

USAFacts Statement on USDA's Termination of the Food Security Survey

In September, the USDA announced it was terminating future Household Food Security Reports. Since 1995, this report has provided valuable data to understand Americans' ability to afford food — including increases in food insecurity during the 2008 financial crisis and the recent period of post-COVID inflation.

At USAFacts, we use government data to help Americans answer their most pressing questions about the country. Americans regularly ask about food security, so in our latest Just the Facts video, we drew on the Household Food Security Report. The survey tells us that 18 million households report low or very low food security. In other words, about one in seven households struggles to access food.

The value of this survey extends beyond public interest. Federal and state government leaders share in operating and evaluating programs that provide food assistance to Americans. This requires trustworthy data to assess the state of their families and communities.

The Household Food Security Report is uniquely informative about access to food in the United States. No other survey measures food security in detail, has done so for multiple decades, uses a large, nationally representative sample, allows for comparing states, and provides additional context such as data on both adults and children.

The Household Food Security survey is valuable, but, as is the case with most sources of government data, it is imperfect. Food insecurity is self-reported by households and can be subject to differing interpretations of definitions and understanding of the concept. And while this survey is more comprehensive than other government surveys, there are multiple other redundant data collections on the subject.

The debate around the discontinuation of the Household Food Security Report underscores a broader issue: the nation needs reliable, consistent, and modern ways to measure food security.

Reducing redundancies to provide a single source of truth and improving data collection and presentation could make the data more trustworthy and authoritative. A unilateral decision to end a valued dataset will not get us there. America deserves a transparent process that assesses the breadth of current surveys, takes feedback from data users, data providers, lawmakers, and everyday Americans — and charts a path forward that provides the facts needed to inform public policy and the American public.

Americans want to know whether programs that spend their tax dollars are working. Whether it is through continuing — and improving — this survey, or through a new approach, the American people deserve a reliable source of data that answers their most pressing questions.