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## N.C. ranks 10th in hunger in the nation

**The state has the tools and know-how to do better.**

**BY BRIAN KENNEDY II, BTC POLICY ANALYST**

In North Carolina, people in nearly 590,000 households do not have enough food to eat each day. North Carolina has the 10th highest rate of food insecurity in the nation.

When a family is “food insecure,” it means that not every family member has access to healthy and nutritious food choices in order to support an active and healthy lifestyle. When families experience food insecurity, they often must make difficult choices about the quality and amounts of food they are able to provide. Households that are considered to have “very low” food security means they not only lack access to healthy and nutritious food, but that they often skip meals all together.

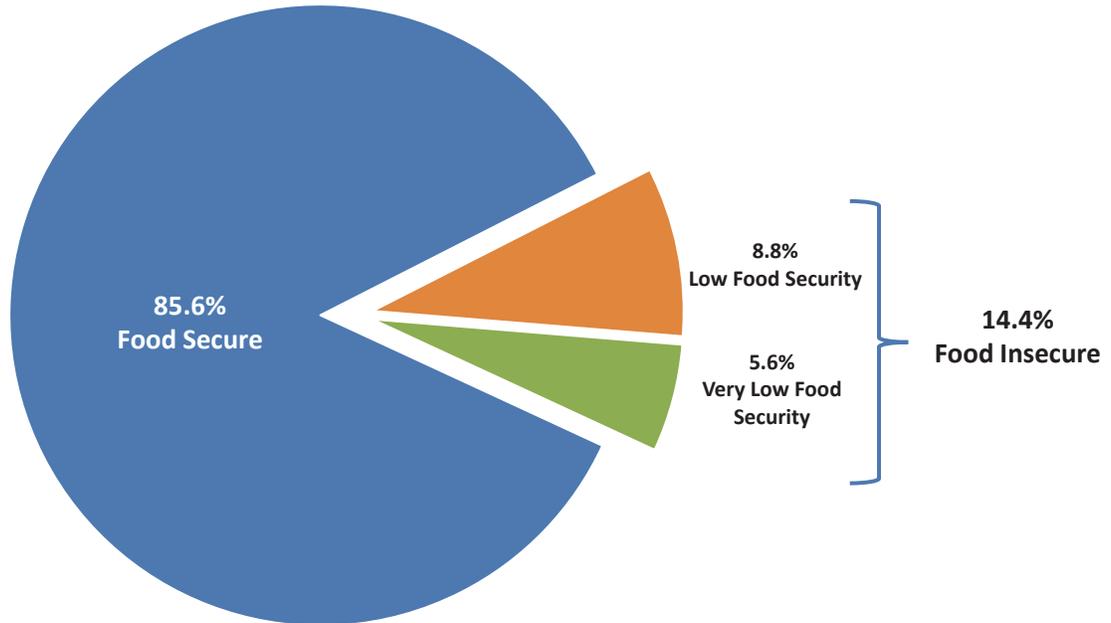
Not everyone in North Carolina experiences food insecurity equally. Households with children are more likely to have difficulty putting enough nutritious food on the table. Nationally, 15.7 percent of households with children are food insecure, compared to only 10.1 percent of households without children.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, households headed by single mothers are more likely to experience food insecurity compared to households headed by single fathers. Last year, 30.3 percent of families led by single women were food insecure, compared to 19.7 percent of families led by single men.<sup>2</sup> Families where the head of household was white experienced food insecurity at a rate of 8.8 percent, compared to 21.8 and 18 percent for Black and Latinx families, respectively.<sup>3</sup> These disparities point to systemic issues such as the racial and gender-pay gap as well as extremely high child care costs.

### **Tools that help to fight hunger also help to reduce poverty**

Because of the extremely high rates of families and individuals experiencing hunger in North Carolina, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a critical tool in helping North Carolinians access nutritious foods. SNAP, the largest anti-hunger program in the nation, also plays a significant role in reducing poverty, improving the health outcomes of children, and making sure families don't have to make tough choices between paying the rent or placing food on the table. Across the nation last year, 3.4 million people were lifted out of poverty by SNAP.<sup>4</sup>

SNAP works across the state, serving families in all 100 counties (Appendix A), including 55,000 veterans.<sup>5</sup> In addition to being one of the most important anti-hunger

**Figure 1:** N.C. is the 10th hungriest place in the country.  
*Percentage of households by levels of food insecurity*



Source: USDA's 2017 Report on Food Insecurity, 3-year average (2015-2017)

programs, SNAP is also responsible for stimulating local economies as one of the nation's most effective public-private partnerships. Last year, roughly 9,700 business across the state participated in the SNAP program, bringing in more than \$2.14 billion in benefits.<sup>6</sup>

Unique to the SNAP program is its built-in ability to reflect the health of the economy. As measures of unemployment and poverty rise, so do the number of individuals participating in SNAP. As the economy adds good paying jobs and opportunities for families to thrive, the number of people participating in the program falls.

SNAP's poverty fighting effect —along with its ability to support families in critical times of need and boost local economies — is what makes this program such an effective and important tool to fight hunger.

**Despite the success of anti-hunger programs like SNAP, lawmakers have sought to limit access.**

Over the past few years, state and federal lawmakers have considered and, in some cases, passed harmful measures that have increased hunger.

In 2016, state lawmakers limited access to food assistance for some of the state's poorest adults by reinstating a harsh federal law placing a three-month time limit on SNAP for nondisabled, childless adults. This change, which affected up to 100,000 people, meant that people would be denied food assistance even though they lived in communities where there were no job opportunities available.

Last year, state lawmakers considered eliminating a policy that allows low-income families with high expenses to be eligible for SNAP. These families, who have modest incomes but pay significant amounts of their income toward things like child care and rent, are often forced to make tough choices about how to cover all of their living expenses. Eliminating this policy,

known as categorical eligibility, would have not only prevented these families from applying for food assistance, but also would have cost the state in additional administrative dollars.

Finally, both state and federal lawmakers have sought to impose harsh requirements and unfunded mandates that will punish North Carolinians who are unable to find work and impose strict administrative requirements on state and local agencies.<sup>7</sup>

**Rather than narrowing access to food assistance, we should be using the tools available to ensure no North Carolinian ever goes hungry.**

North Carolina has the opportunity to take the lead in addressing hunger by using common sense policy options. Protecting the program integrity of SNAP and ensuring every eligible North Carolinian has access to the program is an important first step. By reinstating time-limit waivers for childless adults, lawmakers can ensure that individuals will not be denied food assistance who have difficulty finding consistent and well-paying work.

Last year, people in 28 percent of households that received SNAP (individuals in 183,000 households) were elderly or had disabilities. By implementing the Standard Medical Expense Deduction waiver, a tool that makes it easier for eligible individuals to exclude things like medication and hospitalization costs from their countable income, lawmakers could reduce much of the administrative paperwork seniors must complete and ensure that these individuals have enough to eat each night.

In addition to strengthening and supporting the SNAP program, there are other important tools our leaders can use in order to fight hunger.

More than half of households that receive food assistance have family members who are working.<sup>8</sup> Increasing the state's minimum wage would significantly boost workers abilities to place food on the table for their families. In addition to increasing wages for working families, reinstating a state Earned Income Tax Credit will make sure these families have more money to pay for the basics.

## Endnotes

- 1 USDA's 2017 Report on Food Insecurity, 3-year average (2015-2017)
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2018 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.
- 5 Keith-Jennings, Brynne and Lexin Cai. SNAP Helps Almost 1.4 Million Low-Income Veterans, Including Thousands in Every State, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, November 2018, <https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/11-9-17fa.pdf>
- 6 SNAP Factsheet: North Carolina. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, [https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/snap\\_factsheet\\_north\\_carolina.pdf](https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/snap_factsheet_north_carolina.pdf)
- 7 Kennedy, Brian. Farm Bill is a costly way to make more North Carolinians hungry, The Progressive Pulse, NC Justice Center, May 2018, <http://pulse.ncpolicywatch.org/2018/05/16/farm-bill-is-a-costly-way-to-make-more-north-carolinians-hungry/>
- 8 SNAP Factsheet: North Carolina. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, [https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/snap\\_factsheet\\_north\\_carolina.pdf](https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/snap_factsheet_north_carolina.pdf)