated in the program during the previous 30 days ¹	Share of households with very low food security that participated in the program during the previous 30 days ¹
	<i>Percent</i>	
Food stamps	34.3	35.5
Free or reduced-price school lunch	34.4	25.5
WIC	12.0	7.8
Any of the three programs	55.5	49.3
None of the three programs	44.5	50.7

¹Analysis is restricted to households with annual incomes less than 185 percent of the poverty line because most households with incomes above that range were not asked whether they participated in food assistance programs.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

Table 14

Use of food pantries and emergency kitchens, 2006

Category	Pantries			Kitchens		
	Total ¹	Users		Total ¹	Users	
	1,000	1,000	Percent	1,000	1,000	Percent
All households	115,224	3,761	3.3	115,253	422	0.37
All persons in households	292,811	10,610	3.6	292,907	806	.28
Adults in households	219,645	6,610	3.0	219,664	628	.29
Children in households	73,166	3,999	5.5	73,244	178	.24
Households by food security status:						
Food secure households	102,652	1,125	1.1	102,665	149	.15
Food insecure households	12,504	2,629	21.0	12,491	274	2.19
Households with low food security	7,946	1,297	16.3	7,938	68	.86
Households with very low food security	4,559	1,332	29.2	4,553	205	4.50

¹Totals exclude households that did not answer the question about food pantries or emergency kitchens. Totals in the bottom section also exclude households that did not answer any of the questions in the food security scale.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

A large majority (79 percent) of food-insecure households, and even of households with very low food security (71 percent), did not use a food pantry at any time during the previous year. In some cases, this was because there was no food pantry available or because the household believed there was none available. Among food-insecure households that did not use a food pantry, 25 percent reported that there was no such resource in their community, and an additional 19 percent said they did not know if there was one. Still, 67 percent of food-insecure households that knew there was a food pantry in their community did not make use of it.

About 30 percent of households that used food pantries were classified as food secure. However, just over half (52 percent; analysis not shown) of these food-secure households reported at least some concerns or difficulties in obtaining enough food by responding positively to 1 or 2 of the 18 indicators of food insecurity, indicating marginal food security. (A household must report occurrence of at least three of the indicators to be classified as food insecure; see appendix A.) Households with marginal food security (those that reported 1 or 2 indicators of food insecurity) were about 10 times as likely to have used food pantries and emergency kitchens as were households with high food security (those that reported no indicators of food insecurity).

Use of Food Pantries, by Selected Household Characteristics

The use of food pantries varied considerably by household structure and by race and ethnicity (table 15). Households with children were nearly twice as likely as those without children to use food pantries (4.7 percent compared with 2.5 percent). Food pantry use was especially high among households with children headed by single women (9.8 percent), while use by married couples with children (2.8 percent) and households with elderly members (1.9 percent) was lower than the national average. Use of food pantries was higher among Blacks (7.2 percent) and Hispanics (4.9 percent) than among non-Hispanic Whites (2.4 percent), consistent with the higher rates

Table 15

Use of food pantries by selected household characteristics, 2006

Category	Total ¹	Pantry users	
	1,000	1,000	Percent
All households	115,224	3,761	3.3
Household composition:			
With children < 18	39,238	1,829	4.7
At least one child < 6	17,070	859	5.0
Married-couple families	26,519	732	2.8
Female head, no spouse	9,490	929	9.8
Male head, no spouse	2,605	125	4.8
Other household with child ²	624	43	6.9
With no children < 18	75,987	1,931	2.5
More than one adult	44,645	817	1.8
Women living alone	17,530	641	3.7
Men living alone	13,811	473	3.4
With elderly	26,754	500	1.9
Elderly living alone	10,459	225	2.2
Race/ethnicity of households:			
White non-Hispanic	82,049	1,929	2.4
Black non-Hispanic	13,967	1,011	7.2
Hispanic ³	12,811	625	4.9
Other	6,397	196	3.1
Household income-to-poverty ratio:			
Under 1.00	11,701	1,872	16.0
Under 1.30	16,676	2,382	14.3
Under 1.85	27,368	2,892	10.6
1.85 and over	64,435	513	.8
Income unknown	23,421	355	1.5
Area of residence: ⁴			
Inside metropolitan area	95,865	2,917	3.0
In principal cities ⁵	31,896	1,287	4.0
Not in principal cities	47,398	1,047	2.2
Outside metropolitan area	19,360	843	4.4
Census geographic region:			
Northeast	21,235	653	3.1
Midwest	26,465	889	3.4
South	42,158	1,297	3.1
West	25,367	921	3.6

¹Totals exclude households that did not answer the question about getting food from a food pantry. They represented 0.7 percent of all households.

²Households with children in complex living arrangements, e.g., children of other relatives or unrelated roommate or boarder.

³Hispanics may be of any race.

⁴Metropolitan area residence is based on 2003 Office of Management and Budget delineation. Food pantry statistics by area of residence are comparable with those for 2004 and 2005 but are not precisely comparable with those of earlier years.

⁵Households within incorporated areas of the largest cities in each metropolitan area. Residence inside or outside of principal cities is not identified for about 17 percent of households in metropolitan statistical areas.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

of poverty and food insecurity of these minorities. In spite of their lower use rate, non-Hispanic Whites comprised a majority (51 percent) of food-pantry users because of their larger share in the general population.

Sixteen percent of households with incomes below the poverty line received food from food pantries, compared with 0.8 percent of households with incomes above 185 percent of the poverty line.³¹ Among households with incomes above the poverty line but below 185 percent of the poverty line, 1.0 million (2.9 million less 1.9 million) used food pantries in 2006, comprising 27 percent of all households using food pantries and 6.5 percent of households in that income range.

Use of food pantries was higher in principal cities of metropolitan areas (4.0 percent) and in nonmetropolitan areas (4.4 percent) than in metropolitan areas outside of central cities (2.2 percent). There was not a large regional variation in the use of food pantries, although use was somewhat more common in the West (3.6 percent) and the Midwest (3.4 percent).

Combined Use of Federal and Community Food and Nutrition Assistance

Both Federal and community food and nutrition assistance programs are important resources for low-income households. To design and manage these programs so that they function together effectively as a nutrition safety net, it is important to know how they complement and supplement each other. The extent to which households that participate in Federal food and nutrition assistance programs also receive assistance from community food assistance programs provides information about these relationships.

Just over one in four (27.4 percent) of the households that received food stamps in the month prior to the survey also obtained food from a food pantry at some time during the year (table 16). These households comprised 47.8 percent of all households that reported using a food pantry. Food pantry use was somewhat less common among households with members who participated in the National School Lunch Program (18.2 percent) and WIC (17.7 percent), reflecting the higher income-eligibility criteria of these programs. A sizeable majority of food pantry users (65.4 percent) received food from at least one of the three largest Federal food and nutrition assistance programs. The remainder of food pantry users (34.6 percent) did not participate in any of these Federal programs.

Only small proportions (from 0.6 to 3 percent) of households that received assistance from the three largest Federal food and nutrition assistance programs reported that any household member had eaten a meal at an emergency kitchen during the 12 months prior to the survey. Nevertheless, these households comprised a sizeable share of emergency-kitchen users in the housed population. Among households with incomes less than 185 percent of the poverty line who reported that someone in the household ate one or more meals at an emergency kitchen, 46.8 percent received food stamps, 19.5 percent received free or reduced-cost meals in the National School Lunch Program, 4.2 percent received WIC benefits, and 57.6 percent participated in at least one of these three programs. These statistics probably overstate the

³¹Use of food pantries by households with incomes higher than 1.85 times the poverty line was probably slightly underreported by the CPS food security survey. Households in this income range were not asked the question about using a food pantry unless they had indicated some level of food stress on at least one of two preliminary screener questions (listed in footnote 5). However, analysis of the use of food pantries by households at different income levels below 1.85 times the poverty line (and thus not affected by the screen) indicates that the screening had only a small effect on the estimate of food pantry use by households with incomes above that range.

Table 16

Combined use of Federal and community food assistance programs by low-income households,¹ 2006

Category	Share of category that obtained food from food pantry	Share of food pantry users in category	Share of category that ate meal at emergency kitchen	Share of emergency kitchen users in category
	<i>Percent</i>			
Received food stamps previous 30 days	27.4	47.8	2.9	46.8
Received free or reduced-price school lunch previous 30 days	18.2	36.5	1.1	19.5
Received WIC previous 30 days	17.7	14.6	.6	4.2
Participated in one or more of the three Federal programs	20.1	65.4	1.9	57.6
Did not participate in any of the three Federal programs	5.6	34.6	.7	42.4

¹Analysis is restricted to households with annual incomes less than 185 percent of the poverty line because most households with incomes above that range were not asked whether they participated in food assistance programs.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

actual shares of emergency-kitchen users who participate in the Federal food and nutrition assistance programs, however. The households most likely to be underrepresented in the food security survey—those homeless or tenuously housed—are also less likely than other households to participate in those programs.

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Appendix A—Household Responses to Questions in the Food Security Scale

The 18 questions used for the food security measure ask about conditions, experiences, and behaviors that range widely in severity. Those indicating less severe food insecurity are observed with greater frequency, and frequency declines as severity increases. For example, the condition described by the least severe question, *We worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more*, was reported by 15.1 percent of households in 2006 (table A-1). *Adults cutting the size of meals or skipping meals because there wasn't enough money for food* was reported by 6.3 percent of households. The most severe item, *children not eating for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food*, was reported by 0.1 percent of households with children. (See box on page 3 for the complete wording of these questions.)

The two least severe questions refer to uncertainty about having enough food and the experience of running out of food. The remaining 16 items indicate reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diets and increasingly severe disruptions of normal eating patterns and reductions in food intake. Three or more affirmative responses are required for a household to be classified as food insecure. Thus, all households in that category affirmed at least one item indicating reduced diet quality or disruption of normal eating patterns or reduction in food intake, and most food-insecure households reported multiple indicators of these conditions (table A-2).

A large majority of households (74 percent of households with children and 85 percent of those without children) reported no problems or concerns in meeting their food needs. Households that reported only one or two indications of food insecurity (10 percent of households with children and 6 percent of households without children) are also classified as food secure. Most of these households affirmed one or both of the first two items, indicating uncertainty about having enough food or about exhausting their food supply, but did not indicate actual disruptions of normal eating patterns or reductions in food intake. Although these households are classified as food secure, the food security of some of them may have been tenuous at times, especially in the sense that they lacked “assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways,” a condition that the Life Sciences Research Office includes in its definition of food insecurity (Anderson, 1990, p. 1,598). Research examining health and children’s development in these marginally food-secure households is ongoing. Findings to date indicate that outcomes are either intermediate between those in highly food-secure and food-insecure households or more closely resemble those in food-insecure households (Radimer and Nord, 2005; Winicki and Jemison, 2003; Wilde and Peterman, 2006).

Table A-1

Responses to items in the food security scale, 2003-2006¹

Scale item ²	Households affirming item ³			
	2003	2004	2005	2006
	<i>Percent</i>			
Household items:				
Worried food would run out before (I/we) got money to buy more	15.7	16.6	15.6	15.1
Food bought didn't last and (I/we) didn't have money to get more	12.3	13.1	12.2	12.1
Couldn't afford to eat balanced meals	10.8	11.6	10.7	10.9
Adult items:				
Adult(s) cut size of meals or skipped meals	6.2	6.6	6.2	6.3
Respondent ate less than felt he/she should	5.9	6.3	6.5	6.3
Adult(s) cut size or skipped meals in 3 or more months	4.4	4.8	4.6	4.5
Respondent hungry but didn't eat because couldn't afford	2.7	3.1	2.9	3.5
Respondent lost weight	1.7	2.0	2.0	2.1
Adult(s) did not eat for whole day	1.2	1.3	1.3	1.4
Adult(s) did not eat for whole day in 3 or more months	.9	1.0	.9	.9
Child items:				
Relied on few kinds of low-cost food to feed child(ren)	16.1	17.1	14.7	15.0
Couldn't feed child(ren) balanced meals	8.9	9.8	8.5	8.7
Child(ren) were not eating enough	4.7	4.6	3.7	3.9
Cut size of child(ren)'s meals	1.0	1.2	1.3	1.2
Child(ren) were hungry	.7	1.0	.8	.8
Child(ren) skipped meals	.4	.6	.6	.5
Child(ren) skipped meals in 3 or more months	.3	.4	.4	.4
Child(ren) did not eat for whole day	.1	.1	.1	.1

¹Survey responses weighted to population totals.

²The actual wording of each item includes explicit reference to resource limitation, e.g., "...because (I was/we were) running out of money to buy food," or "...because there wasn't enough money for food."

³Households not responding to item are omitted from the calculations. Households without children are omitted from the calculation of child-referenced items.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2003, December 2004, December 2005, and December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements.

Frequency of Occurrence of Behaviors, Experiences, and Conditions That Indicate Food Insecurity

Most of the questions used to calculate the food security scale also elicit information about how often the food-insecure behavior, experience, or condition occurred. The food security scale does not take all of this frequency-of-occurrence information into account, but analysis of these responses can provide insight into the frequency and duration of food insecurity. Frequency-of-occurrence information is collected in the CPS Food Security Supplements using two different methods (see box, "Questions Used To Assess the Food Security of Households in the CPS Food Security Survey," on page 3):

- **Method 1:** A condition is described, and the respondent is asked whether this was often, sometimes, or never true for his or her household during the past 12 months.
- **Method 2:** Respondents who answer "yes" to a yes/no question are asked, "How often did this happen—almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only 1 or 2 months?"

Table A-2

Percentage of households by food security raw score, 2006

<i>Panel A: Households with children</i>			
Raw score (number of food-insecure conditions reported)	Percent of households ¹	Cumulative percent of households ¹	Food security status
0	73.95	73.95	Food secure (84.39 percent)
1	6.00	79.94	
2	4.45	84.39	
3	3.51	87.89	Low food security (11.36 percent)
4	2.66	90.56	
5	2.13	92.69	
6	1.74	94.43	
7	1.32	95.75	
8	1.17	96.92	Very low food security (4.25 percent)
9	.99	97.90	
10	.75	98.65	
11	.41	99.07	
12	.35	99.42	
13	.29	99.71	
14	.12	99.82	
15	.06	99.89	
16	.03	99.92	
17	.07	99.99	
18	.01	100.00	
<i>Panel B: Households with no children</i>			
Raw score (number of food-insecure conditions reported)	Percent of households ¹	Cumulative percent of households ¹	Food security status
0	85.13	85.13	Food secure (91.48 percent)
1	3.76	88.89	
2	2.59	91.48	
3	2.40	93.88	Low food security (4.66 percent)
4	1.25	95.13	
5	1.01	96.14	
6	1.12	97.26	Very low food security (3.86 percent)
7	1.06	98.32	
8	.74	99.07	
9	.40	99.47	
10	.53	100.00	

¹Survey responses weighted to population totals.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

Table A-3 presents responses to each food security question broken down by reported frequency of occurrence for all households interviewed in the December 2006 survey. Questions using method 1 are presented in the top panel of the table and those using method 2 are presented in the bottom panel. Most households that responded affirmatively to method 1 questions reported that the behavior, experience, or condition occurred “sometimes,” while 16 to 26 percent (depending on the specific question), reported that it occurred “often.” For example, 3.6 percent of households reported that in the past 12 months they had often worried whether their food would run out before they got money to buy more, and 11.5 percent reported that this had occurred sometimes (but not often). Thus, a total of 15.1 percent of households reported that this had occurred at some time during the past 12 months,

Table A-3

Frequency of occurrence of behaviors, experiences, and conditions indicating food insecurity reported by all U.S. households, 2006¹

Condition ²	Ever during the year	Frequency of occurrence			
		Often	Sometimes	Often	Sometimes
		— Percent of all households —		— Percent of — “ever during the year”	
Worried food would run out before (I/we) got money to buy more	15.1	3.6	11.5	24	76
Food bought didn't last and (I/we) didn't have money to get more	12.1	2.4	9.6	20	80
Couldn't afford to eat balanced meals	10.9	2.8	8.1	26	74
Relied on few kinds of low-cost food to feed child(ren)	15.0	3.5	11.6	23	77
Couldn't feed child(ren) balanced meals	8.7	1.4	7.2	17	83
Child(ren) were not eating enough	3.9	.6	3.3	16	84

Condition ²	Frequency of occurrence						
	Ever during the year	Almost every month	Some months but not every month	In only 1 or 2 months	Almost every month	Some months but not every month	In only 1 or 2 months
Adult(s) cut size of meals or skipped meals	6.3	2.0	2.5	1.8	32	39	28
Respondent ate less than felt he/she should	6.3	1.8	2.7	1.8	29	43	28
Respondent hungry but didn't eat because couldn't afford	3.5	1.2	1.4	.9	34	41	25
Respondent lost weight	2.1	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Adult(s) did not eat for whole day	1.4	.5	.5	.4	34	35	31
Cut size of child(ren)'s meals	1.2	.2	.6	.4	21	49	30
Child(ren) were hungry	0.8	.2	.4	.2	22	53	25
Child(ren) skipped meals	0.5	.1	.2	.2	19	46	34
Child(ren) did not eat for whole day	0.1	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

¹Survey responses weighted to population totals. Households not responding to an item or not responding to the followup question about frequency of occurrence are omitted from the calculation of percentages for that item. Households without children are omitted from the calculation of percentages for child-referenced items.

²The actual wording of each item includes explicit reference to resource limitation, e.g., “...because (I was/we were) running out of money to buy food,” or “...because there wasn't enough money for food.”

NA = Frequency of occurrence information was not collected for these conditions.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

and, of those, 24 percent reported that it had occurred often. (Note that calculations across some rows in table A-3 differ from tabled values because of rounding in each column.)

In response to method 2 questions, 19 to 34 percent of households that responded “yes” to the base question reported that the behavior, experience, or condition occurred “in almost every month;” 35 to 53 percent reported that it occurred in “some months, but not every month;” and 25 to 34 percent reported that it occurred “in only 1 or 2 months.” For example, 6.3 percent of households reported that an adult cut the size of a meal or skipped a meal because there was not enough money for food. In response to the followup question asking how often this happened, 2.0 percent said that it happened in almost every month (i.e., 32 percent of those who responded “yes” to the base question), 2.5 percent said it happened in some months but not every month (39 percent of those who responded “yes” to the base question), and 1.8 percent said it happened in only 1 or 2 months (28 percent of those who responded “yes” to the base question).

Table A-4 presents the same frequency-of-occurrence response statistics for households classified as having very low food security. Almost all of these households responded affirmatively (either “often” or “sometimes”) to the first four questions—questions that are sensitive to less severe aspects of food insecurity—and 41 to 49 percent of those who responded affirmatively reported that these conditions had occurred often during the past year. In response to method 2 questions, 36 to 44 percent of households that affirmed adult-referenced questions and 20 to 23 percent of households that affirmed child-referenced questions reported that the conditions had occurred in “almost every month.”

Table A-4

Frequency of occurrence of behaviors, experiences, and conditions indicating food insecurity reported by households with very low food security, 2006¹

Condition ²	Ever during the year	Frequency of occurrence			
		Often		Sometimes	
		— Percent of all households —		— Percent of — “ever during the year”	
Worried food would run out before (I/we) got money to buy more	97.5	47.9	49.6	49	51
Food bought didn't last and (I/we) didn't have money to get more	96.4	39.8	56.7	41	59
Couldn't afford to eat balanced meals	94.5	41.3	53.2	44	56
Relied on few kinds of low-cost food to feed child(ren)	96.0	40.6	55.4	42	58
Couldn't feed child(ren) balanced meals	86.6	26.0	60.6	30	70
Child(ren) were not eating enough	57.8	12.7	45.1	22	78

Condition ²	Ever during the year	Frequency of occurrence					
		Some months but not every month			Some months but not every month		
		— Percent of all households —			— Percent of — “ever during the year”		
Adult(s) cut size of meals or skipped meals	95.4	41.6	43.2	10.7	44	45	11
Respondent ate less than felt he/she should	94.6	39.6	42.8	12.2	42	45	13
Respondent hungry but didn't eat because couldn't afford	68.8	27.1	28.9	12.7	39	42	18
Respondent lost weight	46.3	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Adult(s) did not eat for whole day	32.6	11.6	12.0	9.0	36	37	28
Cut size of child(ren)'s meals	24.2	5.3	12.5	6.4	22	52	26
Child(ren) were hungry	17.2	4.0	9.4	3.8	23	55	22
Child(ren) skipped meals	12.4	2.5	6.0	3.9	20	48	32
Child(ren) did not eat for whole day	2.5	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

¹Survey responses weighted to population totals. Households not responding to an item or not responding to the followup question about frequency of occurrence are omitted from the calculation of percentages for that item. Households without children are omitted from the calculation of percentages for child-referenced items.

²The actual wording of each item includes explicit reference to resource limitation, e.g., “...because (I was/we were) running out of money to buy food,” or “...because there wasn't enough money for food.”

NA = Frequency of occurrence information was not collected for these conditions.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

Monthly and Daily Occurrence of Food-Insecure Conditions

Respondents also reported whether the behaviors and experiences that indicate food insecurity had occurred during the 30 days prior to the survey. (Responses to these questions are used to assess the food security status of households during the 30-day period prior to the survey. Statistics based on this measure are reported in appendix E.) For seven of these behaviors and experiences respondents also reported how many days the condition had occurred during that period. Responses to these questions are summarized in table A-5.

Most households that reported the occurrence of reduced food intake or being hungry during the 30 days prior to the survey, reported that these conditions were of relatively short duration, although some households reported longer or more frequent spells. For example, of the 4.1 percent of households in which adults cut the size of meals or skipped meals during the previous 30 days because there wasn't enough money for food, 63 percent reported that this had occurred in 1 to 7 days, 16 percent reported that it had occurred in 8-14 days, and 21 percent reported that it had occurred in 15 days or more

Table A-5

Monthly and daily occurrence of behaviors, experiences, and conditions indicating food insecurity reported by all U.S. households, 2006¹

Condition ²	For households reporting condition at any time during previous 30 days					Average daily prevalence
	Ever during previous 30 days	Number of days out of previous 30 days			Monthly average occurrence	
		1-7 days	8-14 days	15-30 days		
		Percent ³			Days ³	Percent ³
Worried food would run out before (I/we) got money to buy more	6.79	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Food bought didn't last and (I/we) didn't have money to get more	5.85	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Couldn't afford to eat balanced meals	6.10	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Relied on few kinds of low-cost food to feed child(ren)	8.40	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Couldn't feed child(ren) balanced meals	5.06	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Child(ren) were not eating enough	2.26	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Adult(s) cut size of meals or skipped meals	4.10	63	16	21	8.6	1.17
Respondent ate less than felt he/she should	3.70	58	17	25	9.7	1.20
Respondent hungry but didn't eat because couldn't afford	2.17	60	16	24	9.1	.66
Respondent lost weight	1.31	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Adult(s) did not eat for whole day	.94	76	13	11	5.7	.18
Cut size of child(ren)'s meals	.69	72	12	16	7.2	.16
Child(ren) were hungry	.44	78	8	14	7.0	.10
Child(ren) skipped meals	.31	65	20	15	8.0	.08
Child(ren) did not eat for whole day	.07	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

¹Survey responses weighted to population totals. The 30-day and daily statistics refer to the 30-day period from mid-November to mid-December; the survey was conducted during the week of December 10-16, 2006.

²The actual wording of each item includes explicit reference to resource limitation, e.g., "...because (I was/we were) running out of money to buy food;" or "...because there wasn't enough money for food."

³Households without children are excluded from the denominator of child-referenced items.

NA = Number of days of occurrence was not collected for these conditions.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

of the previous 30 days. On average, households reporting occurrence of this condition at any time in the previous 30 days reported that it occurred in 8.6 days. The daily occurrence patterns were generally similar for all of the indicators of reduced food intake and disrupted eating patterns. Average days of occurrence (for those reporting occurrence at any time during the month) ranged from 5.7 days for *adult did not eat for whole day* to 9.7 days for *respondent ate less than he/she felt he/she should*.

Average daily prevalence of the various behaviors, experiences, and conditions characterizing very low food security was calculated based on the proportion of households reporting the condition at any time during the previous 30 days and the average number of days in which the condition occurred.¹ These daily prevalence rates ranged from 1.20 percent for *respondent ate less than he/she felt he/she should* to 0.08 percent for *children skipped meals*.

No direct measure of the daily prevalence of very low food security has yet been developed. However, the ratio of daily prevalence to monthly and annual prevalence of the various indicator conditions provides a basis for approximating the average daily prevalence of very low food security during the reference 30-day period. For the adult-referenced items, daily prevalences ranged from 19 to 32 percent of their prevalence at any time during the month (analysis not shown, based on table A-5) and from 13 to 19 percent of their prevalence at any time during the year (analysis not shown, based on tables A-3 and A-5). The corresponding ranges for daily prevalences of the child-referenced items were 23 to 26 percent of monthly prevalence and 13 to 15 percent of annual prevalence. These findings are generally consistent with those of Nord et al. (2000), and are used to estimate upper and lower bounds of the daily prevalence of very low food security described in the first section of this report.

¹Average daily prevalence is calculated as the product of the 30-day prevalence and the average number of days divided by 30.

Appendix B—Background on the U.S. Food Security Measurement Project

This report of household food security in 2006 is the latest in a series of reports on Measuring Food Security in the United States. Previous reports in the series are:

- *Household Food Security in the United States in 1995: Summary Report of the Food Security Measurement Project* (Hamilton et al., 1997a)
- *Household Food Security in the United States in 1995: Technical Report* (Hamilton et al., 1997b)
- *Household Food Security in the United States, 1995-1998: Advance Report* (Bickel et al., 1999)
- *Prevalence of Food Insecurity and Hunger, by State, 1996-1998* (Nord et al., 1999)
- *Guide to Measuring Household Food Security, Revised 2000* (Bickel et al., 2000)
- *Household Food Security in the United States, 1999* (Andrews et al., 2000)
- *Household Food Security in the United States, 1995-1997: Technical Issues and Statistical Report* (Ohls et al., 2001)
- *Household Food Security in the United States, 1998 and 1999: Detailed Statistical Report* (Cohen et al., 2002b)
- *Household Food Security in the United States, 1998 and 1999: Technical Report* (Cohen et al., 2002a)
- *Household Food Security in the United States, 2000* (Nord et al., 2002b)
- *Measuring Children's Food Security in U.S. Households, 1995-99* (Nord and Bickel, 2002)
- *Household Food Security in the United States, 2001* (Nord et al., 2002a)
- *A 30-Day Food Security Scale for Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement Data* (Nord, 2002)
- *Household Food Security in the United States, 2002* (Nord et al., 2003)
- *Household Food Security in the United States, 2003* (Nord et al., 2004)
- *Household Food Security in the United States, 2004* (Nord et al., 2005)
- *Household Food Security in the United States, 2005* (Nord et al., 2006)

The series was inaugurated in September 1997 with the three-volume report, *Household Food Security in the United States in 1995* (Hamilton et al., 1997a and 1997b, Price et al., 1997). The advance report of findings for 1995-98 (Bickel, Carlson, and Nord, 1999) was released in July 1999, and a report detailing prevalence rates of food insecurity by State for the 1996-

98 period (Nord, Jemison, and Bickel, 1999) was released in September 1999. Summary reports of findings for 1999 (Andrews et al., 2000), 2000 (Nord et al., 2002b), 2001 (Nord et al., 2002a), 2002 (Nord et al., 2003), and 2003 (Nord et al., 2004) continued the national report series and expanded its scope. Detailed statistical reports for 1995-97 (Ohls et al., 2001) and for 1998-99 (Cohen et al., 2002b) provided additional prevalence statistics along with standard errors for prevalence estimates and explored technical issues in food security measurement.

The estimates contained in all of these reports are based on a direct survey measure developed over several years by the U.S. Food Security Measurement Project, an ongoing collaboration among Federal agencies, academic researchers, and both commercial and nonprofit private organizations (Carlson et al., 1999; Olson, 1999.) The measure was developed in response to the National Nutrition Monitoring and Related Research Act of 1990. The Ten-Year Comprehensive Plan developed under the Act specified the following task:

Recommend a standardized mechanism and instrument(s) for defining and obtaining data on the prevalence of “food insecurity” or “food insufficiency” in the U.S. and methodologies that can be used across the NNMRR Program and at State and local levels.¹

Beginning in 1992, USDA staff reviewed the existing research literature, focusing on the conceptual basis for measuring the severity of food insecurity and hunger and on the practical problems of developing a survey instrument for use in sample surveys at national, State, and local levels.

In January 1994, USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) joined with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) in sponsoring a National Conference on Food Security Measurement and Research. This meeting brought together leading academic experts and other private researchers and key staff of the concerned Federal agencies. The conference identified the consensus among researchers in the field as to the strongest conceptual basis for a national measure of food insecurity and hunger. It also led to a working agreement about the best method for implementing such a measure in national surveys (USDA, 1995).

After extensive cognitive assessment, field testing, and analysis by the U.S. Census Bureau, a food security survey questionnaire was fielded by the bureau as a supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS) of April 1995.² The CPS food security survey was repeated in September 1996, April 1997, August 1998, April 1999, September 2000, April 2001, December 2001, December 2002, and December 2003. Minor modifications to the questionnaire format and screening procedures were made over the first several years, and a more substantial revision in screening and format, designed to reduce respondent burden and improve data quality, was introduced with the August 1998 survey. However, the content of the 18 questions upon which the U.S. Food Security Scale is based remained constant in all years.

Initial analysis of the 1995 data was undertaken by Abt Associates, Inc., through a cooperative venture with FNS, the interagency working group, and other key researchers involved in developing the questionnaire. The Abt

¹Task V-C-2.4, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture: Ten-Year Comprehensive Plan for the National Nutrition Monitoring and Related Research Program. *Federal Register* 1993, 58:32 752-806.

²The Current Population Survey (CPS) is a representative national sample of approximately 60,000 households conducted monthly by the U.S. Census Bureau for the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Its primary purpose is to monitor labor force participation and employment in the United States and each of the 50 States. Various Federal agencies sponsor collection of specialized supplementary data by the CPS following the labor-force interview. The CPS food security survey has been conducted annually since 1995 as one such CPS supplement, sponsored by USDA. From 1995 to 2000 the food security survey alternated between April and August/September; beginning in 2001, it has been conducted in early December.

team used nonlinear factor analysis and other state-of-the-art scaling methods to produce a measurement scale for the severity of deprivation in basic food needs, as experienced by U.S. households. Extensive testing was carried out to establish the validity and reliability of the scale and its applicability across various household types in the broad national sample (Hamilton et al., 1997a, 1997b).³

Following collection of the September 1996 and April 1997 CPS food security data, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (MPR), under a contract awarded by FNS, reproduced independently the results from the 1995 CPS food security data, estimated prevalences of food insecurity and food insecurity with hunger for 1996 and 1997, and assessed the stability and robustness of the measurement model when applied to the separate datasets. The MPR findings (Ohls et al., 2001) establish the stability of the food security measure over the 1995-97 period. That is, the relative severities of the items were found to be nearly invariant across years and across major population groups and household types.

In 1998, USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) assumed sponsorship of the Census Bureau's annual CPS food security data collection for USDA. ERS and IQ Solutions (working under a contract awarded by ERS) analyzed the 1998 and 1999 data, applying and refining the procedures developed for USDA in the Abt and MPR research. These analyses found continuing stability of the measure in those 2 years (Cohen et al., 2002a). Research by ERS and FNS also developed measurement methods for assessing the food security of children (Nord and Bickel, 2002) and for measuring the food security of households during the 30 days prior to interview based on the CPS food security survey data available from 1995 to 2004 (Nord, 2002).⁴

In 2003-06, an expert panel convened by the Committee on National Statistics (CNSTAT) of the National Academies conducted a thorough review of the food security measurement methods. USDA requested the review by CNSTAT to ensure that the measurement methods USDA uses to assess households' access—and lack of access—to adequate food and the language used to describe those conditions are conceptually and operationally sound and that they convey useful and relevant information to policy officials and the public. The panel convened by CNSTAT to conduct this study included economists, sociologists, nutritionists, statisticians, and other researchers. One of the central issues the CNSTAT panel addressed was whether the concepts and definitions underlying the measurement methods—especially the concept and definition of hunger and the relationship between hunger and food insecurity—were appropriate for the policy context in which food security statistics are used.

The CNSTAT panel recommended that USDA continue to measure and monitor food insecurity regularly in a household survey, affirmed the appropriateness of the general methodology currently used to measure food insecurity, and suggested several ways in which the methodology might be refined (contingent on confirmatory research). Research on these issues is currently underway at ERS.

The CNSTAT panel recommended that USDA make a clear and explicit distinction between food insecurity and hunger. Food insecurity—the

³The food security scale reported here is based on the Rasch measurement model, an application of maximum likelihood estimation in the family of Item Response Theory models (Wright, 1977, 1983). These statistical measurement models were developed in educational testing, where test items vary systematically in difficulty and the overall score measures the level of difficulty that the tested individual has mastered. In the present application, the items vary in the severity of food insecurity to which they refer, and the overall score measures the severity of food insecurity recently experienced by household members.

⁴Beginning with the 2005 data, all questions in the food security scale were asked with respect to the last 30 days as well as the last 12 months. These data support calculation of a full-range 30-day scale.

condition assessed in the food security survey and represented in the statistics in this report—is a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food. Hunger is an individual-level physiological condition that may result from food insecurity. The word “hunger,” the panel stated in its final report, “...should refer to a potential consequence of food insecurity that, because of prolonged, involuntary lack of food, results in discomfort, illness, weakness, or pain that goes beyond the usual uneasy sensation.” To measure hunger in this sense would require collection of more detailed and extensive information on physiological experiences of individual household members than could be accomplished effectively in the context of the CPS-FSS. In the CPS-FSS, one person provides information on all household members, and the basic CPS, which carries the CPS-FSS as a supplement, is focused primarily on employment and other labor force issues. The panel recommended, therefore, that new methods be developed to measure hunger and that a national assessment of hunger be conducted using an appropriate survey of individuals rather than a survey of households.

The CNSTAT panel also recommended that USDA consider alternate labels to convey the severity of food insecurity without using the word “hunger,” since hunger is not adequately assessed in the food security survey. USDA concurs with this recommendation and, accordingly, has introduced the new labels “low food security” and “very low food security” to replace “food insecurity without hunger” and “food insecurity with hunger,” respectively, in this year’s report. USDA is collaborating with partners in the food security measurement community to explore how best to implement other recommendations of the CNSTAT panel.

A large number of independent researchers in the academic and nutrition communities also have used the U.S. food security survey module and food security scale to assess the severity and prevalence of food insecurity in various population groups. One general result of these studies has been to verify the consistency of the measurement construct and the robustness of the measurement method in diverse populations and survey contexts. A summary list of many of these studies is available from the Brandeis University Center on Hunger and Poverty at www.centeronhunger.org.

Nonetheless, the following caveats need to be kept in mind when interpreting the prevalence estimates in this report:

- The Current Population Survey, which carries the food security survey as a supplement, is representative of the noninstitutionalized population of the United States. It is based on a complete address list of sampled areas (counties and metropolitan areas), but does not include homeless persons who are not in shelters. This may result in an underestimate of the number of persons with very low food security.
- Case study and ethnographic research suggests that some parents are reluctant to report inadequate food intake for their children even when it has occurred (Hamilton et al., 1997b, p. 88). This may result in an underestimate of the prevalence of very low food security among children based on food security survey data.

- Small, random measurement errors, combined with the nature of the distribution of households across the range of severity of food insecurity, may result in a modest overestimate of food insecurity and very low food security. False positives—the incorrect classification of food secure households as food insecure—are more likely than false negatives because there are more households just above the food insecurity threshold than in a similar range just below it. (Most households are food secure, and the number in each range of severity declines as severity increases.) The same is true at the very-low-food-security threshold (Hamilton et al., 1997a, p. 65; Hamilton et al., 1997b, p. 89).

Appendix C—USDA’s Thrifty Food Plan

The Thrifty Food Plan—developed by USDA—serves as a national standard for a nutritious diet at low cost. It represents a set of “market baskets” of food that people of specific age and gender could consume at home to maintain a healthful diet that meets current dietary standards, taking into account the food consumption patterns of U.S. households. The cost of the meal plan for each age/gender category is calculated based on average national food prices adjusted for inflation.¹

The cost of the market basket for a household is further adjusted by household size to account for economies of scale. The cost of the Thrifty Food Plan is used in this report to adjust household spending on food so that spending can be compared meaningfully among households of different sizes and age-gender compositions. It provides a baseline that takes into account differences in households’ calorie and nutrient requirements due to these differences in household composition. This appendix provides background information on the Thrifty Food Plan and details of how it is calculated for each household.

In 1961, USDA developed four cost-specific, nutritionally balanced food plans: Economy, Low-cost, Moderate-cost, and Liberal. The food plans were developed by studying the food-purchasing patterns of households in the United States and modifying these choices by the least amount necessary to meet nutritional guidelines at specific cost objectives. The Economy Food Plan and the Thrifty Food Plan that replaced it at the same designated cost level in 1975 have been used for a number of important policy and statistical purposes over the years. In the 1960s, a low-income threshold based on the Economy Food Plan was adopted as the official poverty threshold of the United States (Citro and Michael, 1995, p. 110). The cost of the Thrifty Food Plan is used by USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service as a basis for determining families’ maximum food stamp allotments.²

The last revision of the Thrifty Food Plan prior to the 2006 food security survey was conducted by USDA’s Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (CNPP) in 1999. This was done to reflect updated dietary recommendations and food composition data and current food prices and consumption patterns, while maintaining the cost at the level of the previous market baskets (USDA, 1999). CNPP updates the cost of each of USDA’s four food plans monthly to reflect changes in food prices, as measured by the Consumer Price Index for specific food categories. Table C-1 lists estimated weekly costs of the four USDA food plans for the month of December 2006—the month the 2006 CPS food security survey was conducted.

The cost of the Thrifty Food Plan was calculated for each household in the food security survey, based on the information in table C-1, and was used as a baseline for comparing food expenditures across different types of households.³ The food plan costs in table C-1 are given for individuals in the context of four-person families. For households that are larger or smaller than four persons, the costs must be adjusted for economies of scale, as specified in the first footnote of table C-1. For example, the weekly Thrifty Food Plan cost for a household composed of a married couple with no children, ages

¹The costs of the Thrifty Food Plan for residents of Alaska and Hawaii are calculated based on State food prices rather than average national food prices.

²The Thrifty Food Plan was revised several times over the years (with major changes in 1983 and 1999) in order to take into account new information about nutritional needs, nutritional values of foods, food consumption preferences, and food prices (Kerr et al., 1984; USDA, 1999). In these revisions, USDA gave attention both to cost containment—keeping the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan near the food stamp benefit level—and to the buying patterns of households (Citro and Michael, 1995, p. 111).

³For residents in Alaska and Hawaii, the Thrifty Food Plan costs were adjusted upward by 15.1 percent and 54.2 percent, respectively, to reflect the higher cost of the Thrifty Food Plan in those States.

29 (husband) and 30 (wife), is given by adding the individual Thrifty Food Plan costs for the husband (\$34.60) and wife (\$31.20) and adjusting the total upward by 10 percent. The adjusted total (\$72.40) represents the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan for this type of household.

Table C-1

Weekly cost of USDA food plans: cost of food at home at four levels, December 2006

Age-gender group ¹	Thrifty plan	Low-cost plan	Moderate-cost plan	Liberal plan
<i>Dollars</i>				
Child:				
1 year ²	18.30	23.20	26.90	32.80
2 years	18.30	22.80	27.20	32.80
3-5 years	20.30	25.00	30.90	37.50
6-8 years	25.70	34.00	42.00	49.10
9-11 years	30.00	38.20	48.80	57.10
Male:				
12-14 years	31.20	43.20	53.20	63.30
15-19 years	32.50	44.70	55.30	64.70
20-50 years	34.60	44.40	55.30	67.60
51 years and over	31.50	42.20	52.00	62.80
Female:				
12-19 years	31.00	37.40	45.10	54.90
20-50 years	31.20	38.70	47.20	60.90
51 years and over	30.70	37.50	46.70	56.20
Examples of Families				
1. Couple:				
20-50 years	72.40	91.30	112.70	141.40
2. Couple,				
20-50 years,				
with 2 children,				
ages 2 and				
3-5 years	104.50	130.90	160.60	198.90

¹The costs given are for individuals in 4-person families. For individuals in other-size families, the following adjustments are suggested: 1-person – add 20 percent; 2-person – add 10 percent; 3-person – add 5 percent; 5- or 6-person – subtract 5 percent; 7- (or more) person – subtract 10 percent.

²USDA does not have official food plan cost estimates for children less than 1-year old. Since the Thrifty Food Plan identifies the most economical sources of food, in this analysis we assume a food plan based on breastfeeding. We arbitrarily set the cost of feeding a child under 1-year at half the cost of feeding a 1-year old child, in order to account for the added food intake of mothers and other costs associated with breastfeeding. While this estimate is rather arbitrary, it affects only 2.5 percent of households in our analysis.

Source: USDA, Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/Publications/FoodPlans/2006/CostofFoodDec06.pdf>.

Appendix D—Prevalence Rates of Food Insecurity by State, 1996-98, 2001-03, and 2004-06

State-level prevalence rates of food insecurity and very low food security for the period 2004-06 are compared with 3-year average rates for 2001-03 and 1996-98 in table D-1. The prevalence rates for 2004-06 are repeated from table 7. The prevalence rates for the two earlier periods were reported previously in *Household Food Security in the United States, 2003* (Nord et al., 2004). The 1996-98 statistics presented here and in *Household Food Security in the United States, 2003* were revised from those reported in *Prevalence of Food Insecurity and Hunger, by State, 1996-1998* (Nord et al., 1999) to adjust for differences in data collection procedures in the two periods.¹ They are presented as a baseline to assess longer term changes in State-level food security conditions.²

In four States—California, Florida, Hawaii, and Montana—prevalence rates of food insecurity declined from 2001-03 to 2004-06 by statistically significant percentages. In 13 States and the District of Columbia, prevalence rates increased by statistically significant percentages, with the largest increases observed in Maine and the District of Columbia. During the same period, the prevalence of very low food security declined by statistically significant percentages in Florida and New Jersey and increased by statistically significant percentages in 17 States and the District of Columbia. The largest increases were in Louisiana, Maine, and Mississippi. Changes not marked as statistically significant in table D-1 were within ranges that could have resulted from sampling variation (that is, by the interviewed households not precisely representing all households in the State).

¹To reduce the burden on survey respondents, households—especially those with higher incomes—that report no indication of any food access problems on two or three “screener” questions are not asked the questions in the food security module. They are classified as food secure. Screening procedures in the CPS food security surveys were modified from year to year prior to 1998 to achieve an acceptable balance between accuracy and respondent burden. Since 1998, screening procedures have remained unchanged. The older, more restrictive screening procedures depressed prevalence estimates—especially for food insecurity—compared with those in use since 1998 because a small proportion of food insecure households were screened out along with those that were food secure. To provide an appropriate baseline for assessing changes in State prevalence rates of food insecurity, statistics from the 1996-98 report were adjusted upward to offset the estimated the effects of the earlier screening procedures on each State’s prevalence rate. The method used to calculate these adjustments was described in detail in *Household Food Security in the United States, 2001* (Nord et al., 2002), appendix D.

²Seasonal effects on food security measurement (discussed in first chapter) probably bias prevalence rates for 1996-98 upward somewhat compared with 2001-03 and 2004-06. At the national level, this effect may have raised the measured prevalence rate of food insecurity in 1996-98 by about 0.8 percentage points and the prevalence rate of very low food security by about 0.4 percentage points. However, seasonal effects may have differed from State to State.

Table D-1

Prevalence of household-level food insecurity and very low food security by State, 1996-98 (average), 2001-03 (average), and 2004-06 (average)¹

State	Food insecurity (low or very low food security)					Very low food security				
	Average	Average	Average	Change	Change	Average	Average	Average	Change	Change
	2004-06	2001-03	1996-98 ¹	2001-03 to 2004-06*	1996-98 to 2004-06*	2004-06	2001-03	1996-98 ¹	2001-03 to 2004-06*	1996-98 to 2004-06*
	Percent		Percentage points			Percent		Percentage points		
U.S.	11.3	11.0	11.3	0.3*	0.0	3.9	3.4	3.7	0.5*	0.2
AK	12.6	11.5	8.7	1.1	3.9*	5.1	4.1	3.6	1.0	1.5*
AL	12.1	12.5	12.5	-.4	-.4	3.3	3.2	3.3	.1	0.0
AR	14.3	15.5	13.7	-1.2	.6	5.8	4.7	4.8	1.1	1.0
AZ	13.1	12.3	14.6	.8	-1.5	4.3	3.8	4.3	.5	0.0
CA	10.9	12.2	13.3	-1.3*	-2.4*	3.7	3.6	4.3	.1	-.6
CO	12.0	9.7	10.8	2.3*	1.2	4.4	3.0	3.8	1.4*	.6
CT	8.6	8.0	11.0	.6	-2.4	2.7	3.0	4.1	-.3	-1.4
DC	12.5	9.0	13.7	3.5*	-1.2	3.8	2.4	4.7	1.4*	-.9
DE	7.8	6.7	8.1	1.1	-.3	2.6	1.8	2.9	.8	-.3
FL	8.9	11.7	13.2	-2.8*	-4.3*	3.1	3.7	4.5	-.6*	-1.4*
GA	12.6	12.9	10.9	-.3	1.7	5.0	3.6	3.4	1.4*	1.6*
HI	7.8	9.9	12.9	-2.1*	-5.1*	2.8	3.3	3.1	-.5	-.3
IA	11.4	9.5	8.0	1.9*	3.4*	3.9	3.0	2.6	.9*	1.3*
ID	12.7	13.7	11.3	-1.0	1.4	3.5	3.9	3.3	-.4	.2
IL	9.8	7.9	9.6	1.9*	.2	3.5	2.5	3.2	1.0*	.3
IN	10.8	9.9	9.0	.9	1.8	4.0	3.4	2.9	.6	1.1*
KS	12.5	11.7	11.5	.8	1.0	4.5	4.4	4.2	.1	.3
KY	13.6	11.2	9.7	2.4*	3.9*	4.6	3.3	3.4	1.3*	1.2*
LA	14.4	12.3	14.4	2.1*	0.0	5.0	2.6	4.4	2.4*	.6
MA	8.1	6.2	7.5	1.9*	.6	3.0	2.3	2.1	.7*	.9*
MD	9.5	7.7	8.7	1.8*	.8	3.9	2.9	3.3	1.0*	.6
ME	12.9	9.2	9.8	3.7*	3.1*	5.3	2.9	4.0	2.4*	1.3*
MI	12.2	10.1	9.6	2.1*	2.6*	4.6	3.4	3.1	1.2*	1.5*
MN	8.2	7.1	8.6	1.1	-.4	3.2	2.2	3.1	1.0*	.1
MO	12.3	10.4	10.1	1.9*	2.2*	4.4	3.6	3.0	.8*	1.4*
MS	18.1	14.9	14.6	3.2*	3.5	6.4	4.0	4.2	2.4*	2.2*
MT	9.9	12.5	11.2	-2.6*	-1.3	4.3	4.0	3.0	.3	1.3*
NC	12.9	13.7	9.8	-.8	3.1*	4.4	4.5	2.7	-.1	1.7*
ND	6.4	6.9	5.5	-.5	.9	2.2	2.0	1.6	.2	.6
NE	9.5	10.4	8.7	-.9	.8	3.8	3.0	2.5	.8	1.3*
NH	7.4	6.4	8.6	1.0	-1.2	2.2	2.1	3.1	.1	-.9*
NJ	7.7	8.6	8.9	-.9	-1.2	2.1	3.1	3.1	-1.0*	-1.0*
NM	16.1	14.8	16.5	1.3	-.4	5.8	4.4	4.8	1.4	1.0
NV	8.8	9.2	10.4	-.4	-1.6	3.2	3.4	4.0	-.2	-.8
NY	9.8	10.0	11.9	-.2	-2.1*	3.2	3.1	4.1	.1	-.9*
OH	12.7	10.9	9.7	1.8*	3.0*	4.1	3.6	3.5	.5	.6*
OK	14.6	14.1	13.1	.5	1.5	5.3	5.2	4.2	.1	1.1*
OR	11.9	12.9	14.2	-1.0	-2.3	4.4	4.3	6.0	.1	-1.6*
PA	10.0	9.5	8.3	.5	1.7*	3.3	2.6	2.6	.7*	.7*
RI	11.3	11.1	10.2	.2	1.1	3.7	3.6	2.7	.1	1.0*
SC	14.7	13.5	11.0	1.2	3.7*	5.9	4.9	3.5	1.0	2.4*
SD	9.5	8.9	8.2	.6	1.3*	3.3	2.4	2.2	.9*	1.1*
TN	12.5	10.9	11.8	1.6	.7	4.3	3.3	4.4	1.0	-.1
TX	15.9	14.9	15.2	1.0*	.7	5.3	4.1	5.5	1.2*	-.2
UT	14.5	14.6	10.3	-.1	4.2*	5.1	4.4	3.1	.7	2.0*
VA	7.9	8.4	10.2	-.5	-2.3*	2.8	2.2	3.0	.6	-.2
VT	9.6	8.9	8.8	.7	.8	4.3	3.0	2.7	1.3*	1.6*
WA	10.3	11.6	13.2	-1.3	-2.9*	3.6	3.9	4.7	-.3	-1.1*
WI	8.9	9.0	8.5	-.1	.4	2.7	3.2	2.6	-.5	.1
WV	9.3	8.9	9.5	.4	-.2	3.2	2.7	3.1	.5	.1
WY	10.6	10.1	9.9	.5	.7	3.7	4.2	3.5	-.5	.2

*Change was statistically significant with 90 percent confidence ($t > 1.645$).

¹Statistics for 1996-98 were revised to account for changes in survey screening procedures introduced in 1998.

Source: Prepared by ERS based on Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement data.

Appendix E—Food Security During 30 Days Prior to Food Security Survey

The annual food security survey was designed with the primary objective of assessing households' food security during the 12-month period prior to the survey, but information is also collected with reference to the 30-day period prior to the survey. From 1995-2004, information on 30-day food security was collected for only a subset of the food security questions—those indicating more severe levels of food insecurity. Beginning with the 2005 survey, information on the full set of food security questions has been collected for both the 30 days and 12 months prior to the survey. Households that responded affirmatively to each 12-month question were asked whether the same behavior, experience, or condition occurred during the last 30 days. Responses to these questions were used to assess the food security status of households during the 30 days prior to the survey, following the same protocols that were used for the 12-month measure. The 30-day statistics for 2006 are, therefore, comparable with those for 2005, but not with those reported for 2004 and earlier years.

About 94 percent of households were food secure throughout the 30-day period from mid-November to mid-December 2006 (table E-1).¹ About 6.7 million households (5.8 percent) were food insecure at some time during that period, including 2.8 million (2.4 percent) households with very low food security. Changes from the corresponding prevalence rates for the same 30-day period in 2005 (5.7 percent and 2.2 percent, respectively) were not statistically significant.

The prevalence of food insecurity during the 30 days from mid-November to mid-December was 53 percent of that for the entire 12 months prior to the survey; the corresponding statistic for very low food security was 60 percent. If food insecurity during this 30-day period was similar to that for other 30-day periods throughout the year, then these comparisons imply that the average household that was food insecure at some time during the year experienced this condition in 6 months of the year, and the average household with very low food security experienced that condition in 7 months of the year.² However, analysis of food insecurity in different months suggests that food insecurity is somewhat more prevalent in the summer months (July-September) than in March-April and November-December (Cohen et al., 2002a; Nord and Romig, 2006; Nord and Kantor, 2006), so typical frequencies may be somewhat higher than the 6 and 7 months implied by the December data.

The prevalence rates of food insecurity and very low food security during the 30 days prior to the survey varied across household types following the same general pattern as the 12-month measure. Prevalence rates were lowest for married-couple families with children, households with two or more adults without children, households that included an elderly person, White non-Hispanic households, and households with incomes higher than 185 percent of the poverty line. Prevalence rates were highest for households with children headed by single women, households headed by Blacks and Hispanics, and households with low incomes. Relationships between 30-day and 12-

¹The food security survey was conducted during the week of December 10-16, 2006.

²The implied frequency of very low food security (7 months) for those experiencing the condition at any time during the year is consistent with that reported in 2005, but is lower than that estimated in 2004 and earlier years (8 to 9 months). The new methodology for measuring very low food security is more consistent with the 12-month measure than was the method used prior to 2005.

Table E-1

Households by food security status during the 30 days prior to the food security survey and selected household characteristics, 2006¹

Category	Total ¹	Food secure		Food insecure					
		1,000	1,000	Percent	All		With low food security		With very low food security
	1,000	1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent
All households	115,605	108,926	94.2	6,679	5.8	3,900	3.4	2,779	2.4
Household composition:									
With children < 18	39,436	36,278	92.0	3,158	8.0	2,157	5.5	1,001	2.5
With children < 6	17,161	15,746	91.8	1,415	8.2	1,016	5.9	399	2.3
Married-couple families	26,614	25,295	95.0	1,319	5.0	973	3.7	346	1.3
Female head, no spouse	9,572	7,994	83.5	1,578	16.5	984	10.3	594	6.2
Male head, no spouse	2,618	2,419	92.4	199	7.6	149	5.7	50	1.9
Other household with child ²	633	572	90.4	61	9.6	50	7.9	11	1.7
With no children < 18	76,169	72,649	95.4	3,520	4.6	1,743	2.3	1,777	2.3
More than one adult	44,742	43,223	96.6	1,519	3.4	801	1.8	718	1.6
Women living alone	17,584	16,451	93.6	1,133	6.4	525	3.0	608	3.5
Men living alone	13,844	12,975	93.7	869	6.3	417	3.0	452	3.3
With elderly	26,840	26,057	97.1	783	2.9	520	1.9	263	1.0
Elderly living alone	10,499	10,215	97.3	284	2.7	175	1.7	109	1.0
Race/ethnicity of households:									
White non-Hispanic	82,268	78,745	95.7	3,523	4.3	2,017	2.5	1,506	1.8
Black non-Hispanic	14,054	12,572	89.5	1,482	10.5	802	5.7	680	4.8
Hispanic ³	12,875	11,512	89.4	1,363	10.6	906	7.0	457	3.5
Other	6,409	6,098	95.1	311	4.9	175	2.7	136	2.1
Household income-to-poverty ratio:									
Under 1.00	11,829	9,442	79.8	2,387	20.2	1,314	11.1	1,073	9.1
Under 1.30	16,830	13,773	81.8	3,057	18.2	1,682	10.0	1,375	8.2
Under 1.85	27,610	23,475	85.0	4,135	15.0	2,311	8.4	1,824	6.6
1.85 and over	64,495	62,886	97.5	1,609	2.5	1,015	1.6	594	0.9
Income unknown	23,500	22,565	96.0	935	4.0	574	2.4	361	1.5
Area of residence: ⁴									
Inside metropolitan area	96,189	90,725	94.3	5,464	5.7	3,181	3.3	2,283	2.4
In principal cities ⁵	32,051	29,796	93.0	2,255	7.0	1,287	4.0	968	3.0
Not in principal cities	47,541	45,236	95.2	2,305	4.8	1,358	2.9	947	2.0
Outside metropolitan area	19,417	18,202	93.7	1,215	6.3	719	3.7	496	2.6
Census geographic region:									
Northeast	21,302	20,217	94.9	1,085	5.1	638	3.0	447	2.1
Midwest	26,560	25,089	94.5	1,471	5.5	853	3.2	618	2.3
South	42,279	39,655	93.8	2,624	6.2	1,498	3.5	1,126	2.7
West	25,464	23,965	94.1	1,499	5.9	911	3.6	588	2.3

¹The 30-day prevalence rates refer to the 30-day period from mid-November to mid-December; the survey was conducted during the week of December 10-16, 2006. Totals exclude households whose food security status is unknown because they did not give a valid response to any of the questions in the 30-day food security scale. In 2006, these represented 381,000 households (0.3 percent of all households.) The 30-day statistics for very low food security for 2005 and 2006 are based on a different methodology than 30-day statistics on food insecurity with hunger reported in 2004 and earlier years and are not comparable.

²Households with children in complex living arrangements, e.g., children of other relatives or unrelated roommate or boarder.

³Hispanics may be of any race.

⁴Metropolitan area residence is based on 2003 Office of Management and Budget delineation.

⁵Households within incorporated areas of the largest cities in each metropolitan area. Residence inside or outside of principal cities is not identified for about 17 percent of households in metropolitan statistical areas.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

month prevalence rates did not differ greatly across the categories of households listed in table E-1.

The 30-day food security measure facilitates a more temporally precise analysis of the relationship between households' food insecurity and their use of Federal and community food and nutrition assistance programs than does the 12-month measure. That is, measured food insecurity and reported use of food and nutrition assistance programs are more likely to refer to contemporaneous conditions when both are referenced to the previous 30 days than when one or both is referenced to the previous 12 months. For households that left the Food Stamp Program during the year, the 30-day measure of food security can also provide information about their food security status after they left the program.

The 30-day prevalence of food insecurity (36.6 percent) and very low food security (17.2 percent) among households that left the Food Stamp Program during the year were more than twice the corresponding rates for households in the same low-income range that did not receive food stamps at any time during the year (13.5 percent food insecurity and 6.2 percent very low food security; table E-2). Prevalence rates among food stamp leavers were somewhat higher than those among households that received food stamps during the 30 days prior to the survey. This implies that not all households that left the Food Stamp Program did so because their economic situations had improved to a level that assured access to enough food without food stamps. Associations of 30-day prevalence rates of very low food security with use of other food and nutrition assistance programs were similar to those of the 12-month measure reported in table 11.

Table E-2

Prevalence of food insecurity during the 30 days prior to the food security survey, by participation in selected Federal and community food assistance programs, 2006¹

Category	Food insecurity (low or very low food security)	Very low food security
	Percent	
Income less than 130 percent of poverty line:		
Received food stamps previous 30 days	27.2	11.8
Received food stamps in every month during the previous 12 months	26.8	11.3
Received food stamps previous 12 months but not previous 30 days (food stamp leavers)	36.6	17.2
Did not receive food stamps previous 12 months	13.5	6.2
Income less than 185 percent of poverty line; school-age children in household:		
Received free or reduced-price school lunch previous 30 days	22.9	7.3
Did not receive free or reduced-price school lunch previous 30 days	11.2	4.3
Income less than 185 percent of poverty line; children under age 5 in household:		
Received WIC previous 30 days	19.8	5.1
Did not receive WIC previous 30 days	15.4	5.1
Income less than 185 percent of poverty line:		
Received emergency food from food pantry previous 30 days	51.5	30.1
Did not receive emergency food from food pantry previous 30 days	13.0	5.3

¹The 30-day prevalence rates refer to the 30-day period from mid-November to mid-December; the survey was conducted during the week of December 10-16, 2006. The number of interviewed households reporting use of emergency kitchens during the previous 30 days was too small to provide reliable food security prevalence estimates.

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.