

BY THE NUMBERS

Hunger in the United States

Every year the United States government reports on hunger in the United States. (The Census Bureau gathers the information, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture reports on it.) The 2008 data surprised people because it showed more hunger than in previous years, and because no one expected the findings to be quite so bad.

To put together the report, researchers gathered and studied a lot of information. It showed that the number of households suffering from greater food insecurity rose sharply in 2008:

FOOD SECURITY IN HOUSEHOLDS

In 2008, 85.4 percent of US households were food secure, while 14.6 percent were food insecure. In 2007, 88.9 percent of households were food secure, while 11.1 percent were food insecure. Food insecurity is calculated by adding together the number of low-food-security households and the number of very-low-food-security households.

Low Food Security

About 8.9 percent of US households experienced low food security in 2008. That's compared to 7.0 percent in 2007.

Very Low Food Security

About 5.7 percent of US households experienced low food security in 2008. That's compared to 4.1 percent in 2007.

FOOD INSECURITY BY HOUSEHOLD TYPE

Once you get the data on households with food insecurity, you can look more closely at those households. Some patterns emerge.

Some types of households endured food-insecurity rates far above the national level of 14.6 percent. In 2008, 42.2 percent of households with incomes below the poverty line were food insecure. About 37.2 percent of households with children, headed by a single parent were food insecure. About 25.7 percent of black households were food insecure. And 26.9 percent of Hispanic households were food insecure.

Other types of households experienced food insecurity that was lower than the national level. Only 4.1 percent of households made up of married couples with children experienced food insecurity. Only 3.8 percent of households with multiple adults and no children experienced food insecurity. Only 3.1 percent of households with elderly people experienced food insecurity.

FOOD INSECURITY: NUMBERS OF PEOPLE

Many households contain more than one person. So households are one way to measure hunger. Another is to look at the actual numbers of people who are hungry. In 2008, 49.1 million people lived in food-insecure households, out of a population of 299.567 million. About 16.7 million of those people were children.