

Assessing Food Insecurity in the United States During COVID-19 Pandemic*

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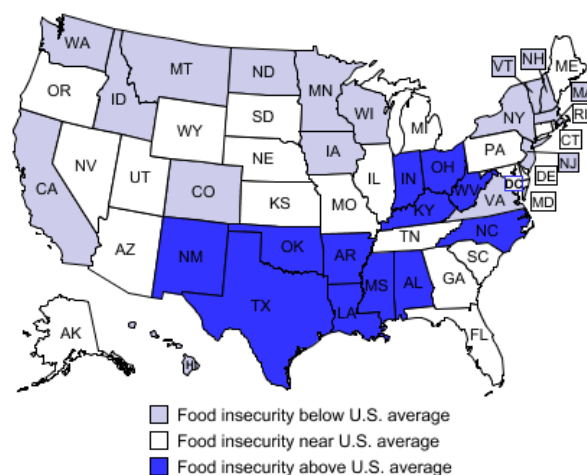
Means and number/percentage of respondents for each state are presented in Table 1. These responses are based on a representative, post-strata weighted national sample (n=10,368) of US adults collected in the last week of March 2020. Even though the responses are weighted, in those states where fewer than 50 respondents are surveyed, those states are treated as missing cases and food insecurity percentages are not provided.

Our descriptive measure of food insecurity is based on the 10-question USDA Adult Food Security Survey Module¹. Unlike the USDA, we ask respondents about their food-related experiences in the last three months. The scores are recoded into a single food insecurity index ranging from 0 to 10 after all the responses are recoded into binary responses. From this continuous scale, a dichotomous variable is then computed to indicate food insecurity for any respondent whose combined score is greater than 2 (= 1) reflecting moderate to high food insecurity and 2 or less (= 0) reflecting no or low food insecurity.

For states with food insecurity reported, 19 states had average food insecurity percentages that were lower than the national average (38.3%); 20 states had higher than average food insecurity percentages. The remaining 11 states did not meet the threshold, based on the number of respondents in our survey from that state, for reporting food insecurity averages.

States reporting the highest averages of food insecurity included: Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas; those states reporting the lowest averages included: Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Oregon, West Virginia, and Wyoming. The highest food insecurity averages were found in Southern and Mid-southern regions of the country; Midwestern and Northeastern states typically reported less food insecurity than other regions of the country. These regional variations appear to be following some of what we already know about where food insecurity is highest (see figure 1), but there appear to be some important pockets of need that are unexpected and certainly will require a finer-grain analysis to better understand these differences and their how and why.

Figure 1
Prevalence of food insecurity, average 2016-18



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service, using data from the December 2016, 2017, and 2018 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements.

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¹United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service (October 4, 2017). U.S. Adult Food Security Survey Module (10 Items), Retrieved March 28, 2020 from <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/survey-tools/#adult>

Table 1. Food Insecurity for US States (n=10,368)

State	% Food Insecure	# Total Respondents	% Total Sample
Alabama ¹	47.7%	153	1.5%
Alaska	----	23	.2%
Arizona	41.1%	231	2.2%
Arkansas	47.4%	95	.9%
California	41.7%	1250	12.1%
Colorado	40.2%	184	1.8%
Connecticut	37.5%	112	1.1%
Delaware	----	30	.3%
District of Columbia	----	24	.2%
Florida	39.8%	688	6.6%
Georgia	43.6%	335	3.2%
Hawaii	----	44	.4%
Idaho	36.2%	58	.6%
Illinois	32.3%	396	3.8%
Indiana	35.8%	212	2.0%
Iowa	24.5%	98	.9%
Kansas	39.6%	91	.9%
Kentucky	44.0%	141	1.4%
Louisiana	40.0%	145	1.4%
Maine	----	41	.4%
Maryland	41.9%	198	1.8%
Massachusetts	37.6%	218	2.1%
Michigan	36.7%	316	3.0%
Minnesota	32.0%	178	1.7%
Mississippi	34.7%	95	.9%
Missouri	40.9%	193	1.9%
Montana	----	34	.3%
Nebraska	24.6%	61	.5%
Nevada	38.4%	99	1.0%
New Hampshire	----	42	.4%
New Jersey	39.6%	280	2.8%
New Mexico	38.5%	65	.6%
New York	35.3%	606	5.8%
North Carolina	40.7%	332	3.2%
North Dakota	----	24	.2%
Ohio	38.7%	367	3.5%
Oklahoma	31.7%	123	1.2%
Oregon	29.6%	135	1.3%
Pennsylvania	33.8%	402	3.9%
Rhode Island	----	34	.3%
South Carolina	36.0%	164	1.6%
South Dakota	----	29	.3%
Tennessee	45.1%	215	2.1%
Texas	42.1%	922	8.9%
Utah	38.8%	103	1.0%
Vermont	----	19	.2%
Virginia	35.9%	270	2.6%
Washington	35.7%	244	2.4%
West Virginia	30.4%	56	.5%
Wisconsin	31.0%	184	1.8%
Wyoming	----	18	.1%
United States	38.3%	10,368	100.0%

¹States highlighted in RED exceed the average national food insecurity percentage.