



News Release

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Feeding America releases new Map the Meal Gap Data; Reflects Effectiveness of Hunger-Relief Efforts During Pandemic

In Southeast Missouri, 1 in 7 Individuals and 1 in 6 Children Are Food Insecure

SIKESTON, MO (MAY 5, 2023) – For the 13th year, Feeding America has published its landmark research study, Map the Meal Gap, which once again finds that food insecurity exists in all 3,143 counties and county equivalents as well as 436 congressional districts in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Map the Meal Gap is the only study that provides local-level estimates of food insecurity and food costs across the United States. This year's county estimates indicate 12.5 million or 1 in 3 individuals experiencing food insecurity may not be eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), after accounting for state-specific gross income limits.

The estimates released reflect data from 2021, a year in which SNAP benefits increased by 20% for recipients. SNAP Emergency Allotments that have now expired, the adjustments to the Thrifty Food Plan, and other supports, like the Child Tax Credit which ended at the close of 2021, all reduced poverty and were critical in supporting our neighbors in need. The enhanced benefit levels, along with other social supports, were likely reasons why food insecurity for the overall population reached historically low levels.

"In 2021, we saw food insecurity decline due in great part to an unprecedented response from the charitable food sector and government nutrition programs," said Tom Summerfelt, PhD, Chief Research Officer of Feeding America. "A strong public and private response to the pandemic helped mitigate national food insecurity from rising significantly in 2020, with many of those response efforts continuing in 2021. This release of Map the Meal Gap comes at a critical time, as most COVID-era programs that supported those in need have now expired. That, coupled with elevated levels of inflation, may be a recipe for food insecurity to increase again if we don't expand efforts to ensure everyone has access to the food and resources they need to thrive."

Southeast Missouri Food Bank, headquartered in Sikeston, is one of 200 food banks that are part of Feeding America's nationwide food bank network. In SEMO Food Bank's 16-county service area, Map the Meal Gap finds that 1 in 7 individuals and 1 in 6 children are food insecure.

"Reflecting on the data from Map the Meal Gap, it's clear to us that the work we and our partners did in 2020 in the midst of the COVID-19 response was effective," said Joey Keys, CEO of SEMO Food Bank. "But in the wake of that, supply chain issues and inflation resulted in more of our neighbors needing help again. We served about 10,000 more people each month in 2022 than we did in 2021; last year we also assisted more than 1,600 neighbors in applying for

SNAP assistance. We know the need is high in southeast Missouri, and Map the Meal Gap illustrates that.”

Other key findings of Map the Meal Gap include:

- In 2021, 14.5% of individuals and 16.8% of children were food insecure in Southeast Missouri Food Bank’s service area.
- Pemiscot County ranks highest in the state for overall and childhood food insecurity, at 19.8% and 29.9% respectively. In Pemiscot County, 73% of the food insecure population has an income below 130% of the federal poverty level.
- SEMO Food Bank serves 9 of the top 20 counties for overall food insecurity and childhood food insecurity in Missouri.
- In SEMO Food Bank’s service area, the average cost of a meal was \$3.12 in 2021, more than an 11% increase per meal from 2020.

Dr. Craig Gundersen, Snee Family Endowed Chair at the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty and a Professor in the Department of Economics at Baylor University and a member of Feeding America’s Technical Advisory Group is the lead researcher of Map the Meal Gap. The study is supported by Conagra Brands Foundation and NielsenIQ.

Map the Meal Gap provides the following data online through an interactive map available at <https://map.feedingamerica.org>:

- The estimated prevalence of food insecurity among the overall and child populations for every U.S. state, county, and congressional district, as well as the service area of each Feeding America food bank.
- The estimated food insecurity prevalence for Black, Latino, and white communities where sufficient sample sizes have allowed estimates to be generated.
- The estimated percentage of the overall population in food-insecure households that are income eligible for SNAP and the estimated percentage of the child population in food-insecure households that are income eligible for free or reduced-price meals.
- The average meal cost in every state and county.
- The food budget shortfall in every state and county.
- For the first time in 2023, the map now also includes state-level food insecurity estimates for seniors and adults age 50-59, produced as part of Feeding America’s State of Senior Hunger report series.

Map the Meal Gap was awarded the 2021 Policy Impact Award by the American Association for Public Opinion Research. The full suite of Map the Meal Gap research from Feeding America allows policymakers, state agencies, corporate partners, food banks and advocates to develop integrated strategies to fight hunger on a community level.

For more information about Southeast Missouri Food Bank and how to help end hunger in southeast Missouri visit semofoodbank.org.

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About Southeast Missouri Food Bank

The mission of Southeast Missouri Food Bank is to end hunger and leverage the power of food to build healthy communities. The food bank provides food to 140 charitable and disaster relief programs in Southeast Missouri. These member agencies include food pantries, soup kitchens, domestic violence and homeless shelters. Southeast Missouri Food Bank also holds regular mobile food distributions and provides monthly boxes of food to 5,500 senior citizens and

weekend backpacks of food during the school year to nearly 1,200 students in 30 school districts. 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. 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.

About Feeding America

Feeding America® is the largest hunger-relief organization in the United States. As a network of more than 200 food banks, 21 statewide food bank associations, and over 60,000 agency partners, including food pantries and meal programs, we helped provide 5.2 billion meals to tens of millions of people in need last year. Feeding America also supports programs that prevent food waste and improve food security among the people we serve; brings attention to the social and systemic barriers that contribute to food insecurity in our nation; and advocates for legislation that protects people from going hungry. Visit www.feedingamerica.org, find us on Facebook or follow us on Twitter