

# Rates of Food Insecurity and Hunger Unchanged in Rural Households

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The proportion of households that were food insecure—that is, they were not consistently and dependably able to get enough food for an active and healthy life—remained unchanged in nonmetro areas from 1998 to 2000, while declining in metro areas. Single-parent families and racial and ethnic minorities had rates of food insecurity and hunger higher than the national average.

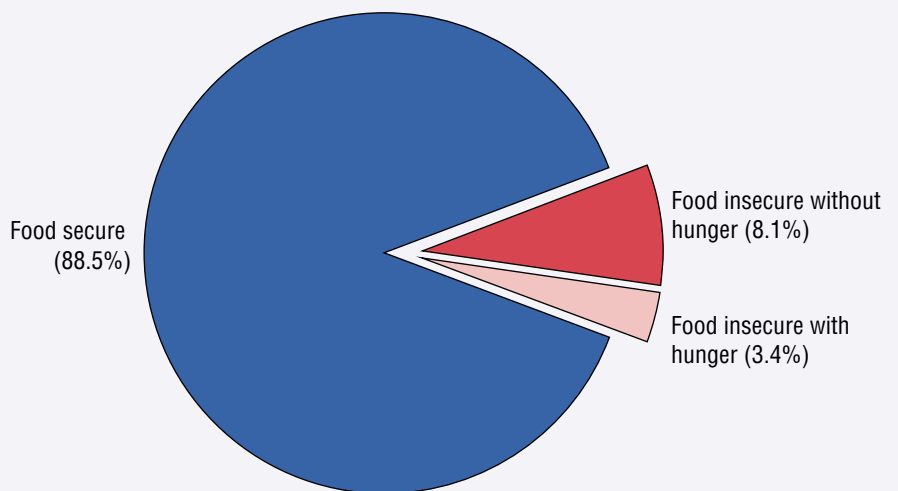
During the year ending in September 2000, 88.5 percent of nonmetro households were food secure throughout the entire year (fig. 1). The food-secure households included 79.8 percent that were fully food secure—reporting no problems or concerns in meeting their food needs—and 8.7 percent that reported one or two indications of difficulty in meeting their food needs. The remaining 11.5 percent of nonmetro households, about 2.4 million, were food insecure at some time during the year. That is, they were uncertain of having or were unable to acquire enough food to meet basic needs for all household members because they had insufficient money and

other resources for food. About two-thirds of the food-insecure households avoided hunger, in many cases by relying on a few basic foods and reducing variety in their diets. But 700,000 households (3.4 percent of all nonmetro households) were food insecure to the extent that one or more household members were hungry, at least some time during the year, because they could not afford enough food.

Food security is one of several necessary conditions for a population to be healthy and well nourished. Households are food secure when they have assured access at all times to enough food for an active healthy life, with no need for recourse to emergency food

sources or other extraordinary coping behaviors to meet their basic food needs. They experience food insecurity when they do not have this assured access to enough food to fully meet basic needs at all times. As food insecurity increases in severity, the quality and variety of meals are reduced and food intake may become irregular. At still more severe levels, insufficient or irregular food intake results in periods of hunger for at least some family members. In households with children, adults usually restrict their own food intake first to provide enough food for the children. Thus, children usually do not go hungry except in households with more severe levels of adult hunger.

Figure 1  
**Food security, food insecurity, and hunger in nonmetro households, 2000**  
*A large majority of nonmetro households were food secure*



Source: Prepared by ERS using data from the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement, September 2000.

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## Prevalence of Food Insecurity and Hunger in Nonmetro Areas Unchanged, 1998-2000

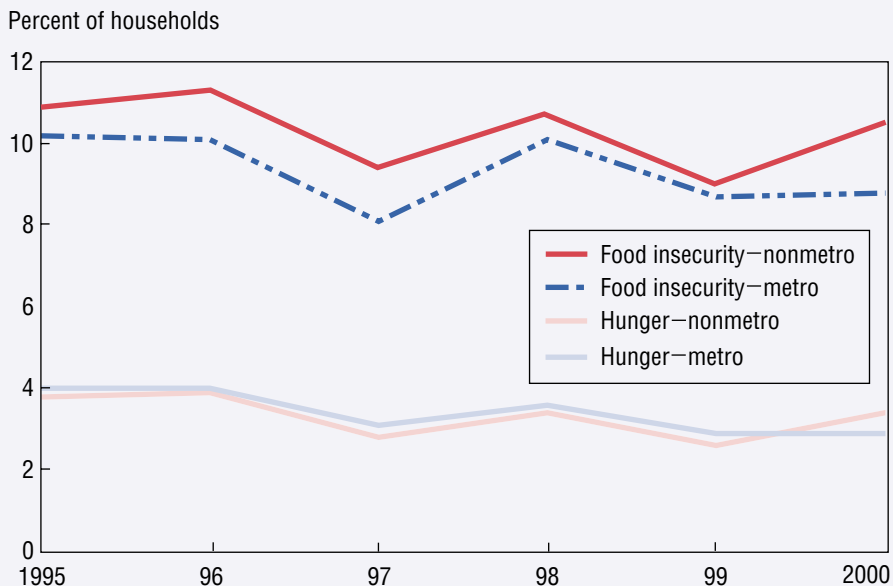
Rates of food insecurity and hunger were unchanged from 1998 to 2000 in nonmetro areas, while declining in metro areas. USDA monitors food security, food insecurity, and hunger in the United States through a nationally representative food security survey, conducted annually since 1995 by the U.S. Census Bureau as a supplement to the monthly Current Population Survey. Food insecurity and hunger declined from 1995 to 1999 in both nonmetro and metro areas (fig. 2).

The year-to-year deviations from a consistent trend include a substantial 2-year alternation that is believed to result from a seasonal influence on food security prevalence rates. The food security surveys were conducted in April in odd-numbered years and in August or September in even-numbered years. Measured rates of food insecurity were higher in the August/September collections. Even though the questions ask about conditions and behaviors over the past 12 months, respondents remember events that occurred in the near past more clearly than those that occurred almost a year earlier. To assess recent trends without this seasonal bias, comparisons are most appropriately made between 1998 and 2000 rather than from 1999 to 2000. During this 2-year period, changes in the rates of food insecurity and hunger in nonmetro areas were small and not statistically significant. In metro areas, the prevalence of food insecurity declined 1.6 percentage points, and the prevalence of hunger declined 0.7 percentage point.

Figure 2

### Rates of food insecurity and hunger, by residence, 1995 to 2000

Food insecurity and hunger remained unchanged in nonmetro areas from 1998 to 2000 after declining somewhat from 1996 to 1998



Note: Data were adjusted so that prevalence rates are strictly comparable for all years. These adjustments are necessary because screening procedures to reduce respondent burden changed each year until they were standardized in 1998. The adjustments result in somewhat lower prevalence estimates than those presented in figure 1 and tables 1-3, which are based on unadjusted data.

Source: Prepared by ERS using data from the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements, 1995-2000.

### Food Insecurity Rates Higher in Nonmetro Areas

In 2000, the rate of food insecurity was higher in nonmetro than in metro areas (table 1). To be classified as food insecure, a household must report at least three indicators of food insecurity, most commonly that (1) they worried that their food would run out before they got money to buy more, (2) the food they bought did not last and they did not have money to get more, and (3) they could not afford to eat balanced meals. More serious indicators, including indicators of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake, were also reported by many food insecure households. Food insecurity was more prevalent in nonmetro than in metro areas in all four geographical regions and for almost all types of households

analyzed. Not all of the nonmetro-metro differences were statistically significant, but only two categories—Hispanics and elderly—registered rates lower in nonmetro than in metro areas.

### Nonmetro West, Minorities, and Single-Parent Families Were Most Food Insecure

Regionally, food insecurity rates were highest in the nonmetro West and South and lowest in the Midwest. Food insecurity was almost three times as prevalent among nonmetro Blacks as among nonmetro Whites, and for nonmetro Hispanics the rate was over twice that of nonmetro Whites. These differences reflect the higher poverty rates of racial and ethnic minorities. For Blacks and Whites, food insecurity was more prevalent

Table 1

**Households with food insecurity, 1998 and 2000**

*Food insecurity was higher in nonmetro than in metro households, and most prevalent in single-parent families with children and among racial and ethnic minorities*

Category	Nonmetro 1998	Nonmetro 2000	Metro 2000	U.S. total 2000
<i>Percent (households)</i>				
<b>All households</b>	11.8	11.5*	10.2*	10.5
<b>Census region:</b>				
Northeast	9.7	10.3*	8.6*	8.8
Midwest	8.3	8.9	8.6	8.7
South	14.1	12.5	11.6	11.8
West	14.4	15.5*	11.2*	11.7
<b>Race and ethnicity (of household head):</b>				
White non-Hispanic	9.6	9.6*	7.0*	7.6
Black	27.9	25.8*	19.8*	20.5
Hispanic	21.2	21.1	21.4	21.4
<b>Household structure:</b>				
Two-parent families with children	12.8	13.1*	10.3*	10.9
Single-parent families with children <sup>1</sup>	34.0	31.5*	27.8*	28.5
Multiple-adult households--no children <sup>1</sup>	5.8	6.1	5.5	5.6
Single men living alone	12.8	9.8	8.8	9.0
Single women living alone	9.8	10.6	10.0	10.1
<i>Percent (persons)<sup>2</sup></i>				
<b>Age:</b>				
All ages	13.7	13.4*	11.9*	12.1
0-17	20.4	20.5*	17.4*	18.0
18-64	12.8	12.4*	10.7*	11.0
65 and over	5.0	4.6	5.3	5.2

\*Difference between nonmetro and metro prevalence rate is statistically significant at 90-percent confidence level.

<sup>1</sup>Statistics for single-parent families with children and multiple-adult households with no children in 1998 are revised from those published in *Rural Conditions and Trends*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2000. Category definitions have been revised to be consistent with the national statistical series published by ERS.

<sup>2</sup>Food insecurity is measured at the household level. In the age breakdown, the numbers represent the percentage of persons in each age category living in households classified as food insecure.

Source: Prepared by ERS using data from the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements, August 1998 and September 2000.

in nonmetro than in metro areas, while the rate for Hispanics was about the same in nonmetro and metro areas.

One out of five nonmetro children lived in food insecure households, reflecting the greater economic difficulties faced by many rural families with children. Food insecurity was much higher in single-parent families with children than in any other household type. This was especially true in nonmetro areas, where almost one in

three single-parent families (31.5 percent) was food insecure sometime during the year ending in September 2000. The incidence of food insecurity was also higher in two-parent families with children than in households with no children, although less than half that of single-parent families. The lowest rates of food insecurity were in multiple-adult households with no children present (6.1 percent) and for single men living alone (9.8 percent).

In 2000, 13.4 percent of the nonmetro population lived in food insecure households. This proportion was slightly higher than the proportion of households because larger families are more likely to be food insecure than are smaller families and persons living alone. The elderly were less than half as likely as working-age adults to live in food-insecure households. Food access and preparation problems not measured by the food insecurity scale, such as limited mobility,

Table 2

**Households with poverty-related hunger, 1998 and 2000***One or more household members experienced poverty-related hunger in 3.4 percent of nonmetro households, unchanged from 1998*

Category	Nonmetro 1998	Nonmetro 2000	Metro 2000	U.S. total 2000
<i>Percent (households)</i>				
<b>All households</b>	3.4	3.4	3.0	3.1
<b>Census region:</b>				
Northeast	2.0	2.8	2.7	2.7
Midwest	2.3	2.4	2.7	2.6
South	4.1	3.8	3.3	3.4
West	5.1	5.3*	3.2	3.5
<b>Race and ethnicity (of household head):</b>				
White non-Hispanic	2.8	3.0*	2.2	2.4
Black	7.2	6.8	6.4	6.5
Hispanic	6.5	5.1	4.8	4.8
<b>Household structure:</b>				
Two-parent families with children	2.3	2.2	1.9	1.9
Single-parent families with children <sup>1</sup>	9.8	7.9	8.0	8.0
Multiple-adult households—no children <sup>1</sup>	1.9	2.3	1.8	1.9
Single men living alone	5.6	4.0	4.2	4.2
Single women living alone	3.7	5.2*	3.8	4.0
<i>Percent (persons)<sup>2</sup></i>				
<b>Age:</b>				
All ages	3.4	3.3	3.1	3.1
0-17 <sup>3</sup>	4.5	4.2	4.1	4.1
18-64	3.5	3.5	2.9	3.0
65 and over	1.4	1.2	1.3	1.3

\*Difference between nonmetro and metro prevalence rate is statistically significant at 90-percent confidence level.

<sup>1</sup>Statistics for single-parent families with children and multiple-adult households with no children in 1998 are revised from those published in *Rural Conditions and Trends* Vol. 11, No. 2, 2000. Category definitions have been revised to be consistent with the national statistical series published by ERS.

<sup>2</sup>Hunger is measured at the household level. In the age breakdown, the numbers represent the percentage of persons in each age category living in households that registered hunger.

<sup>3</sup>Children usually do not experience hunger except in households in which adults experience more severe and prolonged hunger (see table 3). Thus, the prevalence rates for children shown in this table should be interpreted as the proportion of children living in households with hunger among adults. Most of these children were eating diets of reduced quality and variety.

Source: Prepared by ERS using data from the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements, August 1998 and September 2000.

poor health, and inadequate facilities for food preparation, pose additional challenges for some elderly people.

### Hunger Due to Lack of Money Reported in 3.4 Percent of Nonmetro Households

In about one-third of food insecure nonmetro households—those in which food shortages were more serious or prolonged—food intake

was curtailed at times to the extent that one or more household members were hungry. These households reported experiences and behaviors associated with more severe levels of food insecurity. Adults reported eating less than they felt they should and cutting and skipping meals repeatedly due to lack of money for food. Households with children reported inability to feed the children bal-

anced meals and reliance on only a few kinds of low-cost food for the children. One or more household members, mainly adults, in 3.4 percent of nonmetro households (0.7 million households) experienced such hunger during the year prior to the survey; this proportion was not significantly different in metro areas (table 2).

The pattern of hunger rates across the regions, racial-ethnic groups,

Table 3

**Households with poverty-related hunger among children, 1998 and 2000***One half of 1 percent of nonmetro households with children reported hunger among the children*

Category	Nonmetro 1998	Nonmetro 2000	Metro 2000	U.S. total 2000
	<i>Percent (households)<sup>1</sup></i>			
<b>All households with children</b>	1.1	0.5	0.7	0.7
<b>Race and ethnicity (of household head):</b>				
White non-Hispanic	1.0	.3	.3	.3
Black	1.1	1.1	1.7	1.6
Hispanic	2.8	1.8	1.4	1.4
<b>Household structure:</b>				
Two-parent families with children	.3	.4	.3	.4
Single-parent families with children	2.8	1.0	1.5	1.4
	<i>Percent (children)<sup>2</sup></i>			
<b>Children</b>	1.0	.6	.8	.8

<sup>1</sup>Households classified as having hunger among children reported multiple indicators of reduced food intake among children, including cutting the size of children's meals, children not eating enough, and children being hungry because they couldn't afford more food. Households with no children were excluded from the denominator.

<sup>2</sup>Children's hunger is measured at the household level. In the bottom row, the numbers represent the percentage of children living in households in which any children were hungry.

Source: Prepared by ERS using data from the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements, August 1998 and September 2000.

household types, and age groups followed closely that of food insecurity. In both nonmetro and metro areas, 8 percent of single-parent families had episodes of hunger during the year.

### Poverty-Related Hunger Rare Among Rural Children

Although 4.2 percent of nonmetro children lived in households classified as food insecure with hunger (table 2), the children themselves in most of these households were not hungry. In most U.S. households, children—especially younger children—are protected from reductions in food intake unless the level of adults' depriva-

tion is quite severe. Only about 0.5 percent of nonmetro households had levels of food insecurity so severe that children were also hungry at times (table 3). Rates of hunger among children did not differ significantly between nonmetro and metro areas.

Households classified as having hunger among children responded "yes" to at least five of the eight questions in the food security survey that asked specifically about children's experiences of food stress. These households typically reported all of the following: they relied on a few kinds of low-cost food to feed the children because

they were running out of money to buy food; they couldn't afford to feed the children balanced meals; the children were not eating enough because the family could not afford enough food; they cut the size of the children's meals because there was not enough money for food; and the children were hungry, but the family could not afford more food.

Children's hunger was more than twice as prevalent in single-parent families as in two-parent families. Rates of hunger among children were higher among Blacks and Hispanics than among non-Hispanic Whites. **RA**

### **USDA Reports on Food Security and Hunger**

The following reports on the Food Security Measurement Project are available from USDA:

- *Household Food Security in the United States in 1995: Summary Report of the Food Security Measurement Project*
- *Household Food Security in the United States in 1995: Technical Report*
- *Household Food Security in the United States, 1995-1998*
- *Prevalence of Food Insecurity and Hunger, by State, 1996-1998*
- *Household Food Security in the United States, 1999*
- *Household Food Security in the United States, 2000*
- *Guide to Measuring Household Food Security, Revised 2000*

Links to these reports and other information on the Federal Food Security Measurement Project are available from the ERS Food Security Briefing Room on the World Wide Web at:

<http://www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/foodsecurity>