



HUNGRY IN WASHINGTON

Despite Two Years of Progress, over 250,000 Households in Washington Still Struggle with Hunger November 2007

Washington's food insecurity and hunger rates improved for the second year in a row, thanks to efforts to expand access to key anti-hunger programs such as food stamps and school meals. However, 88,000 Washington households went hungry in 2006 despite the progress made and 251,000 were stretched so close to the edge financially that they couldn't be sure they'd have money to put food on the table every day.

The percentage of Washington residents with "very low food insecurity," or hunger, decreased in the period 2003-06 when compared to 1996-98, from 4.7% to 3.6%, dropping below the national average for the first time since the survey began in 1995. Washington's overall food insecurity also decreased from 13.2% to 10.3%.

Gains may be attributed to a rise in Food Stamp (or Basic Food as it's called in Washington) participation in the state. The latest US Department of Agriculture information shows that 68% of eligible individuals received food stamps in 2005, compared to 56% in 2002. Three years of legislative initiatives to expand access to school lunch, breakfast and summer meals may also have affected the rate of food insecurity.

"Food insecurity" is a term developed to describe households financially stretched to the point where they cannot be certain that all household members will not go hungry.

The survey also measures "very low food insecurity" (formerly called "food insecurity with hunger"), describing the household where at least one family member goes hungry at times because there is not enough money for food.

The results of the twelfth annual survey conducted by the Census Bureau for the US Department of Agriculture show a continuing increase in the number of food insecure people nationally, where 11.3% or 35.5 million people continue to struggle to put food on the table due to lack of resources. Over twelve million people, 3.9% of the nation's population, experience "very low food insecurity" or hunger.

State food insecurity differences are attributable to a number of factors according to USDA including low wages, high housing costs, residential instability (moving frequently), and a high tax burden on low-income households. Other factors are relatively low rates of participation in federal food programs including Food

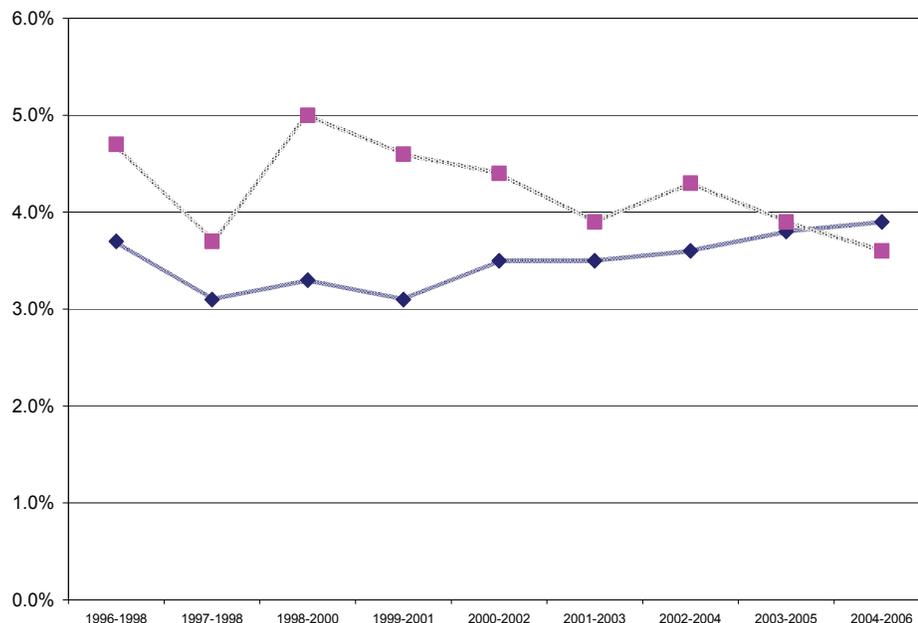
Stamps (in WA 68%) and summer meal programs for children (15% of low-income students eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.) As in past years, Hispanic, African American and Native American households have much higher rates of hunger.

Rankings for Food Insecurity and Very Low Food Insecurity

For eight years, Washington was in the top five states for hunger. The last three years, the state ranked 12th, 22nd and 32nd respectively. The following charts outlines Washington’s rates and rankings since 1996.

	WA rank among all US states for rate of hunger	United States	Washington
1996-1998	32	3.7%	4.7%
1997-1999	22	3.1%	3.7%
1998-2000	12	3.3%	5.0%
1999-2001	14	3.1%	4.6%
2000-2002	5	3.5%	4.4%
2001-2003	2	3.5%	3.9%
2002-2004	2	3.6%	4.3%
2003-2005	2	3.8%	3.9%
2004-2006	4	3.9%	3.5%

Very Low Food Insecurity WA and US, 1996-2006



***Farm Bill Affects Hungry Families
Federal Policy Choices Are Even More Critical***

The U.S. Senate is currently debating the 2007 Farm Bill. The Food Stamp Program accounts for more than half the spending in this enormous package of farm supports, conservation, nutrition and other spending. The Food Stamp Program has not yet recovered from benefit cuts made in 1996 as part of welfare reform legislation. Today, an average family receives \$400 less in benefits per year than they would have if 1996 cuts had not been made.

The USDA survey shows that food secure families spend approximately one-third more on food than their food insecure counterparts. Many of these households receive food stamp benefits but cannot stretch them enough to cover a healthy family diet. Food secure households spend 1.32% of the base for calculating Food Stamp benefits, the Thrifty Food Plan*, on food. Food insecure households spend 1.01% of the Thrifty Food Plan on food. This data points out not only the inadequacy of the Thrifty Food Plan calculation but the absurdity of basing food benefits on a plan so incredibly inadequate to provide any kind of diet, much less a diet that provides the nutritional content encouraged by USDA's own food pyramid.

The Farm Bill approved by the US House included \$4.2 Billion in new investment in nutrition programs, including steps that will improve benefit levels and index benefits to the consumer price index. Unfortunately, the increases are very small in light of the overhaul the Thrifty Food Plan and food stamp benefits need. The Senate bill passed by the Agriculture Committee provided only \$3.2 million in new investments for food stamps and TEFAP, commodity foods for food banks.

It is critical that the Senate increase its investment in the Food Stamp Program, the cornerstone of America's effort to fight domestic hunger.

In addition, some households continue to be left out of the nation's anti-hunger safety net. Congress in 1996 denied food stamps to legal immigrants. Later legislation restored food stamps to many but not all of these individuals. Congress in 2007 should restore the Food Stamp Program to its key role as the number one, universal anti-hunger resource in the United States.

References:

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