



**NEW STUDY ESTIMATES \$21.3 BILLION
FOOD BUDGET SHORTFALL FOR AMERICANS AT RISK OF HUNGER**
*Over One Third of Counties with Both the Highest Food Insecurity and Food Costs Are Majority
African American*

CHICAGO --- March 24, 2011 --- Feeding America, the nation's largest domestic hunger-relief organization, today released a landmark study, "[Map the Meal Gap](#)," providing insight for the first time about the number of meals missing from the tables of America's hungry each year – an estimated 8.4 billion nationwide.

The findings of "Map the Meal Gap" are based on statistics collected by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and food price data from The Nielsen Company. The study was funded by the Howard G. Buffett Foundation and Nielsen.

Map the Meal Gap shines a light on food insecurity at the local level in the United States, revealing new information about how food insecurity, food costs, and ethnicity interact at the county level. A key finding of the report is that among the 44 counties in the United States that fall into both the highest food insecurity and the highest food costs categories, over a third have a majority African American population.

"We know that African Americans in this country struggle with hunger at a disproportionately high rate," said Brian Banks, Director of Public Policy and Community Outreach, Capitol Area Food Bank. "What this study does is help us focus our response to this overwhelming issue. With the first county-by-county data, we can tailor our response to each community."

According to USDA data, people struggling with hunger estimate they would need about \$56 more each month on average to address the shortages in their food budget. On a national level, "Map the Meal Gap" shows this shortfall represents an estimated \$21.3 billion on an annual basis.

African American Communities & Hunger

African Americans experience food insecurity and poverty at a higher rate than the general population, in part because they have lower than average median income and higher than average unemployment. In turn, African Americans are also more likely to participate in federal nutrition programs.

On average, 1 in 4 African American households are food insecure, including 1 in 3 African American childrenⁱ, 1 in 4 African Americans live in povertyⁱⁱ, and according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics more than 1 in 7 African Americans are unemployed as of February 2011ⁱⁱⁱ.

Among the adult clients who come to emergency food program sites, like Feeding America, 5 million (34 percent) are non-Hispanic African American, the second largest racial or ethnic group served^{iv}. While African Americans make up only 12.4 percent of the U.S. population, 22.5 percent (7.4 million) of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps) participants are African American^v. Similarly, African Americans make up 19.6 percent of Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)^{vi}. 90 percent of African American children will receive SNAP benefits at some point before age 20, compared to 49 percent of all American children^{vii}.

“The Map The Meal Gap” Study

In a departure from the standard of measuring meals in pounds, “Map the Meal Gap” estimates the relative cost of a meal, adjusting the national average of \$2.54 per meal that food secure people report they usually spend on a meal according to food prices in each county.

“Map the Meal Gap” also provides critical information that has never been previously available -- food insecurity rates for each county and Congressional District. Previously, food insecurity data was only available at the state level in the USDA’s annual report. The study further analyzes each county’s food insecure population to determine their income eligibility for federal nutrition assistance. This data has the potential to redefine the way service providers and policy makers address areas of need.

“We know hunger exists in every state across the nation, but it looks different from county to county, and therefore, so do the solutions. The results of this study show that the best way for us to help people facing hunger is to understand *who* is hungry and *why* they are hungry at the community level,” said Vicki Escarra, president and CEO of Feeding America.

“Together, the emergency food system and critical federal nutrition programs weave a comprehensive nutrition safety net reaching at-risk Americans at different income bands and in different settings, with special focus on vulnerable child and senior populations.”

“There is no ‘one size fits all’ solution for hunger. For example, in Pulaski County, which is at the southern tip of Illinois, more than 20 percent of the population is food insecure. Of those individuals, 63 percent are potentially eligible for enrollment in the SNAP program (formerly known as Food Stamps). This sample alone shows just how significant the SNAP program can be for many communities in this country,” said Escarra.

“But in Lake County Illinois, a suburb of Chicago, 54 percent of the food insecure population does *not* qualify for food stamps or other government programs, so they often must rely on Feeding America and other charities to help feed themselves and their families.”

“Map the Meal Gap’ provides the following data for each county in the United States in an [interactive map format](#) available online:

- The percentage of the population who is **food insecure**.
- The percentage of the food insecure population who qualify based on income for **SNAP (Foods Stamps)** and other federal nutrition programs.
- The percentage of the food insecure population who **do NOT qualify for federal nutrition programs** and often must rely on charitable food assistance programs and who also need better wages and employment opportunities to help them meet their basic needs.
- The average price per meal in each county, based on new research by The Nielsen Company, using the USDA’s “Thrifty Food Plan.”

“The interactive map will, for the first time, allow policy makers, state agencies, corporate partners and individual advocates to develop integrated strategies to fight hunger on a community by community level,” said Escarra.

“Map the Meal Gap” was conducted using well-established, transparent [methods](#). Data provided by the US Census Bureau, the USDA, and the Nielsen Company were analyzed Feeding America in partnership with Dr. Craig Gundersen, Associate Professor of Agricultural and Consumer Economics at the University of Illinois, Executive Director of the National Soybean Research Laboratory and member of Feeding America’s Technical Advisory Group.

The executive summary of the report features additional information that describes how various ethnic groups are disproportionately affected by high rates of hunger and high food prices.

A summary of the findings, an interactive map of the United States, and the full report are available on Feeding America's web site at www.feedingamerica.org

Tweet about Map the Meal Gap using [#MealGap](#).

Join the national conversation on hunger and learn more about Feeding America:
<http://blog.feedingamerica.org/>

About Feeding America

Feeding America provides low-income individuals and families with the fuel to survive and even thrive. As the nation's leading domestic hunger-relief charity, our network members supply food to more than 37 million Americans each year, including 14 million children and 3 million seniors. Serving the entire United States, more than 200 member food banks support 63,000

agencies that address hunger in all of its forms. For more information on how you can fight hunger in your community and across the country, visit <http://www.feedingamerica.org>. Find us on Facebook at [facebook.com/FeedingAmerica](https://www.facebook.com/FeedingAmerica) or follow our news on Twitter at twitter.com/FeedingAmerica.

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ⁱ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. *Household Food Security in the United States, 2009*. November 2010. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR108/ERR108.pdf>

ⁱⁱ U.S. Census Bureau. *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2009*. www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/p60-238.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Economic News Release. Employment status of the civilian population by race, sex, and age. February 2011. Table A-2. <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empsit.pdf>

^{iv} James Mabli, Cohen, R., Potter, F., Zhao, Z. Feeding America. *Hunger in America 2010*. Table 5.6.1. <http://feedingamerica.org/faces-of-hunger/hunger-in-america-2010/hunger-report-2010.aspx>

^v American Community Survey Demographic and Housing Estimates: 2009. U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Research and Analysis. *Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2009*. Table A-23. October 2010.

^{vi} USDA, Food and Nutrition, Office of Research and Analysis. *WIC Participant and Program Characteristics 2008*. Exhibit 2.6. Report No. WIC-08-PC. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/published/wic/FILES/pc2008.pdf>

^{vii} Estimating the Risk of Food Stamp Use and Impoverishment During Childhood. Rank & Hirschl. Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine, 2009. 163(11): 994-999. Table 2 <http://www.medical-legalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/page/Estimating%20the%20Risk%20of%20Food%20Stamp%20Use%20and%20Impoverishment.pdf>