

Executive Summary

Background: According to the US Department of Agriculture, 15.8 percent of Missouri’s nearly six million residents were food insecure in 2008. This suggests that 934,034 residents faced uncertainty in acquiring sufficient food for their household. Further, the USDA estimates that 5.8 percent of the population, or roughly 344,000 Missourians, had “very low food security” (formerly “food insecure with hunger”) in 2008, suggesting they experienced hunger. Trends in food insecurity and hunger are not positive ones for our state, as current averages for both measures have continuously increased over the first decade of this century. Public spending on hunger programs (e.g., SNAP/Food Stamps) totaled more than 1.4 billion dollars in 2008. The *Missouri Hunger Atlas 2010* is a collaborative effort of University of Missouri faculty to document, at the county-level, the breadth and extent of hunger need, and the performance of public and private programs in meeting that need.

Hunger “need” key findings

- County food uncertainty levels, as well as eligibility rates for SNAP/Food Stamps, WIC, and free/reduced lunch programs, are generally highest in chronically-poor regions in the southern and northern thirds of the state, and particularly in the Missouri Ozarks and southeastern (“bootheel”) regions. St. Louis City also continues to have high need.
- Rates of food uncertainty and eligibility for every major public program to address food insecurity have increased in virtually all areas of the state.
- Levels of food uncertainty remain higher in households with children than in those without children.
- Suburban counties have lower rates of food uncertainty and program eligibility but these percentages continue to increase. Given the high concentration of population in these counties, the absolute numbers of people in need may be masked by low percentages.
- Rural regions have the highest concentrations of high need counties in the state.

Hunger “performance” key findings

- The success of reaching citizens in need varies greatly across the state and is not consistent across programs.
- Many of the counties with the highest rates of food uncertainty and program eligibility are also doing comparatively well in levels of participation in federal assistance programs.
- Fourteen Missouri counties, the majority of them located in the southwest and southcentral regions, are considered high need and low performing counties.
- Many highly-populated suburban counties are among the lowest performers in terms of public program participation, which suggests citizens in these areas are less likely to be receiving the help they need.