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Food Insecurity Trends Rising in Iowa

As Farm Bill Idles, Food Needs Challenge 13 Percent of Iowa Households

IOWA CITY, Iowa (Sept. 4, 2013) — While Congress fails to resolve a stalemate on food assistance and the Farm Bill, long-term trends show hunger rising in Iowa.

An annual report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture on family food insecurity found a larger share of Iowa households had trouble putting food on the table, on average, in 2010-12 than a decade earlier.

Iowa was one of 39 states where the share of households with food insecurity rose from 2000-02 to the most recent three-year period, 2010-12. In Iowa, the share rose from 9.1 percent to 12.6 percent.

Furthermore, Iowa households in more severe conditions — “very low food security” — also increased from 2000-02 to 2010-12, from 2.8 percent to 4.8 percent.

The same report, however, found that Iowa did not show a statistically higher proportion of families having food insecurity issues, on average, in 2010-12 than in 2007-09.

“While the challenge to put adequate food on the table throughout the year remains less a problem in Iowa than the national average, it has become a greater challenge within our state than it used to be,” said Mike Owen, executive director of the nonpartisan Iowa Policy Project, part of the Iowa Fiscal Partnership.

“This is a glimpse of the real-life consequences for Iowa families if SNAP opponents get their way in a new Farm Bill. In short, clearly we are still in recovery from the 2007 recession.

“When the number of Iowans in dire situations already is on the rise despite improvements in SNAP through the years, lawmakers need to be aware of the consequences.”

The report found an estimated 14.5 percent of American households were food insecure at least some time during the year in 2012, meaning they lacked access to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members.

Food security/insecurity

USDA defines **food security** as access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life — one of several conditions necessary for a population to be healthy and well-nourished.

Households are classified as food secure if they report (in a Census Bureau survey) no food-insecure conditions or if they report only one or two food-insecure conditions.

Very low food security

USDA defines **very low food security** as characteristic of a household in which food intake was reduced or eating patterns were disrupted because the household lacked money and other resources for food.

On the web

The USDA report, Sept. 4, 2013:
<http://tinyurl.com/kjphkf4>

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The national change from 14.9 percent in 2011 is not considered statistically significant, and the prevalence of very low food security was unchanged at 5.7 percent, the report noted. USDA uses one-year Census data for national comparisons to previous years, but for state-level comparisons, the data are presented in three-year averages for greater reliability.

For Iowa and many states, however, the situation was different.

According to the latest report:

- **Food insecurity** in Iowa rose from 9.1 percent in 2000-02 to 11.5 percent in 2007-09, and 12.6 percent in 2010-12. The change from 2007-09 to 2010-12 was not considered statistically significant, while the longer-term increase of 3.5 percentage points was considered a statistically significant change.¹
- **Very low food security** in Iowa rose from 2.8 percent in 2000-02 to 5 percent in 2007-09, then dipped to 4.8 percent in 2010-12. The small decline from 2007-09 was not considered statistically significant, while the longer-term increase was considered statistically significant.
- **The 2010-12 Iowa averages** are significantly below the U.S. averages (14.7 percent for food insecurity, 5.6 percent for very low food security).

The Iowa Fiscal Partnership is a joint public policy analysis and research initiative of two nonpartisan, nonprofit organizations based in Iowa, the Iowa Policy Project in Iowa City and the Child & Family Policy Center in Des Moines.

¹ Alisha Coleman-Jensen, Mark Nord and Anita Singh, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, "Household Food Security in the United States in 2012," Economic Research Report No. 155, September 2013. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err-economic-research-report/err155.aspx-.Uidxtbwptw>. Also see Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "Statement by Stacy Dean, Vice President, Food Assistance Policy, On the New USDA Report on 'Food Insecurity.'" September 4, 2013. <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=4007>