

Map the Meal Gap 2026

**A Report on Local Food Insecurity and Food Cost in the
United States in 2024**



Released July 28, 2026

What Is the Issue?

Since 2011, Feeding America has produced local estimates of food insecurity and other measures related to food prices and spending on an annual basis. The primary purpose of this project is to help the Feeding America network and partners better understand food insecurity and food price variation at the local level. Doing so helps inform public policy and program decisions, ensuring that people across the country have effective pathways to be self-sufficient and sustained in their food and nutrition security.

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. Whereas food-secure households have consistent access throughout the year to adequate food for active, healthy living for all household members, food-insecure households lack that access at some time during the year. Food insecurity is often linked to one or multiple factors, creating a cycle that can be hard to break. These factors may include limited income or income instability as well as the high cost of food and other essentials like housing, health care, utilities and child and dependent care. The cost of health emergencies and certain conditions can take funds away from these essentials, and limited access to community resources can make it harder to access food or other essentials. Other barriers to opportunity, including historical and ongoing discrimination, as well as unfair practices or conditions, are contributing factors for many communities (Engelhard & Hake 2020).

The USDA further classifies food-insecure households as having either low food security (households that report multiple challenges acquiring food and reduced diet quality) or very low food security (multiple indications of reduced food intake and disrupted eating patterns). *Map the Meal Gap* estimates reflect the broader measure of food insecurity which includes both low and very low food secure households. This is because of the documented impact of food insecurity on health outcomes (Gundersen & Ziliak 2015) and chronic disease rates (Waxman et al. 2026; Gregory et al. 2017), child development (Drennen et al. 2019; Gallegos et al. 2021), academic performance (Galseku et al. 2026), military readiness (Rabbitt & Beymer 2024) and work productivity (Moy et al. 2026) that strain every community where food insecurity is allowed to persist.

This year's study includes updated food insecurity estimates at the county and congressional district level using annual data through 2024, along with local food budget shortfall and meal cost estimates based on 2024 national survey data and local food price and sales tax data. Food insecurity estimates are available for select ages and race/ethnicities and are either modeled using historical data from federal surveys or estimated directly from an annual, nationally representative survey sponsored and analyzed by USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS).

The recent decision by the USDA to cancel this survey – known as the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FSS) – does not affect the data used in this year's study. However, it means official national and state-level food security data will not be available for 2025 and may be unavailable in future years. Given the broader social and economic impact of food insecurity, it is vital that local governments, public health agencies, school districts, and workplaces understand the level and distribution of food insecurity in their communities. For this reason, Feeding America plans to update its methodology and incorporate additional data sources to continue producing local estimates in the future, and is eager to partner at the local, state, and federal levels to find ways to continue to make this data available.

In the meantime, this research brief presents statistics based on our local estimates of food insecurity and related measures, which reflect the most recent federal data available as of December 2024.

Map the Meal Gap 2026 includes the following:

- Local food insecurity estimates among all individuals, children, and some racial/ethnic groups as well as among seniors and older adults.
 - Local estimated percentages of individuals and children in food-insecure households by income levels.
 - National and local food budget shortfalls and meal costs.
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How Was the Study Conducted?

Our local estimates of food insecurity draw on the Current Population Survey (CPS), American Community Survey (ACS), and Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) program. These data and our estimates reflect individuals, not households; however, not everyone in a food-insecure household is directly affected by that household's food insecurity.

State and local annual food insecurity estimates – covering all individuals, children, and available race/ethnicity groups – are model-based, combining historical CPS, ACS, and LAUS data. National, state, and metro-area estimates for seniors and older adults, and national data by race/ethnicity and country of origin, are estimated directly from the CPS-FSS.

Modelling local food insecurity

To produce our modeled estimates of food insecurity for all individuals, children, and by race/ethnicity, we use a two-step process.

First, we examine how food insecurity prevalence relates to certain economic factors and demographic characteristics using state-level data from the CPS-FSS. We further control for factors unique to each state and year not otherwise captured in our models.¹

Then, we apply the strength of these state-level relationships to corresponding county-level and district-level data from the ACS and LAUS to predict how many individuals live in food-insecure households in every county and congressional district in the country.

We use a similar approach to estimate local food insecurity among children, by race/ethnicity (i.e., Black, Hispanic, and white, non-Hispanic), and income level (e.g., the percentage of all individuals and children in food-insecure households with incomes that are too high to qualify for federal nutrition assistance programs).



Estimating senior and older adult food insecurity

Unlike other food insecurity estimates produced for *Map the Meal Gap*, which are model-based, our estimates for seniors (ages 60+) and older adults (ages 50-59) are derived directly from CPS-FSS data. These estimates are not modeled. Our estimates include national-level data showing how levels of food insecurity vary according to different characteristics. We also provide estimates for all states and major metro areas, showing how food insecurity varies across the country. County and congressional data for seniors and older adults are not available.

Estimating meal costs and food budget shortfall

In addition to food insecurity prevalence, we also estimate how much money, on average, people who are food secure spend on food, expressed on a per meal basis (the average meal cost or cost per meal) as well as how much more money, on average, people in food-insecure households need to have just enough food to meet their needs (the food budget shortfall).

The data used to calculate the national average meal cost and food budget shortfall come from the CPS-FSS. We localize these national averages using a relative price index based on proprietary food price data from NielsenIQ for individual counties and states as well as publicly available grocery sales tax data for every state and county in the country.

More information about our data and methods can be found in our technical appendix (Feeding America, 2026).

What Did the Study Find?

Food insecurity is experienced by people from all backgrounds and demographics, but disparities exist. Several groups are disproportionately affected, including people in certain geographies such as rural areas, cities, and the South (Rabbitt et al. 2025). Heightened risk is also found among children and many communities of color (Rabbitt et al. 2025). While the highest number of people who experience food insecurity are white, individuals identifying as Black, Latino, Native American or Pacific Islander face disproportionately higher rates of food insecurity (Rabbitt et al. 2025). Sources within Native American and tribal communities suggest even greater disparities (Nikolaus et al. 2022). Food insecurity rates among Asian individuals overall are lower than other racial and ethnic groups, but there is variation among different Asian subgroups, and some are at heightened risk for food insecurity (Hales & Coleman-Jensen 2024).

While this section focuses on local estimates from *Map the Meal Gap*, research shows that other groups are also disproportionately affected by food insecurity. These include people with disabilities (Schwartz et al. 2019), people who are formerly incarcerated (Testa & Jackson 2019), immigrant communities (Maynard et al. 2019), households with low incomes (Rabbitt et al. 2025), LGBTQ+ individuals (Wilson et al. 2020), single-parent households (Rabbitt et al. 2025), and veterans (Wang et al. 2015).

Local Food Insecurity

Prevalence of Food Insecurity among Overall Population

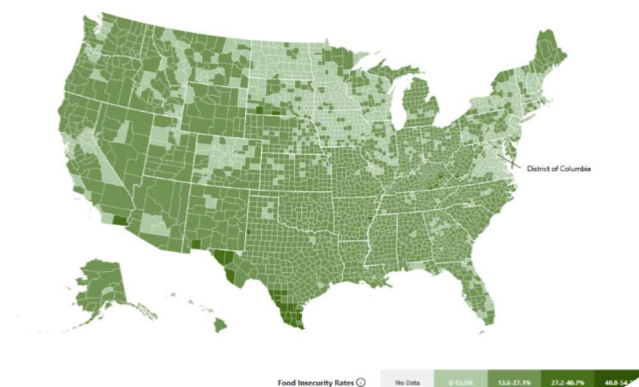
As in years past, the study found that **100% of counties and congressional districts are home to people experiencing food insecurity** at some point during the year. Yet, levels of food insecurity vary by population and place. Locally, the percentage of the overall population estimated to be food insecure in 2024 ranges from 6% (1 in 17) in Oliver County, North Dakota, to 37% (1 in 3) in Dimmit County, Texas.² As for congressional districts, New York contains both extremes: the 4th District (Long Island) has the nation's lowest estimated food insecurity rate at under 8% (1 in 13), while the 15th District (the Bronx) has the highest, at over 30% (1 in 3).

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 (Engelhard & Hake 2020).

Prevalence of Food Insecurity among Child Population

Child food insecurity affected every county and district, reaching an estimated 45% in some places. This estimated rate is more than double the national average, according to the USDA (19.5% or more than 14 million children). Estimates reached as high as 45% in Lee County, Arkansas, and 43% in New York's 15th congressional district, which encompasses the Bronx and is home to the largest estimated number of children in food-insecure households. In contrast, the lowest estimated rates of child food insecurity among all counties and districts are found in New Jersey, namely Hunterdon

Figure 1. Food Insecurity Among the Overall Population in 2024



County (7%) and the state's 7th congressional district (8%).

When compared to the overall population, estimated rates among children were higher 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 (Gundersen & Ziliak 2015), underscoring the economic and social imperative to address this issue.

Prevalence of Food Insecurity among Senior and Older Adult Population

Nearly 13 million seniors and older adults experienced food insecurity at some point in 2024. This includes an estimated 7.7 million (10%) seniors (60 and older) and 4.9 million (12%) older adults (50-59), with rates varying widely by state and metro area. State-level rates ranged from approximately 4% (South Dakota) to 15% (Texas) for seniors, and from 7% (Idaho) to 23% (Arkansas) for older adults. Eight of the ten states with the highest food-insecurity rates among seniors were in the South, as were five of the ten highest-rate states for older adults.

While food insecurity has negative effects for individuals across the age spectrum, for seniors, these effects can be particularly problematic given the unique health, economic, and nutritional challenges that can come with aging (Ziliak & Gundersen 2021). Looking ahead, the Census Bureau projects that by 2050, seniors will comprise around 104 million people age 60 and older (Ortman et al. 2014). If the current rate of food insecurity among seniors does not change, this would equate to almost 10 million seniors experiencing food insecurity.

Prevalence of Overall Food Insecurity by Region and Rurality

More than 8 out of 10 of the counties with the highest food insecurity rates are in the South.

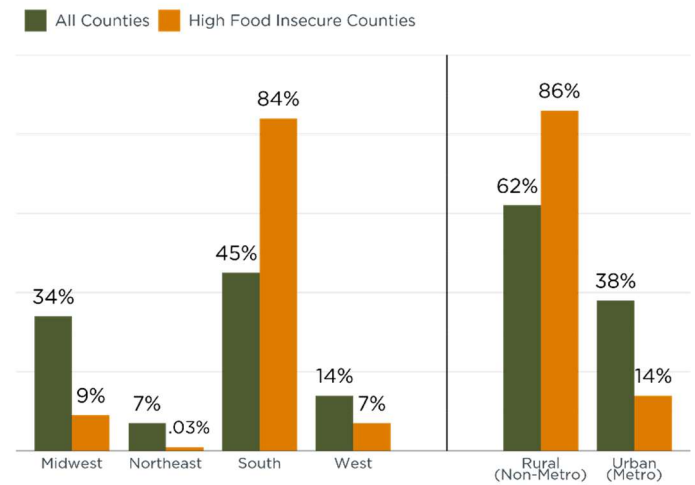
The South contains 45% of all U.S. counties but accounts for 84% (264 of 316) of counties with estimated food-insecurity rates in the highest 10% nationwide (i.e., counties where 21.5% or more of the population is estimated to experience food insecurity).

Looked at another way, nearly 1 in 5 counties within the South itself are among the highest 10% across the country, compared to approximately 5% in the West and 3% in the Midwest. Bronx County, New York, is the only county in the Northeast in the highest 10%.

These regional disparities are consistent with national data from the USDA, showing the share of individuals in food-insecure households is also highest in the South (16%), compared to nearly 14%

in both the West and Midwest, and almost 13% in the Northeast.

Figure 2. Share of All Counties and High Food Insecurity Counties by Region and Rural-Urban Status, in 2024



More than 8 out of 10 of the counties with the highest food insecurity rates 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% (271 of 316) of counties with food-insecurity rates in the highest 10% nationwide.

These disparities are also consistent with national data from the USDA, showing the share of individuals living in food-insecure households is higher in rural areas (17%) than in urban areas (14%), with rural communities facing unique challenges like limited food resources (Valliant et al. 2021) and transportation (Baek 2016).

Prevalence of Food Insecurity by Race/Ethnicity

People from all backgrounds and demographics experience food insecurity, but disparities exist. For example, while most people who experience food insecurity are white, people of other races/ethnicities face disproportionately higher rates.

Local estimates from *Map the Meal Gap* suggest that **in some counties with comparable estimates, food insecurity affects up to 2 out of 3 Black individuals and half of Latino individuals, compared to 1 out of 3 white individuals.**³ In

Clearfield County, Pennsylvania, 62% of Black individuals are estimated to have lived in food-insecure households. Among Latino individuals, estimated rates reach as high as 47% in Jackson County, Arkansas.

Although we do not model local food insecurity by race/ethnicity for individuals other than people identifying as white, Black, or Latino, it's possible to estimate national prevalence among other groups not reported on by the USDA, including Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) or Native Americans. 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. Based on 5-year averages (2020-2024) from the Current Population Survey (CPS), approximately 1 in 17 Asian American and 1 in 4 Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander individuals experienced food insecurity.⁴

Estimates from the Current Population Survey indicate that approximately 1 in 4 Native American households experience food insecurity.⁴ Additional research suggests those rates are higher for some Native and Tribal communities (Nikolaus et al. 2022). Native American/Alaskan Native communities face 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. These disparities reflect how barriers to fairness and opportunity have contributed to food insecurity in many communities.

Food Insecurity and Income

Many people, including people who are working, cannot afford to buy adequate food to meet their nutritional needs. This includes people working low-wage jobs, facing unemployment or having a disability, and people living below the poverty line. In places where food costs and other expenses are high, people earning over 200% of the federal poverty line (\$42,900 to \$66,000 for a family of four as of January 2026) may not be able to afford enough of the food they need to thrive. This is an important threshold because income thresholds determine eligibility for federal nutrition assistance programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the nation's most successful federal food assistance program, and the first line of defense against food insecurity.

Estimates from *Map the Meal Gap* suggest that **nearly half of all people experiencing food insecurity have incomes that are too high to qualify for SNAP.** After accounting for state-specific gross income limits, local estimates suggest that in 2024, 25 million or 48% of individuals experiencing food insecurity may not have been eligible for SNAP.⁵

That so many individuals in food-insecure households don't qualify for SNAP highlights the vital role of charitable food assistance. Even among people who are eligible, not all are enrolled – an estimated 12% of eligible people do not participate in SNAP or receive benefits (USDA 2025). This underscores the need to simplify and modernize enrollment and reduce barriers to access for eligible households, while maintaining program integrity to ensure it remains focused on helping people meet immediate needs and build towards long-term self-sufficiency.

Food Spending and Prices

Neighbors tell us that the high cost of food and other essentials is one of the top reasons it's increasingly difficult to afford and access the food they need to thrive.⁶ The cost of essentials like food, housing, health care, utilities, and child and dependent care can stretch already tight budgets, making it harder to make ends meet (Feeding America 2024).

Food Budget Shortfall among Food-Insecure Individuals

The national food budget shortfall surpassed \$33 billion in 2024. Our analysis of national data from the Current Population Survey indicates that in 2024, people in food-insecure households reported needing an additional \$23.16 per person per week to have just enough money to cover their food needs. This weekly resource gap was effectively unchanged from 2023 but significantly higher compared to 2021, even after adjusting for inflation.⁷ In annual terms, this weekly resource gap translates to \$33.7 billion across all 47.9 million individuals in food-insecure households.⁸

Food Expenditures among Food-Secure Individuals

The national average cost per meal was \$3.70 in 2024. This estimate is based on average food expenditures as reported by individuals who are food secure and translates to \$77.70 per week or \$336.70 per month.⁹ After adjusting for inflation, the cost per meal was also significantly higher compared to 2021.

County meal costs ranged from \$2.56 to \$6.28.

After accounting for county-level food prices and local sales taxes, the average amount that a food-secure individual is likely to spend on food ranges from 69% of the \$3.70 national average in Llano County, TX (\$2.56) to 170% in New York County, NY (\$6.28).

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 Atascosa County, Texas, part of the San Antonio metropolitan area, has a relatively low estimated meal cost (\$2.99), while rural Teton County in Idaho, almost completely surrounded by mountain ranges, is home to the third-highest meal cost in the country (\$5.87).

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.

What Are the Implications?

Estimates from this year's *Map the Meal Gap* study, once again confirm that communities in every state were home to people experiencing food insecurity at some point in 2024, and persistent disparities continue to exist among certain populations and places. The reported food budget shortfall among people in households experiencing food insecurity also remained historically high.

Because the models we use to predict local food insecurity use the CPS-FSS as a primary data source, our estimates are consistent with those reported at the national level by the USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) in its 2024 report on household food security in the United States (Rabbitt et al. 2025). Our updated local estimates should therefore be interpreted in the context of 2024, where food insecurity remained at its highest level since 2014.

Since the adequacy of household resources for food is affected by national economic conditions, it can also be helpful to look at how conditions have changed in recent years. Research shows that food insecurity tends to increase with inflation, relative food prices, and unemployment (Nord et al. 2014), the latter of which our model explicitly accounts for.

In 2024, the national annual average unemployment rate was 4.0 percent, up from 3.6 percent in 2023 (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2025). Although inflation (including food price inflation) continued to slow in 2024 and food became less expensive relative to all goods, overall price levels remained historically high.¹⁰ Between 2020 and 2024, food prices increased by nearly 24 percent, while prices for other household expenses also rose. The cumulative effect of these price increases may have contributed to elevated food insecurity as well as the increase in the food budget shortfall among people experiencing food insecurity.

Since 2024, the economic context has changed in meaningful ways. In 2025, unemployment continued to increase, food price inflation edged up, and food became more expensive relative to all goods.^{10,11} These economic indicators suggest food insecurity remained high in 2025, which is consistent with the Urban Institute's finding from their nationally representative annual Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey (WBNS) that household food insecurity among working-age adults has been significantly elevated since 2023 and remained high in 2025 (Karpman et al. 2026).

Similar economic trends are likely to persist in 2026 as well. In June 2026, the Federal Reserve projected unemployment would hold steady at 4.3% but overall inflation would rise to 3.6% by year-end, up from the 2.7% predicted in March and higher than the 2.6% seen in 2024 and 2025 (Federal Reserve, 2026; U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis 2026). In June 2026, the USDA forecasted a 3.2% increase in food prices, up from 2.9% in 2025 and 2.3% in 2024 (USDA 2026). Anecdotal evidence from the Federal Reserve also suggests recent economic conditions are causing food banks to contend with rising demand, funding cuts, rising fuel costs and future uncertainty, leading some to reduce staff and programs (Federal Reserve System 2026).

Policy is one of the most important and long-term solutions for ending food insecurity. It has the power to address the causes of food insecurity while ensuring everyone has reliable access to nutritious food today. It also has the power to deepen existing challenges and leave more people without the resources they need.

In July 2025, Congress passed the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA), fundamentally changing the structure of SNAP by shifting program costs to the states. This bill includes nearly \$200 billion cuts to SNAP, and close to \$1 trillion cuts to Medicaid. While the administration stated that the intent of these changes is to improve program administration by states, improve program integrity, and encourage economic self-sufficiency for participants, the unintended consequences of the policy changes could result in new barriers to accessing the food and resources needed for people and families to thrive. Feeding America is amplifying the request of key stakeholders such as governors, mayors, state legislatures, and civic organizations to request a delay in implementing some of the policy changes to allow for more time to improve the administration of SNAP and ensuring eligible families still have access to SNAP.

Additionally, while the USDA has discontinued the CPS-FSS beginning in 2025, it is imperative that we continue monitoring food insecurity in America. Rigorous food security data should continue to be collected annually to allow policymakers, researchers, and practitioners to improve the delivery of programs designed to help families reduce their need for government food programs, monitor trends in food insecurity, detect emerging hardship during economic disruptions, and evaluate the impact of policy changes including those mentioned above.

Feeding America plans to continue modeling local estimates of food insecurity and related measures by leveraging historical state-level data on food security from the CPS-FSS alongside more recent state-level data from other sources, including the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). Local-level data on relevant variables from the American Community Survey (ACS) and proprietary local food price data from NielsenIQ will continue serving as important inputs, as will national-level data from the WBNS.

As it currently stands, the USDA's *Household Food Security in the United States in 2024* report will be the last of its kind produced by our longstanding federal partners. Without it, there is an opportunity to work alongside committed partners to find new approaches to understand the realities, impacts, and solutions to food insecurity.

Notes

¹ Corresponding data must also be available for counties and congressional districts, and reflect factors that research has shown to increase the probability of food insecurity.

² 2024 food insecurity estimates were not calculated for two counties (Loving County, TX and Kalawao County, HI) due to small populations. Thus, the statistics presented here were calculated based on estimates for available geographies within all 50 states and District of Columbia.

³ 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 46% of counties (n=1,478) across 43 states and D.C. (excluding ID, MT, ND, SD, UT, VT, WY and Puerto Rico), Hispanic individuals in 58% of counties (n=1,860) across 49 states and D.C. (excluding VT and Puerto Rico), and White, non-Hispanic individuals in 96% of counties (n=3,082) across all 50 states and D.C. (excluding Puerto Rico).

⁴ Calculations by Feeding America using a five-year average (2020-2024) from the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FSS).

⁵ 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.

⁶ *Elevating Voices: Insights Report* defines neighbors as people who have received charitable food assistance and/or experienced food insecurity within the past two years.

⁷ The 2024 estimate of \$23.16 has a margin of error of $\pm\$1.21$ (95% confidence interval: \$21.95 - \$24.37). For 2023, the estimate of \$22.37 has margin of error of $\pm\$1.24$ (95% confidence interval: \$21.13 - \$23.61). After adjusting for inflation using the [Consumer Price Index](#), the upper limit of \$23.61 in 2023 is equivalent to \$24.31 in 2024 dollars, which falls within the 2024 confidence interval, suggesting the year-over-year change is not statistically significant. The 2021 estimate of \$17.51 has a margin of error of $\pm\$1.14$ (95% confidence interval: \$16.38 - \$18.65). The upper limit of \$18.65 in 2021 is equivalent to \$21.59 in 2024 dollars, which is less than the 2024 lower limit, suggesting the difference is statistically significant.

⁸ Because charitable food assistance is explicitly accounted for neither in the 18-item module used to classify households as food insecure, nor in the separate set of questions used to calculate the shortfall among individuals in food-insecure households, it's reasonable to assume that survey respondents report their cash gaps without subtracting the support they receive from food banks and pantries.

⁹ To calculate the average cost of a meal, we use weekly food expenditure data from the 2024 Current Population Survey, focusing on food-secure households, as food-insecure households may underreport due to limited resources. The average weekly expenditure (\$77.70) is calculated on a per-person basis and divided by 21, assuming three meals a day, seven days a week.

¹⁰ Data retrieved on July 21, 2026 from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Price Index from All Urban Consumers at <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/CPIUFDSL>

¹¹ Data retrieved on July 21, 2026 from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Unemployment Rate [UNRATE] at <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/UNRATE>

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