



Hunger in the Tar Heel State

WITH ONE OF THE HIGHEST RATES OF HUNGER IN THE NATION, ACTION IS NEEDED TO ENSURE NC HOUSEHOLDS HAVE ENOUGH TO EAT

BUDGET & TAX CENTER FACT SHEET

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Every night, people in almost 630,000 North Carolina households don't have enough to eat. North Carolina has the 8th highest rate of food insecurity in the nation.

A food-secure household means that all members of the home have access to enough healthy and nutritious food to support an active and healthy lifestyle. Homes that have low food security often must make tough choices about the amount and quality of food they are able to provide their families. Homes that are considered to have "very low" food security often miss meals. According to the USDA, in the past year, more than 90 percent of these families worried that food would run out, nearly 80 percent could not afford a balanced meal, and people in 96 percent of homes with very low food security skipped meals in order to make food stretch.

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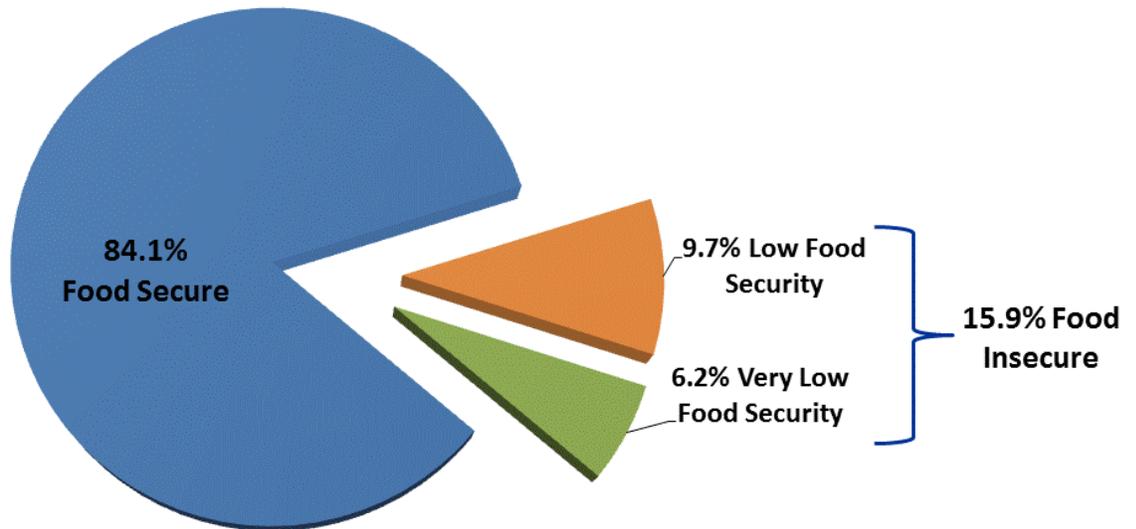
Food insecurity does not affect everyone equally. Households with children are more likely to have trouble putting enough nutritious food on the table. Nationally, 16.6 percent of homes with children are food insecure, while only 10.9 percent of homes without children were. Additionally, single-parent households face different rates of food insecurity based on the gender of the parent. 9.4 percent of households led by single mothers experience very low food security compared to 8.2 percent of households with single fathers.¹

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North Carolina is the 8th Hungriest Place in the US

Households by levels of food insecurity



Source: USDA's 2015 Report on Food Insecurity, 3-year average (2013-2015)

Food Assistance is Critical in Reducing Poverty

Although many North Carolinians—including children, families, and older adults—face hunger and go without adequate and nutritious foods on a regular basis, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) helps reduce food hardship. It is the largest anti-hunger program in the nation and plays a critical role in ensuring that North Carolinians have enough food to eat. SNAP also significantly reduces poverty, improves children’s health outcomes, and helps minimize tough choices like either feeding your children or paying rent on time.

With the increase in the kind of jobs that don’t pay enough to afford the basics, it can be tough to put enough food on the table even when you have a steady job. In 2015, SNAP reached 1.6 million North Carolinians, targeting the most vulnerable folks to help ensure that older adults, veterans, and children get enough to eat each day. SNAP benefits help to stimulate the state’s economy too, pumping upward of \$2 billion into the economy. On average, from 2011 to 2014, SNAP benefits lifted 175,000 North Carolinians, including 81,000 children, out of poverty.²

State lawmakers chose to unnecessarily restrict food aid for childless adults

This year, the harsh three-month SNAP time limit returned for childless, non-disabled adults who aren’t able to find work, volunteer, or job training activities totaling 20 hours per week. The time limit would have returned for 23 counties regardless of state action due to an improving economy in those counties. The remaining 77 counties qualified for a year-long waiver, but the Governor and legislature permanently banned state waivers after July 2016, regardless of the next economic downturn.³ The time limit is harsh:

- It applies to people who live in “extreme” poverty. These folks have an average annual income of \$2,200, or just 19 percent of the poverty line, while on SNAP.
- It harms vulnerable groups like veterans, youth aging out of foster care, people who lack a high school diploma, and under-unemployed workers who want more hours.
- It is not a test of one’s willingness to work. It applies regardless of whether these individuals are actually able to find employment or training opportunities.

North Carolina does not have a plan in place to provide a job opening, volunteer position, or skills training opportunity to all individuals subject to the time limit. Most counties have more people looking for work than jobs available, and only 9 counties operate a SNAP employment and training program. And volunteer postings totaling 20 hours a week are hard to come by in many urban areas, let alone more rural settings.

Policy choices can help us to combat hunger in North Carolina.

School-based initiatives such as the Community Eligibility Program and Breakfast in the Classroom are effective policies which address hunger among children. The Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as Food Stamps, is one of the most direct ways to fight food insecurity. Unfortunately, a bill passed by state legislators last year permanently re-imposed a strict time limit for childless, non-disabled adults, contributing to an historic drop in SNAP participants.

The most efficient way to address hunger is by providing working families with a livable wage. In order to make ends meet, a family of four must earn more than \$53,000 a year. A full-time minimum wage worker makes less than one-third of that. Without a raise in the minimum wage, income supports such as a state EITC and adequate Unemployment Insurance benefits are crucial in making sure families have enough to eat.

¹ Prosperity Watch (Issue 66, No. 1): Nearly 1 in 6 NC households face issues of hunger

² Mitchell, Tazra and Alexandra Sirota. "Elevated Poverty Hampers Economic Opportunity for All." NC Budget and Tax Center. October 2016. Available here: <http://www.ncjustice.org/?q=budget-and-tax/btc-report-north-carolinas-greatest-challenge%E2%80%94elevated-poverty-hampers-economic>

³ Prosperity Watch Issue 64, No. 1: Number of North Carolinians on SNAP Falling Quickly