

‘Low food security’ masks hunger in U.S.

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—The [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#) has decided Americans who go without food are no longer hungry. Instead, they possess “very low food security.”

In an annual report that measures Americans’ access to food, the word “hunger” was omitted in favor of what the department has decided is the more scientifically accurate term.

The president of [Bread for the World](#), an ecumenical Christian anti-hunger group based in Washington, blasted the department’s move as an attempt by the Bush administration to play down the reality of U.S. hunger.

“This was a politically motivated resort to jargon in order to reduce the scandal of hunger in America,” David Beckmann said.

The department’s move was under the influence of an administration that does not like to acknowledge Americans are hungry, he said.

The [Committee on National Statistics of the National Academies](#), an

independent panel of scientific experts who made the recommendation, is defending the change in terminology, saying hunger is a term that describes the consequences rather than the state of food security.

Because hunger is “an individual-level physiological condition that may result from food insecurity,” it must be measured on a person-to-person basis that is beyond the scope of the annual report, the committee said on the department’s website.

The report measures the ability of Americans to put sufficient food on the table for a healthy lifestyle. In previous years, “hunger” had been used to describe Americans at the lowest end of the measure, least able to adequately feed themselves and their families.

Critics also accused the administration of playing politics by waiting until after the Nov. 7 elections to release the report instead of putting it out, as usual, in October.

Beckmann called the new term a “technical, bloodless word” that obscures reality, while “hunger” is a word that motivates people into action.

“These people who are being described as food insecure—these people are hungry,” he said. “‘Hunger’ has meaning to people. ‘Very low food security’ doesn’t mean anything.”

The Department of Agriculture said there were 35 million Americans in 2005—down from 38 million in 2004—who lived in households that at some point in the year were not able to put food on the table. The number of people threatened by “very low food security” was stable at 10 million after five consecutive years on the rise.

Bread for the World’s annual hunger report found that by the third week of each month, nearly 91 percent of food stamp recipients had depleted their benefits and didn’t have enough to make it through an entire month.

“It’s clear that God cares about hungry people,” Beckmann said. “There’s nothing in the Bible about very low food security.”

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