Map the Meal Gap 2025

A Report on Local Food Insecurity and Food Costs in the United States in 2023

May 2025

Contents

Introduction

Food insecurity is defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) as a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food. The condition occurs when at least one member of the household lacks access to enough food for an active, healthy life because of limited money or other resources. It is often linked to one or multiple factors that lead to food insecurity, creating a cycle that can be hard to break. These factors can be related to household income, expenses, access to affordable health care, the surrounding social and physical environment, and barriers to opportunity.[1]

People disproportionately impacted by food insecurity include, but are not limited to, children,[2] many communities of color[3], households with low incomes,[4] immigrant communities,[5] LGBTQ+ individuals,[6] people with disabilities,[7] people in certain geographies (e.g., rural areas, cities, the South),[8] people who are formerly incarcerated,[9] and single-parent households.[10]

By centering on the voices of people facing hunger[a] and focusing on communities most impacted, we can better understand and address these factors to ensure everyone can thrive.

Feeding America's mission is to advance change in America by ensuring fair access to nutritious food for all in partnership with food banks, policymakers, supporters and the communities we serve. Since 2011, Feeding America has produced the *Map the Meal Gap* study, providing estimates of local food insecurity and food costs on an annual basis to better understand people and places facing hunger and to inform decisions and actions that will help us achieve our mission. We do this by generating national and local data about food insecurity, translating those data into insights and tools like map.feedingamerica.org, and engaging partners to help them use and improve our data and research in the future.

Summary of Key Findings

In this brief, we highlight key findings based on 2023 estimates of local food insecurity by select income levels, ages, and races/ethnicities for all U.S. counties and congressional districts, as well as by state and major metro area, as part of our annual *Map the Meal Gap* study. We also report updated national and local estimates of the average meal cost (i.e., national average weekly food expenditures among people who are food secure) and food budget shortfall (i.e., national average weekly dollars needed among people who are food insecure). These findings are explored in more detail in the body of the report.

Local Food Insecurity

- **100% of counties and congressional districts are home to people facing hunger.** Locally, the percentage of the overall population estimated to be food insecure in 2023 ranges from a low of 6% (1 in 17) in Oliver County, North Dakota, to 30% (1 in 3) in Dimmit County, Texas.

[a] Food insecurity and hunger are related but distinct concepts. Food insecurity is a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food, while hunger is an individual-level physiological condition that may result from food insecurity. Although these terms may be used interchangeably in this brief, the focus and statistics referenced here reflect estimates of food insecurity.

- **Child food insecurity affects every county and district, with rates reaching almost 50% in some areas.** The estimated prevalence of child food insecurity in 2023 varies considerably at the local level, with rates reaching as high as 47% in Hancock County, Georgia, and 38% in New York's 15th congressional district – the most populous in the country, encompassing the Bronx.
- **More than 12 million seniors and older adults experience food insecurity.** An estimated 7.4 million (9.2%) seniors (60 and older) and 5.2 million (12.8%) older adults (50-59) experience food insecurity as of 2023, with rates varying by state and major metropolitan area.
- **86% of counties with the highest food insecurity are in the South.** The South contains 45% of all counties but is home to an estimated 86% (283 of 328) of counties with food-insecurity rates in the top 10% (i.e., counties where 20.0% or more of the population is estimated to experience food insecurity).
- **86% of counties with the highest food insecurity are rural.** Nonmetropolitan (rural) counties make up 62% of all counties but represent 86% (281 of 328) of counties with food insecurity rates in the top 10% (i.e., counties where 20.0% or more of the population is estimated to experience food insecurity).
- **Among counties with available estimates, rates of food insecurity for Black or Latino individuals reach nearly 60%.**[b] Although most people experiencing food insecurity nationally are white, non-Hispanic, individuals who are Black or Latino often face disproportionately higher rates. For example, in Ward County, Texas, 56% of Black individuals are estimated to be food insecure, and in Telfair County, Georgia, 58% of Latinos may be facing hunger.

Food Insecurity and Income

- **More than 2 out of 5 of people facing hunger are unlikely to qualify for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).** After accounting for state-specific gross income limits, local estimates suggest that in 2023, 21 million or 44% of individuals experiencing food insecurity may not be eligible for SNAP.[c]

Food Spending and Prices

- **The national food budget shortfall rises to more than $32 billion.** In 2023, people in food-insecure households reported needing an additional $22.37 per person per week to have just enough money to cover their food needs, an increase of 1% from 2022 after adjusting for inflation. In annual terms, this resource gap translates to $32.2 billion

[b] Analyses of food insecurity by race/ethnicity are limited to states and counties for which there are adequate public data to produce food insecurity estimates that follow Feeding America's data release rules. Estimates of food insecurity are available among Black individuals in 47% of counties (n=1,465) across 40 states and D.C. (excluding HI, ID, ME, MT, ND, NH, SD, UT, VT, and WY), Hispanic individuals in 57% of counties (n=1,791) across 46 states and D.C. (excluding ME, ND, VT, and WV), and White, non-Hispanic individuals in 98% of counties (n=3,083) across all 50 states and D.C.

[c] According to national data from the USDA Economic Research Service, not everyone who qualifies for SNAP receives benefits, and not all who participate in the program are food secure.

across all 47 million individuals in food-insecure households and represents an increase of more than 8% since 2022.[d]

- **The national average cost per meal is $3.58**. This estimate is based on average food expenditures as reported by individuals who are food secure and translates to $75.18 per week or $325.78 per month.
- **County meal costs range from $2.60 to $6.09.** The average cost per meal ranges from 73% of the $3.58 national average in Willacy County, TX ($2.60) to 170% in New York County, NY ($6.09), after accounting for county-level food prices and local sales taxes.

Data and Methods

To estimate local food insecurity in every U.S. county and county equivalent, as well as congressional district, we first analyze the state-level relationships between food insecurity rates and select variables that research has shown to contribute to food insecurity and for which there are public data available for every state, county and congressional district (i.e., unemployment, poverty, disability, homeownership, and median income). We also analyze the relationship between food insecurity and the percentage of the population that is Black and the percentage that is Hispanic to reflect the relationship between race/ethnicity and food insecurity independent of the other socioeconomic variables in our models, including discrimination, unfair practices or conditions that contribute to food insecurity.[11] Finally, we control for factors unique to states and years that are not explicitly accounted for in our models.

We then use the strength of these state-level relationships combined with data on the same variables defined at the county and congressional district levels to generate estimated food insecurity rates for all individuals and for children for every county and congressional district in the country. For the child food insecurity estimates, we use data restricted to households with children for all variables except the unemployment rate and disability rate, which are defined for the full population. We use a similar approach to estimate local food insecurity by income as well as race and ethnicity (see our technical appendix for more information about how our models differ by subpopulation group).

Data used to produce estimates for Feeding America's *Map the Meal Gap* study come from the Current Population Survey (CPS), American Community Survey (ACS), and Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).

- State-level data on food insecurity and most independent variables come from the CPS and Food Security Supplement (CPS-FSS); state-level unemployment data by race and ethnicity come from the BLS Geographic Profile of Employment and Unemployment.
- County-level data for all variables except unemployment reflect five-year averages from the ACS (unemployment data reflect one-year averages from the BLS).
- District-level data for all variables reflect one-year ACS averages.

[d] According to the USDA ERS, a total of 47,389,000 individuals lived in food-insecure households in 2023, and those households experienced food insecurity in 7 out of 12 months of the year. Therefore, we calculate the national annual aggregate shortfall as follows: $22.37 per person per week x 47,389,000 individuals in food-insecure households x 52 weeks per year x 7/12 months.

To better understand food insecurity among the aging population in the U.S., we also analyze data from the December Supplement of the CPS through 2023. We provide food insecurity estimates for seniors, defined as adults age 60 and older, a group that is continuing to grow in size as the Baby Boomer generation ages. Additionally, we provide estimates for adults age 50-59, referred to hereafter as older adults, a cohort that represents the next generation of seniors and has historically faced some of the highest rates of food insecurity among adults in the U.S. Our estimates include national-level data showing how levels of food insecurity vary for seniors and older adults according to different demographics and other characteristics. We also provide state-level, and metropolitan-level estimates for both groups, showing how food insecurity varies across the country. Data used to provide estimates for the senior and older adult populations come from the CPS, Feeding America's *Map the Meal Gap* study, and the Census Bureau.

In addition to measuring the prevalence of food insecurity, we also estimate the national and local amount of money that food-secure individuals spend on a single meal (a.k.a. the average meal cost or cost per meal) and the additional amount of dollars needed among people experiencing food insecurity (a.k.a. the food budget shortfall). The data used to calculate the national average meal cost and food budget shortfall come from the CPS, and we localize these measures using a relative price index based on county and state food price data from NielsenIQ and grocery sales tax data for every state and county in the country.

The table below shows all the measures noted above by available subpopulation groups and geographic areas. See our technical appendix for more details on our methodology.

Table 1. Food Insecurity and Related Estimates from Feeding America, by Population and Place

Measure	Geography				
Food insecurity	**Nation[1]**	**State[2]**	**Metro[3]**	**District**	**County**
Overall (all ages)		✓		✓	✓
Black (all ethnicities)		✓		✓	✓
Hispanic (all races)		✓		✓	✓
White, non-Hispanic		✓		✓	✓
Income eligibility[4]	✓	✓		✓	✓
Child (<18 years)		✓		✓	✓
Older adults (age 50-59)[5]	✓	✓	✓		
Seniors (age 60+)[5]	✓	✓	✓		
Meal cost[4]	✓	✓			✓
Food budget shortfall[4]	✓	✓			✓

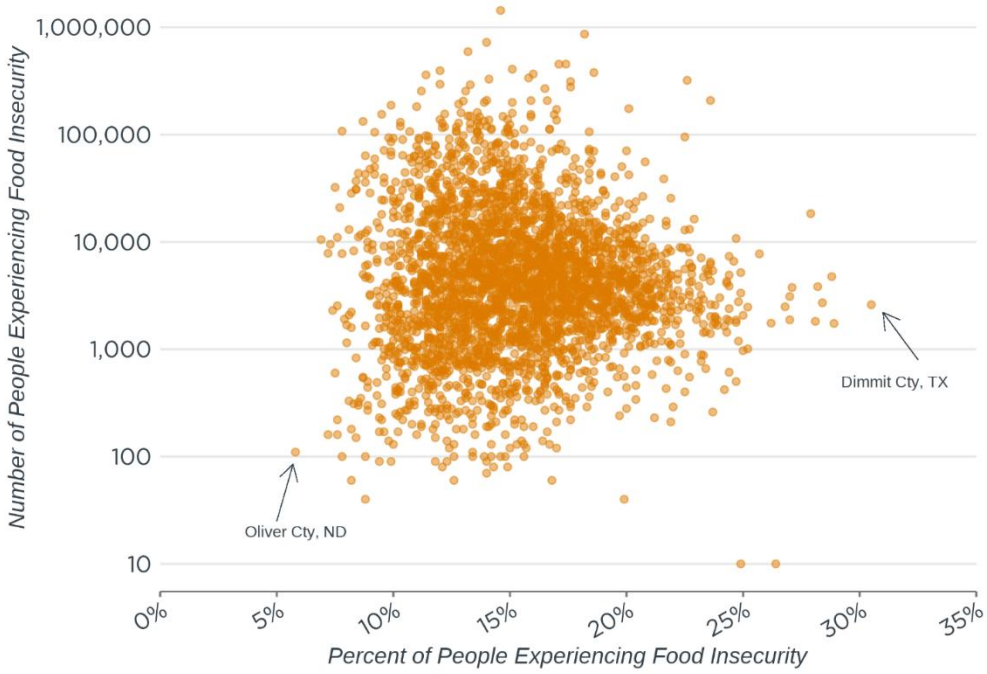
[1] Local food insecurity estimates align with official national statistics from the USDA Economic Research Service, but Feeding America typically defers to the USDA ERS when discussing national food insecurity prevalence.
[2] Estimates for states reflect aggregated congressional district estimates.
[3] We provide estimates of food insecurity for senior and older adult populations for large metropolitan areas (i.e., more than 1 million in total population).
[4] Estimates of income eligibility are available for all individuals and children experiencing food insecurity. Shortfall and meal gap estimates are available for overall food insecure population only. Meal cost estimates reflect reported spending among people who are food secure.
[5] Food insecurity estimates for older adults (age 50-59) and seniors (age 60+) are produced by analyzing data from the Current Population Survey; they are not modeled like the other food insecurity estimates noted above.

Local Food Insecurity

Prevalence of Food Insecurity among Overall Population

100% of counties and congressional districts are home to people facing hunger. On average, food insecurity is approximately 14% across all counties and districts, consistent with the 14.3% of all individuals in food-insecure households as of 2023 reported by the USDA.[12] Yet, levels of food insecurity vary by population and place. Locally, the percentage of the overall population estimated to be food insecure ranges from a low of 6% (1 in 17) in Oliver County, North Dakota, to 30% (1 in 3) in Dimmit County, Texas. These variations reflect differences in factors such as unemployment and poverty and may stem from practices and conditions that prevent households and communities from accessing the food they need.[13]

Figure 1. Every County is Home to People Facing Hunger
Estimated percent and number of all individuals in food-insecure households by county in 2023



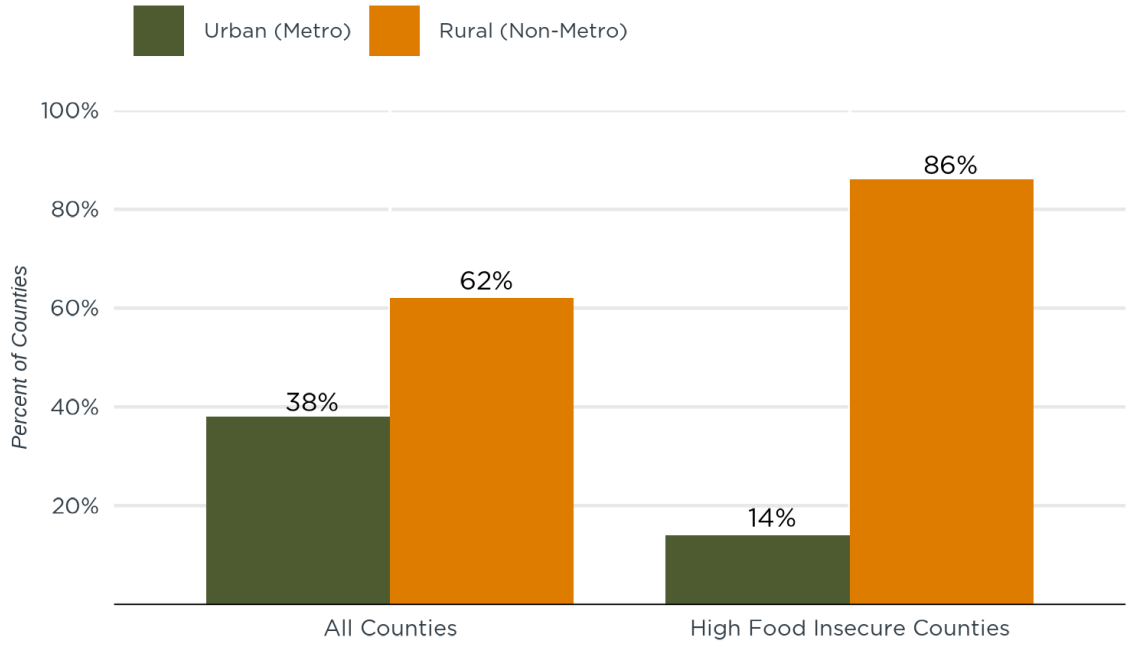
Note: The chart uses a logarithmic scale on the y-axis to visualize the estimated numbers of individuals experiencing food insecurity in all 3,144 counties and county equivalents.
Source: Feeding America.

Prevalence of Food Insecurity among Overall Population by Region and Rurality

86% of counties with the highest food insecurity are in the South. The South accounts for 45% of all U.S. counties but 86% (283 of 328) of those with the highest food insecurity rates – defined as counties where at least 20.0% of the population is food insecure. Regionally, high food insecurity affects 1 in 5 counties (19.9%) in the South, compared to 1 in 30 (3.3%) in the West and 1 in 37 (2.7%) in the Midwest. Bronx County, New York, is the only county in the Northeast in the top 10%. These regional disparities are consistent with national data from the USDA showing individual food insecurity is also highest in the South (16.0%), compared to 13.7% in the West, 13.5% in the Midwest, and 12.4% in the Northeast.[14]

86% of counties with the highest food insecurity are rural. While most people in the U.S., including individuals and households experiencing food insecurity, live in urban (metropolitan) areas, counties with the highest estimated rates of food insecurity are disproportionately rural. Nonmetropolitan (rural) counties make up 62% of all counties but represent 86% (281 out of 328) of counties with food insecurity rates in the top 10% – counties where 20.0% or more of the population is estimated to experience food insecurity.

Figure 2. Counties with High Food Insecurity are Disproportionately Rural
Percent of counties with estimated food insecurity rates of 20.0% or more in 2023



Note: Counties with high rates of food insecurity are defined as those where at least 20.0% of the population is estimated to experience food insecurity (counties in the top 10% of the country) (n=328). We use the USDA ERS 2023 Rural-Urban Continuum Codes to distinguish metropolitan (metro) counties from nonmetropolitan (nonmetro) counties.
Source: Feeding America.

Prevalence of Food Insecurity among Child Population

Child food insecurity affects every county and district, with rates reaching almost 50% in some areas. Across all counties and congressional districts, nearly 13.4 million children (1 in 5) are estimated to live in food-insecure households as of 2023, consistent with national data from the USDA.[15] The estimated prevalence of child food insecurity varies considerably at the local level, however, with rates reaching as high as nearly 47% in Hancock County, Georgia, and nearly 38% in New York's 15th congressional district – the most populous in the country, encompassing the Bronx. In contrast, estimated rates of child food insecurity are lowest in Loudoun County, Virginia (2.5%) and are less than 5% in New Jersey's 7th (4.3%) and 11th (4.9%) congressional districts as well as Virginia's 10th (4.7%), which serves Loudoun County.

Food insecurity is also estimated to be more prevalent among children than it is among the total population in every state and in more than 9 out of 10 counties and districts with comparable data. Research demonstrates links between food insecurity and poor child health and behavioral outcomes at every age, underscoring the economic and social imperative to address this issue.[16,17]

Prevalence of Food Insecurity among Senior and Older Adult Population

More than 12 million seniors and older adults experience food insecurity, and prevalence varies by state and metro area. An estimated 7.4 million (9.2%) seniors (60 and older) and 5.2 million (12.8%) older adults (50-59) experience food insecurity as of 2023. Consistent with reports from the USDA about food insecurity rising in 2023 for most populations, this represents an increase for these two groups.[18]

Variation in food insecurity among these two groups becomes apparent when looking at different geographic levels. In 2023, state-level food insecurity rates for seniors ranges from a low of 3.8% in North Dakota to a high of 13.6% in Texas. For older adults, state-level food insecurity rates ranged from 5.4% in Colorado and New Hampshire to 19.6% in Indiana and Mississippi. Eight of the ten states with the highest rates of food insecurity among seniors are located in the South. For older adults, five of the ten states with the highest rates of food insecurity are located in the South.

In addition to exploring senior food security at a state-level, food insecurity rates among seniors and older adults at the metro-level is another way to better understand this wide-spread need. In 2023, for these two populations, food insecurity data is available for 57 large metro areas (over 1 million in total population). In 2023, metro area food insecurity rates for seniors range from 3.4% (Grand Rapids-Wyoming, MI) to nearly 14.8% (New Orleans-Metairie, LA). For older adults, metro area food insecurity rates range from 4.6% (Sacramento-Roseville-Arden-Arcade, CA) to almost 18% (Memphis, TN-MS-AR).

Prevalence of Food Insecurity among Senior and Older Adult Population by Select Individual and Household Characteristics

The extent of senior and older adult food insecurity also varies across certain socioeconomic categories. In 2023, seniors with a disability are more than twice as likely (16.2% vs 6.9%) to be food insecure than those without a disability. The disparity among older adults is even greater. Older adults with a disability are more than three times as likely (34.1% vs 9.9%) to experience food insecurity than those without a disability. Research has found that having a disability is closely associated with an increased chance of being food insecure.[19,20,21] As adults age, they may develop disabilities and other health problems that make accessing groceries and cooking more difficult.[22]

While multigenerational household structures can yield many positive benefits such as stability and safety,[23] seniors and older adults who have a grandchild in the household are twice as likely to experience food insecurity than those without a grandchild present (18.2% vs 8.9% for seniors and 24.8% vs 12.4% for older adults, respectively). In households with limited economic resources, children are often shielded[e] from food insecurity by adults at the expense of their own needs.[24, 25]

Seniors and older adults who are renters are more than three times likely to experience food insecurity than those who are homeowners (22.0% vs 6.7% for seniors and 26.7% vs 8.5% for older adults, respectively). With housing being one of many costs that can be a strain for adults living on a fixed income, senior and older adult renters are more likely to be cost-burdened (spending more than 30% of their income on housing)[f] than those who own homes.

Across the age spectrum, including seniors and older adults, many communities of color experience food insecurity at disproportionate rates.[26] In 2023, about 1 in 5 Black, non-Hispanic seniors (19.5%) and older adults (20.8%), as well as 1 in 5 Latino seniors (19.3%) and older adults (18.7%) experience food insecurity. In contrast, about 1 in 16 white, non-Hispanic seniors (6.3%) and 1 in 10 white, non-Hispanic older adults (10.4%) experience food insecurity. For seniors and older adults, food insecurity estimates are not available separately for Asian Americans, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and people who identify as multi-racial. However, other research has found food insecurity to be disproportionately high for some of these groups.[27]

Looking ahead, the Census Bureau projects that by 2050, seniors will comprise around 104 million people age 60 and older.[28] If the current rate of food insecurity among seniors does not change, this would equate to more than 9 million seniors experiencing food insecurity.[g]

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[e] Shielding Children from Food Insecurity and Its Association with Mental Health and Well-Being in Canadian Households (citation in reference) describe shielding as: "Adults in food-insecure households will often sacrifice their own nutritional needs so that children are fed first." https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8975915/#CR7

[f] Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University. (2019). Housing America's older adults 2019. Retrieved from: https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/housing-americas-older-adults-2019

[g] *An Aging Nation, The Older Population in the United States* provides population projections for the senior population age 65 and older. To estimate projections for the 60 and older population, we first look at Figure 2. As shown, the population for the age groups from 45 to 64 is distributed in a roughly even way. Using this information, we can say that in 2050, about 25% of those age 45 to 65 are in the 60-65 age range. By taking 25% of the middle projection for the 45 to 64 age group in Figure 3 (95 million/4) and adding this to the middle projection of those 65 and older (80 million), you get 104 million people over the age of 60. Calculations are as follows: (95,000,000 seniors/4) + 80,000,000 seniors=104,000,000 seniors; 104,000,000(.092)=9,568,000 seniors.

Prevalence of Food Insecurity by Race/Ethnicity

Food insecurity can affect anyone, but it's not the same for everyone. Historical and ongoing discrimination, along with unfair practices in policies and institutions, have created disparities in food insecurity. For many communities, these challenges are passed down from one generation to the next, keeping families trapped in a cycle of poverty and hunger.[29, 30] By intentionally focusing on people most impacted, we can ensure everyone thrives.

Among counties with available estimates, rates of food insecurity for Black or Latino individuals reach nearly 60%. Although most people experiencing food insecurity nationally are white, non-Hispanic, individuals who are Black or Latino often face disproportionately higher rates. According to national data from the USDA Economic Research Service, the average food insecurity rate among Black, non-Hispanic individuals and Latino individuals in 2023 is 22.4% (9.2 million) and 22.7% (13.9 million), respectively, while the rate among white, non-Hispanic individuals is 10.4% (20.7 million).[h]

Local estimates show how food insecurity prevalence can vary within each of these subgroups.[i] For example, food insecurity rates among Black individuals for counties with available estimates range from 10% in Hunterdon and Sussex counties, New Jersey to 56% in Ward County, Texas. Estimated food insecurity rates among Latino individuals range from 7% in Calvert County, Maryland to 58% in Telfair County, Georgia. Among white, non-Hispanic individuals, county food insecurity estimates range from 3% in the District of Columbia to 28% in Wolfe County, Kentucky.

Food insecurity among Black or Latino individuals is higher than white individuals in more than 9 out of 10 counties with available estimates. Among Latinos in counties with available estimates, the disparity compared to white individuals reaches as high as 46 percentage points in Telfair County, Georgia (58% vs. 12%). For Black individuals, the gap is as wide as 45 percentage points (56% vs. 11%) in Ward County, Texas. Moreover, in eight out of 10 counties (910 out of 1,117) with available estimates, food insecurity among Black individuals exceeds that of Latinos, with disparities as high as 34 percentage points in Ward County, Texas (56% vs. 22%).

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[h] There are not sufficient respondents in the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement for the USDA ERS to present reliable estimates for non-Hispanic individuals or households that identify as multiple races, American Indian, Alaskan Native, Asian, Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander. As a result, USDA ERS categorizes these groups as "other, non-Hispanic" and estimates that, collectively, 12.5% (3.7 million) of individuals from this group lived in food-insecure households in 2023. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, however, reports household-level estimates of food insecurity by race/ethnicity as part of its Healthy People 2030 initiative. These estimates indicate that household-level food insecurity in 2023 was highest among Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (29.1%), followed by American Indian or Alaska Native (26.0%), two or more races (23.9%), Black or African American (23.3%), Hispanic or Latino (21.9%), White (9.9%), and Asian (6.1%).

[i] Analyses of food insecurity by race/ethnicity are limited to states and counties for which there are adequate public data to produce food insecurity estimates that follow Feeding America's data release rules. Estimates of food insecurity are available among Black individuals in 47% of counties (n=1,465) across 40 states and D.C. (excluding HI, ID, ME, MT, ND, NH, SD, UT, VT, and WY), Hispanic individuals in 57% of counties (n=1,791) across 46 states and D.C. (excluding ME, ND, VT, and WV), and White, non-Hispanic individuals in 98% of counties (n=3,083) across all 50 states and D.C.. In other words, these counties are in states that have a large enough subpopulation over time, have a county subpopulation of at least 500 individuals, and have available data for all variables used to estimate food insecurity for the subpopulation group (see Technical Brief for details).

The disparities noted above reflect how barriers to fairness and opportunity have contributed to food insecurity in many communities. These findings highlight the need for targeted solutions to address barriers and ensure everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

Additional Insights about Food Insecurity by Race & Ethnicity

Feeding America's *Map the Meal Gap* study and the USDA's annual national food insecurity report provide estimates for Black, Latino, and white individuals. Estimates for additional groups like Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) or Native American individuals are not included in these and many other studies for reasons that include smaller population sizes or insufficient data collection processes that create barriers to achieving reliable estimates. Below, we highlight additional insights from other sources that help to show how food insecurity can vary for individuals of different races and ethnicities.

Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Individuals & Households

Historically, when measured as one group, food insecurity among the AANHPI population has been lower than that of other racial and ethnic groups. However, within this diverse group, food insecurity rates vary greatly between AANHPI subgroups. Assumptions that treat AANHPI populations as one group lead to the variations in experience among these subgroups to be overlooked and under-researched.[31,32] These variations become evident when you estimate food insecurity for subgroups within the broader AANHPI group. Based on 5-year averages (2019-2023) from the Current Population Survey (CPS), approximately 1 in 17 Asian American and 1 in 5 Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander individuals experienced food insecurity. Among Asian Americans, even though food insecurity in this group is lower than other racial and ethnic groups, estimates have shown that some nationalities including those of Filipino and Vietnamese descent experience food insecurity at higher rates than other Asian nationalities.[j]

Native American Individuals & Households

The Native American community faces unique challenges in accessing food and these findings highlight the need for targeted solutions to address barriers and ensure everyone has the opportunity to thrive. Estimates from the Current Population Survey indicate that more than 1 in 4 Native American households experience food insecurity and other research suggests those rates are even higher for some Native and Tribal communities.[k] A review of 25 different studies on food insecurity among Native American individuals found that the average food insecurity rate across studies was 46%, ranging from 16% to 80%.[33]

[j] Calculations by Feeding America using a five-year average (2019-2023) from the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FSS).

[k] Single-year estimates estimated by the US Department of Health and Human Services, Healthy People 2030 using data from the Current Population Survey - Food Security Supplement. https://odphp.health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/reduce-household-food-insecurity-and-hunger-nws-01

Food Insecurity and Income

Income Eligibility among Overall Food-Insecure Population

Food insecurity can occur when people do not have enough money for food. People with lower incomes are more likely to experience food insecurity.[34,35,36] This includes people living below the poverty line, working low-wage jobs, facing unemployment or having a disability. However, income alone doesn't determine food insecurity. Income instability, caused by factors including job loss, unreliable work, financial emergencies and more, can lead even households living above the poverty line to experience food insecurity.

More than 2 out of 5 of people facing hunger are unlikely to qualify for SNAP. Federal programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the nation's largest food assistance program, are the first line of defense against hunger, yet many people who are food insecure are not eligible for these critical benefits. Income eligibility thresholds for SNAP range from 130% to 200% of the federal poverty line, which translates to $41,795 to $64,300 for a family of four as of January 2025.[l]

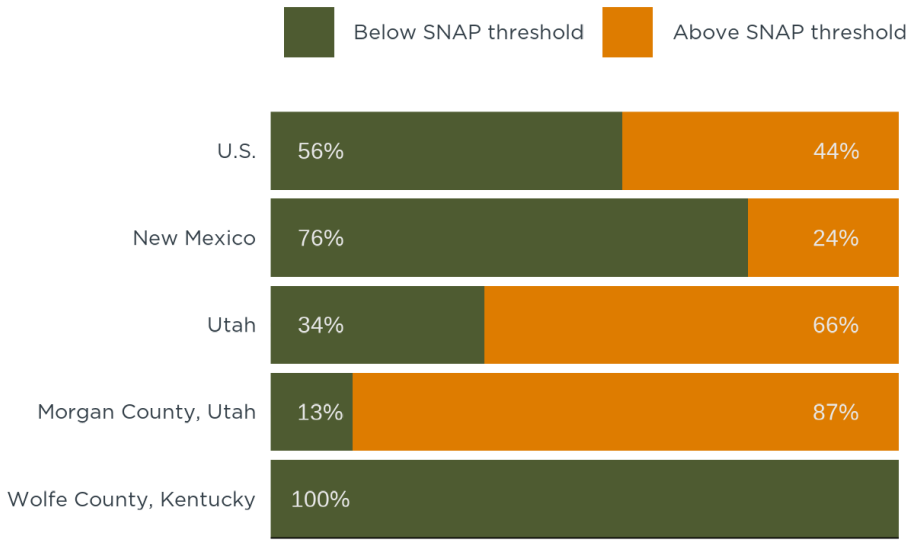
Estimates from *Map the Meal Gap* suggest that 21 million or 44% of individuals experiencing food insecurity have incomes that exceed these thresholds. These estimates account for state-specific gross income limits, but not asset requirements, and vary by state, from 24% in New Mexico to 66% in Utah. While there are some counties where the full food-insecure population likely qualifies for SNAP (0% ineligible), the share of people experiencing food insecurity who are likely ineligible for the program is estimated to be as high as 87% in Morgan County, Utah.

That so many individuals experiencing food insecurity don't qualify for SNAP highlights the vital role of charitable food assistance. Even among those who are eligible, not all are enrolled – an estimated 12% of eligible people do not participate in SNAP or receive benefits[37] – underscoring the need to streamline SNAP eligibility and enrollment to improve access for everyone facing barriers to participation.[m]

[l] New Mexico and Louisiana increased their gross income limit for SNAP in 2024 to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) from 165% and 130% FPL, respectively.

[m] Participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) 2019-2014: A Systematic Review of Barriers and Enablers, a systematic review of studies of barriers and enablers to participation in SNAP among eligible individuals shows that barriers include administrative (e.g., application process is cumbersome, limited language support), environmental/community (e.g., lack of reliable transportation), and household/individual (e.g., limited awareness, stigma, competing demands for time) factors. Enablers to participation in SNAP among eligible individuals include socioeconomic (e.g., incentives for fruit and vegetable purchase), environmental/community (e.g., proximity to registration offices, and proximity to SNAP-approved vendors), and household/individual (e.g., perceived health benefit).

Figure 3. Not Everyone Facing Hunger Qualifies for SNAP
Percent of the estimated food insecure population by SNAP gross income limits in 2023



Note: The federal gross income limit for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) but the U.S. figures above reflect aggregated state estimates from *Map the Meal Gap* and thus account for gross income limits set by each state as of 2024; those limits are 130% (n=16), 160% (n=1), 165% (n=3), 185% (n=4), and 200% (n=27). The limits for Utah and New Mexico, shown above, are 130% and 200%, respectively.
Source: Feeding America.

Food Spending and Prices

Food Budget Shortfall among Food-Insecure Individuals

Neighbors[n] tell us that the high cost of food and other essentials is one of the top reasons why it's increasingly difficult to afford and access the food they need to thrive. The cost of essentials like food, housing, health care, utilities and child and dependent care can stretch already tight budgets, making it harder to get by.[38]

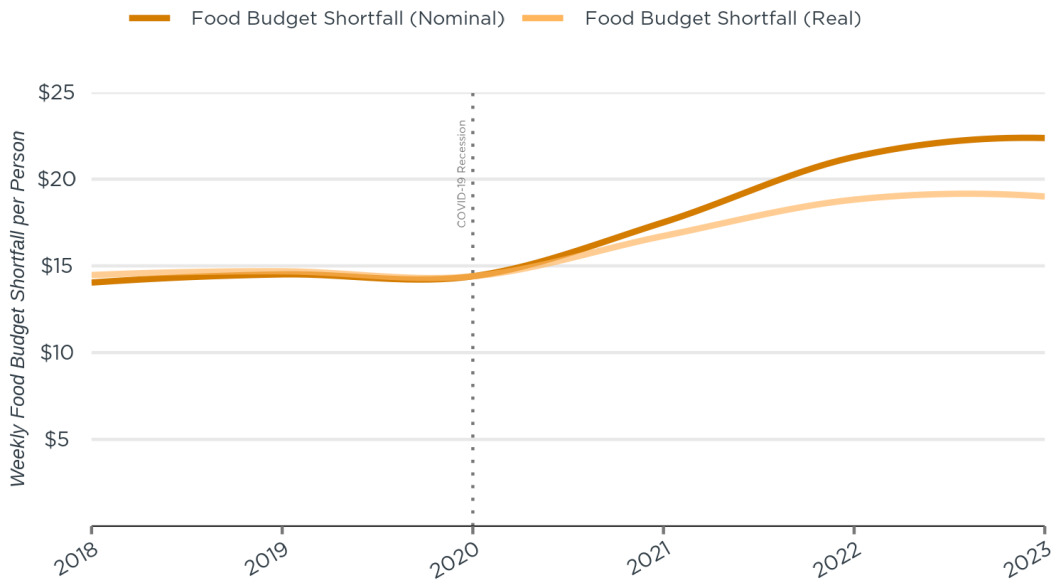
The national food budget shortfall rises to more than $32 billion in 2023. Our analysis of data from the Current Population Survey indicates that in 2023, people in food-insecure households need an additional $22.37 per person per week to have just enough money to cover their food needs. Since, according to the USDA ERS, a total of 47,389,000 individuals live in food-insecure households in 2023, and those households experience food insecurity in 7 out of 12 months of the year, this weekly food budget shortfall of $22.37 translates to an annual shortfall of $32.2 billion ($22.37 shortfall x 47,389,000 individuals x 52 weeks x 7/12 months).

Compared to the previous year, the weekly individual food budget shortfall continues to increase, growing from $21.28 in 2022 to $22.37 in 2023 – an increase of 5.1%, or 1.0% after adjusting for inflation.[o] While the 1-year change of from 2022 to 2023 is relatively small, the shortfall increased by 55% since 2020. Even after accounting for inflation, this resource gap is still 32% higher in 2023 than it was in 2020, suggesting that the inflation of 2022 and the elevated prices of 2023 do not tell the whole story. The increase in reported need among people experiencing food insecurity may also reflect changes in perceptions of need unrelated to prices. For example, as discussed in the Policy and Program Implications section below, temporary pandemic-era assistance programs have continued to sunset in the last few years, and the loss of or reduction in benefits at a time when prices remained elevated could have contributed to higher reported need.

[n] *Elevating Voices: Insights Report* defines neighbors as people who have received charitable food assistance and/or experienced food insecurity within the past two years.

[o] In 2025 we revised the methodology used to calculate the weekly food budget shortfall among people experiencing food insecurity in 2023. The shortfall estimates for 2022 and 2023 reported here reflect this new methodology and are thus not directly comparable to shortfall estimates from previous years. For example, in our 2024 report, using the previous methodology, we reported that the weekly individual shortfall in 2022 was $24.73, and the annualized aggregate shortfall was $33.1 billion. When calculated using the new methodology, these figures are equivalent to $21.28 and $28.5 billion, respectively. Regardless of methodology, the shortfall estimates in 2023 are still higher than they were in 2022, both in nominal and real terms.

Figure 4. People Facing Hunger Report Needing More for the Third Year
Average additional dollars needed per week among people experiencing food insecurity, 2018-2023



Note: "Real" figures are adjusted for inflation and presented in 2020 dollars to reflect real (constant) prices.
Source: Calculated by Feeding America using data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) and USDA ERS.

In annual terms, we also see an increase in the national aggregate shortfall in 2023, from $28.5 billion in 2022 to $32.2 billion – an increase of 12.8%, or 8.4% after inflation. Since 2019, the nominal resource gap has more than doubled. These recent increases in the national annual shortfall reflect not only a growing need among people experiencing food insecurity, but also more people living in food-insecure households. Although inflation slowed in 2023, prices for food and other essentials remained historically high, accounting for most of this continued increase in the average food budget shortfall among people experiencing food insecurity during the year.

Food Expenditures among Food-Secure Individuals

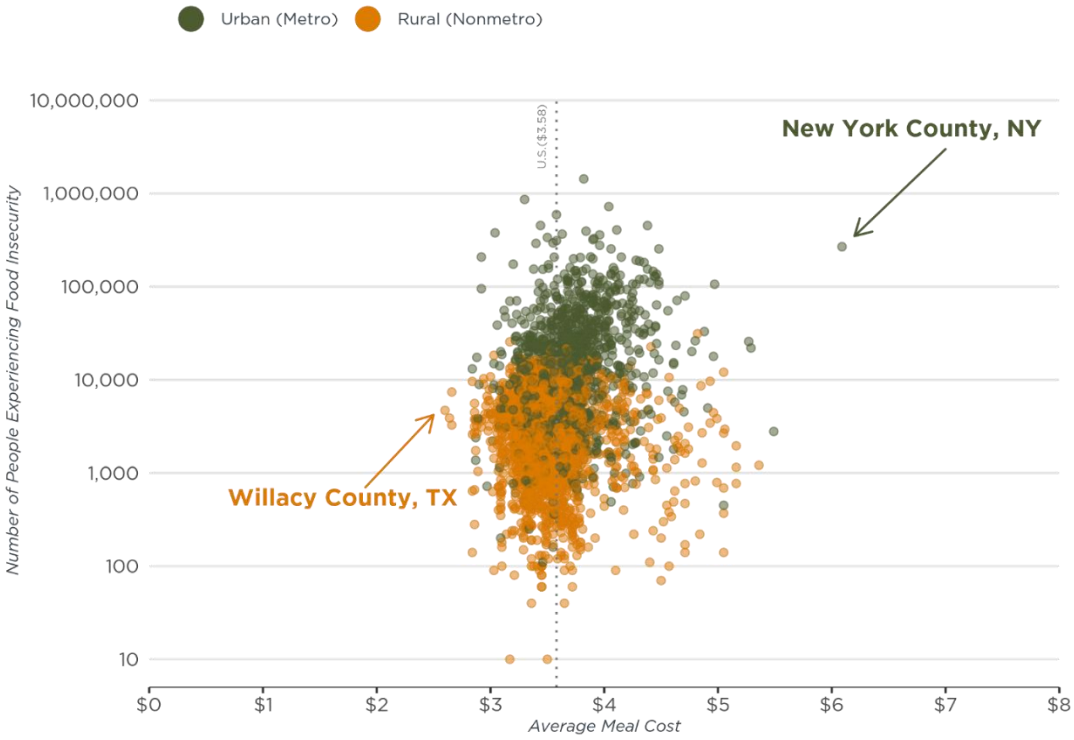
The national average cost per meal is $3.58 in 2023. Individuals who were food secure in 2023 report spending an average of $3.58 per meal, which translates to $75.18 per week or $325.78 per month.[p] Although the average meal cost is higher in nominal terms than it was in 2022 ($3.45), when it was higher than at any point in the last two decades, it fell slightly after adjusting for annual average inflation ($3.58 versus $3.59).[q]

County meal costs range from $2.60 to $6.09. The average amount that a food-secure individual reports spending on food varies greatly by county. The average cost per meal ranges from 73% of the $3.58 national average in Willacy County, TX ($2.60) to 170% in New York County, NY ($6.09), after accounting for county-level food prices and local sales taxes. Although the greatest number of people live in urban areas with higher costs of living, not all urban areas have high food prices, and not every rural community is affordable. For example, urban Pendleton and Gallatin counties in northern Kentucky, both part of the Cincinnati metropolitan area, have a relatively low estimated meal cost of $2.87, while rural Teton County in Idaho is home to the third-highest meal cost in the country ($5.36). For individuals struggling to afford housing, utilities, transportation, and other necessities, the additional burden of high food prices can have a significant impact on their household budget, wherever they may live.

[p] To calculate the average cost of a meal, we use weekly food expenditure data from the 2023 Current Population Survey, focusing on food-secure households, as food-insecure households may underreport due to limited resources. The average weekly expenditure ($75.18) is calculated on a per-person basis and divided by 21, assuming three meals a day, seven days a week.

[q] In 2025 we revised the methodology used to calculate the national average cost per meal or reported spending on food by food-secure individuals. The meal cost estimates for 2022 and 2023 reported here reflect this new methodology and are thus not directly comparable to meal cost estimates from previous years. For example, in our 2024 report, using our previous methodology, we reported that the average meal cost in 2022 was $3.99. When calculated using our new methodology, this figure is equivalent to $3.45, which is slightly lower in both nominal and real terms compared to 2023.

Figure 5. High Meal Costs Span the Rural-Urban Divide
Estimated average meal cost and number of people experiencing food insecurity by county in 2023



Note: The chart uses a logarithmic scale on the y-axis to visualize the estimated number of individuals experiencing food insecurity in all 3,144 counties and county equivalents. Local average meal costs are calculated by adjusting the national average meal cost ($3.58) by county food prices and local sales tax rates imposed on groceries at the state and county level.
Source: Calculated by Feeding America using data from the Current Population Survey, American Community Survey, and NielsenIQ.

Policy and Program Implications

Following a dip in 2021, food insecurity increased significantly in 2022 due to rising food prices, overall inflation and the continued sunsetting of temporary pandemic assistance programs. Despite inflation slowing in 2023, food prices remained elevated, contributing to continued increases in food insecurity as more pandemic-era programs came to an end.

The 2023 estimates from *Map the Meal Gap 2025* indicate that the level of need continues to vary by population and place, but communities in every state remain home to people facing hunger. At the local level, our estimates suggest that food insecurity increased by an average of 7% across all U.S. counties and county-equivalents, consistent with national data from the USDA.[39] Additionally, 9 out of 10 counties had higher rates of food insecurity, and reported need among people experiencing food insecurity increased for the third consecutive year, even after adjusting for inflation.

Although more people were likely food insecure in most places in 2023, not all of them qualified for SNAP or other federal nutrition assistance, including Child Nutrition Programs (CNP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). The increase in the number of people experiencing food insecurity, as well as the reported need among them, occurred at a time when more pandemic-era programs and policies phased out. For example, SNAP emergency allotments that gave all households the maximum benefit ended in early 2023 in 35 states; the suspension of the three-month time limit on SNAP for able-bodied adults without dependents was lifted; and the WIC benefit increase for fruits and vegetables also ended. In the case of SNAP, even the maximum benefit is often inadequate. Research finds that in 2023, SNAP benefits did not cover the cost of a meal in 99 percent of counties.[40]

Although inflation, including food price inflation, slowed in 2023 and held steady in 2024, prices remained historically high.[41,42] U.S. food prices rose by nearly 24 percent from 2020 to 2024, and other household expenses increased as well.[43] The cumulative effect of rising prices continued to have an impact on household food budgets. For example, according to a nationally representative annual survey of adults ages 18 to 64 conducted by the Urban Institute, food insecurity in 2024 plateaued at high rates and remained significantly above pre-pandemic levels.[44]

Key economic indicators suggest similar trends are likely to persist in 2025. In March, the Federal Reserve projected inflation would rise to 2.7% by year-end, compared to 2.5% in 2024, while unemployment was expected to increase to 4.4% from 4.0%.[45,46,47,48] In April, the USDA forecasted a 3.2% increase in food prices, up from 2.3% in 2024.[49] Research consistently demonstrates that food insecurity tends to increase as inflation grows, unemployment rises, and food prices increase.[50] Moreover, anecdotal evidence from the Federal Reserve suggests current economic conditions are causing food banks to contend with rising demand, funding cuts, and future uncertainty, leading some to reduce staff and programs. [51]

Despite data suggesting elevated food insecurity rates in 2024 and projections suggesting similar trends in 2025, SNAP and other federal nutrition assistance programs are facing major proposed cuts this year.[52] One such proposal is to cut SNAP benefits by limiting future updates to the Thrifty Food Plan, which was most recently updated in 2021 to reflect data on food prices, food composition, and consumption patterns, and current dietary guidance for the first time since 2006. If future updates are required to be cost neutral, it would prevent SNAP benefits

from reflecting food cost realities facing SNAP recipients. The 42 million low-income individuals in more than 22 million households who currently participate in SNAP would be hit hardest by such cuts, but food manufactures and grocery stores would also feel the impact of lower food spending, just as they did in 2023 following the expiration of emergency allotments.[53,54] Significant reductions to SNAP are likely to affect the U.S. economy as well. This is because when households use SNAP benefits, they stimulate the economy by $1.54 for every dollar spent.[55] SNAP has also been shown to have a positive and significant impact on local employment, especially in rural counties, increasing employment by about 0.4 jobs per $10,000 of additional SNAP redemptions.[56]

USDA ERS research shows that a $1 billion increase in SNAP during an economic slowdown could boost GDP by $1.54 billion and support 13,560 jobs—including nearly 500 in agriculture.[57] Conversely, significant reductions in SNAP benefits could slow economic growth and eliminate thousands of jobs. The impact would likely be greatest in states that are home to a high share of high farming-concentration counties, especially in the Midwest, such as North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska.[r] Counties like Kenedy, Duval, and Cochran (TX), Corson and Mellette (SD), and East Carroll Parish (LA) are especially at risk. In these mostly rural areas, farming plays a key economic role, and our local estimates indicate that about 1 in 4 residents experience food insecurity as of 2023—placing them among the most food-insecure counties in the U.S. The largest effect of reduced SNAP benefits, however, would likely be felt by trade and transportation industries as well as manufacturing industries.[s] Many of the states and counties whose local economies and workforces depend on these industries are also most vulnerable to recently proposed tariffs by the United States and other countries.[58] In other words, reducing SNAP benefits or eligibility would have serious implications not only for the national economy, but also for local communities, and for the lives and livelihoods of participants and nonparticipants alike.

If SNAP benefits or eligibility are reduced, more people will likely experience food insecurity and need more help from food banks and pantries.[59] Feeding America estimates more than 50 million people received charitable food assistance sometime in 2023, many of whom also receive SNAP benefits.[60]

For all these reasons, Feeding America's policy priorities include a bipartisan farm bill that strengthens federal nutrition programs, full funding for nutrition programs in fiscal year 2026 appropriations legislation, and additional USDA food purchases for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and other programs.[61]

[r] High farming-concentration counties, as defined by 2025 USDA, Economic Research Service (ERS) County Typology Codes, are counties where farming accounted for at least 20 percent of the county's earnings or 17 percent of the county's jobs averaged over 2019, 2021, and 2022.

[s] According to March 2025 data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, North Dakota has the highest share of nonfarm jobs in trade and transportation, followed by several states in the Southeast. Manufacturing makes up a significant share of the local workforce in the Midwest, led by Indiana, which is also home to the largest share of high manufacturing-concentration counties, where manufacturing accounted for at least 25 percent of the county's earnings or 17 percent of the county's jobs averaged over 2019, 2021, and 2022.

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About Feeding America

Feeding America is committed to an America where no one is hungry. We support tens of millions of people who experience food insecurity to get the food and resources they say they need to thrive as part of a nationwide network of food banks, statewide food bank associations, food pantries and meal programs. We also invest in innovative solutions to increase equitable access to nutritious food, advocate for legislation that improves food security and work to address factors that impact food security, such as health, cost of living and employment.

We partner with people experiencing food insecurity, policymakers, organizations and supporters, united with them in a movement to end hunger.

Visit FeedingAmerica.org to learn more.

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