



DREXEL UNIVERSITY

Center for

Hunger-Free Communities

USDA Releases 2013 Household Food Security Data

**No change in high hunger rates:
A major concern for public health**

Philadelphia – September 3, 2014 – Today the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Research Service released its [annual report on food security in the United States](#). In 2013, over 49 million people in the U.S., including over 16 million children, were living in food insecure households, meaning that they did not have access to enough food for an active and healthy life. This includes 17 million people living in households that were very low food secure, a more severe form of food insecurity.

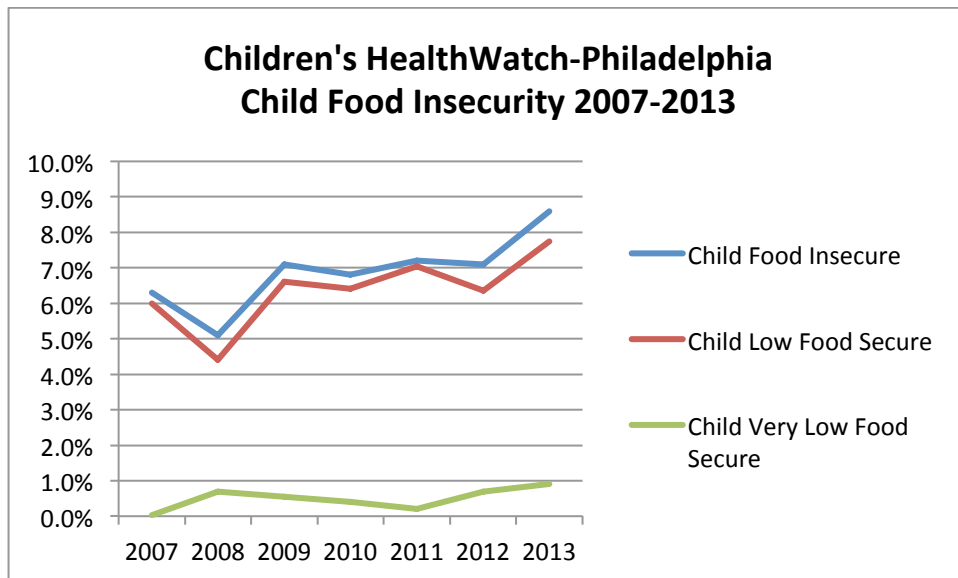
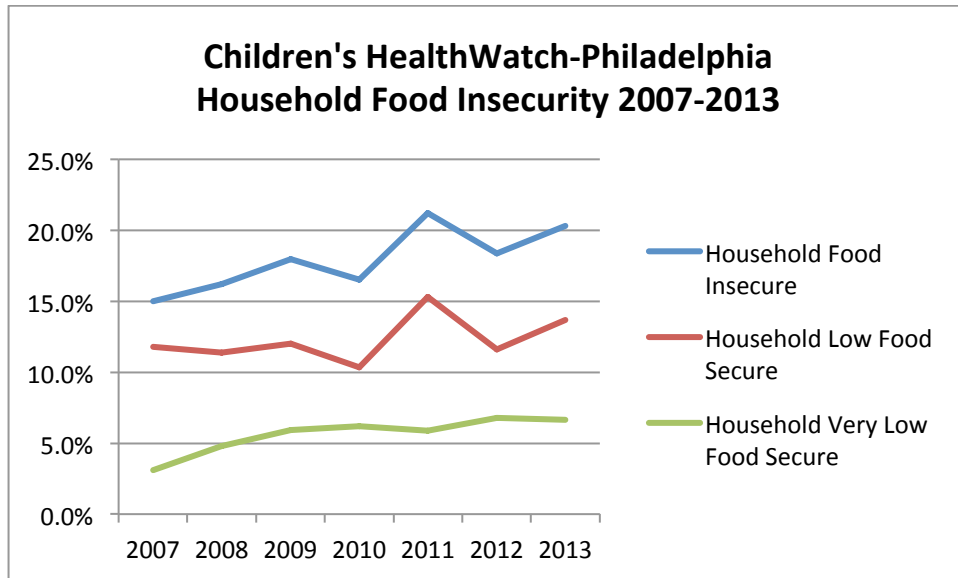
The USDA report described virtually no change in the food insecurity rate since 2012. As in 2012, 1 in 7 households, including 1 in 5 households with children, is still lacking adequate food in 2013.

A closer look at the national data reveals 19.5% of households with children were food insecure in 2013. This includes 8,576,000 children under age 6, or 23.7%, living in food insecure households. This figure has particularly significant public health implications: those early years lay the foundation for children's health, cognitive, social and emotional development and future potential.

"It's unconscionable to fail our children this way," said Dr. Mariana Chilton, an associate professor and director of the Center for Hunger-Free Communities at Drexel University's School of Public Health. "The health impacts of food insecurity are enormous, particularly among young children. Children in food insecure households have poorer health, are more likely to have developmental delays, and are more likely to be hospitalized. In the wealthiest country in the world, this is shameful and disturbing. We can and must do better."

The new USDA data reflects trends in food insecurity issues seen in families across the Philadelphia area. In Pennsylvania, the food insecurity rate of 11.9%, down slightly from 12.3% in 2013, reflects a positive trend. However, Philadelphia families typically experience food insecurity at a higher rate than the state average. The ongoing [Children's HealthWatch study in Philadelphia](#) found that in 2013, 20.3% of families with children under the age of 4 experienced food insecurity. Consistent with the national average of children across the country experiencing food insecurity, 8.6% of children in Philadelphia were food insecure in 2013, and 0.9% experienced very low food insecurity.

These rates have increased since 2012, and reflect a staggering increase since the recession.



The numbers released today by the USDA further demonstrate what families who are experiencing hunger and poverty already know – that it has become increasingly difficult to put healthy, nutritious food on the table. Parents and caregivers from the Center’s Witnesses to Hunger project struggle with making sacrifices to deal with the gap between their income and basic needs – such as paying the electric bill by forgoing purchasing food that week.

[Sherita Mouzon](#), a peer mentor at the Salvation Army and member of [Witnesses to Hunger](#), an advocacy group that knows hunger first-hand, said, “It’s sad. These numbers

are very disheartening. Families are working so hard. But then they have to choose to either pay their bills or put food on the table. What is the government going to do about it? The choices that American families have to make are not fair. Hopefully, this report will help us continue the discussion of the steps we are going to take to resolve this issue.”

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