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Statistical Supplement to Household Food Security in the United States in 2021

Alisha Coleman-Jensen
Matthew P. Rabbitt
Christian A. Gregory
Anita Singh



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Note to Readers

This supplement provides statistics that complement those in *Household Food Security in the United States in 2021* (ERR-309), a research report that presents the primary national statistics on household food security, food spending, and the use of Federal food and nutrition assistance programs by food-insecure households. Additional statistics here cover component items of the household food security measure, the frequency of occurrence of food-insecure conditions, and selected statistics on household food security, food spending, and use of Federal and community food and nutrition assistance programs.

Keywords: food security, food insecurity, food spending, food pantry, soup kitchen, emergency kitchen, material well-being, SNAP, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, National School Lunch Program, WIC, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, COVID-19, coronavirus pandemic

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Statistical Supplement to Household Food Security in the United States in 2021

Introduction

This supplement provides statistics on component items of the household food security measure, the frequency of occurrence of food-insecure conditions, and selected statistics on household food security, food spending, and use of Federal and community food and nutrition assistance programs. It complements the *Household Food Security in the United States in 2021* report (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2022), which provides the primary national statistics on household food security, food spending, and use of Federal food and nutrition assistance programs by food-insecure households.

The statistics presented here are based on data collected in the Current Population Survey (CPS) Food Security Supplement conducted in December 2021. Information about the survey, data, and methods is available in the *Household Food Security in the United States in 2021* report. All statistics were calculated by applying the Food Security Supplement weights to responses of surveyed households to obtain nationally representative prevalence estimates. Unless otherwise noted, statistical differences described in the text are significant at the 90-percent confidence level.¹

¹ Standard errors of estimates were calculated using balanced repeated replication (BRR) methods, based on replicate weights computed for the Supplement by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.

Food Insecurity in Low-income Households

Table S-1 presents food security statistics for households with annual incomes below 130 percent of the poverty line.² By definition, food insecurity results from insufficient household resources; however, many factors that might affect a household's food security (e.g., job loss, divorce, health shock, 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 managed to remain food secure. In 2021, 69.0 percent of households with incomes below 130 percent of the poverty line were food secure, while 31.0 percent were food insecure.

² The Federal poverty line in 2021 was \$27,479 annual income for a family of 4 (2 adults and 2 children). Households with gross monthly income at or below 130 percent of the poverty line are eligible to participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), provided they meet other eligibility criteria. The gross monthly income limit does not apply to households with an elderly member or member with a disability. Some States have adopted a broad-based categorical eligibility that provides a higher gross income limit for SNAP applicants who are categorically eligible for SNAP, based on participation in other programs or benefits. Children were eligible for free meals in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast programs if household income was determined to be at or below 130 percent of the poverty line.

Table S-1

Households with annual income below 130 percent of the poverty line by food security status and selected household characteristics, 2021

Category	Total ¹	Food Secure		All		Food insecure			
		1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent	With low food security		Food secure With very low	
						1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent
All low-income households	16,994	11,722	69.0	5,272	31.0	3,127	18.4	2,145	12.6
Household composition									
With children < 18 years	6,082	4,092	67.3	1,990	32.7	1,361	22.4	629	10.3
With children < 6 years	2,989	2,047	68.5	942	31.5	649	21.7	293	9.8
Married-couple families	2,245	1,615	71.9	630	28.1	464	20.7	166	7.4
Female head, no spouse	3,168	2,029	64.0	1,139	36.0	747	23.6	392	12.4
Male head, no spouse	591	391	66.2	200	33.8	130	22.0	70.0	11.8
Other household with child ²	79	57	72.2	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
With no children < 18 years	10,912	7,630	69.9	3,282	30.1	1,766	16.2	1,516	13.9
More than one adult	4,255	3,108	73.0	1,147	27.0	630	14.8	517	12.2
Women living alone	3,889	2,678	68.9	1,211	31.1	650	16.7	561	14.4
Men living alone	2,769	1,846	66.7	923	33.3	486	17.5	437	15.8
With elderly	4,475	3,444	77.0	1,031	23.0	625	13.9	406	9.1
Elderly living alone	2,533	1,908	75.3	625	24.7	333	13.2	292	11.5
Race/ethnicity of household reference persons:									
White, non-Hispanic	7,631	5,434	71.2	2,197	28.8	1,306	17.1	891	11.7
Black, non-Hispanic	3,656	2,304	63.0	1,352	37.0	804	22.0	548	15.0
Hispanic ³	4,451	3,090	69.4	1,361	30.6	835	18.8	526	11.8
Other, non-Hispanic	1,256	893	71.1	363	28.9	183	14.6	180	14.3
Area of residence ⁴									
Inside metropolitan area	13,883	9,525	68.6	4,358	31.4	2,605	18.8	1,753	12.6
In principal cities ⁵	5,591	3,731	66.7	1,860	33.3	1,083	19.4	777	13.9
Not in principal cities	5,765	4,058	70.4	1,707	29.6	1,077	18.7	630	10.9
Outside metropolitan area	3,112	2,198	70.6	914	29.4	522	16.8	392	12.6
Census geographic region									
Northeast	2,405	1,751	72.8	654	27.2	374	15.6	280	11.6
Midwest	3,294	2,151	65.3	1,143	34.7	655	19.9	488	14.8
South	7,724	5,344	69.2	2,380	30.8	1,461	18.9	919	11.9
West	3,570	2,475	69.3	1,095	30.7	637	17.9	458	12.8

NA = Not reported; fewer than 10 households in the survey with this characteristic had food insecurity or very low food security.

¹Totals exclude households for which income was not reported (about 26 percent of households) and those for which food security status is unknown because the households did not give a valid response to any of the questions in the food security scale (0.4 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 2013 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 18 percent of low-income households in metropolitan statistical areas.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2021 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

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

The survey measures 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 (see tables S-2 for all individuals and S-3 for children). Within a food-insecure household, different household members may be affected differently by the household's food insecurity. Some members—particularly young children—may experience only mild or no effects, while adults were more severely affected. It is more precise 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.”

Table S-2

Number of individuals by food security status of households and selected household characteristics, 2021

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	
All individuals in households	325,508	291,664	89.6	33,844	10.4	22,726	7.0	11,118	3.4
Household composition									
With children < 18 years	153,315	134,393	87.7	18,922	12.3	13,742	8.9	5,180	3.4
With children < 6 years	67,850	58,947	86.9	8,903	13.1	6,717	9.9	2,186	3.2
Married-couple families	105,098	96,754	92.1	8,344	7.9	6,279	5.9	2,065	2.0
Female head, no spouse	33,963	25,665	75.6	8,298	24.4	5,785	17.0	2,513	7.4
Male head, no spouse	12,142	10,181	83.8	1,961	16.2	1,471	12.2	490	4.0
Other household with child ²	2,112	1,794	84.9	318	15.1	NA	NA	NA	NA
With no children < 18 years	172,193	157,271	91.3	14,922	8.7	8,984	5.3	5,938	3.4
More than one adult	133,028	123,122	92.6	9,906	7.4	6,292	4.7	3,614	2.7
Women living alone	21,641	18,781	86.8	2,860	13.2	1,568	7.2	1,292	6.0
Men living alone	17,524	15,367	87.7	2,157	12.3	1,125	6.4	1,032	5.9
With elderly	84,709	78,667	92.9	6,042	7.1	3,991	4.7	2,051	2.4
Elderly living alone	16,056	14,530	90.5	1,526	9.5	798	5.0	728	4.5
Race/ethnicity of household reference persons									
White, non-Hispanic	199,518	186,179	93.3	13,339	6.7	8,851	4.5	4,488	2.2
Black, non-Hispanic	40,394	32,429	80.3	7,965	19.7	5,127	12.7	2,838	7.0
Hispanic ³	58,477	48,775	83.4	9,702	16.6	6,996	12.0	2,706	4.6
Other, non-Hispanic	27,118	24,279	89.5	2,839	10.5	1,753	6.5	1,086	4.0
Household income-to-poverty ratio									
Under 1.00	29,436	20,290	68.9	9,146	31.1	5,700	19.4	3,446	11.7
Under 1.30	43,212	30,122	69.7	13,090	30.3	8,378	19.4	4,712	10.9
Under 1.85	68,208	50,312	73.8	17,896	26.2	11,859	17.3	6,037	8.9
1.85 and over	175,993	167,413	95.1	8,580	4.9	5,957	3.4	2,623	1.5
Income unknown	81,306	73,937	90.9	7,369	9.1	4,911	6.1	2,458	3.0
Area of residence ⁴									
Inside metropolitan area	282,164	252,977	89.7	29,187	10.3	19,666	6.9	9,521	3.4
In principal cities ⁵	90,847	79,791	87.8	11,056	12.2	7,316	8.1	3,740	4.1
Not in principal cities	150,374	136,790	91.0	13,584	9.0	9,350	6.2	4,234	2.8
Outside metropolitan area	43,344	38,686	89.3	4,658	10.7	3,060	7.0	1,598	3.7
Census geographic region									
Northeast	54,704	49,995	91.4	4,709	8.6	3,166	5.8	1,543	2.8
Midwest	67,283	60,520	89.9	6,763	10.1	4,502	6.7	2,261	3.4
South	125,581	111,271	88.6	14,310	11.4	9,693	7.7	4,617	3.7
West	77,939	69,876	89.7	8,063	10.3	5,365	6.8	2,698	3.5

NA = Not reported; fewer than 10 households in the survey with this characteristic had very low food security.

¹Totals exclude individuals in households for which food security status is unknown because the households did not give a valid response to any of the questions in the food security scale. In 2021, these exclusions represented about 413,000 individuals (0.1 percent of the U.S. population).

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 2013 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 15 percent of individuals living in metropolitan statistical areas.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2021 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

Table S-3

Number of children by food security status of households and selected household characteristics, 2021

Category	Total ¹	In food-secure households		In food-insecure households ²		In households with food-insecure children ³		In households with very low food security among children		
		1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent	
All children	72,416	63,154	87.2	9,262	12.8	4,959	6.8	521	0.7	
Household composition										
With children < 6 years	34,822	30,039	86.3	4,783	13.7	2,592	7.4	162	0.5	
Married-couple families	48,203	44,466	92.2	3,737	7.8	2,111	4.4	162	0.3	
Female head, no spouse	17,690	13,226	74.8	4,464	25.2	2,343	13.2	326	1.8	
Male head, no spouse	5,657	4,730	83.6	927	16.4	444	7.8	NA	NA	
Other household with child ⁴	866	732	84.5	134	15.5	NA	NA	NA	NA	
Race/ethnicity of household reference persons										
White, non-Hispanic	39,493	36,301	91.9	3,192	8.1	1,577	4.0	115	0.3	
Black, non-Hispanic	10,120	7,858	77.6	2,262	22.4	1,260	12.5	193	1.9	
Hispanic ⁵	16,519	13,468	81.5	3,051	18.5	1,703	10.3	162	1.0	
Other, non-Hispanic	6,284	5,527	88.0	757	12.0	419	6.7	NA	NA	
Household income-to-poverty ratio										
Under 1.00	9,187	6,252	68.1	2,935	31.9	1,533	16.7	308	3.4	
Under 1.30	13,422	9,222	68.7	4,200	31.3	2,279	17.0	353	2.6	
Under 1.85	19,772	14,217	71.9	5,555	28.1	2,989	15.1	381	1.9	
1.85 and over	36,687	34,829	94.9	1,858	5.1	880	2.4	87	0.2	
Income unknown	15,957	14,108	88.4	1,849	11.6	1,090	6.8	NA	NA	
Area of residence ⁶										
Inside metropolitan area	62,677	54,696	87.3	7,981	12.7	4,325	6.9	443	0.7	
In principal cities ⁷	19,322	16,580	85.8	2,742	14.2	1,434	7.4	229	1.2	
Not in principal cities	34,549	30,633	88.7	3,916	11.3	2,195	6.4	165	0.5	
Outside metropolitan area	9,739	8,458	86.8	1,281	13.2	634	6.5	78	0.8	
Census geographic region										
Northeast	11,348	10,218	90.0	1,130	10.0	435	3.8	NA	NA	
Midwest	14,890	13,054	87.7	1,836	12.3	1,033	6.9	NA	NA	
South	28,635	24,644	86.1	3,991	13.9	2,007	7.0	183	0.6	
West	17,542	15,237	86.9	2,305	13.1	1,484	8.5	178	1.0	

NA = Not reported; fewer than 10 households in the survey with this characteristic had very low food security among children.

¹Totals exclude households for which food security status is unknown because the households did not give a valid response to any of the questions in the food security scale. In 2021, these exclusions represented 67,000 children (0.1 percent).

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

³Households with food-insecure children are those with low or very low food security among children.

⁴Households with children in complex living arrangements (e.g., children of other relatives or unrelated roommate or boarder).

⁵Hispanics may be of any race.

⁶Metropolitan area residence is based on 2013 Office of Management and Budget delineation.

⁷Households within incorporated areas of the largest cities in each metropolitan area. Residence inside or outside of principal cities is not identified for about 14 percent of children living in metropolitan statistical areas.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2021 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

Food Security During the 30 Days Prior to the Food Security Survey

The annual food security survey was designed to assess households' food security during the 12-month period prior to the survey, but information was also collected for the 30-day period before the survey. Households that responded affirmatively to each 12-month period question were asked whether the same behavior, experience, or condition occurred during the last 30 days. Researchers used responses to these questions to assess the food security status of households during the 30 days before the survey, following the same protocols used for the 12-month measure.³ The 30-day food security measurement protocol was revised in 2005, so 30-day statistics for 2021 are directly comparable with those for 2005 and later years but not with those reported for 2004 and earlier years.

An estimated 94.5 percent of households were food secure throughout the 30-day period, from mid-November to mid-December 2021 (table S-4).⁴ An estimated 5.5 percent (7.2 million households) were food insecure at some point during the 30-day period, including 2.2 percent (2.9 million households) with very low food security. The national-level prevalence rates of food insecurity and very low food security were essentially unchanged from the corresponding 30-day period in 2020 (5.7 percent and 2.3 percent, respectively; see Coleman-Jensen et al., 2021).⁵ However, a few statistically significant changes in prevalence rates occurred for some subpopulations. From 2020 to 2021, 30-day food insecurity declined for all households: with children (from 7.7 percent to 6.2 percent), married couple families with children (from 4.7 percent to 3.7 percent), households with children headed by a single woman (from 14.7 percent to 12.4 percent), households headed by Hispanic adults (from 9.7 percent to 8.3 percent), households with income below 185 percent of the poverty line (from 15.6 percent to 14.3 percent), and households located in the South (from 6.8 percent to 6.0 percent). During this same period, 30-day food insecurity increased for women living alone (from 6.1 percent to 7.5 percent).

³ For questions asking about the frequency of conditions or behaviors (items 5, 10, and 17), responses that indicated the described conditions occurred on at least 3 days of the previous 30 days were counted as affirmative. See Nord (2002). Beginning with the 2019 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement data, all continuous variables for the number of days out of the previous 30 days that food-insecure conditions occurred are only released after being categorized into ranges of number of days. In 2021, all of these recoded variables include at least a category for 1 or 2 days, so that the 30-day food security prevalence rate can be calculated the same way as in previous years, using 3 or more days as affirmative. One variable, HESSHM5: "In the last 30 days, did children ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food?" did not meet Census Bureau guidelines for disclosure and no data is provided for that variable. That question was not used in assessing 30-day food security status but is unlikely to affect the estimates because it is the most severe item in the scale and not near the food insecurity or very low food security thresholds.

⁴ The 2021 food security survey was conducted December 12–21, 2021.

⁵ The 2020 food security survey was conducted December 13–19, 2020.

Table S-4

Households by food security status during the 30 days prior to the food security survey and selected household characteristics, 2021¹

Category	Total ¹	Food secure		Food insecure					
				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	132,043	124,819	94.5	7,224	5.5	4,311	3.3	2,913	2.2
Household composition									
With children < 18 years	36,765	34,477	93.8	2,288	6.2	1,582	4.3	706	1.9
With children < 6 years	15,406	14,415	93.6	991	6.4	735	4.7	256	1.7
Married-couple families	23,849	22,978	96.3	871	3.7	666	2.8	205	0.9
Female head, no spouse	9,197	8,054	87.6	1,143	12.4	739	8.0	404	4.4
Male head, no spouse	3,194	2,963	92.8	231	7.2	144	4.5	87	2.7
Other household with child ²	524	481	91.8	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
With no children < 18 years	95,278	90,342	94.8	4,936	5.2	2,729	2.9	2,207	2.3
More than one adult	56,113	54,030	96.3	2,083	3.7	1,255	2.2	828	1.5
Women living alone	21,641	20,024	92.5	1,617	7.5	815	3.8	802	3.7
Men living alone	17,524	16,289	93.0	1,235	7.0	659	3.7	576	3.3
With elderly	42,501	40,887	96.2	1,614	3.8	931	2.2	683	1.6
Elderly living alone	16,056	15,201	94.7	855	5.3	413	2.5	442	2.8
Race/ethnicity of household reference persons									
White, non-Hispanic	85,866	82,603	96.2	3,263	3.8	1,872	2.2	1,391	1.6
Black, non-Hispanic	16,951	15,069	88.9	1,882	11.1	1,211	7.1	671	4.0
Hispanic ³	19,082	17,503	91.7	1,579	8.3	958	5.0	621	3.3
Other, non-Hispanic	10,144	9,644	95.1	500	4.9	270	2.6	230	2.3
Household income-to-poverty ratio									
Under 1.00	11,920	9,862	82.7	2,058	17.3	1,052	8.9	1,006	8.4
Under 1.30	16,994	14,190	83.5	2,804	16.5	1,521	9.0	1,283	7.5
Under 1.85	26,506	22,728	85.7	3,778	14.3	2,190	8.3	1,588	6.0
1.85 and over	71,721	69,863	97.4	1,858	2.6	1,220	1.7	638	0.9
Income unknown	33,816	32,228	95.3	1,588	4.7	901	2.7	687	2.0
Area of residence ⁴									
Inside metropolitan area	113,842	107,695	94.6	6,147	5.4	3,748	3.3	2,399	2.1
In principal cities ⁵	38,360	35,884	93.5	2,476	6.5	1,480	3.9	996	2.6
Not in principal cities	58,118	55,456	95.4	2,662	4.6	1,636	2.8	1,026	1.8
Outside metropolitan area	18,201	17,123	94.1	1,078	5.9	564	3.1	514	2.8
Census geographic region									
Northeast	22,516	21,447	95.3	1,069	4.7	664	2.9	405	1.8
Midwest	28,301	26,713	94.4	1,588	5.6	959	3.4	629	2.2
South	51,183	48,103	94.0	3,080	6.0	1,819	3.5	1,261	2.5
West	30,044	28,557	95.1	1,487	4.9	869	2.8	618	2.1

NA = Not reported; fewer than 10 households in the survey with this characteristic had very low food security within the past 30 days.

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 12–21, 2021. Totals exclude households for which food security status is unknown because the households did not give a valid response to any of the questions in the 30-day food security scale. In 2021, these exclusions represented 204,000 households (0.2 percent of all households). The 30-day statistics for 2004 and earlier years were based on a different methodology and are not comparable with these statistics.

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 2013 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 15 percent of households in metropolitan statistical areas.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2021 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

The prevalence of 30-day very low food security decreased for married-couple families with children (from 1.3 percent to 0.9 percent) and increased for women living alone (from 2.9 percent to 3.7 percent) and the elderly living alone (from 2.0 percent to 2.8 percent) between 2020 and 2021.

The number of households that were food insecure at some time during the 30 days from mid-November to mid-December 2021 (7.2 million households; table S-4) was 53 percent of the number of households that were food insecure at some time during the 12 months before the survey (13.5 million households; Coleman-Jensen et al., 2022); the corresponding statistic for very low food security was 57 percent (2.9 million versus 5.1 million households). If food insecurity during this 30-day period was like that for other 30-day periods throughout the year, then these comparisons imply the average household that was food insecure at some time during the year experienced this condition in 7 months of the year. Likewise, the average household with very low food security experienced that condition in 7 months of the year.⁶ 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. The reason is perhaps because of less access to school meal programs during the summer (Cohen et al., 2002; Nord and Romig, 2006; Nord and Kantor, 2006), so typical frequencies may be somewhat higher than the 7 months implied.

⁶ The number of months is estimated as the monthly rate, divided by the annual rate, multiplied by 12.

Household Responses to Questions in the Food Security Scale

The 18 food security questions ask about conditions, experiences, and behaviors that range widely in severity (items near the top of the lists in table S-5 are relatively less severe, while those nearer the bottom are more severe). Those indicating less severe food insecurity are observed in a larger proportion of households, and the proportion declines as severity increases (table S-5). 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, as well as increasingly severe disruptions of normal eating patterns and reductions in food intake. (See page 26 for the complete question wording.)

Table S-5
Responses to items in the food security scale, 2018–21¹

Scale item ²	Households affirming item ³			
	2018	2019	2020	2021
	Percent			
Household items				
Worried food would run out before (I/we) got money to buy more	14.6	13.9	14.2	13.9
Food bought didn't last, and (I/we) didn't have money to get more	12.2	11.4	11.4	11.0
Couldn't afford to eat balanced meals	12.2	11.8	11.3	11.3
Adult items				
Adult(s) cut size of meals or skipped meals	6.7	6.4	6.2	6.0
Respondent ate less than felt he/she should	6.6	6.7	6.3	6.2
Adult(s) cut size or skipped meals in 3 or more months	5.1	4.9	4.7	4.6
Respondent hungry but didn't eat because couldn't afford food	3.7	3.5	3.3	3.4
Respondent lost weight	2.2	2.2	2.1	2.2
Adult(s) did not eat for whole day	1.4	1.5	1.2	1.3
Adult(s) did not eat for whole day in 3 or more months	1.1	1.2	0.9	0.9
Child items				
Relied on few kinds of low-cost food to feed child(ren)	11.9	11.3	12.9	10.1
Couldn't feed child(ren) balanced meals	7.4	6.8	7.7	6.8
Child(ren) were not eating enough	3.0	2.9	3.6	3.0
Cut size of child(ren)'s meals	1.3	1.2	1.9	1.5
Child(ren) were hungry	0.8	0.8	0.9	1.0
Child(ren) skipped meals	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.5
Child(ren) skipped meals in 3 or more months	0.3	0.4	0.5	0.4
Child(ren) did not eat for whole day	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1

¹Survey responses are weighted to population totals.

²The full wording of each question 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." See box on page 26 for the complete wording of these questions.

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

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2021 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

Three or more affirmative responses are required for a household to be classified as food insecure. 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. Most food-insecure households reported multiple indicators of these conditions. A large majority of households (78.2 percent of households with children and 84.3 percent of those without children) reported no problems or concerns in meeting their food needs (table S-6). Households that reported only one or two indications of food insecurity (9.3 percent of households with children and 6.4 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 households may have been marginal 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 security (Anderson, 1990, p. 1598).⁷ Research examining health and children’s development in these marginally food-secure households generally indicates 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 S-6

Percentage of households by food security raw score, 2021

Panel A: Households with children—18-item household food security scale			
Raw score (number of food-insecure conditions reported)	Percent of households ¹	Cumulative percent of households ¹	Food security status
0	78.19	78.19	Food secure (87.50 percent)
1	5.76	83.95	
2	3.55	87.50	
3	2.79	90.29	Low food security (8.91 percent)
4	1.73	92.02	
5	1.71	93.73	
6	1.60	95.34	
7	1.08	96.42	
8	0.85	97.27	Very low food security (3.58 percent)
9	0.76	98.03	
10	0.74	98.77	
11	0.36	99.13	
12	0.29	99.43	
13	0.18	99.60	
14	0.16	99.77	
15	0.10	99.87	
16	0.04	99.91	
17	0.05	99.96	
18	0.04	100.00	

Panel B: Households with children—8-item child food security scale			
Raw score (number of food-insecure conditions reported)	Percent of households ¹	Cumulative percent of households ¹	Food security status
0	88.39	88.39	Children food secure (93.77 percent)
1	5.38	93.77	Low food security among children (5.49 percent)
2	3.05	96.82	
3	1.76	98.58	
4	0.67	99.26	
5	0.47	99.73	Very low food security among children (0.74 percent)
6	0.07	99.79	
7	0.11	99.91	
8	0.09	100.00	

Panel C: Households with no children—10-item adult food security scale			
Raw score (number of food-insecure conditions reported)	Percent of households ¹	Cumulative percent of households ¹	Food security status
0	84.25	84.25	Food secure (90.64 percent)
1	3.76	88.01	
2	2.63	90.64	
3	2.77	93.41	Low food security (5.41 percent)
4	1.36	94.77	
5	1.28	96.05	
6	1.24	97.29	
7	1.08	98.37	Very low food security (3.95 percent)
8	0.86	99.23	
9	0.30	99.53	
10	0.47	100.00	

¹Survey responses are weighted to population totals.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2021 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

⁷ The Life Sciences Research Office (LSRO) is a nonprofit organization in Bethesda, MD. Concepts and definitions of food security and related conditions developed by LSRO for the American Institute of Nutrition (Anderson, 1990) provided key parts of the theoretical underpinnings of the household food security measure.

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 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 Supplement using two different methods:

- Method 1: A condition is described, and the respondent is asked if this condition was often, sometimes, or never true for their household during the past 12 months.
- Method 2: Respondents who answer “yes” to a 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 S-7 presents responses to each food security question, broken down by reported frequency of occurrence for all households interviewed in the December 2021 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 13 to 24 percent (depending on the specific question) reported that it occurred “often.”

Table S-7

Frequency of occurrence of behaviors, experiences, and conditions indicating food insecurity reported by all U.S. households, 2021¹

Condition ²	Ever during the year	Frequency of occurrence			
		Often	Sometimes	Often	Sometimes
	--- Percent of all households with very low food security ---			Percent of "ever during the year" ³	
Worried food would run out before (I/we) got money to buy more	13.9	3.0	10.9	22.0	78.0
Food bought didn't last, and (I/we) didn't have money to get more	11.0	2.2	8.8	20.0	80.0
Couldn't afford to eat balanced meals	11.3	2.7	8.6	24.0	76.0
Relied on few kinds of low-cost food to feed child(ren)	10.1	2.0	8.2	19.0	81.0
Couldn't feed child(ren) balanced meals	6.8	0.9	5.9	13.0	87.0
Child(ren) were not eating enough	3.0	0.5	2.5	16.0	84.0

Condition ²	Ever during the year	Frequency of occurrence					
		Almost every month	Some months but not every month	In only 1 or 2 months	Almost every month	Some months but not every month	1 or 2 months
	--- Percent of all households with very low food security ---			Percent of "ever during the year" ³			
Adult(s) cut size of meals or skipped meals	6.0	2.0	2.6	1.4	33	43	23
Respondent ate less than felt he/she should	6.2	1.9	2.7	1.6	30	44	26
Respondent hungry but didn't eat because couldn't afford food	3.4	1.1	1.3	0.9	34	40	26
Respondent lost weight	2.2	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC
Adult(s) did not eat for whole day	1.3	0.4	0.5	0.4	31	39	30
Cut size of child(ren)'s meals	1.5	0.4	0.7	0.4	27	46	28
Child(ren) were hungry	1.0	0.3	0.5	0.2	27	50	23
Child(ren) skipped meals	0.5	0.1	0.2	0.2	27	44	29
Child(ren) did not eat for whole day	0.1	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC

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

¹Survey responses are weighted to population totals. Households not responding to an item or not responding to the follow-up 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 full wording of each question 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."

³Columns labeled "Percent of "ever during the year"" show the distribution by frequency of occurrence for households that indicate they experienced the condition "Ever during the year" (shown in the first column of statistics).

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2021 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

In response to Method 2 questions—conditional on affirming the general question—27 to 34 percent of respondents reported that the behavior, experience, or condition occurred "in almost every month;" 39 to 50 percent reported that it occurred in "some months, but not every month;" and 23 to 30 percent reported that it occurred "in only 1 or 2 months."

Table S-8 presents the same frequency-of-occurrence response statistics for households classified as having very low food security.

Table S-8

Frequency of occurrence of behaviors, experiences, and conditions indicating food insecurity reported by households with very low food security, 2021¹

Condition ²	Ever during the year	Frequency of occurrence			
		Often	Sometimes	Often	Sometimes
	- - - Percent of all households with very low food security - - -			Percent of "ever during the year" ³	
Worried food would run out before (I/we) got money to buy more	98.4	44.8	53.6	46	54
Food bought didn't last, and (I/we) didn't have money to get more	96.7	36.1	60.6	37	63
Couldn't afford to eat balanced meals	94.5	39.8	54.7	42	58
Relied on few kinds of low-cost food to feed child(ren)	91.8	34.0	57.8	37	63
Couldn't feed child(ren) balanced meals	83.9	18.5	65.4	22	78
Child(ren) were not eating enough	56.5	13.2	43.3	23	77

Condition ²	Ever during the year	Frequency of occurrence					
		Almost every month	Some months but not every month	In only 1 or 2 months	Almost every month	Some months but not every month	1 or 2 months
	- - - Percent of all households with very low food security - - -			Percent of "ever during the year" ³			
Adult(s) cut size of meals or skipped meals	94.7	42.1	44.5	8.1	44	47	9
Respondent ate less than felt he/she should	94.2	39.6	41.5	13.1	42	44	14
Respondent hungry but didn't eat because couldn't afford food	67.4	26.6	29.8	11.0	40	44	16
Respondent lost weight	47.4	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC
Adult(s) did not eat for whole day	32.5	10.9	13.0	8.5	34	40	26
Cut size of child(ren)'s meals	35.0	11.0	15.2	8.8	31	43	25
Child(ren) were hungry	23.6	7.3	11.7	4.7	31	50	20
Child(ren) skipped meals	14.5	3.4	6.6	4.5	24	45	31
Child(ren) did not eat for whole day	3.5	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC

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

¹Survey responses are weighted to population totals. Households not responding to an item or not responding to the follow-up 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 full wording of each question 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."

³Columns labeled "Percent of "ever during the year"" show the distribution by frequency of occurrence for households that indicate they experienced the condition "Ever during the year" (shown in the first column of statistics).

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2021 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 before the survey.⁸ For seven of these behaviors and experiences, respondents also reported how many days the condition had occurred during that period. Table S-9 summarizes responses to these questions.⁹

Table S-9

Monthly and daily occurrence of behaviors, experiences, and conditions indicating food insecurity reported by all U.S. households, 2021¹

Condition ²	For households reporting condition at any time during previous 30 days					Average daily prevalence Percent ³
	Ever during previous 30 days	Number of days out of previous 30 days			Monthly average occurrence Days ³	
		1-7 days Percent ³	8-14 days	15-30 days		
Worried food would run out before (I/we) got money to buy more	5.92	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC
Food bought didn't last, and (I/we) didn't have money to get more	5.58	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC
Couldn't afford to eat balanced meals	6.32	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC
Adult(s) cut size of meals or skipped meals	3.98	68	13	19	7.8	1.03
Respondent ate less than felt he/she should	3.73	58	16	25	9.4	1.16
Respondent hungry but didn't eat because couldn't afford food	2.13	57	17	26	9.3	0.66
Respondent lost weight	1.40	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC
Adult(s) did not eat for whole day	0.84	68	19	14	6.9	0.19
Relied on few kinds of low-cost food to feed child(ren)	4.70	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC
Couldn't feed child(ren) balanced meals	3.41	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC
Child(ren) were not eating enough	1.69	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC
Cut size of child(ren)'s meals	0.83	59	19	22	9.1	0.25
Child(ren) were hungry	0.53	66	NA	NA	8.2	0.14
Child(ren) skipped meals	0.30	70	NA	NA	NA	NA
Child(ren) did not eat for whole day	NA	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC

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

NA = Number of days of occurrence was not reported because there were fewer than 10 households in the survey with responses for that question and category.

¹Survey responses are 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 12–21, 2021.

²The full wording of each question 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.

Notes: Beginning with the 2019 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement data and continuing in 2021, the variables for the number of days out of the previous 30 days in which food-insecure conditions were experienced are now reported in categories. The midpoint of the categories was used to estimate the average daily prevalence. The category ranges enable reporting of the conditions in 1–7 day, 8–14 day, and 15–30 day increments as in previous annual reports.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2021 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

⁸ Beginning with the 2019 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement data and continuing in 2021, all continuous variables for the number of days out of the previous 30 days that food-insecure conditions occurred are only released after being categorized into ranges of the number of days that a condition occurred. The result is less precise estimates of the average daily prevalence of food-insecure conditions. The midpoint of the range is used to calculate the average daily prevalence. The average daily prevalence for each condition is still calculated as the product of the 30-day prevalence and the average number of days experienced divided by 30. In prior annual food security reports, these estimates were then used to approximate the average daily prevalence of very low food security. That approximation for the daily prevalence of very low food security is no longer presented, given the less precise estimates of average daily prevalence for the conditions.

⁹ Average daily prevalence for these questions is calculated as the product of the 30-day prevalence and the average number of days divided by 30.

Food Spending by Food-Secure and Food-Insecure Households

Usual food spending was adjusted for household size and composition in two ways. First, researchers divided each household's usual weekly food expenditure by the number of household members, yielding the "usual weekly food spending per person" for that household. The second adjustment more precisely accounts for the different food needs of households by comparing each household's usual food spending with the estimated cost of the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) for that household in December 2021 (for a complete discussion of these methods, see Coleman-Jensen et al., 2022). Food-secure households typically spent more on food than food-insecure households of similar age-gender composition. The pattern of higher median food spending relative to the cost of the TFP by food-secure households was consistent for most groups across household structure, race, and Hispanic ethnicity, residence, and geographic region (table S-10).¹⁰ For households with Black, non-Hispanic reference persons and low-income households, food spending relative to the cost of the TFP was similar for food-secure and food-insecure households.

¹⁰ Estimates of median weekly food spending relative to the household cost of the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) for December 2021 are not comparable with estimates for previous years. The cost of the TFP was revised in 2021 to reflect updated data on food prices, food composition, and consumption patterns, and current dietary guidance.

Table S-10

Weekly household food spending relative to the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) by food security status and selected household characteristics, 2021

Category	Median weekly food spending, relative to December 2021 TFP ¹	
	Food secure	Food insecure
	Ratio (Cost of TFP = 1.0)	
All households	1.15	0.99
Household composition		
With children < 18 years	1.03	0.91
At least one child < 6 years	1.06	0.97
Married-couple families	1.06	0.88
Female head, no spouse	1.00	0.95
Male head, no spouse	0.97	0.85
Other household with child ²	NA	NA
With no children < 18 years	1.23	1.08
More than one adult	1.15	0.90
Women living alone	1.35	1.32
Men living alone	1.35	1.08
With elderly	1.08	0.90
Elderly living alone	1.15	0.99
Race/ethnicity of household reference persons		
White, non-Hispanic	1.20	0.99
Black, non-Hispanic	1.01	1.01
Hispanic ³	1.05	1.00
Other, non-Hispanic	1.15	1.01
Household income-to-poverty ratio		
Under 1.00	0.92	0.93
Under 1.30	0.92	0.93
Under 1.85	0.92	0.92
1.85 and over	1.25	1.21
Income unknown	1.07	0.91
Area of residence ⁴		
Inside metropolitan area	1.18	1.01
In principal cities ⁵	1.23	1.05
Not in principal cities	1.19	1.04
Outside metropolitan area	0.99	0.91
Census geographic region		
Northeast	1.21	1.06
Midwest	1.12	1.07
South	1.15	0.94
West	1.18	0.97

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

¹Statistics exclude households that did not answer the questions about spending on food or reported zero usual food spending and those that did not provide valid responses to any of the questions on food security. These exclusions represented 8 percent of all households. Estimates of median weekly food spending relative to the household cost of the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) for December 2021 are not comparable to estimates for previous years. This is because the cost of the TFP was revised in 2021 to reflect updated data on food prices, food composition, and consumption patterns, and current dietary guidance.

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 2013 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 15 percent of households in metropolitan statistical areas.

Note: Beginning with the 2015 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement, food spending amounts are categorized in public-use data.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2021 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

Use of Food Pantries and Emergency Kitchens

The December 2021 CPS food security survey included questions about the use of two types of community-based food and nutrition assistance programs (see box, “Community Food and Nutrition Assistance Programs,” on page 27). All households with incomes below 185 percent of the Federal poverty threshold were asked these questions. 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. The questions analyzed in this supplement are:

- “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 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 or shelter?”

The use of this resource is referred to as “use of an emergency kitchen” in the following discussion.

Table S-11 presents estimates of the number of households that obtained emergency food from food pantries or ate at an emergency kitchen one or more times during the 12-month period ending in December 2021. 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 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 (e.g., temporarily doubled-up with another family) also may have been missed. These two factors—exclusion of the homeless and under-representation of those who are tenuously housed—bias estimates of emergency kitchen use downward, especially among certain population subgroups. This is much less true for food pantry users because they need cooking facilities to use most items from a food pantry.¹¹

Table S-12 compares the food security of low-income households that used food pantries and emergency kitchens with that of low-income households that did not use those facilities. Table S-13 shows use of food pantries by household composition, race, and Hispanic ethnicity, income, and residence.

¹¹ Previous 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).

Table S-11

Use of food pantries and emergency kitchens, 2021

Category	Food pantries			Emergency kitchens		
	Total households ¹	Users	Percent	Total households ¹	Users	Percent
	1,000	1,000		1,000	1,000	
All households	131,547	7,323	5.6	131,538	438	0.3
All persons in households	324,070	19,268	5.9	324,081	864	0.3
Adults in households	252,118	13,706	5.4	252,143	726	0.3
Children in households	71,952	5,562	7.7	71,938	138	0.2
Households by food security status						
Food-secure households	118,197	3,227	2.7	118,200	110	0.1
Food-insecure households	13,314	4,091	30.7	13,307	328	2.5
Households with low food security	8,311	2,104	25.3	8,297	140	1.7
Households with very low food security	5,003	1,986	39.7	5,010	188	3.8

¹Total weighted number of households 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: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2021 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

Table S-12

Prevalence of food security and food insecurity of households with annual incomes of less than 185 percent of the poverty line, by use of food pantries and emergency kitchens, 2021

Category	Food secure	Food insecure		
		All	With low food security	With very low food security
		Percent		
Income less than 185 percent of poverty line				
Received emergency food from food pantry in the previous 12 months	43.0	57.0	30.6	26.4
Did not receive emergency food from food pantry in the previous 12 months	79.9	20.1	13.2	6.9
Ate meal at emergency kitchen in the previous 12 months	26.0	74.0	30.0	44.0
Did not eat meal at emergency kitchen in the previous 12 months	74.2	25.8	16.0	9.8

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2021 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

Table S-13

Use of food pantries, by selected household characteristics, 2021

Category	Total ¹	Pantry users	
			Percent
All households	131,547	7,323	5.6
Household composition			
With children < 18 years	36,553	2,567	7.0
At least one child < 6 years	15,312	1,136	7.4
Married-couple families	23,734	1,036	4.4
Female head, no spouse	9,131	1,257	13.8
Male head, no spouse	3,163	253	8.0
Other household with child ²	524	NA	NA
With no children < 18 years	94,995	4,756	5.0
More than one adult	55,980	2,131	3.8
Women living alone	21,586	1,582	7.3
Men living alone	17,429	1,043	6.0
With elderly	42,346	1,883	4.4
Elderly living alone	15,979	939	5.9
Race/ethnicity of household reference persons			
White, non-Hispanic	85,642	3,070	3.6
Black, non-Hispanic	16,855	1,997	11.8
Hispanic ³	18,938	1,777	9.4
Other, non-Hispanic	10,113	479	4.7
Household income-to-poverty ratio			
Under 1.00	11,840	2,688	22.7
Under 1.30	16,864	3,595	21.3
Under 1.85	26,312	4,553	17.3
1.85 and over	71,604	1,448	2.0
Income unknown	33,631	1,322	3.9
Area of residence ⁴			
Inside metropolitan area	113,393	6,087	5.4
In principal cities ⁵	38,247	2,574	6.7
Not in principal cities	57,843	2,465	4.3
Outside metropolitan area	18,155	1,236	6.8
Census geographic region			
Northeast	22,415	1,109	4.9
Midwest	28,184	1,687	6.0
South	50,984	2,892	5.7
West	29,964	1,635	5.5

NA = Not reported; fewer than 10 households in the survey with this characteristic reported using food pantries.

¹Totals exclude households that did not answer the question about getting food from a food pantry. These exclusions represented 0.5 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 2013 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 15 percent of households in metropolitan statistical areas.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2021 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

Food Spending by Households That Received Food and Nutrition Assistance

Table S-14 presents median food spending, relative to the cost of the December 2021 TFP, by households that received food and nutrition assistance and by nonparticipant households in similar low-income ranges.¹²

Table S-14

Weekly household food spending relative to the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) by participation in selected Federal and community food and nutrition assistance programs, 2021

Category	Median weekly food spending relative to cost of the December 2021 TFP ⁴
	Ratio (cost of TFP = 1.0)
Income less than 130 percent of poverty line	
Received SNAP ¹ benefits in the previous 30 days	0.93
Did not receive SNAP ¹ benefits in the previous 30 days	0.92
Income less than 185 percent of poverty line; school-age children in household	
Received NSLP ² free or reduced-price school lunch in the previous 30 days	0.85
Did not receive NSLP ² free or reduced-price school lunch in the previous 30 days	0.87
Income less than 185 percent of poverty line; children under age 5 in household	
Received WIC ³ in the previous 30 days	0.92
Did not receive WIC ³ in the previous 30 days	0.91
Income less than 185 percent of poverty line	
Received emergency food from food pantry in the previous 12 months	0.88
Did not receive emergency food from food pantry in the previous 12 months	0.93

¹SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly the Food Stamp Program.

²NSLP = National School Lunch Program.

³WIC = Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children.

⁴Estimates of median weekly food spending (relative to the household cost of the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) for December 2021) are not comparable to estimates for previous years because the cost of the TFP was revised in 2021 to reflect updated data on food prices, food composition, consumption patterns, and current dietary guidance.

Note: Beginning with the 2015 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement, food spending amounts are categorized in public-use data.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2021 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

¹² Food purchased with SNAP benefits is included in household food spending as calculated here. However, the value of school lunches and food obtained through the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is not included. Food from these sources supplemented the food purchased by many of these households.

Food Security During the 30 Days Prior to the Food Security Survey in Households That Received Food and Nutrition Assistance

Table S-15 presents prevalence rates of food insecurity and very low food security during the 30-day period just prior to the food security survey for households that received selected types of food and nutrition assistance and for nonparticipant households in similar low-income ranges. This complements table 8 of the *Household Food Security in the United States in 2021* report (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2022), which is based on the 12-month measure. 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.

The prevalence of 30-day food insecurity decreased for households that received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits in the previous 30 days (from 23.6 percent to 19.7 percent), households that received SNAP benefits in every month during the previous 12 months (from 23.6 percent to 19.9 percent), households that received free or reduced-price school lunch (from 18.6 percent to 15.1 percent) and did not receive free or reduced-price school lunch in the previous 30 days (from 17.5 percent to 9.8 percent), and households that did not receive Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits in the previous 30 days (from 13.0 percent to 9.2 percent) between 2020 and 2021 (see Coleman-Jensen et al., 2021, for prevalence estimates for 2020).

From 2020 to 2021, the prevalence of 30-day very low food security decreased for households that did not receive WIC benefits in the previous 30 days (from 4.3 percent to 2.0 percent).

Table S-15

Prevalence of food insecurity during the 30 days prior to the food security survey, by participation in selected Federal and community food and nutrition assistance programs, 2021¹

Category	Food insecure in 30 days prior to survey (low or very low food security)	Very low food secure in 30 days prior to survey
	Percent	
Income less than 130 percent of poverty line		
Received SNAP ² benefits in the previous 30 days	19.7	9.8
Received SNAP ² benefits every month during the previous 12 months	19.9	10.0
Received SNAP ² benefits in the previous 12 months but not previous 30 days (SNAP leavers)	22.4	13.6
Did not receive SNAP ² benefits in the previous 12 months	14.1	5.7
Income less than 185 percent of poverty line; school-age children in household		
Received NSLP ³ free or reduced-price school lunch in the previous 30 days	15.1	5.3
Did not receive NSLP ³ free or reduced-price school lunch in the previous 30 days	9.8	5.0
Income less than 185 percent of poverty line; children under age 5 in household		
Received WIC ⁴ in the previous 30 days	15.6	5.8
Did not receive WIC ⁴ in the previous 30 days	9.2	2.0
Income less than 185 percent of poverty line		
Received emergency food from food pantry in the previous 30 days	44.3	21.3
Did not receive emergency food from food pantry in the previous 30 days	11.5	4.6

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 12–21, 2021. 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.

²SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly the Food Stamp Program.

³NSLP = National School Lunch Program.

⁴WIC = Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2021 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

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. Designing and managing these programs to function effectively together as a nutrition safety net requires knowing 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 (table S-16).

Table S-16

Combined use of Federal and community food and nutrition assistance programs by low-income households,¹ 2021

Category	Share of category that obtained food from food pantry	Share of food pantry users in category	Share of category that ate a meal at emergency kitchen	Share of emergency kitchen users in category
Percent				
Received SNAP ² benefits in the previous 30 days	30.6	50.9	2.8	65.5
Received NSLP ³ free or reduced-price school lunch in the previous 30 days	22.8	27.0	1.2	19.1
Received WIC ⁴ in the previous 30 days	23.2	7.9	NA	NA
Participated in one or more of the three Federal programs	26.3	64.0	2.2	73.7
Did not participate in any of the three Federal programs	10.8	36.0	0.6	26.3

NA = Not reported; fewer than 10 households in the survey reported receipt of WIC and use of an emergency kitchen.

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.

²SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly the Food Stamp Program.

³NSLP = National School Lunch Program.

⁴WIC = Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2021 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

Questions Used to Assess the Food Security of Households in the CPS Food Security Supplement

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 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 were asked only if the household included children age 0–17)

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)

Coding of Responses

Questions 1–3 and 11–13 are coded as affirmative (i.e., possibly indicating food insecurity) if the response is “often” or “sometimes.” Questions 5, 10, and 17 are coded as affirmative if the response is “almost every month” or “some months but not every month.” The remaining questions are coded as affirmative if the response is “yes.”

Assessing Food Security Status in Households Without Children

Households without children are classified as food insecure if they report 3 or more indications of food insecurity in response to the first 10 questions; they are classified as having very low food security if they report 6 or more food-insecure conditions out of the first 10 questions.

Assessing Food Security Status in Households with Children Age 0–17

Households with children are classified as food insecure if they report 3 or more indications of food insecurity in response to the entire set of 18 questions; they are classified as having very low food security if they report 8 or more food-insecure conditions in response to the entire set of 18 questions.

The food security status of children in the household is assessed by responses to the child-referenced questions (questions 11–18). Households reporting two or more of these conditions are classified as having food insecurity among children. Households reporting five or more are classified as having very low food security among children.

Community Food and Nutrition Assistance Programs

Food pantries and emergency kitchens are the main direct providers of emergency food assistance. These agencies are locally based and rely heavily on volunteers. Most of them are affiliated with faith-based organizations (see Ohls et al., 2002). Pantries and kitchens play different roles. Food pantries distribute unprepared foods for offsite use, and emergency kitchens (sometimes referred to as soup kitchens) provide individuals with prepared food to eat on-site. 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). USDA supplied 1.3 billion pounds of USDA Foods to TEFAP in FY 21. This food was provided to community emergency food providers for distribution to the public.

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