FEEDING AMERICA®

A Dynamic Approach to Visualizing Food Insecurity: Exploring Child Food Insecurity

Children growing up in food insecure households are bound to face negative health consequences; however, the reach of protective federal nutrition assistance programs varies significantly across localities.
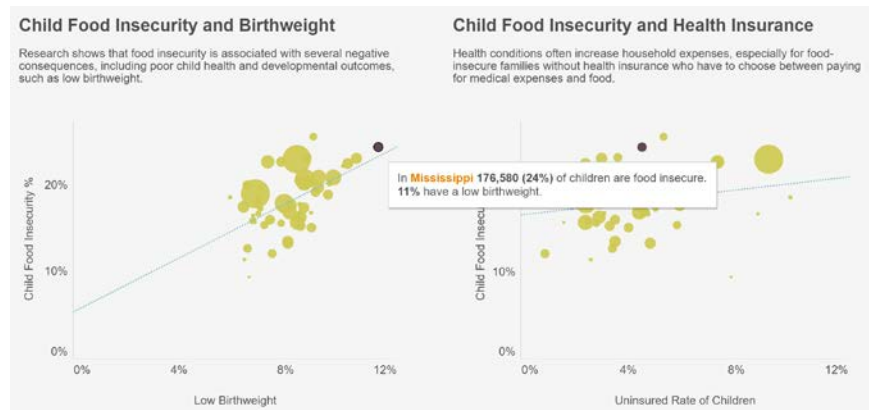

Data is a powerful way to understand how people experience food insecurity. To explore the issue, Feeding America's Research Team has produced a series of interactive data tools leveraging the power of Tableau. The goal of these tools is to create dynamic ways to maneuver and explore data, going beyond traditional reporting in order to allow for a more tailored approach to addressing local needs.

Nationally, the USDA reports that **more than 12 million children** live in a food-insecure household that has limited access to adequate food during the year; however, the distribution of child food insecurity is not equal across geographies.

The number of children living in a food insecure home ranges from a high of 1.7 million in California to a low of 16,000 in North Dakota.

In acknowledgment of the complex relationship between hunger and health, we explore how child food insecurity trends against key health factors: low birthweight and health insurance coverage. What we found is that the states with the highest rates of low birthweight also see some of the highest rates of food insecurity.

For example, in Mississippi, where nearly a quarter of children live in food insecure households, 1 in 10 children are born underweight.

Child Food Insecurity and Birthweight
Research shows that food insecurity is associated with several negative consequences, including poor child health and developmental outcomes, such as low birthweight.

Child Food Insecurity and Health Insurance
Health conditions often increase household expenses, especially for food-insecure families without health insurance who have to choose between paying for medical expenses and food.

In **Mississippi** 176,580 (24%) of children are food insecure. 11% have a low birthweight.

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To further explore how food insecurity is experienced at the local level, we analyzed whether families with children facing hunger earn incomes to be eligible for federal nutrition assistance programs.
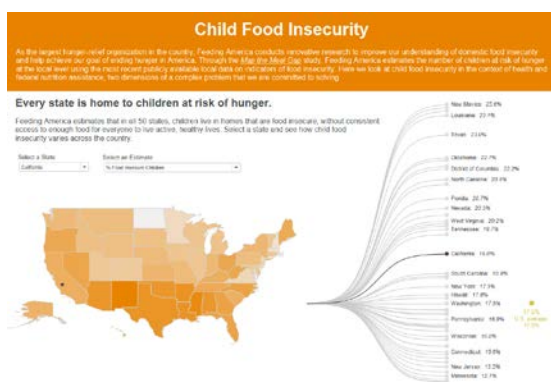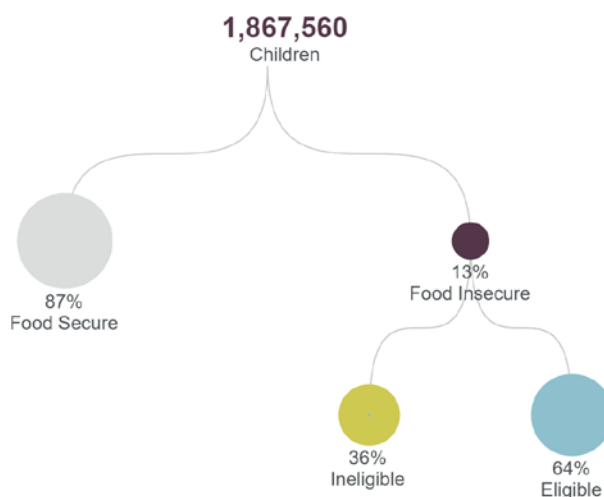
In many places, and for one-fifth of food insecure families with children, access to these critical assistance programs is not an option based on income eligibility. Instead, many turn to nonprofit food banks for support.

For example, in Virginia, where median incomes and costs of living are higher than average, more than a third of food insecure families aren't eligible for any federal child nutrition assistance.

Estimated Eligibility in Virginia:

Not all families who are food insecure receive adequate support or even qualify for federal assistance. Feeding America estimates the percentage of children in food-insecure homes unlikely to qualify for WIC and other child nutrition programs.

1,867,560
Children

87%
Food Secure

13%
Food Insecure

36%
Ineligible

64%
Eligible

To support adoption of this tool in your own community, we encourage you to play with the variables to identify and share new statistics or charts of value. Customize the visualizations with your local data to leverage the findings in strategic planning, communications, policy, and public awareness efforts.

1 Enter your geography of interest: county, state, or local food bank service area.

2 Explore how the variables shift based on your geographical selections.

3 Grab screenshots or notable statistics. When sharing insights from the visualizations, please cite:

Gundersen, C., A. Dewey, A. Crumbaugh, M. Kato & E. Engelhard. *Map the Meal Gap 2018: A Report on County and Congressional District Food Insecurity and County Food Cost in the United States in 2016.* Feeding America, 2018.

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