

# 2022 USDA FOOD INSECURITY REPORT



## Ten Percent of America's Children Didn't Have Enough to Eat in 2022

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has released its annual report on Household Food Insecurity in the United States, which details the harsh reality that families face every year: There's just not enough food on millions of kids' plates. This new set of data shows that we've reversed substantial progress and that U.S. policies left 10% of all children — or 7.3 million kids — food insecure in 2022, an increase of 2.3 million over the previous year.

## The Current State of Children's Hunger in the U.S.

As with this year's [findings on child poverty](#), rates of food insecurity have returned to pre-pandemic levels. Inflation, high food prices, and post-pandemic policy changes plunged many families back into food insecurity. Emergency allotments and Pandemic EBT (P-EBT), remained intact through 2023, but they were not enough to offset other factors. The expanded Child Tax Credit (CTC), which reduced recipients' food insecurity by 26%, expired in January 2022, removing crucial support for millions of households. Food prices soared by 11%, straining families with already tight resources.

Food insecurity is more complex than just the amount of food on a family's table — it also concerns the quality of the food available to children. While many families have enough resources to prevent children from feeling hungry throughout the day, they may rely on processed, calorie-dense foods that are often more affordable than nutritious whole foods. Many low-income families and families of color live in “food deserts,” or areas without grocery stores, forcing them to rely on gas stations, convenience stores, and fast food restaurants that offer few or no healthy, nutritional options. In short: Even if a child has enough food to stave off the feeling of hunger they still may not be adequately nourished. USDA found the following rates of food insecurity:

- **Food Insecurity:** Children who are food insecure are defined as those who lack enough food for a healthy, active lifestyle at any time during the year due to insufficient money or resources. USDA found that in 2022 7.3 million children, or 10% of all kids, were food insecure, up from five million children (6.8%) in 2021.
- **Very Low Food Security:** Children in very low food security households may have to skip meals or go days without eating due to insufficient money or resources. The report showed an increase in children experiencing very low food insecurity, with more than 780,000 children going without food compared to 521,000 children in 2021.

The data also underscores deep inequities for families of color. Black households with children are nearly three times as likely to be food insecure as white households and more than twice as likely to be very food insecure. Hispanic households with children are more than twice as likely to be food insecure and more than three times as likely to be very food insecure than white households with children.

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## The Importance of Nutrition in Children's Development

Adequate nutrition is essential for a child's [physical, mental, and social development](#). Decades of research show that children experiencing food insecurity have poorer health outcomes and are more likely to use emergency room services than their food-secure peers. While children who experience very low food security may exhibit the expected signs, such as low body weight and reduced immune system functioning, even those with enough to eat but inadequate nutrition are likely to be in poor health.

Additionally, food insecurity makes children more susceptible to anxiety and depression. These children are also at greater risk of [developing behavioral problems and performing poorly in school](#), which may impact their long-term economic, social and other outcomes.

## Policy Recommendations

Pandemic-era benefits offered us a unique look into what our country would be like if it invested in feeding our children. Expansions to the following programs delivered significant reductions in food insecurity among children:

- **Child Tax Credit:** The expanded Child Tax Credit, which expired in January 2022, offered an increased tax credit on a monthly basis to families with children. During a time of uncertainty and economic volatility, this credit [reduced hunger by 26%](#). The CTC has since reverted to its prior amount and yearly distribution, directly correlating with spikes in child hunger and poverty.
- **SNAP:** The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) plays an irreplaceable role in reducing both child hunger and poverty. In 2022, the program lifted 1.4 million children out of poverty and reduced [childhood food insecurity by 8.6%](#). Congress has an opportunity to strengthen and protect SNAP in the upcoming Farm Bill and to improve access.
- **WIC:** During the current budget process, Congress has taken a particular interest in slashing the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), which provides additional food and fruit and vegetable assistance to mothers and children under age five. Early negotiations proposed cutting benefits for children by 56%, despite the fact that WIC lifted [nearly 100,000 children](#) out of poverty in 2022 and [reduces food insecurity among children by nearly 20%](#). We urge Congress to fully fund WIC to keep children and mothers fed.
- **School Lunch Programs:** School lunch may be the only meal that some food-insecure students receive that day. However, an [estimated 1.54 million U.S. students](#) cannot afford the meals offered at school. Pandemic-era expansions to school meal programs in 2022 lifted more than 800,000 children out of poverty, but these numbers dwindle as the programs sunset in 2023. We strongly support the Universal School Meals Program Act introduced by Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-MN) and Sen. Bernie Sanders' (I-VT), which would provide meals for all children regardless of income.