



CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE

A Voice for Washington's Children, Youth & Families

Hungry in Washington: New USDA Food Security Data Confirms Washington's Top-Five Place for Hunger

November 2003

On October 31, the U.S. Department of Agriculture released new national and state-by-state household food insecurity and hunger data in its report *Household Food Security in the United States, 2002*.

This annual report ranks Washington as the fifth hungriest state in the nation. Washington has had hunger rates in the top five since USDA began fielding the food security survey in 1995. Last year's analysis ranked Washington 2nd in the nation, but the change in ranking is not statistically significant according to USDA. The report shows that an annual average of nearly 104,000 Washington households experienced hunger in 2000-2002, and 290,000 households were at risk of hunger.

The report is based on data from the December 2002 Food Security Supplement to the Census Population Survey and provides the most recent information on household food insecurity and hunger. "Food insecurity" describes households financially stretched to the point where they cannot be certain that all household members will not go hungry. "Food insecurity with hunger" describes the household where at least one family member goes hungry at times because there is not enough money for food.

Nationally, the 2002 survey results show an increase of food insecurity from 10.7% to 11.1% between 2001 and 2002, and an increase in food insecurity with hunger from 3.3% to 3.5%. Thirteen million children lived in food insecure households, and over a half million lived in households where members went hungry. The rate of food insecurity in households with children was twice that of households without children, 16.5% vs. 8.1%.

More than 12% of Washington's households were food insecure in the current report, and 4.4 were food insecure with hunger in the period 2000-2002. USDA averages the state-level data over three years to insure more statistical reliability.

Each multi-year report produced by USDA ,and by other organizations utilizing USDA data, has featured Washington in the top five states for hunger. **The following table shows national and Washington rates of food insecurity with hunger for various three-year periods since the survey began:**

Three-year Period	United States	Washington	
1996-98	3.7%	4.7%	Ranking: 4
1997-99	3.1%	4.7%	Ranking: 2
1998-2000	3.3%	5.0%	Ranking: 2
1999-2001	3.1%	4.6%	Ranking: 2
2000-2002	3.3%	4.4%	Ranking: 5

Key Findings:

1. Washington continues to experience a high level of hunger, according to the USDA food security survey. The national prevalence of hunger is 3.3% and Washington's is 4.4%, fifth highest in the nation. On average, families experiencing hunger did so in eight or more months during the year.
2. Washington is one of only seven states with food insecurity and hunger rates significantly higher than the national average. Other states are Idaho, Mississippi, Oregon, Oklahoma, Texas and Utah.
3. Thirteen states have a higher food insecurity rate than Washington. However, for every ten food insecure households in Washington, nearly 4 are hungry, compared to only 3 out of 10 nationally. This relationship is also shown to be true in the Western States where out of 10 food insecure households, 3.2 are hungry.
4. Nationally, food insecurity is only slightly higher in areas outside metropolitan areas than in metropolitan areas: 17% compared to 16.4%. Data for Washington, analyzed by the Oregon Center for Public Policy, found that food insecurity in rural areas was two times that of metropolitan areas (22% compared to 11.2%).¹
5. Nationally, rates of hunger and food insecurity are much higher among African American and Hispanic households. 7.2% of African American households and 5.7% of Hispanic households experience food insecurity with hunger. There is no comparable data for Washington State; however, it is likely that the trend would remain true here.
6. Children are also more likely to be food insecure than the population at large (18.1%) but less likely to be hungry (0.8%). More than one-third of children in female headed, single parent, households were food insecure; 1.8% were hungry.
7. The report also provides valuable information on utilization of food assistance programs by families. Only 20% of hungry families with income below 130% of the federal poverty level (the eligibility level for food stamps) had received food stamps in the prior 30 days. 31.2% of food insecure families and 49% of food secure families in this income category, had received food stamps in the previous 30 days. 70% of food insecure families visited a food pantry in the previous year.
8. Western states continue to hold most of the top spots in the hunger ranking: Oregon is #2, Utah #3, and Washington and Arizona rank #5. Other stops are southeastern states: Oklahoma #1 and Mississippi #4.

¹ Hunger In Your State: A guide for producing state-level reports, Michael Leachman, Oregon Center for Public Policy, November 2002.

Household Food Security in the United States, 2002, Mark Nord, Margaret Andrews and Steven Carlson, USDA Economic Research Service, October 2003.
<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/fanrr35/fanrr35.pdf>.