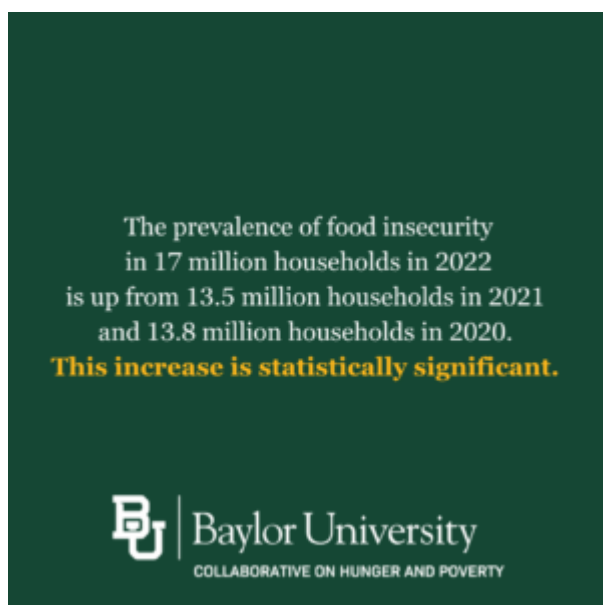


# Texas has second-highest food insecurity in the nation

November 16, 2023

Food insecurity increased significantly in the United States last year, and Texas has the second-highest rate of food insecurity in the nation, a recent [report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture](#) revealed.



Food insecurity refers to the inability of households to acquire adequate food, at times, for one or more household members. The prevalence of food insecurity in the state presents both challenges and opportunities for Texas Baptists as they seek to minister to human needs in Christ's name.

“While the overall economic outlook in Texas may look strong, low-income residents have experienced a huge dose of hardship,” said Jeremy Everett, founding executive director of the [Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty](#).

The report revealed 15.5 percent of Texas households reported a lack of consistent access to affordable and healthy food between 2020 and 2022, making Texas second only to Arkansas in terms of food insecurity.

Along with Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma and South Carolina, Texas and Arkansas are the six states where the prevalence of food insecurity was

higher than the national average.

Everett attributed the rising food insecurity in Texas primarily to two factors: a significant number of workers receiving no more than the minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour and a worker shortage in state agencies, creating delays in processing applications for SNAP—the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—in a timely manner.

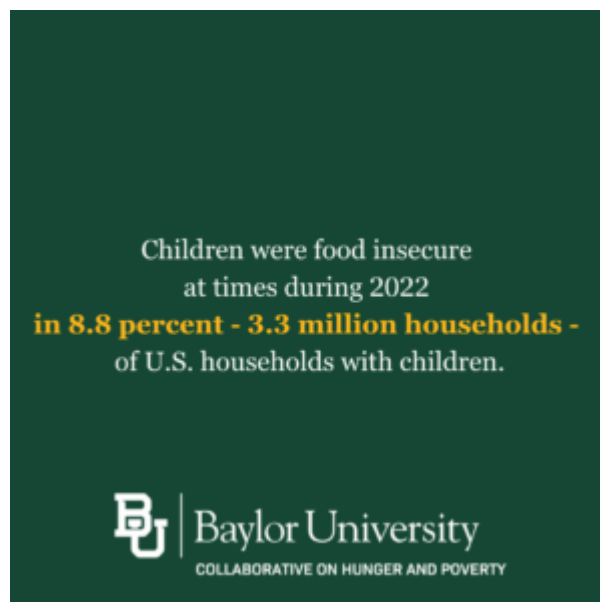
At the same time, Texas has experienced rising costs of food and fuel along with the rest of the nation, he added.

“Low-income Americans spend a higher percentage of their income on the necessities—food, transportation and shelter. When rent is up, food prices are up and transportation costs are up, it has a huge impact,” Everett said.

## **Food insecurity higher in homes with children**

The report from the USDA Economic Research Service showed 17 million U.S. households experienced food insecurity at some point during 2022, compared to 13.5 million households the previous year. Food insecurity affected 12.8 percent of households in the country last year.

The food insecurity rates last year were significantly higher for households with children (17.3 percent), households with children under age 6 (16.7 percent), and households with children headed by a single female (33.1 percent) or a single male (21.2 percent).



Children in 3.3 million homes—8.8 percent of U.S. households with children—were food insecure at some point in 2022.

“The 2022 Household Food Security in the United States report is a sobering reminder that, while the vast majority of Americans are able to affordably feed themselves and their families, too many of our neighbors struggle to put healthy food on the table,” Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack said.

“These numbers are more than statistics. They paint a picture of just how many Americans faced the heartbreaking challenge last year of struggling to meet a basic need for themselves and their children. And the survey responses should be a wake-up call to those wanting to further roll back our anti-poverty and anti-hunger programs.”

Everett pointed out one factor affecting food insecurity in 2022 was the termination of several COVID-era relief programs from which low-income Americans particularly benefitted.

# Lessons from the pandemic

“We learned a lot during the pandemic about ways to have an impact on hunger and poverty,” he said. “For instance, the child tax credit has a significant impact on reducing the child poverty rate.”

Another pandemic-related factor that affected food insecurity in Texas specifically was the inability of congregate summer feeding programs to continue, he noted. For several years prior to COVID, churches and other community service providers built a network that significantly increased the number of children who received meals during the summer.

“The pandemic blew that infrastructure up,” Everett said.

However, the [Meals-to-You](#) program—first piloted in 30 East Texas and West Texas counties through a partnership led by the Texas Hunger Initiative in 2019—became the national Emergency Meals-to-You program, delivering food boxes to households in rural areas.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 made noncongregate and summer meal delivery a permanent option for children, and it allowed for summer electronic benefit transfer options beginning next summer.

One of the most effective ways to fight food insecurity is to maximize SNAP benefits, Everett observed.

“We know SNAP is an economic driver for communities. It accounts for 1 out of 10 jobs in local grocery stores,” he said.

Everett noted every dollar in SNAP benefits helps generate \$1.50 in economic activity. When Texas fails to access available SNAP dollars, it results in a loss for the state’s food and agricultural sector, he added.

Reducing food insecurity is a complex issue greater than the ability of any

one entity to solve, Everett said, but coalitions of nonprofit organizations, social service agencies and businesses can help build [hunger-free communities](#).

“We like to see churches at the epicenter of these coalitions,” Everett said. “It’s a way for us to carry out our biblical mandate to feed the hungry.”