

UNDERSTANDING THE 2020 USDA FOOD INSECURITY REPORT

Why do headlines say, “No increase in food insecurity in 2020”?

Yes, a hunger crisis arose out of the pandemic.



Key reasons the USDA report showed food insecurity in 2020 had remained steady

- ✘ Data are complicated, and it matters both how they are presented and collected.
- ✘ While at a high level, food insecurity may look unchanged, many households were disproportionately impacted.
- ✘ Policy change matters and helped a lot of people quickly get the help they need during this crisis.

Major policy changes that happened during 2020

- ✘ All kids in MA had access to universal free school meals.
- ✘ SNAP became easier to apply for.
- ✘ All SNAP households received the maximum benefit amount, and benefits increased by 15%.
- ✘ Families received additional P-EBT benefits to make up for meals their children would ordinarily receive in school.

Where does Project Bread get their data?

✘ USDA Food Security Report

The USDA releases an annual report on food insecurity in the United States every year. Data for the report are collected in December, ask about food insecurity over the past 12 months, and come from phone or face-to-face interviews. Historically, Project Bread has considered this “the gold standard” of data when we report on the status of hunger.

However, the USDA data **specific to Massachusetts** are based on a 3-year rolling average, in this case 2018, 2019, and 2020. What is more helpful than a rolling average is seeing points in time, because, as we all know, this pandemic has been a roller coaster—enter the U.S. Census Bureau’s Household Pulse Survey.

✘ U.S. Census Bureau’s Household Pulse Survey (HPS)

The HPS survey is collected weekly/biweekly, asks participants about food insufficiency in the past 7 days, is online and self-administered, and participants are recruited via text messaging and emails.

The HPS data has allowed Project Bread for the first time to see changes in food insecurity over a shorter period, helping us to create a real-time picture of food insecurity in our state.



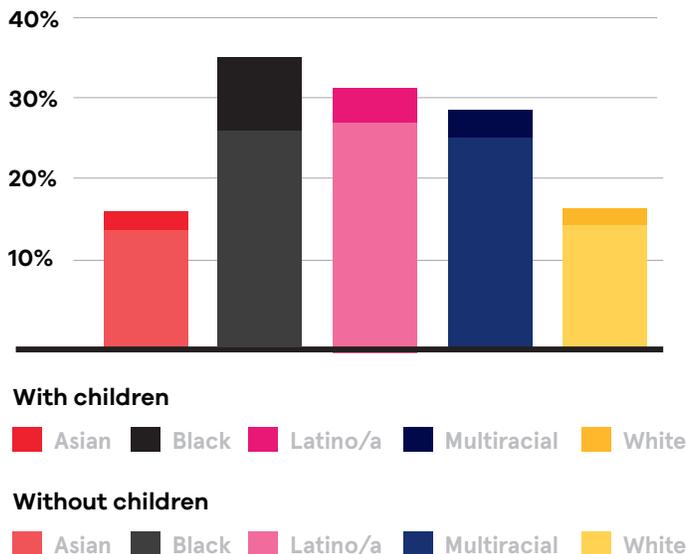
Comparing the data

U.S. CENSUS BUREAU'S HPS

- At the onset of the pandemic, an estimated 19.6% of households in MA were food insecure. Between June and February 2020, the rate of food insecurity remained high in MA as the pandemic limited employment and access to food resources.
- Food insecurity among households with children rose at the onset of the pandemic with an estimated 23.6% of households with children reporting food insecurity.
- The pandemic furthered disparity between BIPOC households and white households with rising food costs, loss of employment, and diminished public transportation.

BIPOC households:

Food insecurity among all households in MA in 2020 by race/ethnicity:



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- While at a high-level, food insecurity did not seem to change at the state or federal levels, digging deeper showed that many groups are disproportionately affected.
- The prevalence of food insecurity increased for all households with children from 13.6% in 2019 to 14.8% in 2020.

BIPOC households:

- The prevalence of food insecurity also increased in BIPOC households from 19.1% in 2019 to 21.7% in 2020.
- Households that live in poverty continue to have high rates of food insecurity.
- Households with children, especially single-parent households, continue to have high rates of food insecurity.
- 45.4% of food insecure households are not participating in federal nutrition assistance programs.
- Reported participation in the National School Lunch Program was lower among food-insecure households in 2020 (19.5%) than in 2019 (27.6%).

The bottom line

Food insecurity is still a problem. And, it's important to look not just at high-level food insecurity rates, but also to disaggregate the data to look at groups that are disproportionately impacted.