



For Immediate Release

STUDY SHOWS STATE AND LOCAL FOOD INSECURITY REACHED LOWEST LEVELS SINCE STUDY'S INCEPTION 10 YEARS AGO

Improvements likely erased by COVID-19 pandemic per study projections

Frankfort – June 3, 2020 – After nearly ten years, food insecurity levels for most communities across the country, including Kentucky, had reached their lowest levels in 2018, according to a study released by Feeding America. [Map the Meal Gap](#), released today by Feeding America, is the only study that provides local-level estimates of food insecurity across the United States. Feeding America, the nation's largest domestic hunger-relief organization with a network of 200 member food banks, including the members of Feeding Kentucky, has released the report for ten consecutive years to offer insights on how food insecurity and food costs vary at the local level. Food insecurity is a measure defined by the USDA as lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members.

In conjunction with the *Map the Meal Gap* study, which uses the most recent data from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Census Bureau, Feeding America has released an [interactive map](#) based on its recently released study, [The Impact of the Coronavirus on Local Food Insecurity](#), which used the *Map the Meal Gap* model to predict changes to food insecurity rates for the overall population and children in response to projected changes to poverty and unemployment in the wake of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. That analysis shows that progress made to food insecurity in the U.S. this past decade will likely be wiped out and food insecurity rates will climb higher than the peak of the Great Recession, potentially going from more than 37 million people facing hunger in 2018 up to more than 54 million in 2020. In Kentucky, an additional 234,000 people could become food insecure in the wake of the pandemic.

"It is unacceptable that even before the pandemic struck, 1 in 7 Kentuckians did not always know where their next meal would come from," said Feeding Kentucky Executive Director Tamara Sandberg. "Making matters worse is that many of these individuals do not qualify for federal nutrition assistance programs. They have nowhere else to turn but the charitable food sector, which is struggling to keep pace with the need for food assistance. We call on partners in government, business, education, agricultural and faith-based sectors to continue working to close the meal gap and end hunger in Kentucky."

Per *Map the Meal Gap 2020*, food insecurity exists in all 120 counties. Kentucky has the 8th highest rate of overall food insecurity in the United States. The report also shows that children are more likely to be food insecure, with the child food insecurity rate at 18.9 percent compared to 14.8 percent for the overall population for Kentucky. Kentucky's child food-insecurity rates remain higher than the national rate of 15.2 percent.

Overall food insecurity in Kentucky ranges from a low of 6.9 percent of the population in Oldham County up to 24.8 percent in Harlan County.

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The analysis also finds that 33 percent of residents of Kentucky who are food insecure are likely ineligible for federal nutrition assistance under current program requirements. This means that many households must rely even more on charitable food assistance.

According to the COVID-19 impact analysis, all counties across the country will likely see increased rates of food insecurity. In Kentucky, the pandemic is projected to increase the food insecurity rate by 35 percent. Nearly 900,000 Kentuckians (897,000) Kentuckians may experience food insecurity because of COVID-19.

The Feeding America studies underscore the extent of need that remains in communities across the U.S. While food insecurity affects every community, people of color, and African Americans in particular, are disproportionately impacted as a result of structural disparities. Structural and institutional racism have positioned communities of color as particularly vulnerable to the economic fallout and health consequences of this pandemic. Both pre-pandemic and in 2020, counties with the highest rates of food insecurity are overrepresented by counties with a majority African American population.

Other key state findings of *Map the Meal Gap 2020* include:

- Six Kentucky counties have overall food insecurity rates of 24.4 percent or higher and are included in the list of 25 US counties with the highest overall food insecurity rates: Harlan, Bell, Magoffin, Breathitt, Clay and Wolfe.
- Kentucky's Fifth Congressional District has the highest food insecurity rate in the state and the ninth highest rate in the nation at 20 percent.
- *Map the Meal Gap* reports on food price variation across counties. Using data from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS), the study finds that, on average, food-secure individuals in the United States report spending \$3.09 per person, per meal as of 2018. In Kentucky, the cost per meal is \$2.68.
- The estimated annual meal gap – the additional number of meals needed -- in Kentucky is 112,147,500. This meal gap measure is a conversion of the total annual food budget shortfall in Kentucky divided by the weighted cost per meal in the state.

Map the Meal Gap 2020 uses data from USDA, the Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics and food price data and analysis provided by Nielsen, a global measurement and data analytics company. The study is supported by [Conagra Brands Foundation](#) and [Nielsen](#).

Dr. Craig Gundersen, Professor of Agricultural and Consumer Economics at the University of Illinois, Executive Director of the National Soybean Research Laboratory and a member of Feeding America's Technical Advisory Group is the lead researcher of *Map the Meal Gap 2020* and the food insecurity projection analysis.

The *Map the Meal Gap 2020* [map](#) allows policymakers, state agencies, corporate partners, food banks and advocates to develop integrated strategies to fight hunger on a community level.

Separately, a new [interactive map](#) shows the 2020 food insecurity projections compared to the most recent *Map the Meal Gap* data. To account for local unemployment variation, this new analysis adjusts the national annual unemployment projection due to COVID-19 using projected changes in the unemployment rate by industry and

occupation from [Goldman Sachs Investment Research](#) and actual percentages of workers by industry from the American Community Survey.

Join the conversation about *Map the Meal Gap 2020* on Twitter using [#MealGap](#).

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About Feeding Kentucky

Feeding Kentucky is comprised of seven Feeding America food banks (Dare to Care Food Bank; Facing Hunger Food Bank; Feeding America, Kentucky's Heartland; Freestore Foodbank; God's Pantry Food Bank; Purchase Area Development District; and Tri-State Food Bank) that reach all 120 counties of Kentucky and serve an estimated one in seven of all Kentuckians annually. Last year, its members distributed 72 million meals in partnership with more than 800 charitable feeding agencies such as pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters. For more information on how you can fight hunger in your community, visit [FeedingKy.org](#).

About Feeding America

Feeding America® is the largest hunger-relief organization in the United States. Through a network of 200 food banks and 60,000 food pantries and meal programs, we provide meals to more than 40 million people each year. Feeding America also supports programs that prevent food waste and improve food security among the people we serve; educates the public about the problem of hunger; and advocates for legislation that protects people from going hungry. Visit www.feedingamerica.org, find us on [Facebook](#) or follow us on [Twitter](#).

Contact

Tamara Sandberg, Executive Director

Tamara@FeedingKY.org

Cell: 859-358-6719

Office: 502-699-2657