

One Texas household in six struggles to avoid hunger

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WASHINGTON—Texas has a higher percentage of food-insecure households than the national average and ranks second in the nation in terms of total households struggling to avoid hunger, according to a new report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In 2014, 17.2 percent of Texas households—1.7 million—experienced hunger or engaged in coping mechanisms to avoid it, such as cutting back on meal size or not purchasing prescription medication to have money to buy groceries. California ranks No. 1 nationally in terms of total number of food-insecure households at more than 1.8 million.

In comparison, 14.3 percent of households nationally—more than 17 million—experienced food insecurity, according to the USDA [report](#).

Advocates respond to report

“It is difficult to fathom 1.7 million Texans facing the reality of food insecurity today,” said Ali Hearon, hunger and care ministries specialist with Texas Baptists’ Christian Life Commission. “This information is daunting and deeply saddening. I pray this new information will not dishearten the faith community but rather serve as a catalyst for an even stronger pursuit of wholeness, unity and health in Texas.”

The report reveals food insecurity remains high in Texas, and the state continues to have more households at risk of hunger than the nation as a whole, noted Kathy Krey, director of research with the Texas Hunger Initiative at Baylor University.

“However, we are encouraged that the current rate of 17.2 percent between 2012 and 2014 is down from a high of 18.8 percent between 2008 and 2010,” she said. “This progress shows what can happen when we work together toward a common goal. We have more work to do, but if we do it together, we can continue to lower food insecurity in our state.”

One of 14 states

Taking into account margins of error, Texas is one of 14 states where the prevalence of food insecurity ranked higher than the national average. Others are Alabama, Arizona, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Missouri, Mississippi, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon and Tennessee. Mississippi experienced the highest prevalence of food insecurity, at 22 percent.

“We are faced with a chronic hunger problem in the U.S.,” said Celia Cole, chief executive officer of Feeding Texas, formerly the Texas Food Bank Network. “Year after year, these numbers remain far too high. To solve this problem, we need to create more opportunities for struggling families to earn a living wage and increase our investment in programs designed to supplement lower earnings.”

Conditions virtually unchanged

The percentage of U.S. food-insecure households remained essentially unchanged from 2013 to 2014, and the percentage of households experiencing severe food insecurity—5.6 percent or 6.9 million households—also remained constant.

“Children were food insecure at times during the year in 9.4 percent of U.S. households with children (3.7 million households), essentially unchanged from 9.9 percent in 2013,” the report states. “These households were unable at times during the year to provide adequate, nutritious food for their children.”

The report revealed 87 percent of food-insecure Americans live in households earning less than 185 percent of the federal poverty level—the cutoff for many federal assistance programs—or \$37,000 for a family of three.

“We have proven programs to supplement the needs of families who earn too little to make ends meet,” Cole said. “We must reinvest in these programs and take a hard look at why our economy is not producing enough jobs that allow workers to stop worrying about their next meal.”

The 2014 food-security survey covered 43,253 households, comprising a representative sample of the U.S. population. Researchers asked one adult respondent in each household questions about experiences and behaviors of household members that indicate food insecurity, such as being unable to afford balanced meals, cutting the size of meals because of too little money for food, or being hungry because of too little money for food. The food security status of the household was assigned based on the number of food-insecure conditions reported.