Webinar: Household Food Security in the United States in 2016 Transcription

Good morning everyone and welcome to our webinar Household Food Security in the United States in 2016. My name is Nancy McNiff and I will be your moderator today. The webinar is being recorded and will be posted on the ERS website next week. At any time during this webinar you may enter a question into the chat feature at the bottom left corner of your screen and our speaker will answer at the end of the presentation. Our speaker today is Alisha Coleman-Jensen. Alisha is a social science analyst with the Food Assistance Branch at the Economic Research Service U.S. Department of Agriculture. Her research focuses on the measurement and determinants of food insecurity in the United States. She is the lead author of USDA's annual report on household food security analyzing the prevalence and severity of food insecurity in U.S. households. The report includes changes in food insecurity from previous years, the prevalence of food insecurity by selected household characteristics and food insecurity among children. I think we're ready to start now so Alisha you can begin your presentation.

Thank you Nancy, excuse me. Good morning to everyone and thank you, thank you for joining us today. So the report they released this morning describes the

food security of U.S. households during calendar year 2016 and it's based on USDA's most recent annual food security survey which was conducted in December 2016. The report provides information on how many U.S. households had difficulty putting enough food on the table in 2016 and food security statistics reflect the extent to which difficult economic conditions result in material hardship in U.S. households. So the percentage of U.S. households that was food insecure with essentially unchanged from 2015 to 2016 that's say that change was not statistically significant.

This shows the outline of what we'll be talking today so the key question we're asking is how many U.S. households were consistently able to put adequate food on the table? We'll talk about how food security is measured, the main findings from the annual food security report. We'll talk about the food security survey and then a summary and then at the end I'll talk about just briefly about some other recent reports on food security that ERS released this summer.

This pie chart shows the statistics for all U.S. households. In 2016, 87.7 percent of U.S. households were food secure throughout the year. Food secure means that they had consistent access

to adequate food for active healthy living for all household members throughout the year. Food insecure households are those that were unable at some time during the year to provide adequate quantity or quality of food for one or more household members due to a lack of resources and in 2016, 12.3 percent of U.S. households were food insecure that's about 15.5 million households. We measure food insecurity at differing degrees of severity. For about two thirds of food insecure households inadequate food met primarily inadequate in quality, variety or desirability and these households reported few if any reductions in food intake. So this presented 7.4 percent of households and they're labeled with low food security on the chart and those are represented by the gold slice of the pie chart. And that 7.4 percent of U.S. households in 2016. However in a little more than a third of food insecure households, inadequate food and that not enough food and this subset of food insecure households was in the more severe range of food insecurity described as a very low food security and this is represented by the red slice in the pie chart. 4.9 percent of all U.S. households had very low food security in 2016 that's about 6.1 million households. Households classified as having a very low food security reported the normal eating patterns of

some household members were disrupted at times
during the year and their food intake reduced below
levels they considered appropriate. What we mean by disrupted
eating patterns is that respondents reported
skipping meals and in some situations going a whole
day without eating. Most households with very
low food security reported that an adult in the
household had been hungry at times but did not eat
because there wasn't enough money for food.

The next slide shows food security definitions.
And I just want to stop and note that Nancy
shared the audio call-in number
if you're having issues you can call that number
and enter that code, if you're having problems.
So turning back now to this slide,
this shows the definitions of food security that I
just spoke about. Food insecurity is considered a
household level, economic and social condition while
hunger is an individual level physiological condition
that is not measured directly in the survey.
Very low food security describes a severe range of food
insecurity which is a condition in which mainly
leads to hunger. And again very low food
security describes the subset of food
insecure households in the severe range
of food insecurity.

This slide provides a sort of picture of how food

security is measured. So like many things
food security is a continuum. Early research
showed that food insecurity was a managed
process which means households have some
control over how food insecurity is experienced.
So for example as food security deteriorates households
may become anxious about the household food supply
and try to stretch their food and food budget. They
may try to juggle the household spending to
maintain food security to the extent they can. As
food insecurity worsens households may
reduce the quality and variety of food or rely on
low cost foods to feed their family.
And if food insecurity becomes more severe adults
may reduce their own food intake while trying
to ensure children get enough to eat and then in
the most severe situations we see reduced food intake
among children. Research has shown that
parents will try to shield their children from food
insecurity to the extent they can and adults
will reduce their own food intake in order to try to
protect their children.

These are some examples of the food security survey
questions. Households are asked a series of ten questions
about food insecurity for the household as a whole
and adults in the household and households
with children are asked an additional eight items
about children food insecurity. And these questions follow

along that same continuum and represent the varying degrees of food insecurity. So for example, asking about worrying about food, we couldn't afford to eat balanced meals. Did you ever cut the size of the meals or skip meals and did you ever not, did you ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food? A couple things I want to point out about all the questions is that they asked about the last 12 months. And as I mentioned of the outset, our surveys conducted each December so these questions are for the prior calendar year. So from January to December 2016, and each question stipulates that food insecurity or the food insecure condition was the result of not having enough money or resources for food. So these are not representing you know issues like just not having time to eat or fasting or dieting or things of that nature. This is food insecurity due to resource constraints.

So turning now to trends in food insecurity. So just to orient you to the graph, the blue line at the top is food insecurity which includes both low and very low food security. And the red line towards the bottom shows the prevalence of very low food security which again is the more severe range of food insecurity. The yellow shaded portion of the graph represents the recession from December 2007 through January 2009.

And then on the trend lines I've included some key numbers that we'll talk about. So let's look first at the prevalence of food insecurity. So in 2007 before the recession the full effects of the recession set in 11.1 percent of U.S. households were food insecure.
Food insecurity increase substantially with the economic recession and in 2011 peaked at 14.9 percent. Since that time we've seen a decline in food insecurity to 12.7 percent in 2015 and now 12.3 percent in 2016.
The year to year change from 12.7 percent to 12.3 percent was not statistically significant. But the overall decline from 14.9 percent to 12.3 percent was statistically significant and if you can see we are continuing the downward trend in food insecurity. For very low food security in 2007, 4.1 percent of U.S. households report a very low food security that peaked at 5.7 percent during and after the recession and in 2015 with 5 percent in 2016 the prevalence of very low food security was 4.9 percent. Again the change from 2015 to 2016 with not statistically significant that could have resulted from family variation that's a decline from the peak of 5.7 percent down to 4.9 percent is a statistically significant decline.

This next slide has a lot going on and it may be

sort of small on your screen. If you're
interested in looking at these numbers in greater
detail, all the numbers are taken from Table Two in
the annual food security report. So if you look at
Table Two you can find all the numbers behind this chart.
So this graph shows both the changes and prevalence
of food insecurity by household characteristics
between 2015 and 2016 and the
bars marked with an asterisk show a statistically
significant decline. And then the other sort of
takeaway from this chart is just to examine
the sort of the groups are some
populations that have higher or lower food
insecurity rates compared to other groups in 2016.
So I'm going to start at the top of the chart and
pull out some of the numbers that, that may be
of interest. So first, actually I take that back,
I'm not going to start at the top. So first I want
to draw your attention. to the asterisks on the
chart which are for white non Hispanic
head of households and for households not in
principal cities. Those were the two categories
that had statistically significant declines
from 2015. None of the other differences from 2015
to 2016 were statistically
significant and I'll note that statistical
significance is related both to the size of the
change and also to the margin of error around the
estimates. So I'll turn now and start

at the top of the chart. So in 2016, 12.3
percent of all households were food insecure.
We see the highest prevalence rates for
female headed households with children, those are single
mother households in 2016, 31.6 percent
were food insecure. And 21.7 percent of single father
households were food insecure.
9.9 percent of married couple families
with children were food insecure.
And that's a consistent finding that we see
higher food insecurity rates for single
parent households compared to marry parent
households. Turning now to households
without children. We see higher food
insecurity rates for women and men living alone. About
14 percent than we do compared with a
households with more than one adult but no children.
In 2016, 8 percent of households with more than
one adult and no children were food insecure.
But similarly we see some lower prevalence
rates for households with elderly compared to households
with children. In 2016, 7.8 percent of
households with elderly were food insecure.
Turning now to race ethnicity of households head
or household reference person in the survey we
see higher food insecurity rates for black non
Hispanic headed households at 22.5
percent and for Hispanic headed households at
18.5 percent. We see somewhat lower food

insecurity rates for households headed by white non Hispanics 9.3 percent in 2016.
Some of the differences across household composition and across race ethnicity are related to income differences across those groups.
And these statistics do not control for differences across income. They're simply showing the prevalence across, of food insecurity across these different groups. You can see that for households with incomes under the federal poverty line that's under 1.0 is under the federal poverty line and 1.85 and over is 185 percent of poverty line and above.
Those are incomes below the federal poverty level of 38.3 percent were food insecure in 2016 compared with 5.6 percent were food insecure for those with incomes 185 percent of the poverty line and over.
Finally at the bottom of the chart we have the prevalence of food insecurity by metropolitan and non metropolitan residence. So in principal cities are the sort of cities within metropolitan areas not in principal cities are more suburban areas outside the cities and metropolitan areas and then outside metropolitan area is a non metropolitan or you can think of as a rural county.
We tend to see higher food insecurity rates for both cities and the more rural areas 14.2 percent of households in principal cities were

food insecure and 15 percent of households in
non metropolitan counties were food insecure
compared with 9.5 percent of households
in more suburban areas being food insecure.
And again if you want to look at those numbers in
more detail turn to Table Two in the annual food
security report.

This next slide shows the prevalence of food
insecurity across the states. First I want to
note that the state data relies on three
years of data averaged. We do that to ensure that
there are large enough sample sizes for all
states to produce reliable estimates. So this is data
average from 2014, 2015 and 2016.
So let's walk through the map first. This is the
prevalence of food insecurity. Very low food
security is not shown on the map but it's available
in the report if you're interested. And all the, the figures
and the numbers on this slide come from Tables Four
and Five in the annual food security report.
So you can see the key below the map.
The lighter orange states have food insecurity below
the U.S. average. So in terms of food insecurity those
states are better off. The medium orange states have
food insecurity near the U.S. average and the darker
orange or red states have food insecurity
above the U.S. average. So in terms of
food insecurity these states are worse off.

Food insecurity prevalence ranges from a high, excuse me,
a low of 8.7 percent in Hawaii to our high of
18.7 percent in Mississippi. As you can see on the right
side of the slide and
again these statistics are in Tables Four and Five in the
report. We, in the report we include comparisons to the
immediate three year period so in this case
2011, 2012 and 2013 averaged and then we also
compare to the previous ten year period, so 2004 to 2006.
There was an significant increase in food
insecurity from 2011 to 2013, to 2014 to 2016. In one
state, in New Mexico, and we saw significant
declines in food insecurity from 2011 to 2013,
to 2014 to 2016 in sixteen states and those
are listed here on the slide.
Very low food security again it's not shown on
the map but prevalence ranges from 3 percent
in Hawaii and Delaware to 7.7 percent
in Louisiana and Alabama.

I want to turn now and talk about households with
children specifically. Measuring food insecurity
in households with children is somewhat
more complicated than in measuring food
insecurity in all households as we measure
food insecurity among adults and among
children separately. So parents often as I've
mentioned will try to protect their children
from food insecurity even when parents themselves

experience reduced dietary quality and intake and
in some food insecure households only adults
are food insecure. So households with food
insecurity among children report that households
are unable at some time during the year to provide
adequate nutritious food for their children. Households
with very low food security among children
again that's the more severe range of
food insecurity. Caregivers reported that
children were hungry, skipped a meal or did
not eat for a whole day because there was not enough
money for food. So I'm going to turn
now and talk about food insecurity and statistics of
households with children. So in 2016,
83.5 percent of households with
children were food secure. 16.5 percent
of households with children were
food insecure. So that represents
households in which adults or children or both
were food insecure. Within that 8.5
percent of households with children reported
food insecurity among adults only while 8
percent of households with children reported food
insecurity among children where children's nutrition
was affected by household food insecurity.
And then in the more, that represented 3.1
million households. And food insecurity among
children was unchanged from 7.8
percent in 2015 and I'll show the

trends on the next slide. Children along with adults
experienced very low food security in .8
percent of households with children.
That's about 298,000 households in 2016
and this group of households, parents
reported that children were hungry.
Very low food security among children was
unchanged from .7 percent in 2015.

So this graph shows trends in food insecurity for
households with children, just to orient you to this
chart, the top blue line it shows the food insecurity
in a household with children. Again where adults or
children or both were food insecure. And then the middle red
line shows food insecurity among children and the
darker sort of burgundy or brown at the bottom
shows a very low food security among children.
So similar to the previous trend chart I showed you,
each of the lines include the number of
households that were, the prevalence of household with
food insecurity before the full effects of the
Recession set in. It shows the peak and then food
insecurity in 2015 and 2016. So for households, for food
insecurity in households with children, in 2007, 15.8
percent were food insecure that peaked at
21.3 percent during the Recession. In 2015, 16.6
percent of households with children were food
insecure and in 2016 that was 16.5 percent.
And the change from 2015 to 2016

is not statistically significant. The red line showing food insecurity among children in 2007 8.3 percent were food insecure that peaked at 11 percent in 2008 and in 2015, 7.8 percent children were food insecure in 7.8 percent of households with children and in 2016 that was 8 percent.
Very low food security, the line at the bottom, in 2007, .8 percent of households with children were food insecure that peaked at 1.3 percent and in 2015 0.7 percent of households with children reported very low food security among children and in 2016 that was 0.8 percent. It's worth noting that food insecurity and very low food security among children are both back down to the pre-recession levels in 2007.

So so far all of the statistics we've been talking about are about food insecurity in the last twelve months or in the the calendar year 2016. This slide shows food insecurity anytime in the thirty days prior to the survey and the estimated average daily prevalence of very low food security. So in addition to asking about the last twelve months when the survey was conducted, respondents are also asked about food insecurity experience in the thirty days prior to the survey. The survey is conducted in

mid-December each year, so the thirty days prior
to the survey of mid-November to mid-December,
so in that thirty day period in 2016, 6.7
percent of U.S.
households were food insecure and 2.8 percent of U.S.
households were very low food secure.
Compared with 2015, there were no,
there were no statistically significant changes
in 2015, 7 percent of U.S. households were food
insecure in the thirty days before the survey and
2.9 percent were very low food secure
in the thirty days before the survey.
We estimate the average daily prevalence of very
low food security to be between 0.6 to
0.9 percent of U.S. households.

Turning now to talk about use of federal food or
nutrition assistance programs by food insecure
households. One caveat about these
numbers that these are self reported survey
data and there is under reporting of participation
in assistance programs in the survey data.
But in 2016, among food insecure
households, 59 percent reported
participating in one of the three, in one of three, of
the three largest USDA programs.
So those were SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition
Assistance Program formerly Food Stamps, free or reduced price
school lunch program and the WIC program for women,

infants and children. So the bulk of food insecure households reported participating in SNAP, 43.6 percent, 29.8 percent of food insecure households reported accessing free or reduced price school meals and 9.5 percent of food insecure household reported receiving WIC. So 41 percent of food insecure households reported not participating in any of these programs. Some of those households may have been ineligible and some may choose not to participate for other reasons.

We also ask about use of community food assistance programs which would be food pantries or food banks, emergency kitchens or soup kitchens. Typically we see lower use of these program than we do the federal nutrition assistance programs but and variation across food security status with the most frequent use among those who are reported to be food insecure. So among all U.S. households 4.8 percent reported using a food pantry in 2016 and 0.6 percent reported using an emergency kitchen or soup kitchen. For households that are food insecure 26.5 percent reported using a food pantry. And about 36 percent of those with very low food security reported using a food pantry in 2016. Use of emergency kitchens or soup kitchens was less frequent but still, follow that similar

pattern in terms of greater use and access among those with food insecurity. So 3.5 percent of food insecure households reported using a soup kitchen and 5.9 percent of very low food secure households reported using soup kitchens.

In the survey we also asked about people's food spending including spending on food at home and away from home. Median weekly food spending was higher among households that were food secure which you might expect then somewhat lower among food insecure households.
Taking into account estimated food need which means taking into account the age, composition of the household, the number of members and so forth, the typical food secure household spent 29 percent more for food then the typical food insecure household.

This slide shows some of the details on the annual food security survey which is used for these estimates. It's part of the current population survey food security supplement. This survey is conducted by the Census Bureau each year and it's sponsored by the Economic Research Service of USDA.
About 40,000 households are interviewed and it's representative of the U.S. civilian population. You may have heard of the CPS

before as it's also the source of unemployment statistics that are reported monthly as well as poverty statistics. And as I mentioned it's conducted annually in December.

So just to summarize the main findings from the report. The percentage of U.S. households who were food insecure in 2016, 12.3 percent was essentially unchanged from 2015 but continued a downward trend from a high of 14.9 percent in 2011.
Children who were food insecure at times during the year in 8 percent of U.S. households with children which again was essentially unchanged from 2015. But as in 2015, the 2016 prevalence of food insecurity among children was near the 2007 pre recession levels.

This next slide shows three report covers from reports that were released this summer by ERS and they all focus on food security research. So the first is food insecurity, chronic diseases and health among working age adults and that report examines the connection between food insecurity and chronic disease and we find that adults that are in food insecure households are more likely to report having a chronic disease as well as more likely to report poor health.
The effects of energy price shocks on household food security in low income households was

also released this summer and that report finds that higher energy prices are related to higher food insecurity. And that the findings are, most strongest for low income households those that wouldn't have the greatest constraints on their resources. And then finally children, children's food security and USDA child nutrition programs presents mostly a literature view synthesizing the research on food security and child nutrition programs and finds that overwhelmingly the research shows that those programs do help to reduce food insecurity and for children in food insecure households, the school meals program provide an important source of nutrition.

And I also want to direct your attention to an Amber Waves article that was released today on the food security report. I think Nancy has a link that she can share in the Q and A section if you want to download it or or access it. It's an Amber Waves is the, Amber Waves is the ERS magazine highlighting some of our research findings and there is an article titled, "Understanding the Prevalence, Severity and Distribution of Food Insecurity in the United States" that was released this morning and it highlights some of the findings from our annual report.

There are a lot of other resources on the ERS website including media resources about how to interpret the food security statistics and how to report on them.
As well as links to lots of other reports and graphics. I do want to note that we have data visualizations on our website. Those interactive data visualizations will be updated at 3 P.M. today. They couldn't be updated at the same time as the food security report because they are posted on a public server that we didn't want posted until after the food security report was released. So look for those updated interactive data visualizations later today. The static graphics on our website and the key statistics and graphics area are currently updated to 2016 and there is my contact information if you have any questions feel free to reach out to myself or any of my co-authors on the food security report. we'd all be happy to help you with whatever you have questions about. I think I'm going to turn it over to Nancy now. And she might have some questions for us.
-Thank you.
-Thank you very much Alisha
Yes we are now going to turn to questions. As a reminder please enter any questions that you have into the left hand bottom corner chat feature.
And I will relay the questions to Alisha and we have a few questions already. The first one is about food prices of the been declining recently, how might

that have affected food insecurity in 2016 and
going forward?

That's an important question so,
food insecure or sorry food prices were
somewhat lower in 2016 particular for
food at home. We haven't done research
on 2016 yet to say actually what cause changes in
food insecurity. We focus first on getting the annual
report out and then doing some of that
sort of supplementary research later.
So I can't say definitively for 2016
but prior research has shown that food prices
do have an impact on food insecurity and lower food
prices are likely to be linked to lower food
insecurity. That's both at the national level
comparing changes in food prices over time and
in local areas comparing food prices
across geography in places with higher food
prices compared to places with lower prices. So we
would expect that declining food prices
could be linked to declining food insecurity
but again we can't say definitively for 2016
that, that's the case. Thank you Alisha.
Another question. How many children are food insecure?
What's the number? Right. So it's difficult
to say precisely how many children are
food insecure in the U.S. because the survey asked
if any children in the household are experiencing

food insecurity. So in households with more
than one child we don't know for sure whether all
of the children were food insecure.
But we can provide a range of the number of food
insecure children in U.S. households.
So 3.1 million households
reported food insecurity among children and that
there were 6.5 million children within
those households. Now it's unlikely that every
child in those households experience would
insecurity. In some cases, there may have been
food insecurity among older siblings
and somewhat less food insecurity among
younger siblings. So the range of the
number of food insecure children in the U.S.
in 2016 would be between 3.1
million and 6.5 million children. It's
safer to refer to these children as children in
food insecure households rather than food insecure
children. Okay. We have a question. I
think it's specifically on slide number 8 and you did
sort of go over it and I'm going to bring it now.
You did go over it but I want to make sure that it's
covered fully because we had a question about what
exactly a principal city is?
So it's at the bottom of that bar chart.
So principal cities are, so let me back up.
The Census and other federal agencies define
metropolitan areas and then within them, within

metropolitan areas there are principal cities and
then metropolitan areas not in principal cities. So
principal city if you can think of as the sort of,
sort of urban center within a metropolitan area.
So... you could, so that would be
sort of the most densely populated part of the
metro area and then not in
principal cities would be still in the
metropolitan area and link to that larger city but
more suburban area. So you can think of the areas
where people might live and then commute into the city
would be that the not in principal city areas
around the metropolitan area.
And then outside metropolitan area
would be non metropolitan county that
you might think of as you know borough. So you could
think of you know even though these are kind of
more technical and not very clear terms it's
basically are referring to cities, suburbs and rural areas
on that chart and we see higher food insecurity in
the cities and the rural areas and relatively lower food
insecurity in suburbs. Do you know why that's
the case for the suburban areas?
We know that food insecurity is closely linked
with economic resources and rural, excuse me, suburban
areas tend to have somewhat lower poverty
rates as well compared with principal cities and
rural areas are non metropolitan areas.
So we have a question about why do you think the

level of children who were food insecure is below or back below or near the pre-recession level but that's not the case for people overall for households overall? I think that's a really important question and that's something we've been thinking about as well. I don't have a definitive answer for why food insecurity is back to pre-recession levels for food insecurity among children. It could be that you know many nutrition assistance programs are targeted specifically toward children or toward households with children and so it could be those greater resources. It could also be that protective factor among adults that parents and others are trying to protect their children to the extent they can.
But we can't say for sure at this point exactly what, why those levels have returned for children but not for all households.

Our next question is a specific about the CPS design. How do you think the CPS design, for example civilian address space sampling contribute to the report of the emergency food program use? That's a really important point so the question the person is asking is related to the CPS samples that it's an address space sample. So, households end up in the sample because their residence

is sampled. And what that means is
that people who are homeless for example are
excluded from the survey. And that could impact
estimates in a couple of areas. So one
is just the estimates of food insecurity if you might
imagine people who are homeless may or likely
would have higher food insecurity rates than
households who are not homeless and those
homeless individuals or homeless families are
excluded from the survey. We do include a note about
that in the report. And as the questioner
notes it also could have impacts on the estimates
of soup kitchen use. It may have less of an
impact on estimates of food pantries because
a lot of the food available in food pantries
require cooking facilities but certainly I
would say that this is, could be an underestimate
of the full extent of use of the emergency
food assistance programs since those who are
homeless are excluded. Okay. We have a question
based on employment levels. Given that we're near full
employment, are we reaching a level at which it's
going to be hard for food insecurity to drop much
further? What goes into the, determines food
insecurity? Right it's difficult to say. We know
from prior research that unemployment certainly
is related to food insecurity. And ERS conducted a study a few
years ago where we looked at trends in unemployment
and trends in food prices and trends, food prices

relative to other goods and also trends and inflation
overall. And we found that declining unemployment
is related to declining food insecurity but that other
factors are also important. So as we mentioned food
prices are another factor and prices overall.
So even as there, there maybe changes in
some areas but not others that you know all interact
together to affect food insecurity.
But we can't you know it would be
conjecture to say what full employment
if it would prevent food insecurity from
dropping further. There are a number of other factors
besides unemployment that also relates to food insecurity.

Okay, thank you Alisha. Those are actually all the
questions that we have. If you have further questions
for Alisha please feel free to email her or one
of our co-authors and that's all we have.
Thank you all for joining us today and have a great day.