

**Food Insecurity:  
Who Is Affected?**

*Food insecurity* is defined as not having access to adequate food because of money or other resource restrictions.

**U.S. Residents**

In 2012, 14.5% of U.S. residents, over 17.6 million households, were food insecure. In addition, nearly 6% had very low food security, meaning resource restrictions led them to reduce their food intake.

Rates of food insecurity for low-income households, families headed by a single parent, and black and Hispanic households are much higher than the national average.

Households in major cities of metro areas had the highest prevalence of food insecurity (16.9%); those in nonmetro areas were in the middle (15.5%); and those in suburban and other metro areas outside major cities had the lowest (12.7%).

**Children and Youth**

Close to 16 million children—21.6% of children in the U.S.—lived in families that were food insecure in 2012.

Early childhood health and nutrition influence a child’s ability to learn and perform well in school; this affects success and health later in life.

College students are not immune to food insecurity. Campus food pantries have increased from 4 in 2008 to some 120 in 2014, which suggests increased need for food assistance.

**Seniors**

One in 12 seniors lacked the financial resources to access adequate food in 2012.

**Wisconsinites**

More than 11% of people in Wisconsin were food insecure and struggled to provide a nutritionally adequate diet for their family in 2013. (See page 2 for more about Wisconsin.)

**Key Points**

- More than 17.6 million U.S. households including almost 16 million children lacked the resources to buy adequate food in 2012.
- Food insecurity is especially harmful in prenatal life and early childhood, when growth and development are rapid.
- Eighty (80) percent of U.S. households with children were food insecure in 2012.
- Almost 1 in 3 children (29%) benefits from the nation’s largest food assistance program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).
- SNAP enabled 47 million low-income Americans to buy nutritionally adequate food in a typical month in 2013.
- Poverty puts households at greater risk for food insecurity and hunger.
- Over 1 in 5 children (22%) lived below the poverty line in 2012 (\$23,492 for a family of four).
- Studies show that SNAP is an effective antipoverty program, reducing the poverty rate by up to 16%—or by 8 million people—when benefits are added to gross income.

**A Look at SNAP**

**Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**

Formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, SNAP is the nation’s largest anti-hunger program and an effective antipoverty program.

The federal government pays the entire cost of SNAP benefits and splits the cost of program administration with states.

SNAP is a “countercyclical” safety net program: it grows as need grows during economic downturns and contracts as the economy improves.

The USDA reports that total SNAP benefits in 2013 were over \$76 billion, with an average monthly benefit per person valued at \$133.

**Eligibility Requirements**

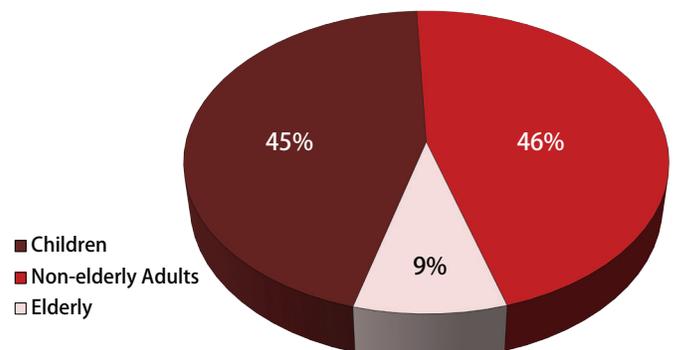
Under federal rules, the main SNAP eligibility criteria are:

1. Gross monthly income must be at or below 130% of the poverty line (elderly and families with disabled members are exempt); some states use expanded eligibility criteria that raise the gross income limit for many households.
2. Income after deductions must be less than or equal to the poverty line (\$19,500 a year for family of 3 in 2014); and
3. Assets must be below \$2,000. The cutoff for the elderly and families with disabled members is \$3,250.

**Recipient Benefits**

SNAP benefits are based on recipients’ income and expenses. The average eligible home received \$278 a month in 2012.

**Almost Half of SNAP Recipients Are Children**



Source: USDA Characteristics of SNAP Households 2014.

## Reducing Food Insecurity in Schools

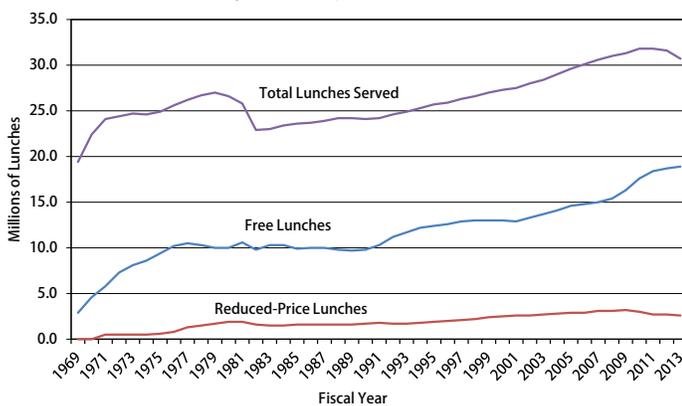
### National School Lunch Program

The National School Lunch Program provided free or low-cost lunches to more than 31 million students each school day during the 2012–2013 school year. Participating schools receive cash subsidies and USDA food items for each meal they serve. It is the nation's second largest food and nutrition assistance program after SNAP.

Across Wisconsin, 43% of public school students were eligible for free or reduced-price meals in 2012–2013; in the Madison Metropolitan School District, 56.6% of students were eligible.

Any child that attends a participating school and whose family income is below 130% of the federal poverty line is eligible for the free meal program. Students with family incomes between 130–185% of the poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals, paying no more than 40 cents.

National School Lunch Program Participation, 1969–2013



Source: USDA Food and Nutrition Service Child Nutrition Tables.

### School Breakfast Program

The School Breakfast Program serves children in 89,000 schools. Eligibility is the same as for the school lunch program. In 2012, 12.9 million students participated, with 10.1 million children receiving their meals for free or at reduced price.

In Wisconsin, 1,799 schools participate with average daily participation in 2012 of 170,405 children.

A federal program called the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) allows schools with a high percentage of low-income children to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students.

High-poverty, CEP-eligible, Wisconsin schools include seven schools in the Madison Metropolitan School District and all but seven Milwaukee Public Schools.

### Other Food Security Programs

- Child and Adult Care Food Program
- Summer Food Service Program
- Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program
- After-School Snacks and Suppers

## FoodShare: Wisconsin's "SNAP"

FoodShare is Wisconsin's SNAP program. It targets people with low-incomes, including working as well as unemployed people.

In January 2014, 15% of Wisconsinites received FoodShare assistance. More than 72% of these participants were families with children. Additionally, almost 26% of recipients were families with elderly or disabled members.

The average monthly benefit issued to FoodShare households in March 2014 was \$221. FoodShare is intended to supplement households' existing income to help meet food needs.

Almost 70% of FoodShare households have incomes below the poverty line.

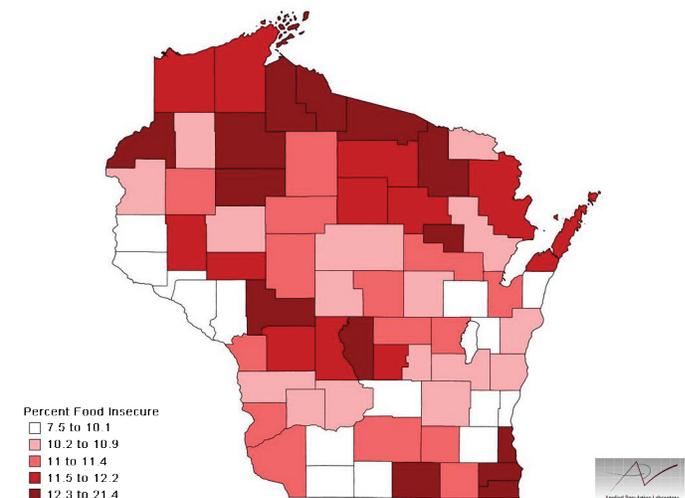
Of households receiving FoodShare benefits, 32% have at least one person working, with an average monthly earned income of \$1,221. In March 2014, Wisconsin's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 6.7%.

## Mapping WI Food Access and Security

### Wisconsin Food Security Project ([www.foodsecurity.wisc.edu](http://www.foodsecurity.wisc.edu))

The Wisconsin Food Security Project provides local information on food access and the food security infrastructure in Wisconsin. This tool was developed by professors at UW–Madison and UW–Extension as an outreach resource that helps planners and policymakers identify both strengths and weaknesses in local communities. It is also designed to help individuals and families locate food-related resources in their community.

### Predicted Food Insecurity Rate in Wisconsin\*



Source: Wisconsin Food Security Project mapping tool, using data provided by Feeding America.

\*These are 2011 estimates of each county's food insecurity rate based on its economic and demographic characteristics, and are not based on survey data. This tool is intended to help identify high- vs. low-risk counties.

## **IRP-Morgridge Fact Sheet #5: Food Insecurity and Food Assistance Programs Sources**

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