



ONE IN SIX KANSAS HOUSEHOLDS WERE FOOD-INSECURE IN 2013

Households with children were at increased risk

Introduction

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), food insecurity is “a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food.” It is associated with poor health status, increased rates of obesity, anxiety and depression among adults, and poor academic performance and behavioral problems among children.

According to data from the annual U.S. Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement, one out of every six Kansas households (16.5 percent) was food-insecure in 2013. In other words, more than 183,000 Kansas households, representing approximately 460,000 people, did not have reliable access to affordable, nutritious food. In those households, family members reported that they reduced the quality or variety of their diets because there was not enough food and no money to buy more.

Food insecurity is more common among, but not limited to, low-income households. Households headed by minorities or by persons with lower levels of educational attainment are at increased risk for food insecurity. Households which include children have rates of food insecurity nearly double those without children, and households led by single women with children are at even greater risk.

Households which include seniors usually fare somewhat better than the general population, with food insecurity rates approximately half that of other household types (*Figure 1, page 2*).

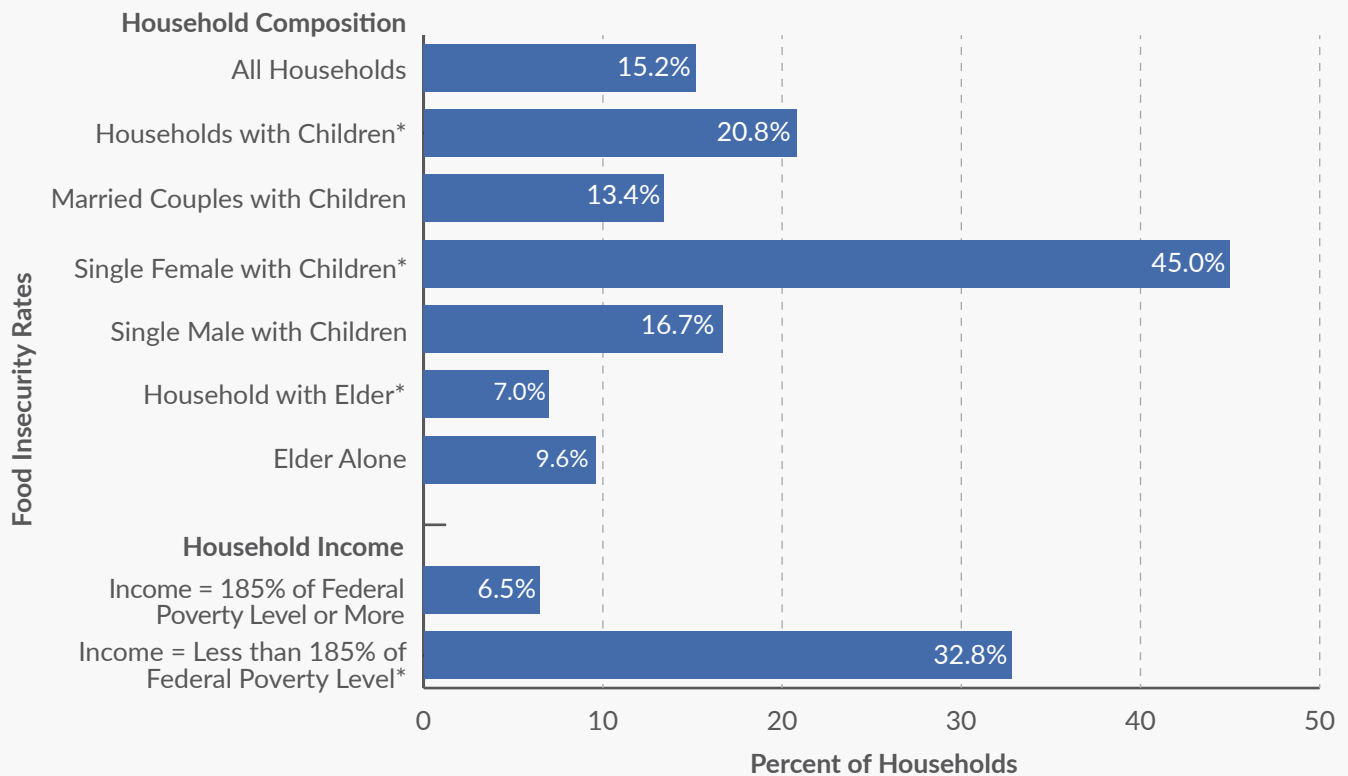
The majority of Kansas’ food-insecure households consisted of working families in 2013, with 68 percent having one or more full-time workers. Although these families were working, they still struggled to obtain enough food because of a lack of sufficient resources. Many reported having to choose between buying food or paying for other necessities. Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of Kansans who sought assistance at food pantries or emergency meal programs during 2013 reported having to choose between paying for food or utilities; 63 percent reported choosing between paying for food or medicine.

Rates of household food insecurity in Kansas have been similar to or slightly higher than national rates since annual measurement began in 1995. In both Kansas and across the United States, rates of food insecurity increased with the onset of the Great Recession in 2008 and have remained higher than pre-recession levels. While national rates have declined slightly since 2011, rates of household food insecurity in Kansas have increased from 14.2 percent to 16.5 percent between 2011 and 2013 (*Figure 2, page 2*).

KEY POINTS

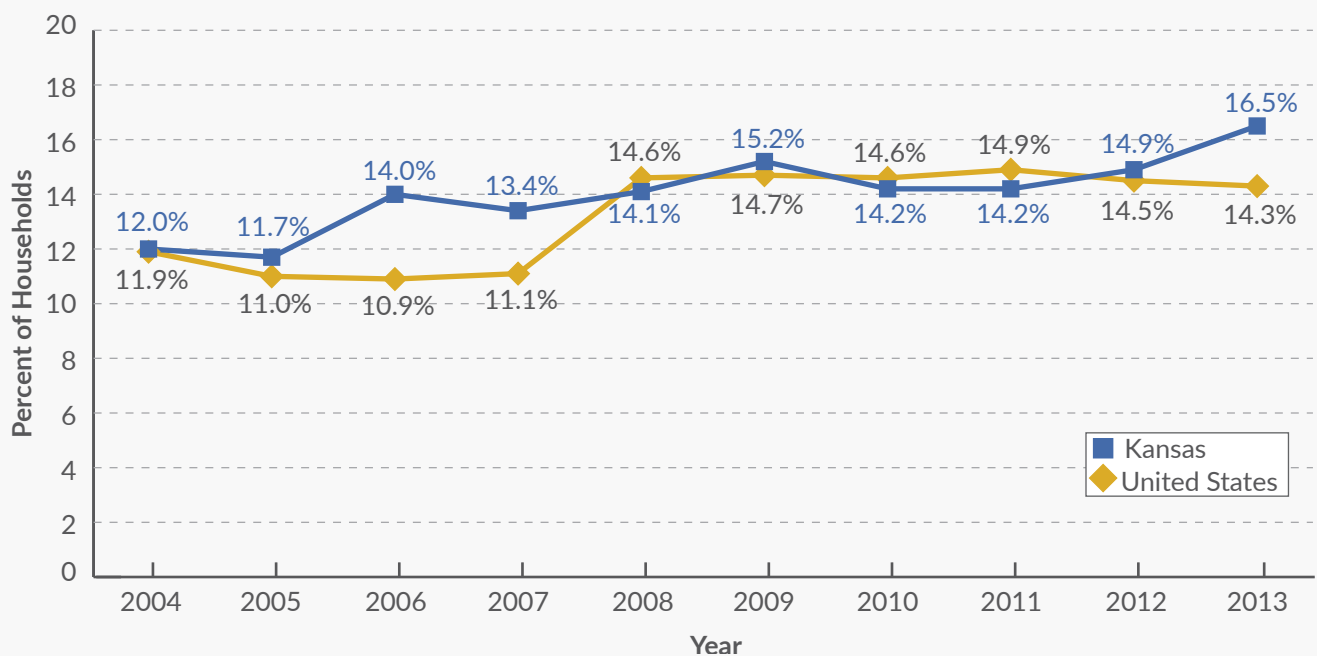
- One in six (16.5 percent) Kansas households were food-insecure in 2013, meaning they lacked reliable and consistent access to enough food to support healthy lifestyles.
- That same year, more than one in five Kansas children (22.5 percent) lived in households that were food-insecure.
- The majority of food insecure households consisted of working families in 2013—more than two-thirds (68 percent) had one or more full-time workers.
- Solutions to reduce the rate of food insecurity in Kansas could include improved access to food assistance programs and incentives to low-income families for purchasing healthy foods.

Figure 1. Food Insecurity Rates in Kansas by Household Characteristics, 2011–2013



Source: Rates calculated by KHI, using data from the 2011 through 2013 December Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements. Rates are aggregated across the three years to provide sufficient sample size for subgroup analysis. * indicates that there is a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between group and reference group. Reference groups are "All households" for household composition, and "Income 185% of FPL or more" for household income.

Figure 2. Annual Rates of Household Food Insecurity in Kansas and the United States, 2004–2013



Source: Rates calculated by KHI, using data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements, 2004–2013.

Costs and Consequences of Food Insecurity

Food insecurity has serious consequences. Healthy diets—ones which provide enough nutrients to support active lifestyles—are essential to support good health. Numerous studies have linked food insecurity with declines in general health status and increases in rates of hospitalization, depression and anxiety among adults. Children who grow up in food-insecure households are at increased risk for poor academic performance and behavioral problems. And, paradoxically, food insecurity and obesity frequently go hand-in-hand because the least expensive foods are often calorie-dense and nutritionally poor.

There are substantial direct and indirect financial costs associated with food insecurity. More than \$800 million is spent each year in Kansas on government-sponsored and private-sector food assistance programs (Figure 3). A 2011 report commissioned by the interest group Center for American Progress estimated the indirect costs of food insecurity in Kansas during 2010 to be \$1.62 billion. That estimate included the economic costs of lost workplace productivity, increased costs of education related to poor educational outcomes, avoidable health care spending and the cost of private-sector food assistance programs, but did not include the cost of government-sponsored nutrition assistance programs.

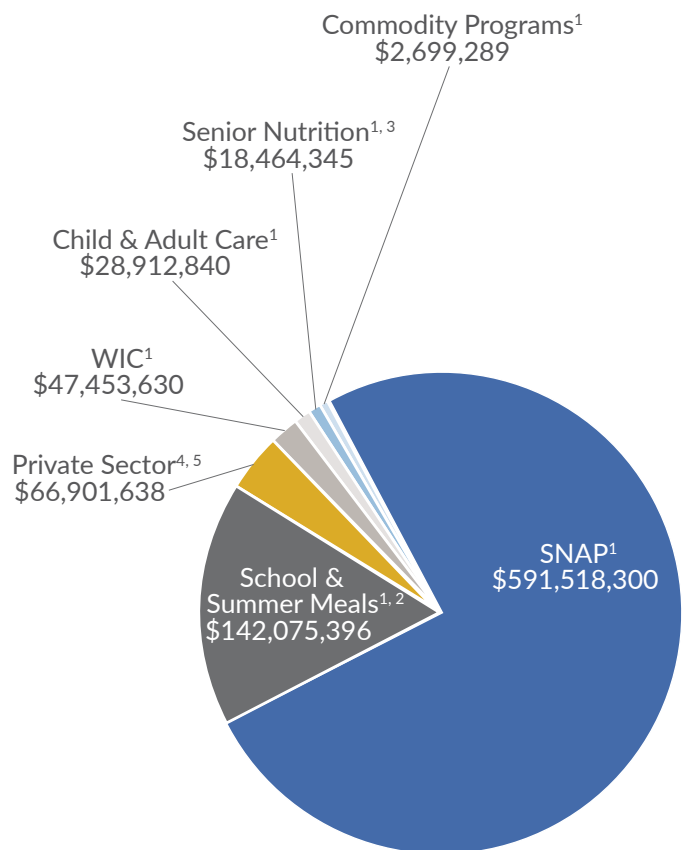
Policy Options for Reducing Food Insecurity in Kansas

Food assistance programs serve as a vital first line of defense in alleviating food insecurity and preventing hunger. However, many Kansas families who are eligible to receive food assistance are not getting it. For example, Kansas had one of the lowest state participation rates (69 percent) in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly called Food Stamps), in 2011, ranking 44th in the nation. That means that nearly one-third of individuals (31 percent) who are eligible do not receive SNAP benefits. Greater participation in this federally sponsored food assistance program could help to reduce food insecurity and hunger while also providing economic benefit to Kansas. The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that every \$5 in SNAP benefits generates \$9 in economic activity.

Policymakers could encourage the Kansas Department of Children and Families (DCF) to strengthen their efforts to increase SNAP participation.

Another federal program with low participation in Kansas is the Summer Food Service Program. Many low-income families with children who receive free or reduced-priced meals at school face additional food hardship when school is out for extended periods of time. The Summer Food Service Program helps to alleviate this by providing meals during summer recess for all children in low-income districts. According to reports from the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), Kansas ranked last (50th) among states in 2012 for the percentage of low-income children served by this program, and has consistently ranked among the bottom five states since 2008.

Figure 3. Approximate Annual Spending on Food Assistance Programs in Kansas



Source: 1) U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services program data. 2) FRAC, Profile of Hunger, Poverty and Federal Nutrition Programs, Kansas, 2012. 3) U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Community Living, Administration on Aging (AoA) State Program Reports. 4) Feeding America "Hunger in America 2014," Kansas report. 5) Expenses from organizational annual reports with Kansas share prorated based on number of counties in service area. All data are the most recent that were available at the time of this report.

Policymakers could increase children's access to meals during the summer break by requiring that public schools in low-income areas offer meal sites for the Summer Food Service Program. Incentive grants could also be offered to encourage private-sector sponsorship of summer meal sites in underserved locations.

Although getting food to food insecure families is an important first step, most food assistance programs do little to address the underlying causes of food insecurity. Policies that encourage financial stability for low-income families will be needed to achieve sustainable reductions in food insecurity in Kansas. Actions that could be considered include requiring personal finance education in high school curricula, increasing employment opportunities that provide stable and adequate wages for low-income families, and programs to encourage low-income families to build their financial assets with savings reserves that could be accessed in emergency situations.

Policies that improve access to and affordability of healthy foods could also aid in reducing rates of food insecurity and improving the diets of low-income families. For example, Kansas is one of only 14 states that collects sales tax on food. As a result of the Kansas budget bill signed in the final hours of the 2015 Kansas Legislative session, Kansas taxes on food is the second highest rate (6.5 percent) in the nation.

Offering incentive programs that provide matching funds for purchases of healthy foods with SNAP and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) benefits could also help low-income families to have more purchasing power and make healthier food choices. A pilot study conducted in 2012 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) found that fruit and vegetable consumption increased by 26 percent among SNAP participants who received modest financial incentives in the form of additional SNAP benefits (30 percent per SNAP dollar spent) for the purchase

Kansas is *one of 14* states that collect sales tax on food—holding the second highest tax rate of *6.5%*.

of select fruits and vegetables. USDA is currently offering competitive grants to support nutrition incentive programs such as this for SNAP program participants.

Conclusion

Food insecurity is a serious and costly problem in Kansas. In 2013, one in six Kansas households lacked consistent and reliable access to enough food for everyone in the home. Food insecurity is associated with poor health status, obesity, anxiety and depression among adults, and poor academic performance and increased rates of behavioral problems among children. Despite more than \$800 million invested in food assistance programs in Kansas each year, rates of food insecurity are not declining. Policymakers could help to reduce rates of food insecurity in Kansas by implementing measures that improve access to and participation in food assistance programs, and policies that provide more opportunities for low-income families to achieve financial stability.

For more detail on the issue of food insecurity in Kansas, please see the companion report, "Food Insecurity in Kansas."

ABOUT THE ISSUE BRIEF


This brief is based on work done by Barb J. LaClair, M.H.A., Jennifer Boden, M.A., Shawna Chapman, Ph.D., M.P.H., M.A., and Andrea N. Hinton. It is available online at www.khi.org/FoodInsecurityIssueBrief.

KANSAS HEALTH INSTITUTE

The Kansas Health Institute delivers credible information and research enabling policy leaders to make informed health policy decisions that enhance their effectiveness as champions for a healthier Kansas. The Kansas Health Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan health policy and research organization based in Topeka that was established in 1995 with a multiyear grant from the Kansas Health Foundation.

Copyright© Kansas Health Institute 2015. Materials may be reprinted with written permission. Reference publication number KHI/15-26.

 212 SW 8th Avenue | Suite 300
Topeka, Kansas | 66603-3936

 785.233.5443

 khi.org

 /KHIorg

 @KHIorg