



News Release

For Immediate Release

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STUDY SHOWS IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HUNGER; SOUTHEAST MISSOURI HAS HIGHEST RATES IN STATE

Sikeston, MO (June 25, 2020) – The recently released *Map the Meal Gap*, an annual study on the prevalence of hunger, showed southeast Missouri has some of the highest rates of food insecurity in the state. The effect of these high rates of hunger was only made worse by the coronavirus pandemic and resulting joblessness.

Overall, the rate of food insecurity in southeast Missouri is 16.1 percent and 20.2 percent for children, according to the study. Food insecurity means the household lacks the resources to provide enough food for a healthy diet.

“We’ve known for a long time that we serve some of the poorest counties in the state,” said food bank Chief Executive Office Joey Keys. “In fact, seven of the top 10 counties in Missouri for high rates of hunger are in Southeast Missouri Food Bank’s service area. When COVID-19 hit and people began losing jobs, a tough situation became even worse. So, when our rates of hunger are adjusted to take into account the increases in unemployment and economic hardship, they increase by 5 to 10 percent.”

Pemiscot County in the Missouri Bootheel has the highest rate of hunger in the state with 21.6 percent, or one in five people, living in a home that does not have access to enough healthy food. The child hunger rate in Pemiscot County is 27.5 percent, or almost one in three children who may not know where their next meal will come from. When adjusted for COVID-19, those figures increase to 26.4 percent for overall hunger and 35.9 percent for child hunger.

Other counties posting high rates of hunger are:

- Ripley County, No. 2 in the state, 20.6 percent for overall hunger, 27.8 percent for childhood hunger. COVID-adjusted rates are 25.2 percent and 35.8 percent respectively.
- Dunklin County, No. 4, 19.9 percent for overall hunger, 25.5 percent for childhood hunger. COVID adjusted: 25 percent and 34.4 percent respectively when adjusted for COVID.
- Wayne County, No. 5, 19.9 percent for overall hunger, 25 percent for childhood hunger. COVID adjusted: 25 percent and 34.1 percent respectively.
- New Madrid County, No. 6, 20.18.8 percent for overall hunger, 24.6 percent for childhood hunger. COVID adjusted: 23.6 percent and 33.1 percent respectively.
- Mississippi County, No. 8, 18.5 percent for overall hunger, 22.5 percent for childhood hunger. COVID adjusted: 24.1 percent and 32.5 percent respectively.
- Butler County, No. 10, 18.2 percent for overall hunger, 19.4 percent for childhood hunger. COVID adjusted: 23.4 percent and 29 percent respectively.

“The study shows many people in southeast Missouri, especially children, are dealing with hunger on a regular basis,” Keys said. “This information coupled with another recent report on senior hunger, helps us see where the need is greatest so we can develop strategies to address those needs. That often includes distributing more food in those counties, including holding mobile distributions, doing special distributions through schools for the families of students or expanding our weekend backpack program for kids.”

Southeast Missouri Food Bank supplies food to 140 food pantries, soup kitchens, homeless and domestic violence shelters, and senior centers in its 16-county coverage, which extends south to the Arkansas border, north to Ste. Genevieve, east to the Illinois state line and west to Van Buren and Carter County. The food bank also provides monthly boxes of food to 5,000 eligible senior citizens through the Commodity Supplemental Feeding Program, operates The Emergency Feeding Assistance Program for eligible families, and mobile food pantries on evenings and weekends for working parents.

“A lot of the people we serve may have a job, but they don’t make enough to make ends meet every month, so they need a little help,” Keys said. “Others may be temporarily unemployed because of a layoff or plant shutdown. We also see a lot of veterans and senior citizens who may have had a serious health condition that depleted their nest egg or they’re raising grandchildren. Hunger can be the result of a lot of life circumstances.”

“Map the Meal Gap shows once again that not one single county in this country is free from hunger,” said Claire Babineaux-Fontenot, chief executive officer of Feeding America. “In the decade before the pandemic, we made progress in finally returning to pre-Great Recession levels of food insecurity, though that number was still regrettably high. That fragile progress has given way under the weight of this crisis. The Feeding America network of food banks knows all too well the precarious nature of household budgets. We also know that the work that we do has great potential to help and we cannot make meaningful progress alone. Our vision is an America where no one is hungry. Join us in making that mission a reality for the tens of millions of people out there who need us now more than ever.”

Map the Meal Gap 2020 uses data from USDA, the Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics and food price data and analysis provided by Nielsen, a global measurement and data analytics company. The study is supported by Conagra Brands Foundation and Nielsen.

Keys encouraged the public to help address hunger in their community by volunteering at a local food pantry or the SEMO Food Bank, donate to the food bank online at semofoodbank.org, and encourage legislators to address hunger issues at the state and federal levels.

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About Southeast Missouri Food Bank

Founded in 1985 in Sikeston, Southeast Missouri Food Bank provides food to 140 charitable and disaster relief programs in Southeast Missouri. The Food Bank’s 16-county coverage area includes Bollinger, Butler, Cape Girardeau, Carter, Dunklin, Madison, Mississippi, New Madrid, Pemiscot, Perry, Reynolds, Ripley, Scott, Ste. Genevieve, Stoddard, and Wayne counties. Member agencies include food pantries, soup kitchens, domestic violence and homeless shelters, senior citizen programs, children’s programs, and non-profit rehabilitation facilities. The mission of Southeast Missouri Food Bank is to end hunger and leverage the power of food to build a healthy community. The Food Bank is affiliated with Feeding America, the nation’s largest food bank network, and has received the highest possible rating from Charity Navigator,

attesting to its adherence to best practices. Those interested in helping can do so by making a tax-deductible contribution, donating food, or scheduling a time to volunteer. Visit SemoFoodBank.org for more information.

Rates of Food Insecurity in Southeast Missouri

Area	Food insecure, overall	No. of food insecure people	Food insecure, overall COVID adj.	Food insecure Children	Food insecure Children COVID adj.
SEMO Food Bank area	16.1%	59,620	22.2%	20.2%	30%
Missouri	13.3%	813,840	18.5%	16.4%	25.6%
Bollinger County	15.2%	1870	20.6%	19.4%	29%
Butler County	18.2%	7800	23.4%	23.3%	32.4%
Cape Gir. County	12.4%	9730	17.6%	14.2%	23.4%
Carter County	16.6%	1030	22.3%	19.3%	29.6%
Dunklin County	19.9%	6060	25%	25.5%	34.4%
Madison County	15.2%	1850	20.5%	17.3%	26.9%
Mississippi County	18.5%	2540	24.1%	22.5%	32.5%
New Madrid County	18.8%	3340	23.6%	24.6%	33.1%
Pemiscot County	21.6%	2680	26.4%	27.5%	35.9%
Perry County	10.5%	2000	15.3%	11.5%	19.9%
Reynolds County	16.1%	1020	21.1%	20.4%	29.3%
Ripley County	20.6%	2820	25.2%	27.8%	35.8%
Scott County	16.2%	6270	21.2%	20.3%	29.1%
Ste. Genevieve County	12.4%	2220	17.3%	17.0%	25.5%
Stoddard County	16.1%	4750	21.2%	19.5%	28.5%
Wayne County	19.9%	2640	25%	25.0%	34.1%