

**Hunger in the Heartland:
Hunger and Food Insecurity
Among Kansans, 1995–2000**

January 2004

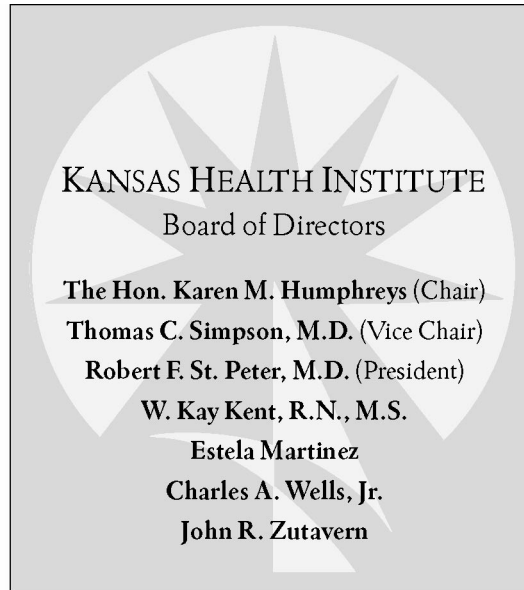
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Food security, defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as “access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life,” is a fundamental goal of any society and is a critical component of long-term health and well-being. Research has shown household food insecurity to be associated with increased levels of anxiety and chronic health conditions among adults, as well as anxiety, depression and behavioral problems among school-aged children. Recent published studies have reported associations between food insecurity and obesity. This study uses data from the annual Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement, for the time period 1995 to 2000, to describe the characteristics of household food insecurity and hunger in Kansas.

Each year, approximately one in ten Kansas households (about 105,000 households) reported that they had experienced uncertain availability or access to enough food at some time during the previous year. About one-third of these households (approximately 38,000) were food-insecure to the extent that one or more members went hungry at some time during the year because they could not afford enough food. The other two-thirds of food-insecure households obtained enough food to avoid hunger by using a variety of strategies such as eating less varied diets, participating in federal food assistance programs, or getting emergency food from community food pantries. The annual rates of household food insecurity and hunger in Kansas have remained relatively unchanged over the study period, and are similar to national rates.

Some segments of the Kansas population were at increased risk for food insecurity and hunger. Households with annual incomes less than \$30,000 were six times as likely to be food-insecure as those with higher incomes (18 percent vs. 3 percent). Households headed by minorities and households headed by single parents with children also experienced increased rates of food insecurity and hunger. Households headed by single women with children were at the highest risk, with 38 percent reporting food insecurity and one-third of food-insecure households reporting hunger. Single mother households in Kansas fared somewhat worse than their national peers, where 30.2 percent of households reported food insecurity.

Most food-insecure households were working families. A majority (58 percent) of food-insecure Kansas households had at least one full-time worker in the household; almost one in five (18 percent) had two or more full-time workers.

For families that cannot afford to purchase sufficient amounts of food, help may be available through a number of public and privately funded programs. In this study, food-insecure households were asked whether they had obtained food from food pantries or soup kitchens, or had participated in federally subsidized nutritional support programs such as Free-and-Reduced Price School Meals, Food Stamps, or the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). Only a slight majority (54 percent) of low-income, food-insecure Kansas households (with or without hunger) reported that they had received assistance from federal nutrition programs. Even fewer (16 percent) food-insecure households reported that they had obtained emergency food from a community food pantry.

BACKGROUND

The U.S food supply is the most varied and abundant in the world, and Americans spend a smaller share of their disposable incomes on food than citizens of any other country.¹ In 1994, the U.S. food supply provided an estimated 3,800 calories per person per day, enough to supply every American with more than one and one-half times their average daily energy needs.² Despite this abundance of supply, many American families have difficulty obtaining enough food. In 2001, approximately

11.5 million households in the U.S. (11 percent) struggled to obtain enough food to meet the basic needs of all household members, due to insufficient resources for food. In an estimated 3.5 million households, one or more members went hungry at least some time during the year because they could not obtain enough food.³

These findings are based on data from the Food Security Supplement Survey, administered annually by the U.S. Bureau of the Census as a component of the Current Population Survey (CPS). The Food Security Supplement does not try to assess the nutritional quality or safety of food, but focuses instead on food insecurity that results from a lack of resources. Randomly selected households participating in the national survey are asked to respond to a series of 18 questions about their food situation; their responses are scored to place the households on a continuum representing household food security status (Appendix I).

Households classified as “food insecure” were at some time during the year uncertain of having, or unable to acquire enough food to meet the basic needs of all their members, because of a lack of money or other resources.³ Most food-insecure households found ways to obtain enough food to avoid hunger. But some households had at least one person who went hungry at some time during the year due to a lack of food, which put them in the “food insecure with hunger” category of this study. The survey focused on household food security during the previous 12 months, and the survey sample was structured to provide national and state-level estimates of food insecurity and hunger, as well as additional information about coping strategies and

DEFINITIONS

Food insecurity: limited or uncertain availability of sufficient food for an active and healthy life, due to a lack of money or resources.

Hunger: the uneasy or painful sensation caused by a lack of food, due to a lack of money or resources.

nutrition support programs that families employ in an effort to avoid hunger. Findings from the sampled households were weighted statistically to produce estimates of hunger and food insecurity among the population. Sample sizes for the United States and for Kansas are displayed in Table 1. Details of the Food Security Supplement survey methodology have been published elsewhere.^{4,5}

Food insecurity affects human development and health throughout the lifespan, but can be particularly harmful during critical or vulnerable stages early and late in life.⁶ Research has shown that children who come from low-income families that experience hunger or food insecurity are more likely to have psychosocial dysfunction, behavioral, emotional and academic problems, and to display aggression and anxiety.⁷ Food insecurity also has been found to be associated with depressive disorder and suicidal symptoms in adolescents,⁸ and food-insecure elderly persons have been shown to have poorer nutritional and health status than their food-secure peers.⁹ Recently, food insecurity has been associated with overweight and obesity, possibly due to poor diet and disordered eating.^{10,11}

Food insecurity is usually not a one-time problem. Research has shown that most households that experience food insecurity often deal with it on a recurring basis, not just one or two times per year. A recent study¹² found that about two-thirds of households classified as food-insecure in the CPS Annual Food Security Supplement surveys experienced recurring episodes of food insecurity within the year, and about one-fifth experienced food insecurity almost every month of the previous year. A growing body of research makes it clear that food insecurity and hunger are not merely issues of societal equity, but that there are real costs associated with the increased health problems and decreased academic achievement. Understanding the characteristics of households that experience food insecurity and hunger is key to identifying effective solutions to the problem. This report uses data from the Food Security Supplement to describe the characteristics of household food insecurity and hunger in the state of Kansas from 1995 to 2000, which represents the most current data publicly available at the time of this study.

RESULTS

Hunger in Kansas

Just as hunger and food insecurity exist at the national level, they also exist in Kansas. In 2000, an estimated 108,000 Kansas households reported that they had worried about not being able to obtain enough food to feed their household members at some time during the previous year. In almost 38,000 homes, at least one member suffered from hunger at some time during the year. In nearly 4,000 of these homes, children skipped meals or went hungry because the family did not have enough food. Data from the CPS Food Security Supplement show that Kansas had rates of food security similar to the national rates from 1995–2000 (Table 2). Averaged over the entire six-year period, 89.9 percent of Kansas households said they were “food secure” throughout the previous year.

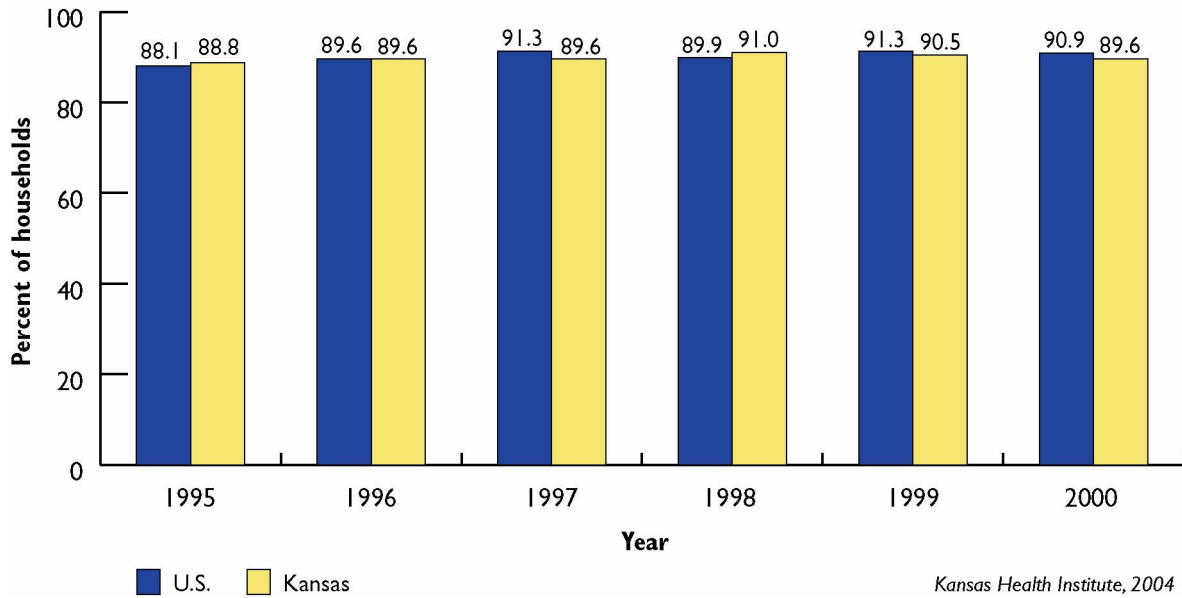
Nationally, household food security rates improved slightly from 88.1 percent in 1995 to 90.8 percent of households in 2000. The improvements in food security were attributed to rising household incomes.¹³ However, if rising incomes were the primary reason for observed improvements, then we might expect that falling incomes and unemployment associated with the nation’s economic downturn in more recent years may have caused food security rates to drop again. Although annual food security rates for Kansas are similar to national findings, smaller survey sample sizes limit the ability to detect year-to-year trends at the state level.

Characterizing food-insecure households

Not all households are at equal risk for food insecurity and hunger. The first objective of this study was to describe the demographic characteristics of households at increased risk. The data indicate that some segments of the population are faring better than others.

As might be expected, poverty and food insecurity often go hand-in-hand. Only 82 percent of Kansas households with annual incomes at or below \$30,000 were food secure, compared to 97 percent of households with incomes above \$30,000. Almost nine out of ten (89 percent) households that experienced food insecurity or hunger said they did not always have enough to eat because of a lack of money. Household food insecurity is often experienced when an event, such as job loss, gaining a household member, or loss of Food Stamp benefits, places stress on

Percent of Households that Were Food Secure for the Entire Year, 1995–2000

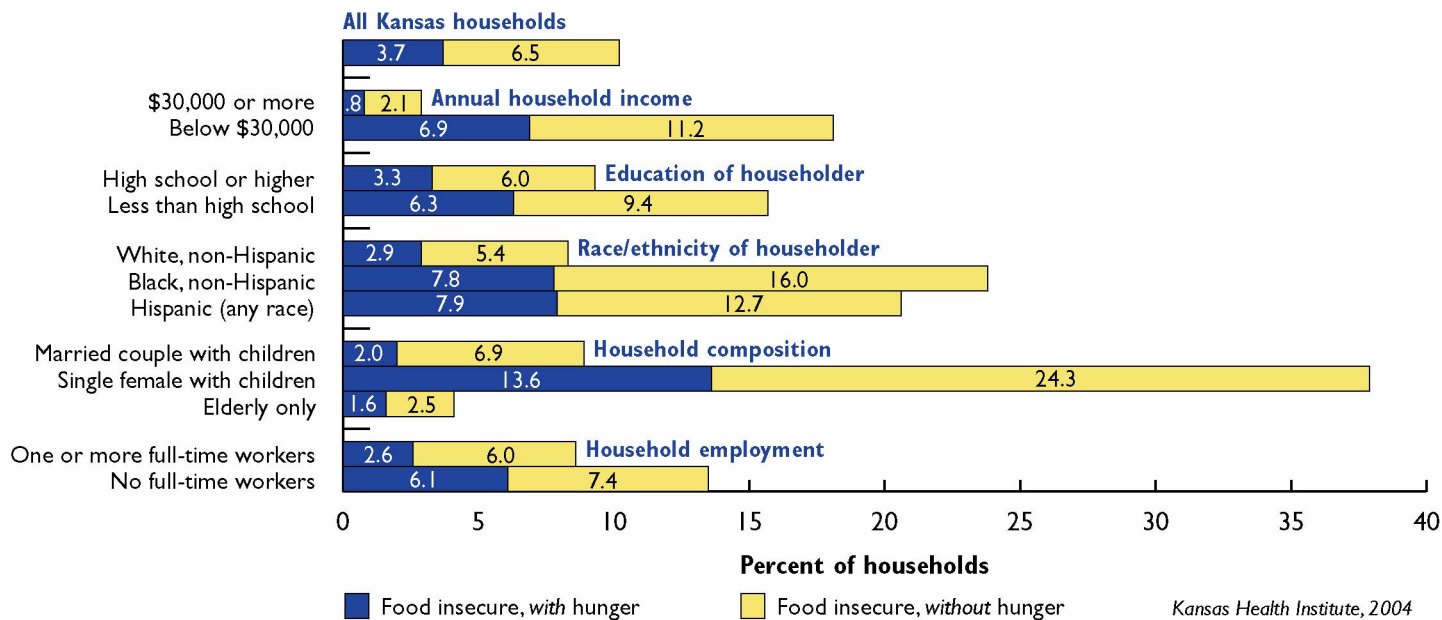


the household budget. In this study, unemployment also was found to be a strong predictor for food insecurity; only 70 percent of households that had an unemployed adult looking for work had been food secure for the entire year, compared to 91 percent of Kansas households with no unemployed members at the time of the survey interview.

Although household income is a key factor in access to adequate nutrition, household hunger and food insecurity cross many demographic boundaries and are sometimes found where they might not be expected. As shown in Table 3, food insecurity and hunger exist among working households, where individuals appear to be healthy and active in the community. Even among Kansas households reporting incomes of \$50,000 or more, some reported having experienced food insecurity. About one of every fifteen food-insecure households had annual household incomes of \$40,000 or more.

Most food-insecure households were working families. More than 58 percent of food insecure households in Kansas had at least one full-time worker in the family. Almost one in five (18 percent) food-insecure homes had two or more full-time workers.

Food Insecurity and Hunger in Kansas, by Household Characteristics 1995–2000



Single mothers and minorities—the most vulnerable groups

While elderly people are at increased risk for many health and social problems, Kansas households consisting of older adults (60 years or older) seem to be doing well in regard to access to food, with only four percent reporting food insecurity between 1995 and 2000. In contrast, homes led by single mothers with children experience food insecurity more often than any other household type, with 38 percent of such households being classified as food-insecure. Single-mother households in Kansas were more likely to be food-insecure than their national counterparts, where only 30 percent of households were food-insecure (statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level). In both Kansas and the nation, about one-third of food-insecure households led by single females with children had at least one person who went hungry at some time during the previous year.

Additional data available from the CPS Food Security Supplement may provide some insight for the reasons that single-mother households in Kansas are more likely than their national peers to be food insecure. While Kansas households headed by single mothers were slightly more likely than comparable U.S. households to have at least one member working full-time, household

incomes in the Kansas group were slightly lower. Two-thirds (67 percent) of Kansas households consisting of single women with children had incomes below 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Level, or FPL, (approximately equal to an income of \$31,500 for a family of four in 2000), compared to the national rate of 63 percent ($p < 0.05$). The effect of this income difference may be negated, however, by lower costs of living in Kansas as compared to other locations. Although determining the reasons requires further investigation, findings from this study clearly indicate that many single mothers in Kansas are having difficulty feeding their families, and they are more likely to struggle in Kansas than in other parts of the nation.

Households led by racial or ethnic minority individuals are also at increased risk for food insecurity. From 1995 to 2000, 24 percent of Kansas households led by Blacks and 21 percent of households led by Hispanics reported that they had experienced food insecurity in the past year. By comparison, just eight percent of white, non-Hispanic households in Kansas reported food insecurity. Findings at the national level were similar. As seen in single-mother households, minority households frequently experience both poverty and food insecurity. More than one-half of Kansas Black and Hispanic households surveyed lived below 185 percent of the poverty level between 1995 and 2000. Because it would be difficult to separate the effects of race and ethnicity from those of income in this study, we cannot determine with certainty how much of the increased risk for minority households may be attributable to their racial or ethnic identity alone. We were unable to determine rates of food insecurity and hunger among other racial minority groups due to insufficient sample size at the state level.

Unemployment increases the risk of hunger

As mentioned previously, unemployment was strongly associated with increased rates of food insecurity and hunger. Nearly one in three (30 percent) Kansas households that included one or more unemployed adults at the time of the survey reported experiencing food insecurity at some time during the previous year, and 12 percent reported going hungry. In Kansas households where the only worker(s) were unemployed, 40 percent reported insecurity (including those that were food-insecure with hunger), and nearly one in five households (19 percent) reported hunger. This is the highest rate of hunger reported by any of the subgroups analyzed in this study. Clearly, unemployment benefits and available nutrition support programs have not

provided an effective “safety net” for the prevention of food insecurity and hunger among households experiencing unemployment. From the data available in this study, we are not able to determine whether this is because of insufficient program availability, non-participation choices made by at-risk households, or lack of household knowledge about available assistance programs.

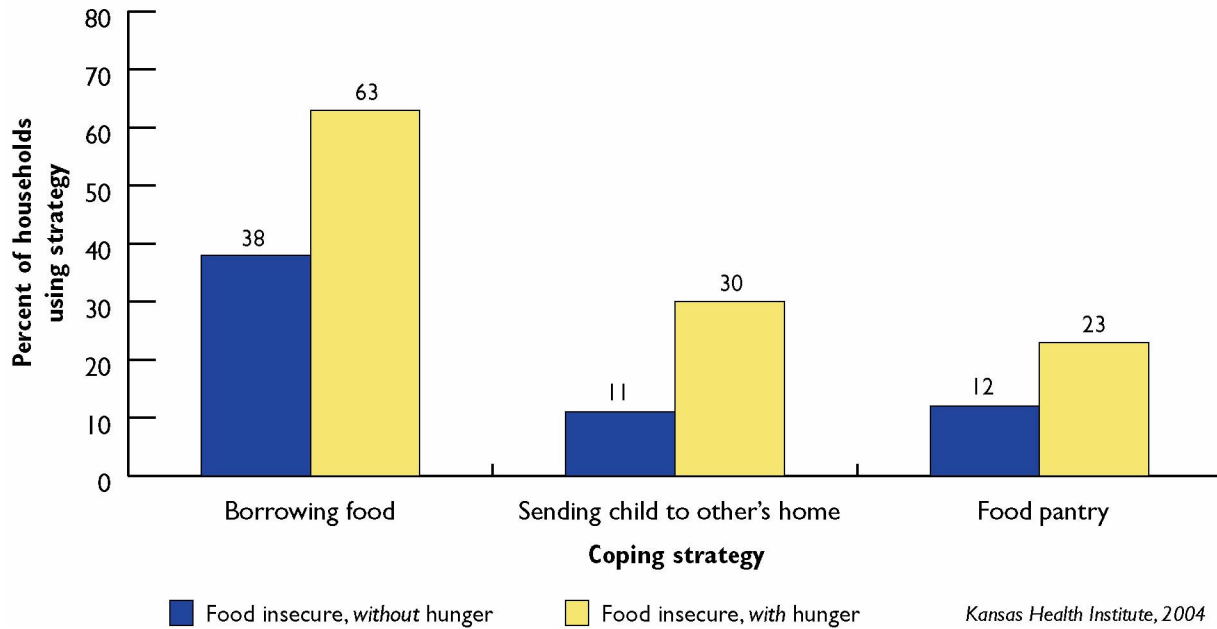
Food insecurity and hunger exist in both rural and urban Kansas

Although the data available in the CPS Survey do not allow us to determine food insecurity rates for specific locations or regions within Kansas, we were able to look at food insecurity in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas of the state. We found no significant differences in the rates of food insecurity and hunger; 10 percent of households in both groups reported food insecurity.

How do families cope with food insecurity?

Food-insecure families use many strategies to prevent hunger. In most households, children (especially younger children) are protected from hunger unless hunger among adults in the household becomes quite severe.¹⁴ Parents may skip meals themselves, postpone paying other bills in order to be able to buy food, obtain food from food pantries or soup kitchens, borrow food from friends or neighbors, or send their children to other homes for meals in order to forestall hunger among their children. The Food Security Supplement survey asked food-insecure households how often they used such coping strategies; results are presented in Table 4. Borrowing food from friends or relatives was the strategy reported most often by households that experienced food insecurity.

Coping Strategies Reported by Food Insecure Households in Kansas, 1995–2000



Food pantries and emergency kitchens are the main privately supported providers of emergency food assistance, and are often locally based and heavily reliant upon volunteer effort. Food pantries provide households with packages of grocery items to be taken home for preparation; emergency kitchens provide prepared meals for clients to eat on-site. Both nationally and in Kansas, the use of food pantries and emergency kitchens for nutritional support was reported only infrequently by food-insecure families. Just 12 percent of food-insecure (without hunger) Kansas households reported that they had obtained food from food pantries. Among Kansas households reporting hunger, 23 percent said they had used a food pantry. The state survey samples were too small to provide reliable estimates of the numbers of Kansas households that had eaten meals at emergency kitchens.

Reasons for the low rates of reported use of these community resources for supplemental food supplies are somewhat unclear. In some cases, families may live in locations where there are no local food pantries or community kitchens. In other cases, families may not be aware of resources that exist in their communities, or may be resistant to accepting charity assistance. In 1999 and 2000, households were asked whether there was a church, food pantry or food bank in

their community where they could obtain emergency food if needed; 15 percent of food-insecure Kansas households said there was no such resource in their community, and another 10 percent said they did not know if there was a resource. Nevertheless, of the remaining 75 percent of food-insecure respondents who knew of an available resource, only one in five had used the food pantry services.

Government nutrition support programs also help to prevent hunger

In addition to informal coping strategies and privately sponsored assistance programs, the federal government sponsors several large nutrition assistance programs. The Food Security Supplement survey asks low-income households about their participation in four of these: Food Stamps, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), free and reduced-price meals from the National School Lunch Program, and free and reduced-price meals from the Elder Meal programs. Program participation findings are shown in Table 5 and discussed below.

The Food Stamp Program is the centerpiece of the federal hunger safety net, and the largest food assistance program in the United States. Participating families are given vouchers or electronic benefit cards that allow them to purchase food items through local retail grocery outlets. The Food Stamp Program is an “entitlement” program, meaning that anyone who meets the eligibility standards (income less than 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level, U.S. citizenship, limited assets) can receive food stamp benefits. Nonetheless, many eligible people do not participate in the Food Stamp Program. Researchers have estimated that only 53 percent of Kansans who were eligible for food stamps in September 2000 participated in the program, slightly below the national average of 59 percent for that month.¹⁵ Of low-income (less than 185 percent of the poverty level) Kansas households surveyed between 1997 and 2000, 41 percent of households that reported hunger, and 28 percent of those that were food-insecure without hunger, had used food stamps in the past year. (Data from 1995 and 1996 were not included here because survey questions were not comparable). Among food-secure households in Kansas, about 6 percent reported receiving food stamp benefits at some time during the year. While food stamp benefits may have helped these families avoid food insecurity, it is also evident from the study findings that the food stamp program did not serve all low-income, food-insecure or hungry households.

Data available in this study do not allow us to know with certainty how many of the households experiencing food insecurity or hunger would have been eligible for food stamp benefits, but chose not to participate. Social stigma, burdensome application processes, inconvenient office hours and locations, fear of deportation, brief and transient periods of food insecurity, or availability of alternative sources of assistance may all be factors that function as disincentives to participation in the Food Stamp Program. Our study findings also indicate that some households that had participated in the Food Stamp Program during the previous year also reported experiencing hunger. Because the survey asked households whether they had received food stamps or experienced food insecurity at any time during the prior year, it is possible that the families were not participating in the Food Stamp Program at the same point in time that they experienced food insecurity or hunger. Other families may have experienced episodes of hunger because they were unable to make their food stamp benefits last until the end of the monthly benefit period. On average, food stamp benefits provide about 79 cents per person per meal; food purchases must be budgeted carefully to ensure that adequate food supplies are available throughout the monthly benefit period.

The National School Lunch Program is the second of the three major federal nutrition support programs, with more than 99,000 participating schools across the U.S. All meals served under the program are subsidized through federal and state funding, and free or reduced-price meals must be made available to low-income students. Children from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the poverty level are eligible for free meals, while those with family incomes between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals, for which students can be charged no more than 40 cents. Schools may also offer breakfasts to students under a related program, but not all do. Schools participating in the breakfast program must offer free and reduced-price meals to low-income students, under the same income guidelines as the lunch program. Nationally, about 57 percent of the school lunches served in 2001 were free or reduced-price.¹⁶ Among low-income Kansas households (less than 185 percent of the poverty level) with school-age children, participation in the free or reduced-price lunch program was higher than participation reported for the other federal nutrition programs; about two-thirds of low-income, food-insecure households with school-age children reported that their children had received free or reduced-price school lunches in the previous 30

days. Of food-insecure or hungry households that reported their child(ren) had received free or reduced-price lunches, more than two-thirds reported that their child(ren) also participated in a reduced-price breakfast program.

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) is the third of the three major federally sponsored nutrition support programs. The program serves low-income (incomes at or below 185 percent of FPL) pregnant, postpartum and breast-feeding women, and infants and children up to age five who are determined to be at nutritional risk. It provides food vouchers, nutrition counseling and referrals to health and social services to participants at no charge. The vouchers may be used to purchase specific food items such as milk, infant formula, cereals, juice, peanut butter and eggs. Unlike the Food Stamp Program, WIC is not an entitlement program. Instead, specific amounts of funding are allocated to states each year. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has estimated that about 47 percent of all babies born in the United States participate in WIC. Of all eligible women, infants and children, the program is estimated to serve about 90 percent.¹⁷ In this survey, households with incomes less than 185 percent of the poverty level and a woman of childbearing age or with one or more children under the age of five were asked whether they had received WIC benefits during the previous 30 days. In Kansas, 21 percent of low-income, food-insecure respondent households reported recent WIC participation. As with the reported food stamp participation rates, not all households that were asked about participation in the WIC program would have been eligible for benefits, so these results must be interpreted with some degree of caution. Nevertheless, these findings suggest low participation and seem somewhat inconsistent with the much higher USDA estimates of program participation.

Perhaps the most significant finding from our analysis of program participation is that many of the low-income households that reported food insecurity or hunger did not report receiving nutritional support benefits from any of the major federal government programs (Food Stamp Program, WIC, free and reduced-price school meals, or free and reduced-price meals from the Elder Meal programs). From 1995 to 2000, only 56 percent of Kansas households that experienced food-insecurity without hunger, and 50 percent of Kansas households that experienced hunger also reported receiving benefits from one or more of the four programs

(Table 5). Adding in reports of assistance received from food pantries or soup kitchens changes the results only slightly. Although the results for Kansas are slightly better than the U.S. rates, these findings suggest that many families are struggling to meet their household nutritional needs without the assistance of existing safety-net programs.

SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF HUNGER

Reducing poverty seems to be the surest way to reduce hunger and food insecurity in Kansas. There are, however, many other ways that policymakers, program managers and communities in Kansas can improve access to adequate nutrition by all members of their constituencies. Examples of the range of possible options are discussed below, and Internet addresses for additional information are listed in Appendix II.

Options for Reducing Food Insecurity and Hunger

State-level policy options:

- Food policy councils
- Enhanced coordination and referral between nutrition support programs
- Increasing program participation rates
- Expanding program eligibility
- Expansion of school breakfast and summer meal programs for children
- Limiting legal liability for food recovery activities
- Promotion of farm-to-school programs

Local and community options:

- Expansion of food pantry and emergency kitchen programs
- Increasing consumer awareness of available assistance
- Summer meal programs for school-age children
- Group purchasing cooperatives
- Farmer's market programs
- Community gardening projects
- Food recovery and gleaning programs
- Consumer education on low-cost nutrition options

State-level policy options

There are a number of approaches that might be undertaken at the state level to address food insecurity and hunger among the state’s population. For example, some states have formed food policy councils, composed of broad-based public and private representation from all food-related sectors in the state (agriculture, food distribution, retailers, food safety, food security, etc.).

These councils are tasked with a “food system” approach, to bring attention to all facets of the food system from seed to table, while providing information and policy recommendations for improving the food system within their jurisdictions. Issues of food insecurity and hunger are within the defined scope of interest for most of the currently existing food policy councils.

Stronger coordination and referral networks between various nutrition support programs provide another opportunity to reduce food insecurity and hunger. Currently, there is no direct service coordination between the Kansas Food Stamp Program (administered by the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services) and the Kansas WIC program (administered by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Bureau for Children, Youth and Families and accessed through local health departments). Given current budgetary constraints and reductions within SRS local offices, enhanced cross-agency coordination of nutrition support activities may be worth exploring as an opportunity for efficiency gains and service enhancement. Unemployment benefit offices (administered through the Kansas Department of Human Resources) could provide information and referral services to the unemployed who may be eligible for nutrition programs.

Examples of other state-level policy options include encouraging school districts to expand the breakfast program and after school snack program to more students, providing start-up funding to expand summer meal programs for children, creating laws to limit legal liability for food recovery programs and promoting farm-to-school programs, which encourage the purchase of locally-grown food products to supplement school meals.

Another area where Kansas policymakers could address food insecurity rates is through the support of state-level data collection efforts to monitor food insecurity and hunger in a timely and comprehensive manner. While the data available from the CPS Food Security Supplement

provide estimates of the overall magnitude of the food insecurity problem, the long time lag between data collection and public availability, coupled with data limitations that do not allow more complete geographic or sub-population analyses, limit our ability to fully understand patterns of food insecurity and hunger, or to effectively target interventions within our state.

Increasing program participation

Maximizing the numbers of eligible households and individuals who participate in nutrition support programs is one important way the state can improve food security among low-income families, while accessing additional federal dollars. After a decline in the mid-1990s, the number of households receiving food stamps in Kansas has been on the rise. Participation rates are also rising, from 52 percent of individuals eligible in state fiscal year 2001 to 68 percent in state fiscal year 2003.¹⁸ Food stamp officials attribute the increase to program changes such as easier application processes, enhanced outreach efforts that encourage eligible people to apply, and the creation of more access points for people to obtain application materials. While increased participation rates are laudable, nearly one-third of eligible Kansas families did not participate in 2002, signaling the need for enhancements.

Low rates of utilization of food pantry and emergency kitchen assistance were reported by households experiencing food insecurity and hunger. Efforts to enhance the visibility of these important community resources, and to reduce or eliminate the social stigma that may be associated with participation, may help to connect food-insecure households with assistance.

Expanding program availability

Participation in the federal school lunch and breakfast programs is high in Kansas. But for children who rely on free and reduced-priced school meals to stave off hunger during the school year, the summer months can be difficult. Community-based summer meal programs for low-income children can help to fill that nutritional gap. Administrative program data from the USDA indicate that, during the 2001–2002 school year, 48 students participated in the school breakfast program for every 100 who received free or reduced-price lunches in Kansas, ranking Kansas 15th among states. But fewer summer nutrition programs are available to children; in 2002 there were 177 Summer Food Service sites in Kansas, compared to 1,677 schools

participating in the School Lunch Program. Just seven students received summer lunches in July 2001 for every 100 who ate free or reduced-price lunches during the school year, ranking Kansas 47th in the country on this measure.^{19,20} Although administrative burden and inadequate reimbursement rates have been frequently cited as barriers to implementation of summer nutrition programs, many communities have found creative solutions through partnerships between local school districts, community hospitals and churches, and other community organizations. The USDA publication “*2002 Model Programs Booklet: USDA Summer Food Service Program*” provides many examples of such creative community collaborations.²¹

Local and community options

In addition to the privately sponsored food pantry and emergency kitchen programs that have already been mentioned, there are many other ways in which community groups may work to reduce food insecurity and hunger. The examples included here are not intended to be all-inclusive, but rather, to stimulate exploration of potential community solutions.

Food cooperatives or group-purchasing clubs are one way to enhance food-purchasing power within the community. These programs generally operate on one of two models: buying clubs where members pool their resources to purchase foods in bulk quantities at reduced costs, or retail cooperative food stores that maintain an inventory more like regular food retailers. In the latter, members often purchase items at a discounted price in return for their voluntary work contributions. The Heartland Share project, which operates in over 200 communities across Kansas, offers participants a monthly ‘share’ of foods purchased through bulk purchasing power at savings of up to 50 percent, in exchange for two hours of community service each month. Multiple shares can be purchased, so long as additional community service hours have been fulfilled. This program, open to households at any income level, is a creative way to stretch food budgets while also strengthening community ties.

Farmer’s markets are another opportunity to increase the availability of low-cost, fresh produce to low-income households, particularly when the sales location is in or near low-income neighborhoods. By bringing fresh, locally grown products directly to consumers, nutrient-rich

vegetables and fruits can be offered at prices often below retail, and both growers and consumers benefit.

Community gardening projects, where growing space and seeds are made available to community residents who are interested in growing their own fresh produce, can help low-income families to supplement their diets with nutrient-rich fresh fruits and vegetables. These programs offer the additional benefits of community-building and enhanced self-sufficiency through skill development. However, they do also require a significant investment of time on the part of the participants, and may not be feasible for all families.

Food recovery and gleaning programs are another approach that may offer community benefit at multiple levels. The USDA estimated that in 1995, about 96 billion pounds of food (27 percent of the edible supply in the U.S.) was lost to human consumption at various stages in the marketing system.¹ While not all of these losses are recoverable for human consumption, many are. For example, in Washington, D.C., AmeriCorps workers have joined with a local gleaning organization to pick and distribute fresh produce that would have otherwise gone to waste in the fields because it was misshapen, small in size or slightly blemished. In other communities, organizations are working with local restaurants to recover excess prepared and processed foods and redistribute them to local meal site programs. Through gleaning and perishable food salvage programs, safe and nutritious foods may be diverted from the waste stream and utilized to feed disadvantaged individuals. Food recovery also offers additional benefits by allowing agencies that serve the hungry to reallocate resources that would have been spent on food toward other needed services.

Educational programs that focus on budget management and balanced low-cost nutrition strategies may help low-income families provide better nutritional balance and avoid food insecurity during periods of budget shortfalls.

Finally, state and local governments should evaluate the locations of supermarkets and grocery stores within their communities. Research has shown that low-income households, particularly in rural and poor urban areas, generally have less access to reasonably priced, high-quality foods

than wealthier households. Supermarkets, which are more frequently located in suburban areas, can afford to charge lower prices and provide a wider variety of products.²² Local governments, by offering economic incentives or easing zoning restrictions, may be able to attract grocery retailers to low-income areas.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

This study is subject to several limitations. First, because homeless people were not included in this survey sample, our findings may underestimate the number of families and individuals experiencing food insecurity or hunger, and most likely result in underestimates of the percentages of food-insecure households that sought assistance from food pantries and emergency kitchens. Second, for reasons of privacy protection, detailed information on household income and geographic location of residence were not available in the public-use data files. These factors limited our ability to provide precise estimates of which families would have qualified, on the basis of household income, for each of the federal nutrition support programs. We were also unable to conduct any analysis of specific geographic locations within the state that might be at increased risk for food insecurity and hunger. Better understanding differences by locality within the state would be helpful in tailoring interventions to the most vulnerable populations. Third, sample size limitations hampered our ability to conduct additional sub-population analyses that might be helpful in identifying vulnerable populations and tailoring interventions more effectively. Finally, the substantial time lag between data collection and data availability limited our ability to comment upon the current food security conditions in our state. The data in this report describe food insecurity and hunger only through the year 2000. Despite these limitations, the available data do provide us with a reliable baseline measure, from which we can measure future progress. Furthermore, the sub-group analyses that we were able to conduct provide us with valuable knowledge about the increased vulnerability of some household types, such as households led by single mothers, minority households, and households experiencing unemployment.

CONCLUSIONS

Between the years 1995 and 2000, little progress has been made in reducing the number of Kansas households that experience food insecurity and hunger. It is important to consider that the data available for this study were collected during a period of strong economic conditions, and that hunger and food insecurity likely increased during the subsequent period of economic downturn. The data available for this study tell us two things with certainty. First, food insecurity and hunger persist in Kansas. Second, we know that many of the households that experienced food insecurity or hunger did not obtain assistance from the nutrition safety-net programs that might have eased their situation.

Reducing poverty seems to be the surest way to reduce hunger and food insecurity in Kansas. But, short of that, there may be additional options that Kansas policymakers and local communities can employ to ensure that sufficient amounts of nutritious foods are within reach of all Kansans. Many of the potential solutions could be implemented with minimal cost to the state by taking advantage of available federal funding and community volunteer resources.

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Table 1: Number of Households Interviewed, by Year

Year	Kansas	United States
1995	572	44,647
1996	589	86,421
1997	576	127,536
1998	588	167,481
1999	543	205,127
2000	575	245,529

Table 2: Annual Household Food Insecurity and Hunger Estimates

	Kansas			United States		
	Estimated # of Households	Percent	95% C.I.	Estimated # of Households	Percent	95% C.I.
Food Secure						
1995	886,367	88.8%	86.6–91.0	88,271,000	88.1%	87.8–88.4
1996	866,819	89.6%	86.7–92.4	90,863,000	89.6%	89.3–89.9
1997	954,149	89.6%	87.3–91.8	102,280,000	91.3%	91.0–91.5
1998	931,934	91.0%	88.8–93.3	103,490,000	89.9%	89.6–90.2
1999	1,019,379	90.5%	88.3–92.7	104,810,000	91.3%	91.0–91.5
2000	943,053	89.6%	87.3–92.0	106,230,000	90.9%	90.7–91.2
1995–2000		89.9%	88.7–91.1		90.2%	90.0–90.3
Food Insecure, Without Hunger						
1995	71,887	7.2%	5.4–9.0	7,784,000	7.8%	7.5–8.0
1996	63,599	6.6%	4.2–8.9	6,412,000	6.3%	6.1–6.6
1997	66,467	6.2%	4.5–8.0	5,817,000	5.7%	5.5–5.9
1998	50,820	5.0%	3.3–6.7	6,821,000	6.6%	6.4–6.8
1999	78,323	7.0%	5.0–8.9	6,166,000	5.9%	5.7–6.1
2000	70,985	6.7%	4.8–8.7	6,521,000	6.1%	5.9–6.4
1995–2000		6.5%	5.5–7.4		6.4%	6.3–6.5
Food Insecure, With Hunger						
1995	39,726	4.0%	2.6–5.3	4,160,000	4.2%	4.0–4.3
1996	37,511	3.9%	2.1–5.7	4,127,000	4.1%	3.9–4.3
1997	44,846	4.2%	2.8–5.7	3,126,000	3.1%	2.9–3.2
1998	40,857	4.0%	2.5–5.5	3,627,000	3.5%	3.3–3.7
1999	28,365	2.5%	1.3–3.7	2,987,000	2.8%	2.7–3.0
2000	37,911	3.6%	2.2–5.1	3,135,000	3.0%	2.8–3.1
1995–2000		3.7%	2.9–4.4		3.4%	3.3–3.5

There were no statistically significant differences observed between Kansas and national rates.

**Table 3: Food Insecurity and Hunger in Previous Year,
by Household Characteristic, 1995–2000**

Household Characteristic	Kansas				United States			
	Food Insecure, Without Hunger		Food Insecure, With Hunger		Food Insecure, Without Hunger		Food Insecure, With Hunger	
	Percent	95% C.I.	Percent	95% C.I.	Percent	95% C.I.	Percent	95% C.I.
Household Income								
Below \$10,000	16.2%	12.1–20.3	13.0%	9.3–16.8	18.3%	17.8–18.8	12.8%	12.4–13.3
\$10,000–\$19,999	10.9%	8.8–13.7	5.3%	3.2–7.4	12.3%	11.9–12.7	5.8%	5.6–6.1
\$20,000–\$29,999	7.7%	5.2–10.1	3.9%	2.1–5.6	7.4%	7.1–7.7	3.2%	3.0–3.4
\$30,000–\$39,999	3.0%	1.3–4.7	2.2%	0.8–3.7	4.3%	4.0–4.6	1.6%	1.4–1.7
\$40,000 and above	1.7%	0.8–2.6	0.2%	0.0–0.5	1.4%	1.3–1.5	0.5%	0.4–0.5
Income/Poverty Ratio								
Less than 1.85% of FPL	13.9%*	11.6–16.2	8.7%	6.9–10.6	15.9%*	15.6–16.2	8.6%*	8.4–8.8
<i>Equal or greater than 185% of FPL</i>	2.6%	1.9–3.4	1.1%	0.6–1.6	2.3%	2.2–2.4	1.2%	1.1–1.3
Household Composition								
<i>With children <18 years</i>	11.2%	9.2–13.1	4.5%	3.2–5.9	10.6%	10.3–10.8	4.1%	4.0–4.3
<i>Married, with Children</i>	6.9%	5.1–8.8	2.0%	1.0–3.0	7.2%	7.0–7.4	2.2%	2.0–2.3
Single Male with Children	NR	NR	NR	NR	11.5%*	10.5–12.5	4.4%*	3.7–5.1
Single Female with Children	24.3%*	18.5–30.2	13.6%*	9.0–18.2	20.4%*	19.8–21.0	9.9%*	9.4–10.3
Adults over age 60 only	2.5%*	1.3–3.6	1.6%*	0.6–2.6	3.0%*	2.9–3.2	1.6%*	1.5–1.8
Adults under age 60, no Children	4.1%*	2.8–5.3	4.3%*	3.0–5.7	4.5%*	4.3–4.6	4.0%*	3.9–4.2
Race/Ethnicity of Householder								
<i>White, non-Hispanic</i>	5.4% §	5.3–5.4	2.9% §	2.8–2.9	4.5%	4.4–4.6	2.5%	2.4–2.6
Black, non-Hispanic	16.0% §*	15.8–16.1	7.8% *	7.7–7.9	13.1%*	12.6–13.5	7.4%*	7.1–7.8
Hispanic, any Race	12.7% § *	12.4–13.0	7.9% *	7.7–8.2	14.3%*	13.8–14.8	6.2%*	5.9–6.5
Education of Householder								
<i>Less than High School</i>	9.4%	6.3–12.5	6.3%	3.7–8.9	12.2%	11.9–12.6	6.6%	6.4–6.9
Graduated High School	7.1%	5.4–8.9	3.9%	2.6–5.2	7.1%*	6.9–7.3	3.5%*	3.4–3.7
Post High School	5.3% §*	4.2–6.5	2.9%*	2.1–3.8	4.0%*	3.8–4.1	2.3%*	2.2–2.4

**Table 3 Continued: Food Insecurity and Hunger in Previous Year,
by Household Characteristic, 1995–2000**

Household Characteristic	Kansas				United States			
	Food Insecure, Without Hunger		Food Insecure, With Hunger		Food Insecure, Without Hunger		Food Insecure, With Hunger	
	Percent	95% C.I.	Percent	95% C.I.	Percent	95% C.I.	Percent	95% C.I.
Household Employment								
<i>1 or more full-time workers</i>	6.0%	4.9–7.1	2.6%	1.8–3.3	5.5%	5.4–5.6	2.4%	2.3–2.5
0 full time, 1 or more part-time	9.3%*	5.5–13.1	8.2%*	4.3–12.1	10.0%*	9.5–10.6	6.0%*	5.6–6.5
All workers are unemployed	21.3%*	9.5–33.1	18.8%*	7.9–30.0	19.1%*	17.8–20.4	15.9%*	14.7–17.1
Not in labor force	5.6%	3.8–7.5	4.4%	2.7–6.0	7.1%*	6.8–7.3	4.7%*	4.5–4.9
Unemployment								
<i>0 unemployed workers</i>	5.8%	4.9–6.8	3.2%	2.5–3.9	5.9%	5.8–6.0	3.1%	3.0–3.1
1 or more unemployed	17.9%*	11.3–24.5	12.2%*	7.0–17.4	14.3%*	13.6–14.9	9.5%*	9.0–10.0

NR – Not reportable due to small sample size (Relative Standard Error greater than 30%)

* Indicates that the difference between that group and the reference group (indicated in italics) is statistically significant at p<0.05

§ Indicates that the difference between the Kansas and national estimates is statistically significant at p<0.05.

**Table 4: Coping Strategies: Percent of Food Insecure Households Reporting,
1995–2000**

Coping Strategy	Kansas				United States			
	Food Insecure, Without Hunger		Food Insecure, With Hunger		Food Insecure, Without Hunger		Food Insecure, With Hunger	
	Percent	95% C.I.	Percent	95% C.I.	Percent	95% C.I.	Percent	95% C.I.
Got or borrowed food from others	37.8%	30.8–44.8	63.2%	53.7–72.6	41.8%	40.9–42.7	65.0%	63.8–66.1
Sent children to eat at others' homes	10.7%	5.3–16.2	30.0%	18.6–41.2	10.4%	9.7–11.1	33.5%	31.7–35.3
Got food from food pantry or church, previous year	11.6%	7.0–16.1	23.0%	14.8–31.3	12.7%	12.1–13.3	26.7%	25.6–27.8
Ate meals at emergency kitchen, previous year	NR	NR	NR	NR	1.5%	1.3–1.7	5.2%	4.6–5.7
Any of the above strategies	57.9%§	56.6–59.2	83.7%§	81.7–85.8	61.6%§	61.5–61.6	88.2%§	88.1–88.2

NR – Not reportable due to small sample size (Relative Standard Error greater than 30%)

§ Indicates that the difference between the Kansas and national estimates is statistically significant at p<0.05.

Table 5: Participation in Federal Nutrition Support Programs: Percent of Low-Income,^{1,2} Food Insecure Households Reporting Program Participation, 1995–2000

Program	Kansas				United States			
	Food Insecure, Without Hunger		Food Insecure, With Hunger		Food Insecure, Without Hunger		Food Insecure, With Hunger	
	Percent	95% C.I.	Percent	95% C.I.	Percent	95% C.I.	Percent	95% C.I.
Food Stamps, within past year	28.1% §	22.4–33.8	41.2%	33.3–49.1	35.8%§	35.0–36.6	41.5%	40.3–42.6
Free or Reduced-Price Meals for Elders, within past 30 days ² (households with a member age 60 or greater)	NR	NR	NR	NR	6.7%	5.8–7.6	8.5%	6.7–10.3
Free or Reduced-Price School Lunches, within past 30 days ² (households with a child age 5-18)	67.0%	56.2–77.8	66.1%	52.6–79.7	62.1%	60.8–63.5	66.6%	64.6–68.5
Free or Reduced-Price School Breakfasts, within past 30 days ² (households with a child age 5-18)	46.1%	34.2–58.0	53.4%	40.3–66.6	42.4%	41.0–43.8	44.3%	42.2–46.5
WIC, within past 30 days ² (households with a woman age 15-45 or child age less than 5)	21.2%	13.1–29.2	12.1%	5.2–19.1	20.8%	19.7–21.8	17.9%	16.4–19.4
Percent of all low-income, food-insecure households receiving assistance from any of the above programs	55.8% §	54.4–57.1	49.8%	48.0–51.6	51.0%	50.9–51.0	48.1%	48.1–48.2

1. Analysis is restricted to low-income households (household income less than 185% of the Federal Poverty Level) because most households with higher incomes were not asked program participation questions.

2. Not all households were asked each question. Households were asked about participation in age-related programs only if a household member was within the eligible age range.

NR – Not reportable due to small sample size (Relative Standard Error greater than 30%)

§ Indicates that the difference between the Kansas and National estimates is statistically significant at $p < 0.05$.

APPENDIX I. Current Population Survey, Hunger and Food Insecurity Screening Questions

1. We worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more.
2. The food that we bought just didn't last, and we didn't have money to get more.
3. We couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.
4. In the last 12 months, did you or other adults in your household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?
5. (If yes to question 4) How often did this happen?
6. In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?
7. In the last 12 months, were you ever hungry but didn't eat because you couldn't afford enough food?
8. In the last 12 months, did you lose weight because you didn't have enough money for food?
9. In the last 12 months, did you or other adults in your household ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food?
10. (If yes to question 9) How often did this happen?

Questions 11-18 are asked only if the household includes children age 0-18

11. We relied on only a few kinds of low-cost food to feed our children because we were running out of money to buy food.
12. We couldn't feed our children a balanced meal, because we couldn't afford that.
13. Our children were not eating enough because we just couldn't afford enough food.
14. In the last 12 months, did you ever cut the size of your children's meals because there wasn't enough money for food?
15. In the last 12 months, were the children ever hungry but you just couldn't afford more food?
16. In the last 12 months, did your children ever skip a meal because there wasn't enough money for food?
17. (If yes to question 16) How often did this happen?
18. In the last 12 months, did your children ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food?

Scoring: A 'yes' response 0–2 items is considered food secure, a 'yes' on 3-7 items is scored as food insecure without hunger, 8-12 items food insecure with moderate hunger, 13-18 items, food secure with severe hunger. For households with no children, a 'yes' on 0-2 items is considered food secure, 3-5 items food insecure without hunger; 6-8 items, food insecure with moderate hunger; 9-10 items, food insecure with severe hunger. Questions 4, 9, and 16 are counted as 'yes' if it occurred in 3 or more months during the previous year.

APPENDIX II. Resources for Community Food Security

Organizations Working to Reduce Food Insecurity and Hunger in the U.S.

United States Department of Agriculture Food Security Initiative
http://www.reeusda.gov/food_security/foodshp.htm

Food Research and Action Center
<http://www.frac.org/index.html>

Community Food Security Coalition
<http://www.foodsecurity.org/index.html>

America's Second Harvest
<http://www.secondharvest.org/>

Share Our Strength
<http://www.strength.org/>

Organizations Working to Reduce Food Insecurity and Hunger in Kansas

Kansas Foodbank Warehouse
<http://www.ksfoodbank.org/index.html>

Kansas Campaign to End Childhood Hunger
<http://www.ifmnet.org/programs/ctech.cfm>

Kansas Nutrition Network
<http://www.kansasnutritionnetwork.org/>

Measuring Food Security

“Guide to Measuring Household Food Security,” United States Department of Agriculture.
<http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/FoodSecurity/surveytools/>

“Community Food Security Assessment Toolkit,” United States Department of Agriculture.
<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/efan02013/>

State Government and Policy Options

“Good Choices in Hard Times: Fifteen Ideas for States to Reduce Hunger and Stimulate the Economy,” Food Research and Action Center.
<http://www.frac.org/html/publications/pubs.html>

“State Government Responses to the Food Assistance Gap,” Food Research and Action Center.
<http://www.frac.org/html/publications/pubs.html>

State Food Policy Councils

Iowa <http://www.iowafoodpolicy.org/>

Connecticut <http://www.foodpc.state.ct.us/>

Oklahoma <http://www.kerrcenter.com/kerrweb/ofpc/>

Community Programs

“Together We Can! A What, Why and How Handbook for Working to End Hunger in Your Community,” United States Department of Agriculture.

http://www.reeusda.gov/food_security/foodshp.htm

“The National Nutrition Safety Net: Tools for Community Food Security,” United States Department of Agriculture.

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsec/FILES/SafetyNet.pdf>

“USDA’s Community Food Security Initiative Action Plan,” United States Department of Agriculture.

http://www.reeusda.gov/food_security/actplan.htm

“A Citizen’s Guide to Food Recovery,” United States Department of Agriculture.

<http://www.usda.gov/news/pubs/gleaning/content.htm>

Heartland Share Program Information

www.heartland.org

“A Guide to Community Food Projects,” Community Food Security Coalition.

http://www.foodsecurity.org/cfsc_case_studies.pdf

Summer Meal Programs

“Hunger Doesn’t Take a Vacation,” Food Research and Action Center.

<http://www.frac.org/html/publications/pubs.html>

“2002 Model Programs Booklet: USDA Summer Food Service Program,” United States Department of Agriculture.

www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Summer/States/model_programs.html

“A Guide to Starting the Summer Food Service Program in Your Community,” United States Department of Agriculture.

www.summerfood.usda.gov/Library/Guide.pdf