



## News Release

**For Immediate Release**

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### **FOOD INSECURITY LEADS TO HARD CHOICES FOR MANY IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI**

Sikeston, MO (June 1, 2022) – Food insecure families and individuals in southeast Missouri were forced to make tough choices in 2021, according to new research from the University of Missouri. Prepared for Feeding Missouri, the report marks the first time all six regional food banks, including Southeast Missouri Food Bank, partnered to gather quantitative data about the statewide impact of hunger.

Thirty-three percent of food insecure households served by Southeast Missouri Food Bank reported choosing between paying for food and paying for utilities in 2021, while 28 percent of households facing hunger had to choose between food and medicine or medical care. That's according to "Food Assistance and Hunger in the Heartland 2021: State Report for Missouri," an in-depth report by MU's Interdisciplinary Center for Food Security. The report did not include data from many other food bank programs or resources, like Backpacks for Friday, partner mobile food pantries or congregate feeding sites.

"The data from this study, conducted a year ago, reflects what many of our neighbors experience every day," said Joey Keys, chief executive officer of SEMO Food Bank. "Inflation, food shortages, and rising food and transportation costs this year have made those challenges even more difficult for families and individuals facing hunger."

In general, the food bank is now spending three times more on food acquisition and distribution compared to pre-pandemic rates.

Using key data from the study, the food bank will work to strategically address the needs of those it serves.

"Many new challenges have arisen over the last few years," Keys said. "The data from this study will help us as we work to find the most effective ways to improve food security in our region."

The report also highlights the connection between food and health, with 64 percent of households saying they purchase the least expensive food, even if it wasn't the healthiest option. Additionally, 72 percent of households served by SEMO Food Bank have a member with high blood pressure, 59 percent have a member with high cholesterol and 50 percent have a member with diabetes or pre-diabetes.

"We know access to healthy food is important to overall health, and this report underlines that," Keys said. "We also know that healthier foods like fresh produce and protein often cost the most. The food bank strives to make healthier foods more accessible to the people we serve."

Additional findings also provide insight on who is visiting food pantries and making use of the food bank's services. According to the study, 53 percent of households have at least one adult age 65 or older, 30 percent have a least one child 18 or younger, and 70 percent identified as female. Furthermore, 77 percent of households have at least one member with a high-school degree or higher education, 36 percent include at least one working adult and 17 percent of households include a veteran.

"The neighbors we serve come from all walks of life and may be experiencing any number of challenges that amplify food insecurity," Keys said. "Seniors, families, veterans and many others rely on our network to ensure consistent access to healthy food. The food bank services and network agencies are vital to so many in the community to fill those times when food is scarce."

To read the complete report for Southeast Missouri Food Bank, visit [www.semofoodbank.org/news-publications/](http://www.semofoodbank.org/news-publications/); the statewide report is available at [foodsecurity.missouri.edu](http://foodsecurity.missouri.edu).

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### **About Southeast Missouri Food Bank**

Southeast Missouri Food Bank provides food to 140 food pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters in 16 southeast Missouri counties. They include Bollinger, Butler, Cape Girardeau, Carter, Dunklin, Madison, Mississippi, New Madrid, Pemiscot, Perry, Reynolds, Ripley, Scott, Ste. Genevieve, Stoddard, and Wayne counties. The food bank also provides mobile food distributions, monthly boxes of food to eligible seniors and weekend backpacks of food to 1,200 in 31 school districts. 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 volunteering. Visit [SemoFoodBank.org](http://SemoFoodBank.org) for more information.