



MARYLAND

FAMILY POLICY IMPACT SEMINAR

Food Resource Management: Key to Food Security Outcomes Among Rural, Low-Income Families

Adequate quantity and quality of food is a basic need that affects our ability to learn, earn, survive, and thrive. Given the numerous negative outcomes associated with poverty and hunger, food insecurity is a serious threat to the well-being of our society. While food assistance programs undoubtedly help low-income families meet their food needs, such measures are not enough to alleviate food insecurity^{1,2}. In order to effectively address food insecurity, policymakers must consider the potential of intervention strategies, such as nutrition education. This policy brief presents findings from a national study of rural, low-income families, with particular emphasis on skills that may protect families from food insecurity.

Background

Rural, low-income families face income inadequacy, limited access to resources, underemployment and unemployment, and many other barriers to self-sufficiency, which create family frailty and crisis³⁻¹². Rural families have a higher risk of nutrition-related chronic illnesses, obesity, and other conditions^{13,14}, therefore problems affording food may compound this risk. Food insecurity disproportionately affects rural women, minorities, and children¹⁵.

Although food stamps help some families meet food needs, food stamp benefit amounts and participation in other food assistance programs are not significantly associated with food security^{16,17}. Barriers such as misinformation about eligibility, fluctuations in eligibility, and lack of access prevent large numbers of eligible individuals from receiving food stamps. Because food assistance cannot alleviate food problems in all at-risk families, policymakers should consider other means of addressing food insecurity.

Some studies suggest that life skills and community resource knowledge protect some rural families from food insecurity. Food security is also associated with food resource management skills, such as the abilities to manage bills, make a family budget, and stretch groceries until the end of the month¹⁷⁻¹⁹.

Rural Mothers Interviewed

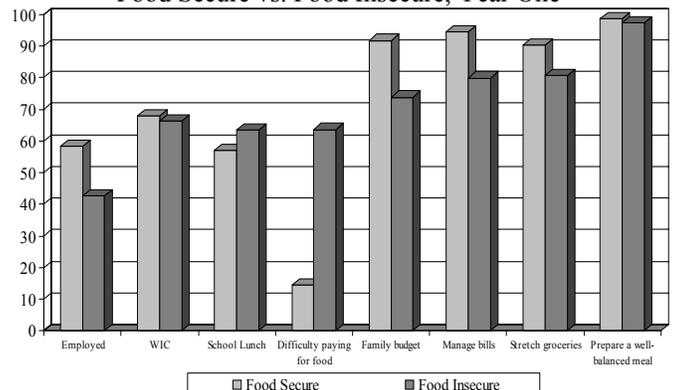
Average age: 29	Average # of children: 2.4
Race/Ethnicity: 22% Latina	4% Multiracial/Other
8% African American	65% Caucasian
1% Native American	
Marital Status: 47% Married	14% Living w/Partner
24% Single	15% Divorced/Separated
Educational Attainment:	
10% <9 th Grade	20% Some High School
29% Diploma/GED	14% Specialized Training
3% College Degree	24% Some College/AA
Annual household income: \$14,000 in Wave One	
	\$22,090 in Wave Two
Food stamp benefit:	\$110/month in Wave One
	\$104/month in Wave Two

Recent Findings

A recent analysis of 315 rural mothers revealed significant differences between mothers in food secure and food insecure households²⁰. Key findings reveal:

- Mothers in food secure households reported higher levels of food-related life skills, including the abilities to make a family budget, manage bills, and stretch groceries to the end of the month.
- During Year One, the ability to make a family budget predicted food security. However, the stability of these relationships over time is unclear.

Food Secure vs. Food Insecure, Year One



- Income, food stamps, and participation in WIC and the School Lunch Program are not significant predictors of food security in either year.
- From Year One to Year Two, household incomes and overall skills increased, while food assistance receipt and problems affording food decreased.
- The food security status of 29.7% of households studied improved from Year One to Year Two, while 50.5% stayed the same and 19.8% declined.
- Unlike Year One, levels of food-related life skills did not significantly differ between mothers in food secure and food insecure households in Year Two.

Implications

Food insecurity, one of the many detrimental consequences of poverty, adversely affects the health and well-being of millions of Americans. These findings provide important insight into the factors that may protect low-income families from food insecurity and suggest implications for :

- Improvement in access to, and effectiveness of, food assistance programs.
- Better coordination of various food assistance policies and programs aimed at addressing food insecurity.
- Optimizing skills and behaviors aimed at managing family resources.
- Inclusion, or expansion, of food resource management in nutrition education programs.
- Additional research to determine the best means of intervention to help protect rural, low-income families from food insecurity.

Suggestions for Policy and Programming

- Target efforts to alleviate poverty and food insecurity to address the diverse strengths and needs of low-income families
- Continue to revise Food Stamp Program eligibility and increase access to food stamps
- Increase nutrition education resources dedicated to food resource management intervention for limited resource populations
- Provide food resource management tools as part of food assistance programs
- Encourage doctors, health agencies, and nutrition educators to screen for food insecurity.

This policy brief created by: Stephanie Grutzmacher, MS. Review by Bonnie Braun, PhD & Elaine A. Anderson, PhD, thesis advisors.

References:

- ¹ Ribar, D.C. & Hamrick, K.S. (2003). Dynamics of poverty and food insufficiency. Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Report Number FANRR36. Washington DC: Educational Research Service, United States Department of Agriculture.
- ² Olson, C.M., Seiling, S.B., & Lawrence, F.C. (2001). Factors contributing to the protecting against food insecurity in rural counties of the U.S.. Nutrition Education for Diverse Audiences II: Integrating Research and Practice Conference. Dallas, TX, September 2001.
- ³ Braun, B., Lawrence, F., Dyk, P., & Vandergriff-Avery, M. (2002). Southern rural family economic well-being in the context of public assistance. *Southern Rural Sociology*, 18(1), 259-293.
- ⁴ Findeis, J., & Jensen, L. (1998). Employment opportunities in rural areas: Implications for poverty in a changing policy environment. *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 80(5), 1000-1007.
- ⁵ Cook, P., & Gibbs, R. (2000). *Rural Conditions and Trends: Socioeconomic Conditions*, 11(2). Available at www.ers.usda.gov/publications/rcat/rca112/contents.htm.
- ⁶ Gibbs, R.M. (2001). Nonmetro labor markets in the era of welfare reform. *Rural America*, 16(3), 11-27.
- ⁷ McKernan, S.M., Lerman, R., Pindus, N., & Valente, J. (2000). The relationship between rural-urban locations, changing welfare policies, and the employment of single mothers. Paper presented at Rural Dimensions of Welfare Reform: A Research Conference on Poverty, Welfare, and Food Assistance, Washington DC, May 2000.
- ⁸ Weber, B., Duncan, G., Whitener, L., & Miller, K. (2003). Still left behind, but gaining ground: Rural poverty in America. *Perspectives: On Poverty, Policy, and Place*, 1(1), 3-5.
- ⁹ Miller, K., Crandall, M., Weber, B. (2003). Persistent poverty in rural America. *Perspectives: On Poverty, Policy, and Place*, 1(1), 6-9.
- ¹⁰ Flora, C.B., & Flora, J.L. (2003). *Rural Communities: Legacy and Change*, Second Edition. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- ¹¹ Lichter, D.T., & McLaughlin, D.K. (1995). Changing economic opportunities, family structure, and poverty in rural areas. *Rural Sociology*, 60(4), 688-706.
- ¹² Lichter, D.T., & Jensen, L. (2001). Poverty and welfare among rural female-headed families: Before and after PRWORA. *Rural America*, 16(3), 28-35.
- ¹³ Monroe, P.A., O'Neil, C., Tiller, V.V., & Smith, J. (2002). The challenge of compliance: Food security in rural households affected by welfare reform. Mississippi State, MS: Southern Rural Development Center.
- ¹⁴ Anderson, K., & Swanson, J. (2002). Rural families: Welfare reform and food stamps policy brief #2. Available at www.human.cornell.edu/pam/extensn/jswanson/foodstampsbrief.pdf.
- ¹⁵ Nord, M., Andrews, M., & Carlson, S. (2003). Household food security in the United States, 2002. Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Report Number FANRR35. Washington DC: Educational Research Service, United States Department of Agriculture.
- ¹⁶ Ribar, D.C., & Hamrick, K.S. (2003). Dynamics of poverty and food insufficiency. Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Report Number FANRR36. Washington, DC: Educational Research Service, United States Department of Agriculture.
- ¹⁷ Olson, Seiling, & Lawrence, 2001.
- ¹⁸ Anderson & Swanson, 2002.
- ¹⁹ McLaughlin, C., Tarasuk, V., & Kreiger, N. (2003). An examination of at-home food preparation activity among low-income, food insecure women. *Journal of American Dietetic Association*, 103(11), 1506-1512.
- ²⁰ Grutzmacher, S. (2004). Influence of food-related life skills on food security in rural, low-income families. Master's thesis. University of Maryland.

Data for this research come from the USDA multi-state, longitudinal research study NC223: "Tracking the Well-being of Rural, Low-Income Families in the Context of Welfare Reform." For more information, please contact ea8@umail.umd.edu or bbraun@umd.edu.

A copy of this and other research briefs can be obtained at: www.hhp.umd.edu/FMST/fis/MDresources.htm